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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, November 3, 2009

—
Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, November 3, 2009

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1000)

[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 16 petitions.

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FAIRNESS FOR THE SELF-EMPLOYED ACT

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (for the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-56, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

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

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INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the following three reports of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association respecting its participation in, first, the visit to Rome, Italy by the Mediterranean Special Group, held in Naples, Italy June 14 and 15, 2009; second, the visit of the Science and Technology Committee held in Boston, Monterey and Livermore, U.S.A. from July 6-10, 2009; and finally, the Conference on NATO's New Strategic Concept: Launching the Process, held in Brussels, Belgium on July 7, 2009.

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BANKRUPTCY AND INSOLVENCY ACT

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-476, An Act to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act and other Acts (unfunded pension plan liabilities).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to table my latest bill in an ongoing effort to protect the pension plans of hard-working Canadians. The official name of my bill is an Act to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act and other acts. In 1927, it was J.S. Woodsworth, the leader of the CCF, who introduced Canada's first pension legislation, the old age security pension, as a way to address seniors' poverty. It was adopted by the minority Liberal government of the day. In the mid-1960s, again it was the NDP member, Stanley Knowles, who forced the minority Liberal government of Lester Pearson to adopt CPP, again to further address seniors' poverty.

Clearly it has been and remains the NDP that has shown the way on pension reform in Canada, and we continue that work with the tabling of this significant bill. I refer to my bill as the Nortel bill, because it would address in a real way the very serious situation these workers find themselves in as Nortel goes through the CCAA process. The Nortel bill amends the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act and the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act, among others, to ensure companies make good on their unfunded pension liabilities. The Nortel bill classifies these unfunded pension liabilities as preferred creditors and places them on the same tier as other secure debt to bondholders, investors and other such creditors. It is designed to prevent speculators from buying up assets on the cheap while leaving pension funds gutted and workers without the benefits they have earned.

In addition, the Nortel bill, through new procedures, helps former employees of bankrupt corporations to claim moneys owed. The bill also ensures that payouts resulting from bankruptcy will not be deducted from employment insurance benefits. Finally, unlike the situation with current pension protections, there is no cap on the amount of benefits protected. It would not be retroactive, meaning that for Nortel to benefit, a judge would need to order that the liquidation be conducted under the BIA.

Having consulted for many months with seniors' pension experts, I know the bill would give security and peace of mind to millions of Canadians.

Government Orders

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

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● (1005)

PETITIONS

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour today to present a petition signed by hundreds of people from the Waterloo region. They remind government that the veterans of Canada's armed forces have demonstrated a willingness to sacrifice their lives in the service of our country and that currently there exists a chronic shortage of medical and convalescent facilities for veterans across Canada. They call on government to expand the range and scope of medical and convalescent facilities available to Canada's veterans and to commit publicly to expanding the number of beds in rest homes available for veterans. They ask government to initiate a re-evaluation of medical services provided to our veterans, specifically those in their senior years, to ensure that adequate resources and attention are being paid to those who have served our country.

AIR PASSENGER BILL OF RIGHTS

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my petition calls upon Parliament to adopt Canada's first air passenger bill of rights by supporting Bill C-310.

The bill would provide compensation to air passengers flying with all Canadian carriers, including charters, anywhere they fly.

The bill includes measures towards compensation for overbooked flights, cancelled flights and unreasonable tarmac delays. It also deals with late and misplaced baggage. It requires all-inclusive pricing by airlines in their advertising. Air Canada currently operates under European laws, so certainly Canadian customers should receive the same treatment in Canada as they do in Europe.

The bill would ensure that passengers are kept informed of flight changes, whether they are delays or cancellations.

The new rules must be posted at the airports and passengers must be kept informed of their rights for compensation. The bill is not meant to punish the airlines. If they follow the rules, they will not pay a cent in compensation.

The petitioners call on the Government of Canada to support Bill C-310, which would introduce Canada's first air passenger bill of rights.

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QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (for the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development) moved that Bill C-50, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and to increase benefits, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it certainly gives me pleasure to rise and speak with respect to Bill C-50, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and to increase benefits.

We have an opportunity today to help experienced workers who have lost their jobs because of the recent downturn in the economy. It is the fair and right thing to do. I hope all of my colleagues, particularly Liberal colleagues, will come around and agree to help with the passage of the final reading of this bill.

Before I continue, I would like to provide the House with some context, a quick rundown of some of the economic activities in the western provinces where I am from.

It is time for a reality check. Even though there is a lot of negative news, we do have some glimmers of hope. While we are continuing to take action to help Canadians who need help due to the recession, there are good news stories that we are hearing every day. I would like to share a few of those good news stories I have heard. I will start on the west coast and work my way east.

In British Columbia, for example, Nanaimo's restored Harmac pulp mill started a second shift in September and hired 265 of 500 former employees of the bankrupt and closed Pope and Talbot mill.

The Catalyst Paper's Crofton kraft mill was looking to restart just a few weeks ago, bringing back one of its two shifts, recalling 104 of the 375 workers laid off in February when the kraft mill closed.

There is welcome news in Prince George as well. Walmart will expand into a super centre and increase its permanent staff by 70 to 310, as well as hiring 40 temporary staff for the grand opening.

In Alberta, the CrossIron Mills shopping centre opened in Balzac in July and hired 3,500 workers.

In the northwest, a \$71 million contribution for Yukon's \$160 million Mayo hydroelectric dam expansion has been finalized. Up to 300 people could be hired over the next two years.

Less than a year after Liquidation World closed its door in Whitehorse, it will move back and employ between 12 and 20 people. SSI Micro, a Yellowknife-based company, won a multi-million dollar contract to upgrade the government of Nunavut's IT services and plans to hire more staff.

Government Orders

In Saskatchewan, Enbridge has the \$2.4 billion Alberta Clipper pipeline project, creating about 12,000 person years of employment, as part of which 5,000 full- and part-time jobs are right in Saskatchewan.

The first phase of Loblaw's \$350 million warehouse and distribution facility located in Regina will initially hire 500 people, and by 2017 up to 1,700 people will be hired at its distribution centre.

I have provided this information because it gives a realistic snapshot of what is happening. Yes, there is bad news, but it is mixed with flashes of hope on the horizon and there are more and more strong flashes of hope every week.

What our Conservative government is trying to do is create a few more flashes of hope through the actions that we can take. Certainly all of us realize that there is only so much we as a government can do. However, where we have been able to act, we have acted and we are continuing to act. Bill C-50 is an example of our action.

Bill C-50 is legislation that will extend regular employment insurance benefits to unemployed long-tenured workers so they can be ready for a recovering economy. It is for Canadians who need a little more time.

Who are these long-tenured workers? They are individuals who have worked and paid their taxes and EI premiums for many years. They have paid into the system for a long time. They have not needed much help in the past but they need help now. They have worked hard but suddenly have lost their jobs and have had to start over in a recovering economy.

Resiliency is a trademark of Canadian workers, but we still have a responsibility to help them over the current hurdle. Bill C-50 is a temporary measure that will help workers who have paid EI premiums for many years and have never or rarely collected EI regular benefits.

Bill C-50 will provide between five and twenty weeks of additional benefits, depending on how long an individual has been working and paying EI premiums. It will help bridge these workers over until the economy recovers.

It applies to workers who have paid at least 30% of the annual maximum EI premiums for seven out of ten years, and we will allow up to 35 weeks of regular benefits in the past five years. Why is that? It is because we recognize that workers from some industries, including manufacturing and forestry, have used EI during temporary shutdowns.

• (1010)

Lest members of the House believe that only a few Canadian workers will qualify for this extended measure, let me tell them that this temporary measure will ultimately benefit some 190,000 long-tenured workers. These long-tenured workers come from all sectors of the economy. More than one-third of those who have lost their jobs across Canada since the end of January and have established an EI claim are long-tenured workers. Many of those workers have been in the same job or the same industry all their lives and face the prospect of having to make a transition into a new job. This is never easy and it takes time.

That is why we are acting. Specifically, we are acting to provide continuing support to those workers while they look for jobs in a recovering economy. For example, under the legislation workers who paid premiums in seven of the past ten years would get five extra weeks of EI regular benefits. For every additional year of contributions, the number of weeks of benefits would increase by three weeks, up to a twenty week maximum.

The start date will be January 4, 2009, now that we have made the amendment, and the measure will remain in place until September 11, 2010. This means that payments of these extended benefits will continue until the fall of 2011 for those who need them. To gradually transition out of the measure, the level of additional benefits will be reduced in five week increments.

By extending EI for long-tenured workers, we are only doing what is beneficial for our economy. These are workers with solid experience. With some adjustments they will make it back into the workforce and continue to be productive. We believe this is fair. These workers can continue buying groceries for their families, pay for their heating costs as winter approaches, and buy clothes for their children. It helps unemployed workers who have worked hard over the years and are now in a vulnerable state. It is our responsibility to support them as they struggle to get through the recession. We stand behind them. They will get through this downturn.

Of course, this temporary measure has not been initiated in a vacuum. It builds on other initiatives we have introduced as part of Canada's economic action plan.

One of the most complementary actions we have taken in our action plan is the career transition assistance initiative. Through this initiative we are further supporting long-tenured workers by helping them train for future jobs. Workers can get their EI benefits extended up to a maximum of two years while they undertake longer term training. This will be very significant as the economy emerges.

They can also get earlier access to EI if they invest in their training using part or all of their severance package. This initiative is available to the same type of worker, long-tenured workers, using the same criteria as is used for Bill C-50. Career transition assistance is complementary, and closely linked, to Bill C-50.

Through our economic action plan, we are also supporting unemployed Canadians through other measures. We are providing nationally five extra weeks of EI regular benefits. We have increased the maximum duration of EI regular benefits from 45 to 50 weeks available in regions of high unemployment.

Government Orders

We are also protecting tens of thousands of jobs through the work-sharing program. We have made changes that allow more flexibility for employer recovery plans. Agreements have also been extended for an additional 14 weeks to a maximum of 52 weeks. It supports employees who might otherwise be laid off. It allows them to continue working a reduced work week while they receive EI benefits for the days they do not work. As of this week, over 5,900 active work-sharing agreements across the country are preserving the jobs of almost 167,000 Canadians. We are working for Canadians so that Canadians can continue working.

We are also providing an additional \$1.5 billion towards skills training to be delivered by the provinces and territories.

Let me refer to another program, the targeted initiative for older workers, which applies to people who are 55 to 64 years of age. Under the economic action plan, we are investing an additional \$60 million over three years to provide upgrading and work experience to help older workers make the transition to new employment. Further, we have expanded the program so that it extends access to older workers in major communities as well as smaller cities affected by significant downsizing or closures.

I am especially interested in pointing out the active, supportive and positive aims and methods of this program and contrasting its active approach with the passive, uninspiring so-called solutions that some members of the opposition have put forward for our older workers. We believe in our older workers, as we do in all of Canada's workers. We want to help them use their skills and experience to get back into the workforce and continue to contribute.

• (1015)

Our older workers have much to teach our younger workers and much to contribute to the work and value of our companies. We are going to help them remain active in the workforce. We are not going to give up on them.

Best of all, we are also supporting initiatives that focus on aboriginal Canadians. The aboriginal skills and employment partnership, ASEP as it is commonly known, has received an additional \$100 million over three years to provide on the job training and work opportunities in sectors such as natural resources, construction and tourism. The initiatives funded under this program depend on partnerships between aboriginal communities and the major employers in the field.

In addition, the aboriginal skills and training strategic investment fund will help about 5,800 aboriginal people over two years to get the specific skills they need to benefit from economic opportunities now and into the future. This fund also supports greater investment in training for aboriginal people who face barriers to employment, such as low literacy or a lack of essential skills.

The economic action plan is helping Canadians access the labour market in all kinds of different ways. One way is by freezing EI premiums for 2010 at \$1.73, the same rate as 2009. This rate is now at its lowest level in a quarter century. Right now freezing the EI premium rate translates into \$10.5 billion stimulus to the economy at the exact time that the economy needs it.

Canadian employers and Canadian workers can be assured that the EI premium rate will not increase during the economic downturn. That would not make any sense.

We are delivering on our commitment to improve the governance and management of the EI account by establishing the Canada employment insurance financing board, the CEIFB. The board will be an independent arm's-length crown corporation. It will implement an improved EI premium rate setting mechanism that will ensure EI revenues and expenditures break even over time and will set the EI premium rate starting in 2011.

These important changes will ensure that EI premiums, all of them, will be there for Canadian workers when they need them. It will ensure that EI premiums, the hard-earned dollars of Canadian workers, will not again be used for pet political projects as was done in the past. No, the CEIFB will ensure that EI premiums will be used properly and will not be mismanaged like they were in the past by previous governments.

In closing, let me return to Bill C-50. The purpose of this bill is to help long-tenured workers directly affected by the force of this recession. As explained earlier, the legislation before us proposes a temporary measure that will provide much needed assistance to long-tenured workers throughout the country.

The passage of this bill will make a difference in their lives. It will make a difference in the lives of their families. It will make a difference to industry. It is the fair and the right thing to do, so this government is doing it.

These are workers who have striven long and hard to support their families and to work hard for their employers. Now it is time for us to assist them in their hour and time of need and to support them while they find a job.

I ask my colleagues to join with us to get behind the bill and to help each and every one of those 190,000 people who are waiting for the bill to pass and to take effect.

I would ask members to unanimously support the passage of the bill.

• (1020)

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend my hon. colleague on his speech.

In his current function as parliamentary secretary certainly he has had a lot of conversations with stakeholders on this issue. When the government was formulating Bill C-50 I would imagine at that point the government would have addressed the issue of seasonal workers.

My question comes from an illustration in my riding that talks about a group of individuals who work in a shrimp processing plant. They are seasonal workers. They have been doing it for 35 years in some cases, for an extremely long time. The average age is above 50, so the member can well imagine how long they have been working at those jobs and how much they depend on them through their daily lives.

Government Orders

The problem is that because the work is seasonal in nature they do not qualify under Bill C-50 because of the rules stated, that if they claimed so many weeks in the past five years, per year, they are ineligible.

How does the parliamentary secretary square that issue? What is it that I should say from him to the individual shrimp worker on the Bonavista Peninsula in Newfoundland?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Speaker, I will have a question for the hon. member and I would like to know how he would square that.

This particular bill is aimed at long-tenured workers who have worked hard for long periods of time, have not relied on the EI system, find themselves in a vulnerable position, are not able to find work and their benefits are running out.

As Craig Riddell, a University of British Columbia professor and member of the Expert Panel on Older Workers said on October 8 that the University of British Columbia public affairs study on long-tenured workers found that these workers are hardest hit by unemployment and take up to 35% longer to find new employment than other workers. He recommended a targeted increase in EI benefits for long-tenured workers.

Almost a billion dollars is going to 190,000 people. How does the member square the fact that the member voted against second reading and potentially third reading and against every clause that would help 190,000 people? How does he stand up and say to any one of those 190,000 people that he is not supporting extra benefits for them because he would like extra benefits for someone else? How does the member square that? How does his party square that?

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the parliamentary secretary for outlining the great list of initiatives our government has embarked upon to help unemployed people.

Recently I had the privilege of touring Conestoga College in my riding. There was a middle-aged gentleman who was taking advantage of the retraining opportunities that are available to him. He was really excited and enthusiastic about the possibilities this will give him.

I am wondering if the parliamentary secretary could expand for Canadians who are watching this, on the amazing opportunities that are available for retraining, which in fact is really the course we need to embark upon if we are going to provide long-term solutions for the unemployment problem.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Speaker, of course we cannot look at Bill C-50 in a vacuum. It is a bridge to other programs that already exist.

We have done a number of initiatives, and one of them is the career transition assistance program. We spent 1.5 billion additional dollars on top of \$2.5 billion, with the provinces and territories, to ensure that people can be retrained and their skills can be upgraded to meet the jobs of today and the jobs of tomorrow.

When we look at all that has been done, it is basically saying, "Let us use our dollars to our advantage, to prepare people for the economy that will be emerging, for the economy of the future". Bill C-50 is a bridge to what we are already doing. It is just another

example of how we put a package together through the economic action plan, through various specific bills to ensure that we help the most vulnerable at the time they need it most.

I would again urge all colleagues to get behind Bill C-50 and pass it.

• (1025)

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, back in January when the budget was introduced following the disastrous economic update statement in November, there were some measures in it for EI. I do not think anybody outside the Conservative caucus would indicate that they were enough, but they did in fact add five weeks of EI for everybody who was on EI, which is a fair way to do it.

The minister, in her introduction to the estimates, actually boasts about that fact when she says that they have included extending five extra weeks of benefits, which is now only available in some regions, to all Canadians. She saw that as a step forward back in the spring, and now she has brought in a bill that clearly discriminates against people and decides who is deserving and who is not deserving.

How does the member juxtapose those two positions, and why has that changed from the spring to the fall?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Speaker, I just referred to Craig Riddell, the University of British Columbia professor and member of the Expert Panel on Older Workers, who indicated that those who are having greater difficulty are the long-tenured workers, and they are the ones we specifically want to help.

What I find difficult to understand is how the member and the Liberal Party have chosen to turn their backs on the most vulnerable and the unemployed by walking away from the committee that was studying additional benefits that had to do with what might go forward into the future. They abandoned that track and allowed us to introduce this specific legislation and what we are proposing also for the self-employed. Then they had the audacity to vote against the bill and every clause of the bill as it proceeded through the House and through committee. They voted against 190,000 potential workers who could benefit from this program.

How does the member square that? What does he tell them? How does he look them in the face and say that he opposed this legislation and that if he had his way, they would get nothing?

I do not understand that. It makes absolutely no sense to me. No matter what other benefits we could provide, this is a particular benefit of almost \$1 billion over three years. Why would he not support it?

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have to compliment the parliamentary secretary on his speech. It is very exciting to hear of the possibilities that can happen in this country during a time of economic downturn.

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I would like to ask the parliamentary secretary to expand on the benefits for long-tenured workers, who have had jobs and paid EI premiums over a number of years. Perhaps he could expand on the training aspect, the opportunities those workers have that will help support them during a time of stress, but also their hopes for the future.

Could he go over some of the programs that have been put in place by our government?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Speaker, before I get into the skills upgrading program, I would like to mention one of the other initiatives we took, which was the work-sharing program which allowed people to keep their jobs.

There have been many quotes from a number of industries stating that it was a win-win situation for employers. They were able to retain the workers they needed the most because it would be difficult to get trained staff when the economy recovers. Workers were able to continue their jobs. A significant number of workers, 167,000, were helped with this program.

We have targeted \$60 million specifically for older workers for skills training. These workers have a lot to add to our society given their wisdom and their age.

Our government has invested \$500 million in training to help about 40,000 long-tenured workers participate in these programs so they will be upgraded. Some of these programs last 104 weeks, that is almost two years, a significant period of time.

We have provided \$1.5 billion to the provinces and territories under existing labour agreements. They have the infrastructure to do something with this money. It can get out there very quickly and it allows them to manage it.

When we add all this together, we have made a significant effort toward helping those who are most vulnerable and in particular need because of the economy as it is now, but not only for now but into the future as well.

• (1030)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague describe the whole fabric of interconnected programs and how Bill C-50 is just one part of a comprehensive package to help workers. I just sit here in puzzlement. I would ask my colleague to explain why there might not be unanimous endorsement in the House

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Speaker, I quite frankly cannot understand it. I do not know what the Bloc would have against older workers or the vulnerable. I do not understand that. With regard to the Liberal Party specifically, I have no idea why those members would turn their backs on the most vulnerable and the unemployed. They walked away from having any input in the system, and then when we brought forward a program, they vote against it.

The only rationalization I can see is that the Liberal leader, in his own self-interest and for his own personal reasons, would like to have an opportunistic election that no one else in Canada wants. Not one Canadian can understand why he would want an election, why

he would oppose a bill simply to bring us down even if it would help those who need help the most. It is not—

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate. The hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity again to speak to Bill C-50 in the House. We spoke to it when it was introduced and we have dealt with it in committee.

We had a vote on an amendment yesterday that Liberals supported. One of our key concerns about this bill, shared even by those who have agreed to go along with this bill, is that it already disenfranchises so many workers. We did not want to see further workers disenfranchised because this bill has to work its way through Parliament.

It is impossible to look at Bill C-50 without considering the context, the situation that this country is in, what we have gone through in the last year and a half in Canada, and the economic crisis that the bill is supposed to address. The background, as we know, is that the crisis started last year. Questions were raised as far back as last spring in the House and outside the House about the potential for Canada facing some economic difficulties. Of course, the Minister of Finance, the Prime Minister and everybody else told us not to worry, but to be happy. They told us that the sky was not falling and that Canada was not in any kind of trouble.

I have an article here from the *National Post*, a great Liberal institution, dated May 30. The headline is “[Finance minister] denies Canada headed for recession”. He goes into his thing about the economic fundamentals being strong. He said that we should not worry and that Canada was not heading into a recession. He also told us not to worry and that Canada would never go into a deficit. We were doing great, living off the strong fiscal management of the Liberal Party. The finance minister told us that we did not have to worry and that we could not mess it up that badly.

On September 27, in the middle of a federal election, when Canadians were worried about what was happening with the economy in Canada, we already had action in the United States from then-President Bush and incoming, soon-to-be-elected President Barack Obama, who said that we needed some stimulus and activity.

On September 27, the headline in the paper said “[Prime Minister] says Canada not in deficit, despite opposition claims”. The Prime Minister said:

The opposition tries to tell people that we're in deficit when we're in surplus. Tries to tell people we're in recession when our economy is still growing. Tries to tell people we are losing jobs when actually more people are working.

That was only a year ago. The Prime Minister assured the people of this country that they should not worry, that people were working, that we were not in deficit, that we were not going to go into deficit, that we were not in recession, and that we were just fine. Then, we came back after the election.

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The Prime Minister used a strategy to address this issue with Canadians. First, it was to tell them that it was a buying opportunity when their stocks went down. Second, it was to bring in an economic update that did nothing except throw political tricks into an economic update. Third, it was to prorogue Parliament. Fourth, it was to conjure up separatist-socialist coalitions. Finally, in January, prodding by the Liberal Party made the government say that it will try to have a look at this. It finally brought forward the budget in January of this year.

There were some things in there. Nobody would suggest it was enough. In fact, if one were to look at the reports that came out from the Caledon Institute, the CCPA, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, labour union groups and other social policy networks, they said that this would not be enough to help Canadians. However, at least there was that five extra weeks.

Everybody who was unemployed and had a claim was eligible. It did nothing to increase eligibility, which was and continues to be the number one issue with employment insurance, but at least it offered five weeks. It offered those five weeks to everybody. I have asked two members of the Conservative Party if they could explain the juxtaposition of the Minister of Human Resources who, in talking about those extra five weeks in her own estimates tabled here, said:

—including extending five extra weeks of benefits, which is now only available in some regions, to all Canadians.

That was one of the boasting factors that the Minister of Human Resources talked about from the January budget. She said that Canada has projects where people get an extra five weeks and that five extra weeks of benefits is something that was always part of private members' bills, initiatives and proposals put forward by other people. That is not a panacea, but she is saying that the government has taken it and given it to all Canadians. One would assume that she said that because she felt proud of it.

It is almost as if she believed in equality. It is almost as if she felt that everybody was equally deserving of assistance. Now, we are debating a bill that goes in exactly the opposite direction. It divides Canadians into those who are deserving and those who are not deserving. That is a very significant contradiction in view, expressed over a period of a few months.

• (1035)

We have had employment insurance bills in the House for some time that talked about reforming EI. In the last Parliament they were Bills C-265 and C-269. We looked at those bills. What did they ask for? They consistently asked for the elimination of the two week waiting period. As people know, when they get their employment insurance, it is not really a waiting period. My colleague from Bonaville—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor would agree with me that people who lose their job do not wait two weeks; they wait a lot longer than two weeks. In some cases they wait two months. The standard for Service Canada is that 80% of people get their claim processed in 28 days. We brought that to this House of Commons 12 months ago and the minister denied there was a problem. Then in the spring, she admitted there was a problem and she spent \$60 million hiring people, but eliminating the two week waiting period is a possibility.

Increasing the rate of benefits is a possibility. It is now 55%. A number of private members' motions, opposition motions, social policy groups have indicated that should be 60%. The way we calculate benefits, perhaps going to the best 12 weeks is another way of looking at this; increasing the maximum insurable earnings. If somebody is making \$70,000 and loses their job and they qualify for EI, they do not get 55% of their salary of \$70,000, they get 55% of the maximum insurable earnings, which is in the low forties.

There are a number of ways we can change EI if we are serious about reform. Who else was talking about that back in the spring, and what were they talking about? “To be locked into a system which has 58 separate employment insurance regions, where one Canadian gets treated dramatically different than another Canadian, it doesn't seem right to me”. That was British Columbia Premier Gordon Campbell, who supported the call of the Leader of the Opposition for a national 360 hour standard of eligibility during the period of the recession.

Saskatchewan Premier Brad Wall said, “Here is an example where the recession's impact in Canada has moved from east to west, and we are feeling the effects”. Brad Wall supported the call of Mr. Campbell for some kind of national standard for employment insurance eligibility.

Again, Premier Gordon Campbell on May 29 called on the federal government to have one employment insurance standard throughout Canada. The Premier of Ontario had a position that said we should have one national standard across Canada, and 360 hours made sense. That is what people called for. Maybe it is 420 hours, which is the lowest eligibility, but the point is, we should have some equality in the system.

Premier Campbell is quoted in the *Globe and Mail* as saying, “The federal government needs to overhaul a clearly discriminatory employment insurance system to help the swelling ranks of the jobless in western Canada”.

The Premier of Ontario called for a national standard of employment insurance. It was not just the premier. Christine Elliott, who was at the time I believe running to be the leader of the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party, had some pretty sharp words for the Minister of Finance, with whom she enjoys a particularly close relationship, saying, “Ideally, the federal government will quickly reform EI to better meet Ontario's needs. The federal EI program is unfair to Ontario”.

Premier Stelmach said, “Alberta has complained about varying eligibility rules”. Premier Stelmach weighed in as well, so every western province has indicated that there was a problem. This was not the Liberals, the NDP or the Bloc saying that there was a problem. These were Canadians from coast to coast to coast suggesting that there was a problem.

Government Orders

We had an opposition day motion on March 5 brought forward by the New Democrats which called for a number of changes: eliminating the two week waiting period; reducing the qualifying period to 360 hours; allowing self-employed workers to participate, and we will have a look at that in the next few days as the government unveils its plan; and raising the rate of benefits to 60% and basing those benefits on best 12 weeks. Those were all things that were mentioned.

I mentioned Bills C-265 and C-269 in the last Parliament. There is Bill C-280, which we have debated in this Parliament and which we will be looking at today or Thursday in the human resources committee. It calls for 360 hours, increasing the weekly benefit, and reducing the qualifying period.

The member for Brome—Missisquoi brought forward Bill C-241 that we looked at in committee last Thursday. It will be coming back to the House. It calls for the elimination of the two week waiting period. There was another bill brought forward by the NDP member for Welland, which referred to severance payments and how they are treated in EI.

• (1040)

There were a number of changes across the board, some of which are very standard, that people were calling for. Primarily, they wanted a national standard of 360 hours for EI eligibility and a two-week waiting period. They wanted to take a look at the rate of benefits, the maximum insurable earnings and how benefits are calculated. Those are all things we have talked about. I have not seen any academic, social policy expert, anybody, suggest that the answer to the crisis was to further provide benefits and then to limit those benefits to only a few people.

In the spring the leader of the Liberal Party made his point clear, that we would call for a national standard of 360 hours for employment insurance eligibility. That was the call of the Leader of the Opposition, supported by many people across the country.

Our proposal was that it would be temporary in nature during a difficult period of time. One thing that often gets lost in this debate is the importance of EI as a stimulative measure to the economy. Those people who get EI need EI. Those people who get EI spend that money on food and shelter, things that they need for themselves and their families. That money goes back into the economy. This is a country that went crazy for stimulus back in January and February. Everybody was calling for stimulus. Those who evaluate stimulus said that the best stimulus is to invest in social infrastructure, particularly EI because that means the money will go into the economy. The second best stimulus was in infrastructure. The third best stimulus was tax cuts, particularly tax cuts that do not disproportionately put money into the hands of those who need it the most, low-income and middle-income Canadians. It is a very important stimulative effect.

What was the government saying to all this at that point in time? It was discouraging.

The Minister of Human Resources was quoted as saying, at the end of January, after the Conservatives brought forward the budget and were being criticized for not having addressed the key issues of EI:

Our goal is to help people get back to work, and get back to work quickly in jobs that will last. We do not want to make it lucrative for them to stay home and get paid for it—

That quotation was never retracted. It raised the hackles of people across the country, particularly those who are on EI, not because they want to be on EI but because they have to be on EI.

There was a running smear campaign against people on EI, that it was a nine-week work year, as if people would find a way to get fired from their jobs. Members must keep in mind that people cannot collect EI if they quit their jobs. That is a change that was made. The minister's suggestion was that people would be rushing out, trying to find a way to get fired so that they could go on EI for a maximum of 55% of what they were earning in their job for a maximum of anywhere from 19 to 45 weeks, or 50 weeks with the extension, most of them at the low end of that. It does not make any sense. Who would do that? It is an insult to Canadians who lose their jobs.

She changed her tune a bit in June. The minister was quoted as saying, "There is no need to change the threshold for employment insurance eligibility because as the economy worsens, more and more Canadians will find it easier to qualify". She also said, "If the unemployment rate goes up in a given region, then it gets easier for people there to access EI for a longer period of time, and most of the regions around Canada now have become easier to access".

Let us think about that. The United States has Barack Obama's version of hope: equality for all; benefits for those who need them. Canada has the Conservative government's version of hope: "Don't worry. Things are getting worse. We are not doing anything to help you. But you will find it easier to get EI because more of your friends and neighbours will be unemployed and then the unemployment rate will go up in the region and it will be easier to qualify". That is what passes for hope from the Conservative government, "Wait. Don't worry. Things are getting worse. It is good news for you, but bad news for your neighbours, bad news for your friends, bad news for Canadians". That is what we heard from the government.

A very important report was released in June by the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. The committee held hearings specifically about how EI affects women. I do not think it is much of a secret that with the system as it currently exists fewer women qualify for EI benefits and they get less payments. That is an inherent problem with EI that needs to be fixed. It is a problem which the Leader of the Opposition addressed when he called for a 360-hour national standard. That would have helped women and part-time workers.

• (1045)

He also called for an overhaul of the EI system. That is what is needed. We cannot do it piecemeal. There are things that we should do in the time of a recession. We do need an overhaul of the employment insurance system.

Government Orders

Changes came in. People were hurt. The economy was different. We were coming out of a time of recession and into a period of a long sustained recovery under Liberal governments. We are now back into a Conservative recession. Things have changed. That is just a fact of life. The circumstances are different now than they were in the 1990s. I could debate with colleagues in this House about what happened in the 1990s to no effect, but what we can do is impact people today who need help at a difficult time.

The status of women committee heard from a number of people. Richard Shillington testified at the committee hearings. He said:

Think of EI as a series of hurdles. To be eligible for your benefit, you first of all have to have had paid employment.... You have to have a certain number of hours. You have to have left your job for the right reason—you can't be fired; it has to be a lay-off.

We heard in the spring that 80% of people who were eligible were getting EI. That is incorrect. There was testimony from another witness who indicated:

The government likes to argue that 80% of all currently employed workers would qualify for regular EI benefits if they were to lose their jobs. However, this ignores the fact that job loss particularly affects those with unstable patterns of work, such as workers on reduced hours before a layoff as well as part-time, temporary, and contract workers. It also ignores the fact that many unemployed workers qualify for EI for a shorter period of time but quickly exhaust their benefits.

Those people would not be helped by Bill C-50 in the least.

There were a number of recommendations, a whole host of them which I will not read but I recommend this to all members for their consideration. One of the recommendations is that Human Resources and Skills Development Canada implement a uniform 360-hour qualification requirement. There is another about increasing the maximum benefit entitlement. There is one about the two-week waiting period. There are some recommendations about self-employment which I think we will be looking at in the next few days to see if they meet the needs of those who are most in need.

We had the EI working group over the summer, in which I took part. I have talked about that in this House on many occasions. I do not want to belabour people with that process, or how I spent my summer vacation. It was a discouraging time.

The government came up with numbers that were patently false, indicating that a 360-hour national standard would cost \$4.4 billion. A week later the government said that it had made a bit of a mistake, that it would cost \$2.5 billion. The actual cost as verified by the Parliamentary Budget Officer was \$1.2 billion, but there still are government members, including the Prime Minister, who stand in the House and use the \$4.4 billion figure. Unbelievable. There was documentation given to the committee that was marked "not for distribution" which had already been given to the media. That documentation showed those false numbers.

That is what we dealt with over the summer. I have talked about that before. It was a frustrating time.

I believe Parliament can work. I believe Canadians want Parliament to work. I had hopes that if we got together away from question period and used the strong resources of the human resources department that we could have effected some change. We could have all taken a little bit of water in our wine and come up

with something that would have helped Canadian workers, but that was not to be, which is too bad.

The government came back in the fall and introduced Bill C-50. That is the bill we are talking about today. The fundamental problem with Bill C-50 is that it is discriminatory. Even the government would have to acknowledge that it picks winners and losers. It determines who is deserving of benefits. The minister has used this terminology herself, even at committee, "helping the most deserved workers".

It is a discriminatory bill. Imagine a government coming forward with a health care system and saying, "We have a great new health care system. The only hitch is that if you have ever used the health care system, you do not get that health care. It is only for the deserving ones who have never used health care in Canada". What would the outcry be to that? The outcry would be that that is clearly unacceptable. That is not what governments do. Governments do not pick winners and losers. Governments are governments for all the people.

Bill C-50 does not meet the needs of most Canadians. It does not meet the needs of most unemployed Canadians. It does not even meet the needs of most characterized long-term unemployed Canadians. It is a bill that is flawed. It is a bill that does nothing to address the number one concern of Canadians, which is to increase access to employment insurance for those who need it.

● (1050)

The bill does nothing to help seasonal workers who through no fault of their own work in the fishery, the forestry industry, or the tourism business. It does nothing for part-time workers. It is not a bill that we can support.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first I want to congratulate the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour on his speech.

I must admit that his speech was more reassuring than what we have heard from his party in the past since he recognizes that the policies implemented by the Liberal Party were bad policies that hurt the unemployed. I will come back to that later in my own speech.

Now I have a question for my colleague. I will say at the outset that I find it encouraging indeed to hear that the member and his party want to improve our employment insurance system. I know that my colleague is very sincere in that regard. Yesterday, they voted against Bill C-50, just like we did, but they did vote in favour of the amendment.

I would like to hear what he has to say on the amendment, more precisely on Motion No. 1, subparagraph (a)(i). Because of this provision, entire regions are excluded with each day that passes, starting this week.

Government Orders

Have they had the opportunity to look at that provision? If they have, do they understand it the same way we do?

[English]

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Speaker, I applaud the work my colleague has done for the people of his province on employment insurance.

Bill C-50 is going to pass this House probably today. We are opposed to the bill. We do not like the bill. If we look at what a government should be spending, the money that is available in its envelope, this is not a priority. We think most people who have looked at this in a learned way would agree.

One of our major concerns about the bill is that not enough people are covered. By fixing a start date of January 4 on the bill it means that some people will be covered by the bill who might not otherwise be covered as it works its way through Parliament. The amendment may be far from perfect, but at the very least the bill is going to pass. We do not want to disenfranchise people who will get help. We do not think people are not deserving. We just disagree that the people who are excluded are not deserving. We want to make sure that people at least get coverage from the bill. We do not think it is the right way to go forward, but we do not want to see people get hurt as the bill works its way through Parliament.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour—or Sydney Crosbyville as I and many people like to call it nowadays—on his work.

During the summer, after the working group was set up, there was a miscommunication, and I am putting that mildly, regarding the numbers that were put forward by the government, on the issue of 360 hours, as to how much the program would cost compared to what the Parliamentary Budget Officer said it would cost. I would like the member to tell that story as he was closely involved with it. The Conservatives brought up an issue of voting against that because it helped out x amount of workers. In 2005 when we put in a measure that extended weeks for workers, the member will never guess what the Conservatives did: they voted against it.

In that vein at some point I would like to see some honest, earnest effort by the government to practise what it used to preach, which would be the orders of the day given that in the past the Conservatives railed against any of these extensions, and now all of a sudden it becomes our responsibility to vote for this because it helps out so many. This just does not go far enough. I would like my hon. colleague to comment on that and especially on his work with the working group.

• (1055)

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Speaker, I am not going to give an opinion of what happened in the working group. I have made that statement in the House. I will just deal with the facts.

The working group, not just Liberal members but Conservative members together agreed to ask the department to give a price on a 360-hour national standard. We also asked for a price on a 420-hour national standard. We received a cost for a 360-hour national standard that was clearly inflated, that indicated if we brought forward a 360-hour national standard for one year it would increase

the unemployment rate in the country by 2% which was laughed off the table and the Conservatives had to retract.

In the 1970s when EI made its big change from what it had been in the 1940s until 1970, it is said that there was a 2% increase in unemployment because of EI. I do not know if that is true or not, but I know back then people could quit their jobs and collect EI. There were a lot more ways that people could collect EI. To suggest there was a labour market impact of 2% is an absolute travesty.

The Conservatives changed their view a week later. We went to the Parliamentary Budget Officer who confirmed the Liberal Party's estimates, the TD Bank's estimates, CCPA's estimates, CLC's estimates, everyone's estimates of somewhere between \$1.2 billion and \$1.5 billion. The government still uses the old number. So far it has not apologized or retracted that and I think that it should.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my friend, which consists of two points.

The notion of a special committee set up over the summertime was a bit of a failed legacy. It put things on time delay more than anything else. The prospects of getting together and having some sort of agreement between his party and the Conservatives on something like EI was very unlikely, at best.

I have a question about the transfer and the creation of this independent body from government, which is employment insurance now. When the transfer was made, some \$2 billion were provided. One of the concerns we raised at the time was it would not be enough money in the event of any type of recession or downturn in the economy.

The employment insurance fund had been robbed of more than \$50 billion over the years, over-collecting employment insurance premiums. Then when the government created this new entity at arm's-length from government, it did not transfer more than \$50 billion. It transferred a couple of billion dollars.

It did not feel like insurance at all for workers in case something were to go wrong and the government seemed to lowball what might be required to be paid out. Now we have this hodgepodge measure where we have to force the government to come back to the table with more support for the unemployed.

I come from a region that has been very hard hit for a number of years, more and more unemployed in the forestry, fishing and mining sectors. I know he is familiar with such similar circumstances. Was it right for the government to have created this body and seed it with so little money compared to what the government had extracted from it? It was so ill-prepared for any hard times down the road?

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Speaker, that is not correct. Two billion dollars clearly is an insufficient amount of money.

Government Orders

I remind my colleague it was Liberals who demanded that the committee have a look at the new CEIFB, the Employment Insurance Financing Board. It was Liberals who raised the issue of how suitable that would be. It might be that a body like this might do some good work, but there were absolutely no stipulations provided about this board, except that it would get \$2 billion.

The actuary, as I recall, said in committee that it required at least \$10 billion to \$15 billion and the high side of that. The first thing the government did was freeze premium rates, which was the number one purpose of the board in the first place.

The concern people have, not just workers but the CEIFB and others, is that we will now have to raise payroll taxes. Payroll taxes will have to go up as a result of what has happened under the government. That is not correct.

In terms of the EI working group, I do not apologize for trying to get something done. I do not apologize for making the effort. It took my summer and the summer of others to try to make things work. In other places in this world people can make things work. We were prepared to do that. The government clearly was not. It never came forward with ideas. It is introducing a self-employed piece today. It could have brought that to committee and we could have looked at it.

There was never an intention from the government to make this work. It does not mean that as parliamentarians we are not obliged to do everything we can to try to make Parliament work, even if it has to take place outside the walls of this institution.

• (1100)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this bill at the third reading stage. As others have already said, this bill is supposed to help long-tenured workers. I said “supposed to”, because few long-tenured workers will be helped by this bill. I will explain.

This is a smokescreen to make us forget that the Conservatives, just like the Liberals, do not take care of the unemployed. As I said earlier, I am happy that the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour said what he did, because I think he is sincere. Could his party vote at all stages of bills, like Bill C-241, which deals with the removal of the waiting period? I hope so. I know that is his goal. This is a bill from my Bloc colleague, the member for Brome—Missisquoi, which would ensure that people are not penalized when they join the jobless market. I call it the jobless market, because it has practically become a market for the government, as it saves money on the backs of the unemployed, with the EI fund as it is.

The Bloc Québécois is against the bill for long-tenured workers. The Bloc is against it because it is a discriminatory bill. The bill picks and chooses good and bad unemployed workers, as well as being a terrible bill in and of itself. That is why we are not the only ones in Quebec who are against it. The major unions are against it. These unions, in Quebec alone, represent more than 1.5 million workers out of the 4.5 million people who are of working age. There is a reason they are against it. Unemployed workers themselves and the organizations that represent them in Quebec are against it. The unemployed, the major unions, the churches, and in some areas,

groups in some municipalities that cut across all social lines known as the Sans-Chemise—these people and organizations are against it.

Some of the industries that have been hardest hit by the economic crisis and by job losses have spoken out against it. The forestry industry is against this bill. They have their reasons. One of them is that this is a terrible bill. This bill creates a smokescreen to try to mask this government's weaknesses and its abandonment of the unemployed.

I said this was an exclusionary bill. Why exclusionary? Because to benefit under this bill, you must have worked for at least seven years, and in those seven years you must have contributed at least 30% of the maximum annual employment insurance premium. As well, during those seven years, you must not have received employment insurance for more than 35 weeks. There again, it is five weeks more and it will gradually increase based on the number of years you have worked, up to 15 years. It makes no sense whatsoever.

This is discrimination based on time worked, premiums paid and use of the scheme. One of my colleagues said in this House that it was as if we were telling someone they will not be entitled to get health care under a health insurance program because they have already used it in the last seven years. They are not entitled to it again. They had access for a certain number of weeks and so they are no longer entitled. It is the same principle. This is insurance that people have paid for in case they lose their jobs.

The bill is also discriminatory in that it directly targets people for exclusion. Even if someone has worked all those years, and I note again, in order to be eligible, they have to have worked at least seven years.

• (1105)

Even if an individual has worked seven years or more, if they are employed in precarious work, for instance seasonal work, or part-time, or on call—and we are now talking about a majority of people in society—they will be excluded, because in all those years they of course turned to employment insurance. So each time that individual was laid off, they were probably entitled to employment insurance. Now, if that individual was not entitled to claim, they will no longer be entitled now, because that means that the individual did not meet the eligibility criteria. So here we see everyone we are excluding. In addition to excluding a large number of people to start with, we are also targeting people who have precarious jobs for exclusion.

As I said when I started to speak, this bill is terrible, because it makes a law that assigns status to people based on their being bad unemployed workers or good ones. People do not decide on their own to be a bad unemployed worker. worker? It is the law that excludes them based on the length of time they have worked, paid premiums or received employment insurance benefits.

Government Orders

That makes no sense. In that respect, this bill is terrible. It creates a principle in a law that is completely appalling. As well, it is misleading in its very form, as well as in the words of the government and its ally the NDP. The government claims that it will affect 190,000 unemployed people, and pay out a total of \$930 million. The NDP says it is more than that; it says it is \$1 billion. The NDP says this is what it asked for and it is happy with the result. We have to be straight with the people we represent. We owe them the truth. Are they covered or are they not covered? We have to tell them.

The residents of the Gaspé peninsula and the Acadian peninsula need to know whether they are covered. Yesterday, in the remarks I heard, people mentioned companies that should be insured but that will not be. I looked at who those companies were and most of the employees have claimed employment insurance benefits in the last seven years. They will therefore not be affected by this measure. We have to tell them that.

They say that 190,000 unemployed will be affected. But in the study of this bill, the government and its ally, the NDP, were utterly incapable of explaining how they arrive at this conclusion. Neither the public servants, the minister or the secretary of state could tell us. If we take their figures and do the math, it turns out that 6% at most of the unemployed all across Canada would qualify. Again, this is at most, and it would amount to about \$300 million.

The hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst says that even if it is not much, it is something. I can understand that. If it were shared equally, dished out objectively to ensure fair, equitable treatment, I would agree with him. I would say at least we got that much. These people have been eating poop for ages because of government decisions. I say eating poop because there are people who are literally forced into poverty when they lose their jobs. Even if they are entitled to benefits, they do not get any. The eligibility criteria have been tightened up so much that they do not qualify.

I would agree with him if it were done fairly and equitably. But that is not the case. All Quebecers, everyone who represents workers, the unemployed and sectors that are supposed to be targeted, are unanimous in their opposition, because this is basically a bad bill, that creates unacceptable precedents. We cannot accept the unacceptable.

What is unacceptable is creating categories of good and bad unemployed and excluding people on the basis of the sector in which they work and sometimes even their gender. We know very well that the precarious jobs that will be excluded by this measure are filled mostly by young people and women. That is why we are unanimously opposed.

● (1110)

If we were hearing anything different, we would take note. We have been all through it and cannot understand why Parliament would accept a bill like this.

Remember the government's inability to explain exactly how it arrives at the figures it uses. This is a lost political cause that betrays the unemployed. It is a smokescreen. As an FTQ representative from the Eastern Townships said, it is nothing but a smokescreen.

To add insult to injury, the bill even excluded people as well on the basis of the time we would take to debate it and pass it in the House. We said that did not make any sense because we needed time to study it. The minister agreed to change this provision and give the House time to study it before it was duly sent to the Senate.

The amendments are accompanied by provision (a)(i) in Motion No. 1 to this very effect. For claimants, "the number of weeks of benefits set out in the table in Schedule I that applies in respect of a claimant is increased as a result of the application of any of subsections 12(2.1) to (2.4), in which case:

(i) in respect of a benefit period established for the claimant on or after [not "on and after"] January 4, 2009, that has not ended on the day on which this subsection is deemed to have come into force—"

What does this mean? As of this week, the regions have fallen, if I may put it that way. Automatically, they are no longer eligible. As I am speaking, Quebec City and Hull may not be eligible. Next week, it will be the turn of south central Quebec and Sherbrooke. It will continue this way so long as the bill is not passed. In saying that this bill will help people, one must be very careful. It probably will, but it will help very few and at what cost? At the cost of legislation assigning people a status and enshrining principles that are totally unacceptable. Even Quebecers who might find it of benefit say it is unacceptable.

I will give forestry as an example, because it is a good one. There are two examples, one involving Canada's position and one involving Quebec's. So let us take the case of forestry. Representatives of the Canadian forestry manufacturing industry testified in committee that they supported it, while the Quebec forestry sector does not. Did they consult the people in the rest of Canada? I do not know. I do know that in Quebec, however, they were consulted. That means that it is not the same position. Just as the Conservatives and the NDP have decided to ignore Quebec, there are sectors of activity doing the same thing. And yet, the representatives of the Canadian forestry industry acknowledged that Quebec did not agree. However, they were speaking for Canada as a whole. Fortunately, they were asked to specify. The same thing happened at the Canadian labour congress, which is made up of people I highly respect, who do an exceptional job representing workers. The president and other representatives said they supported the bill, while acknowledging its many weaknesses.

● (1115)

In Quebec, however, their affiliate, the FTQ opposes it, for the same reasons we do.

Some things need to be examined very carefully. Does it help people and whom? If it does help, under what conditions, at what cost and is it worth the cost?

Government Orders

What should and must happen is an in-depth reform of the employment insurance plan. It has been rewritten over the past 14 years by the Liberals and now the Conservatives so that as many people as possible are excluded. Of all the people unemployed, some 54% are excluded, as the department acknowledges. And yet, they paid their EI premiums all their life, and when they have the misfortune to lose their job, they have no income. Their money is in Ottawa, and the provinces and Quebec have to meet their needs with welfare, the last resort.

The government is impoverishing the workers along with their families, the regions and the province involved and this adds to the fiscal imbalance. This is how the government amassed surpluses in the amount of \$57 billion over the past 14 years and then used them for other purposes.

To restore the employment insurance system, we have to come back to more reasonable qualifying requirements. This refers to the 360 hours for which there is consensus support in the opposition—and the Conservatives were also in favour when they were on this side—taking into account, of course, the regional variations based on the unemployment rate. Raising the number of weeks of benefits to 50 is also being considered. This currently applies to workers, but this is a temporary measure that should be made permanent. In addition, the rate of benefits should be raised from 55% to 60%.

Most claimants are often low-wage earners, the vast majority of whom barely make minimum wage. This means that they receive 55% of the minimum wage. That is really not a big income. It would therefore make sense to raise the benefit rate to 60%.

What is needed is a comprehensive overhaul, including the elimination of the two week waiting period. It is wrong to penalize workers because they have lost their jobs. This two week period should not be tagged on at the end. The idea is to enable people to start receiving benefits immediately following a job loss. That is often when the shock is the greatest, because facing ongoing financial obligations can be difficult while trying to adjust to the loss of an income.

The self-employed should also be included. Thankfully, we are told legislation to that effect is forthcoming. We will review it. Unless we find unpleasant surprises in it as we did in Bill C-50, or something showing a lack of respect for everyone, if we find something good in the proposed legislation, we will support provisions to include self-employed workers.

How can all this be done? By changing the discourse and, more importantly, changing the political will so that we can make things better for the unemployed. This will require unfreezing premiums. The government padlocked the plan by freezing the rate of premium at \$1.76, when the problem is not premiums but benefits, that is, the benefits payable under this plan.

I am running out of time. I will therefore conclude here and try to come back to the situation of older workers during questions and comments. In conclusion, two things are needed. One is to unpadlock the plan, and the other is to make sure that we have in this place a debate on a real, comprehensive reform that will be respectful of the unemployed, their families and all our different regions as well, by actually providing unemployed workers with

benefits so that they can regain their dignity, even if they have lost their jobs.

• (1120)

[English]

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to seek unanimous consent to split my time with the hon. member for Windsor West.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member for Welland have the unanimous consent of the House to share his time?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, in speaking to Bill C-50 it is always difficult to, as my colleague from the Bloc said, pick winners and losers, and no question the bill does that. There are some winners in the bill and clearly there are those who are going to lose including a lot of my personal friends. They work for the Canadian auto workers in my region and whom I have worked with for a number of years. They will not benefit from this bill. There is no question about that.

Because of what we saw in past years with the number of layoffs and what we have seen prior to the enactment of this bill, they will not be covered. It is just that simple.

In saying that, we do not have unfortunately a sense within the House that we can go back and take a comprehensive look and review the entire system of employment insurance. What has happened is we have been piecemealing the system since it was reviewed in the 1990s. When it was reviewed in the 1990s, it was a review to gut it. That gutting of the employment insurance system, under the Liberal government, has given us what we have today; a patchwork quilt of help across the country that should indeed cover all of us and it does not.

What is happening now is we are adding bits here, adding bits there, we do not like this one, we do not like that one, and people move from this one to that one.

My own private member's bill that would have made sure that severance and vacation pay would have been kept by unemployed workers when they collected employment insurance was defeated by the Liberals. They chose to have that bill defeated.

Yet, the Liberals stand in their place and say that they want to reform the system. When they have the opportunity, they do not take the opportunity, which is really regrettable.

We need a comprehensive review. We need to ensure that employment insurance protects the unemployed. That is what it is meant to do. That is why workers pay the premium. They pay it because they believe, as workers, that if the eventuality falls upon them that they are unemployed, they will be able to collect EI benefits.

The bill will do that for a certain group of workers, but not all workers unfortunately. It will not protect those laid off in 2008. It will not add on those who have unfortunately had the misfortune of being laid off for numerous weeks over previous years through no fault of their own. That is regrettable. No one who is laid off can collect from the system voluntarily because one does not choose to be laid off. Employers choose to lay off workers.

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Consequently, if workers choose to leave their jobs, they do not qualify at all. To punish those who are laid off through no fault of their own is erroneous from the get go. It is egregious at best.

One needs to look at EI in its totality, not in a piecemeal quilt but that is what we are doing. That does not serve workers in the country and it does not serve the unemployed.

However, this bill will indeed help some. In my riding John Deere workers were laid off in 2009 when their plant closed and moved to Mexico even though it was a profitable plant. It was making money for that corporation and it just simply decided to get up and leave. Those workers, as they head into 2010 and exhaust their benefits, will be the recipients of the help in this bill. That is a good thing for them.

Unfortunately, the workers at Henniges, which is about two kilometres away, who were laid off in 2008 will receive nothing from the bill. They too would have worked for long periods of time. It was a plant that continued to work for long periods of time and did not experience layoffs, similar to the Deere plant workers.

Unfortunately, we will have on the one hand one group protected and on the other hand one group not protected. That is the difficulty with trying to bring together one piece at a time into a comprehensive melding of things to make this work. That is why it does not.

As we look to ensure that unemployed workers are covered we need to start looking at it from a comprehensive perspective, so that we actually are going to reform the system, not add one layer of complexity on to another and take one out from underneath.

My colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley asked a question about \$2 billion being put in the fund as we head into this new independent, arm's length body that will adjudicate the fund. Clearly, \$2 billion versus \$57 billion that was already there is inadequate. That is why we piecemeal systems because we do not fund them appropriately.

• (1125)

Yet workers and employers believe they funded it appropriately. They duly paid their premiums over a number of years and built up that surplus. We saw the surplus evaporate before our very eyes through the Conservative and Liberal governments' mismanagement of that fund. They simply spent it, and now we have to dip into general revenues to pay the unemployed.

I see the parliamentary secretary shaking his head. He is right. General revenue is now having to back up the unemployment fund. The governments had a surplus that was squandered, and I do not say that flippantly. Those two parties decided they would spend it on something other than the unemployed. That money rightfully belonged to the unemployed.

It is shameful that the unemployed are now asking why the system is not working for them. I do not think it does not work for them because people are trying to be nasty. The refrain is we do not have enough money, although we used to have enough. Someone decided to spend it elsewhere and that is regrettable. We have a premium freeze for the next little while and as we head out of it, we will ask workers to pay more.

My hope is that by the time they are asked to pay more, they get a comprehensive review of the system so if they are eventually laid off five years after paying their money, the money will be there again for them, not squandered like it was the last time.

As we can see, the bill will cover some workers. The number is 190,000. The numbers and dollar figures are bandied about. Is it \$935 million? Is it \$1 billion? No one knows for certain. Certainly the department and the commission are making some sense of what it might be and who it might be cover based on some other statistics. We will not know until the uptake. What we do know is workers out there need the help.

Most economists say that we may see a jobless recovery into 2010. If that is the case, we know people will be unemployed. Those who started their unemployment this year will be unemployed next year. How many is the debate. We do not know. I think that all of us in the House could agree on one thing. If it is not 190,000, but 150,000 or 100,000 because the other 90,000 have work, that will be a good thing. I do not think any of us in the House would say that is a bad. We will know they have jobs. They will be earning a living, putting money into the community and looking after their families. No one really wants to collect unemployment insurance.

When one thinks about it, workers only get 55¢ on the dollar. I am certain most members in the House would not want to make 55% of their wages. That is what the unemployed get when they are laid off. No one wants to be unemployed to make less money. They would rather work.

As we work through this system, this will help a certain segment of workers across the country. There will be regions, and the Bloc quite rightly points out that there are sectors within Quebec, that will not get covered. The forestry sector has been taking a hit for a long time. The vast majority of those workers will not be protected. The vast majority of auto workers in Ontario will not be protected either because of what they have suffered.

However, workers across the country may not always be in all of our ridings. There may be a few here and a few there. I am fairly certain there are a few workers in every riding. There will be pockets throughout the country that are larger than others. This is a national program. This is meant for all of us. This is meant to ensure we get protection across the country, no matter where.

Workers can be laid off in one region and move to another to try to seek work, while they collect unemployment insurance. It is a national program that we all used to cherish. We want to cherish it again as workers. We need to work hard in this place to ensure the system, as it goes forward, works like it did before the reforms came in the 1990s under the Liberal government. We need to ensure it works for workers and protects workers in their time of need. We need to ensure it is no longer what it is today, which is a patchwork quilt of protections across this land.

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•(1130)

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a very brief question for the member. He speaks about how the bill will not help certain segments. Would he elaborate on that?

Many corners of the country, including mine, have seasonal workers. I am thinking of the announcement of the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans at the wharf in Escuminac, when only three of one hundred and fifty eligible lobster fishers were eligible for the program.

There are great gaps in coverage with respect to seasonal workers. Could he elaborate on how we must do more to protect their needs and guard their expectations for a reasonable livelihood in the far corners of our great country?

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague is absolutely right. There are gaps in the system. I hate to be redundant and repeat myself, but it was his party, when in government, that actually gave us the gaps we see today. If we are to pretend that somehow the gaps materialized because of Bill C-50, then we are mistaken. At best, this is trying to paper over a small piece of a large gap.

What needs to happen is what I said earlier, and I have said this before in the House. We need review unemployment insurance, now called employment insurance, from top to bottom. At the end of the day, if we do not, we will be constantly trying to paper over the gaps. There will be losers across this land and we will never get to the root cause in the sense of being able to effect and help those who are unemployed.

Papering over the gaps will not work. We simply need to continue to work to ensure the system works for all Canadians.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to hear a bit more about the John Deere situation. It is an interesting situation. It reminds me of some of the poor planning that has happened in the manufacturing sector and the vulnerabilities that we currently still have.

Could the member for Welland elaborate on the John Deere situation because good jobs have now been lost?

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is absolutely right. When it comes to industrial policy in the country, we saw a manufacturer that was making money and a union that bargained a collective agreement that took into consideration where the dollar was heading, which was an upward spiral at the time, to ensure the company would remain profitable.

The workers, by the company's own admission, were the best in North America. That is what the CEO told me. Yet at the first opportunity, the plant was moved, lock, stock and barrel, to Mexico, minus the hoops of one barrel on its way past Wisconsin. It simply dropped off there. It laid off 800 workers in Welland from a place that had been there for almost 100 years. It was nearing its 100th anniversary. It was well known and well renowned for its quality, craftsmanship, price and competitiveness, but that was left behind.

That multinational corporation walked away from the community because we lacked an industrial policy that spoke to those corporations in a meaningful way, a policy that told them they must

adhere to the rules of the game in Canada and that they could not simply walk away because they thought they could.

That was the unfortunate eventuality for those John Deere workers who had never been laid off. In fact, in our region it was one of only a few bright spots. It was hiring folks nine months before the closure announcement.

It is regrettable we do not have an industrial policy that ensures those sorts of things do not happen. However, notwithstanding it has now happened, we need to ensure we have protection for those workers so they are covered by employment insurance. We need to ensure, as they head into uncertain times, that they will be covered, that they will be protected and that they will be able to stay in their communities and continue to raise their families in those communities that they so cherish.

•(1135)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to participate in the debate on Bill C-50.

The employment rate in my riding of Windsor West in the last two years has lead the nation. It had historically high amounts prior to that. For many years, I have raised alarm bells in the House, both with the previous Liberal administration and now the Conservatives, that the lack of auto policy would cost my region jobs. We saw an erosion in the auto industry. Now it has totally dropped off the cliff, with Canada moving from first in auto assembly to tenth.

Bill C-50 will not particularly help the auto sector and workers, as the member for Welland noted quite correctly. However, I will support the bill because I know what it is like for families when they run out of benefits and do not have the necessary supports. The effect it has not only on families but communities is terrible and it can be avoided.

The bill has some positive elements. If we can cover 150,000 or 190,000 people for \$1 billion, which is the estimated cost, or whatever it might be, then I am willing to vote for it. I and people in my community do not want other people going through what we are going through right now.

We are faced with even greater complications. Not only do we have the loss of jobs, but also the loss of an industry due to a lack of policy. In my opening comments I noted that Canada did not have an auto policy. The minister is convening a meeting with CAPC this Friday, which is a good move. There will finally be some action there.

The actual competition, which is the United States, has sprinted almost to the finish line with a new energy economy. In fact, George W. Bush, not Barack Obama, set up a \$25 billion fund for the U.S. auto industry prior to the sector's fallout and the repercussions from that. As a consequence, Michigan, for example, will get two new car factories and four new battery factories because it has been very assertive in procuring the technology, development and evolution to ensure things happen.

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There are congratulations to extend to Ken Lewenza, president of the CAW, but there are also some difficulties. Once again, he has negotiated an investment in Windsor, Ontario for a new engine. Unfortunately, the St. Thomas plant in the London area will be closed, I am very concerned about the workers there. London is now quickly approaching the Windsor numbers for unemployment insurance, at 11%. I am worried people will continue to fall off the system.

The bill will help those who in the past have not had claims in the system. It targets some older workers and that is very important. I have seen the fallacies of some policies, especially with older workers. The government has claimed that they need retraining, that everything will be fine and that the market will settle itself.

My region has a mould, tool and die manufacturer, which is the best in the world, hands down. It has engineered change to the industry and has led the world for many years. However, now jobs are being shed because of trade policy and the lack of enforcement of a number of trade issues, such as dumping and the whole procurement process that leaves Canada many times outside the door.

I would point to one in particular. The Department of National Defence shamelessly out-sourced a contract to Navistar International. It is building Canadian vehicles for our military in Texas, instead of Chatham, Ontario doing it. Canadian men and women could have been working building those vehicles and we would have been paying less unemployment insurance than retooling the factory, which was a small undertaking. Ironically, while those trucks are being built in Texas, our workers are sitting at home. It is unacceptable that this policy continues.

That procurement was allowed under our current trade agreements, but we are the only nation that does not do it. The United States does this on a regular basis and it is unacceptable.

I want to briefly talk about what we can do for employment insurance by increasing the benefits and what it means to individuals. They are able to save their homes, ensure their kids continue to go to school, pay their bills during difficult times and there is a sense of stability. We are making choices about how we want to use our resources.

• (1140)

This government and the previous administration had an EI surplus windfall of \$57 billion provided by the workers and the actual companies and their contributions. To take that money away is nothing more than thievery. It is a slap in the face to all those who have paid into the system, especially when they need it at a time when we have an economic downturn as we have right now.

Ironically, this downturn was not brought on by workers' wages and pensions. Rather, it was brought about by greed and mismanagement, often incubated in the U.S. housing market and other markets. It has now been turned on its head to be an attack on workers' wages and benefits, and is now what the new benefit descriptions have called a legacy cost, which is absolute nonsense.

When people sit down at a table and work with an employer and negotiate a pension instead of a wage increase, instead of a benefit increase, that is a deferred wage that they are entitled to, that they

should have. It is something they have actually sweated for and is something they actually deserve to have for themselves and their family later. It is important for this country to continue to work on its pensions. As a New Democrat, I am glad that we have been able to move the ball on this issue as well.

What could we do in terms of economic policy to change things around now, to provide the resources to expand the employment insurance system to make sure that people can continue to have their homes and be able to move forward and get some new employment?

One thing that has been missed in the public debate, and it is very interesting, is that this country has been making large corporate tax cuts since the year 2000. I commissioned a paper, because as things stand right now we are going from about 29% down to 15% by 2012.

Independently of doing my own research, I had the economists and other supports through the Library of Parliament, which every member of Parliament here is entitled to, run the numbers on estimates of what corporate tax reductions have cost from the year 2000 to today and then, on top of that, what they are going to cost from today to 2012 in order to bring us down to the 15% mark.

Interestingly enough, the first wave, from 2000 to about two months ago, represents \$85 billion in terms of overall revenue that we have forgone as a country, which we no longer have to put towards a number of different measures. Now, the second wave, which is still coming up, is going to cost us \$86 billion. Another \$86 billion is going to be necessary for that.

What is interesting is that right now the government is borrowing money from future generations to provide a corporate tax cut for the oil and gas companies, some of the pharmaceutical companies, and the insurance companies, profitable industries that do not need this type of incentive and that will not change the way they conduct their operations in the market.

That loss of revenue means not only that we do not have that money to spend currently on targeting different industrial areas, but also that we will have to pay it back with interest. We are borrowing at record low rates right now, 0.25%. It is going to be interesting later on, over the years, when we pay this off, especially if we are in a structural deficit, which I believe we are, because we have gutted our capacity to get out of this economic downturn quite significantly.

All we have to do is point to the fact that everybody is hoping for a market recovery and for shares to go up based upon speculation on the price of oil and other things, but our unemployment rates still climb.

We have seen some recovery, in things like the Ford plant and the new investments that were made by the CAW during negotiations at the table. These things have been done in isolation; the government was not there. They have been able to increase the numbers of jobs but not to the level that historically we would have had to pull ourselves out of the system.

For the automotive sector in particular, this is a structural change. It is not a cyclical one. We are going to see some problems in terms of the overall recovery.

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Canadians want to know right now why on earth we would continue to have large corporate tax cuts at this point in time. Seeing as we have shed record numbers of manufacturing jobs across Ontario and Quebec, obviously lowering corporate tax rates has not worked. Obviously those industries that are under attack because of the economic and trade policies of other countries are not preserving actual jobs. The numbers of jobs are shrinking anyway.

We need to turn that around and have good sectoral strategies. One of the things we can do is invest in green technology, not only for the consumer element but also for research and development. That is going to require investment. Where does that come from?

I would suggest that one of the first things we should do is stop borrowing from our children to provide corporate tax cuts to the corporations that do not need them right now. Let us instead put that money back into their future, so that they can actually be part of the solution instead of dealing with this continued policy of the problem.

• (1145)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his great speech.

I am trying to get my mind around the Liberal position on employment insurance as an issue. The Liberals took \$57 billion out of the system to balance the budget a few years ago. Now we are finding that on a measure such as this, which we agree is a very important measure but certainly not an all-inclusive one, nor one that is going to solve the entire problem, the Liberals are speaking against it and are planning to vote against this particular bill.

Could the member help me sort out in my mind what is wrong with the Liberal position on this whole area of EI?

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, I do not know if it is continued arrogance or just not understanding or appreciating what Canadians are going through. It does not make any sense.

However, he is correct in noting the \$57 billion that was in the fund. Now, according to the CFIB board, as an unfortunate repercussion of the government's new policy and a \$2 billion fund that is already exhausted, we are going to see payroll taxes increase. The Parliamentary Budget Officer has already determined that. The member for Outremont did a good job for our side on that.

I spent some time talking about the corporate tax reductions because, ironically, what we are going to have, when the auto sector has been reeling and will not benefit right now from this type of policy, is this payroll tax which will be an additional tax on those companies that are struggling right now. The forestry sector, the auto sector, the manufacturing sector, and any of those sectors that are struggling right now will have a new tax introduced on them so that they are actually going to be subsidizing, once again, the banks, the oil industry and the other types of institutions that are doing quite well.

It makes no sense to bring in this type of policy at this point in time because it will actually further prohibit economic development.

I can tell members that the investors for the auto sector and for the manufacturing sector are looking at these types of policies. They are not necessarily looking at the overall corporate tax reduction. I

mentioned Michigan and how the Americans have been procuring plants much more significantly than we have here.

The finance minister can brag all he wants about having the corporate tax rate down to 15% by 2012 and say that right now we have a better rate than the United States does, but the reality is that jobs are going somewhere else.

In fact, in Michigan, they have also done a number of things in their sector. They are now competing for our film industry. They have made an old auto facility into a mecca for the film industry. That economic development is going to be quite significant. It is going to compete against Toronto.

There are a number of industries in which we are losing out because other types of programs and services are being offered by our competitor to the south. All we can do is say that we have a lower corporate tax rate and they should come here.

The reality is that they have actually been getting the rebound and we have not. That is very troubling because some of the stuff that is actually developing, for example, in the auto sector is new technology. There is not only the overall assembly of that new technology at the high level, at tier one, in the actual production of vehicles, but also a changing industry for the parts and supply development of this new technology. The clustering of those new facilities will often go around the new development, or facilities might go there instead of retooling in Canada, which would be necessary for them to service this new type of investment that is happening in the United States. Often, in the past, if a plant went to the United States, we in Ontario would at least be able to feed off it by supplying parts and services along with Ohio and Michigan.

However, now, with some of the new technologies emerging, my concern, and it is being validated, is that the parts sector will be more vulnerable than ever before because Americans are looking at whether they should retool or just actually build new facilities in the United States to supply these new plants. If that happened, it would cost Canadian taxpayers significantly and communities very significantly.

One only has to look at the corridor or region from London to Windsor, Ontario. As I noted, London is up to over 11% unemployment right now. We have to ask those members where the policy is. We have been pushing for this policy all along. Once again, I do thank the minister for at least convening CAPC on Friday, but it is not enough.

The U.S. has a \$25 million policy of low-interest loans. In Canada we will match that with a \$50 million policy over five years for \$250 million. Ironically, the industry knows that money came from a new tax that the government put on the auto sector. A new tax provides for the incentive that they put out there, and at the end of the day they do not accept that at all.

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Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as does the member for Windsor West, I have some experience in the automotive sector and the automotive parts sector. Of note, the commitment of the government to cut taxes is significant. The commitment to cut corporate taxes is significant, so that global corporations and Canadian corporations make that commitment to choose Canada as their first place to do business. Just this year we saw one of Canada's most iconic corporations make the decision to move back to this country, due in large part to the commitment to reducing corporate taxes.

The member for Windsor West see the situation as the glass being half empty. We on this side of the House see it as the glass being half full.

I was encouraged yesterday to hear the quarterly reports from Ford, an automotive manufacturer, a member of the sector the member for Windsor West alluded to in his speech, saying they made a \$1 billion profit in the latest quarter. I am sure doing business in Canada is looking more favourable every single day.

However, I am not here to speak about the auto industry per se, I am here to speak about Bill , C-50, and I would like to begin, if I may.

I rise again to discuss Bill C-50, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and to increase benefits. We have an opportunity today to help experienced workers who have lost their jobs because of a recent downturn in the economy. This is an important time. Our economy is still fragile and a recovery is still in its infancy. It is important that we take prudent, responsible and affordable action to ensure our recovery blossoms and Canadians benefit in both the short and the long term.

Bill C-50 is legislation that will temporarily extend employment insurance regular benefits to unemployed, long-tenured workers so they have more time to look for a new job. It is prudent, responsible and affordable.

Who are these long-tenured workers? They are Canadians who have worked hard, paid their taxes and their employment insurance premiums for many years and have never or rarely collected employment insurance regular benefits. Then suddenly, they have lost their jobs and they have to start over. In times like these, in a time of a changing and recovering economy, such a prospect can be tough to handle.

We are concerned about all unemployed Canadians, but we are focusing now on long-tenured workers who have been particularly affected by the recent downturn in our economy. We know that Canadian workers work hard. We know they are prudent and care for themselves, their families and their communities. We know they want to get back to work when they find themselves without work to go to. Canadians work hard and want to help themselves, but we still have a responsibility to help them over the current hurdle.

We want to make sure that the employment insurance system, which Canadian workers have paid into, is flexible and responsive to their needs. After all, workers pay into the system and employers pay into the system, so the system should work for them when they need it. Bill C-50 is a temporary measure that will help workers who have never or rarely collected EI regular benefits.

Bill C-50 will provide from five to 20 weeks of additional benefits, depending how long an individual has been working and paying employment insurance premiums. Once a person meets the criteria of a long-tenured worker, the calculation is simple: the longer a person has worked, the more weeks of extended benefits they will get. The more they have paid into the system, the more they will get out of it. That applies to workers who have paid at least 30% of the annual maximum employment insurance premiums for seven out of ten calendar years.

Most workers working full time or close to full time for many years will have no trouble meeting this threshold, and we are making allowance for their having received up to 35 weeks of regular benefits in the past five years.

● (1150)

This part of the bill recognizes that workers from some industries, including manufacturing and forestry, have used EI during temporary shutdowns. This is just a natural part of our economy and it needs to be recognized. I think it is a prudent measure in the bill.

Adding to the prudence of the bill, we have made sure that the use of the special benefit aspect of employment insurance, like maternity and parental benefits, compassionate care and sickness benefits, will not affect a worker's eligibility, so let us be clear on that one.

Workers who have taken time off and used these special benefits will not be negatively affected in the application of the bill. They will be just as eligible as a person who has not used these benefits.

Another prudent measure is the coverage this bill would have throughout our economy. Our minister and her officials have estimated that up to 190,000 Canadians would be able to benefit from the measures contained within this bill. That is a large group of Canadians and a very large portion of the unemployed due to this recession. As such, this bill would be a huge help to Canadians and Canada as a whole.

Long-tenured workers come from all sectors of the economy, not only forestry and manufacturing, but also technology, the trades and the service sector. They also come from all across Canada. There is not an area in Canada which has not been touched by this recession, and there is not a corner of the country where we cannot find long-tenured workers who have been laid off and are having a tough time in this tough economy.

Within my great riding of Huron—Bruce there are many long-tenured workers who would benefit from this bill. That is why I am very passionate about it and the details that lie within it.

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As many of my colleagues have said already, approximately one-third of those who have lost their jobs across Canada since the end of January have established an EI claim for long-tenured workers. Specifically, this new measure would provide continuing support to these workers while they look for jobs in our changing and recovering economy. For example, under the legislation, workers who paid premiums in seven of the past ten years would get five extra weeks of EI regular benefits. For every additional year of contribution, the number of weeks of benefits would increase by three weeks, up to a maximum 20 weeks.

At this point I would like to address the three amendments that our government made to this bill, amendments that were endorsed by the House just yesterday. They are technical amendments that will further support long-tenured workers and ensure the bill maintains its wide scope.

The first two amendments establish that the measures in the bill now start on a fixed date, that date being January 4, 2009 for eligibility, regardless of the timing of royal assent for this bill, which is very encouraging. This will create certainty for our long-tenured workers. This will also ensure that all long-tenured workers who lost their jobs in 2009 will be eligible for the additional weeks of benefits, regardless of the length of time needed to approve the bill.

As part of these amendments, we have also made sure that Canadians or Americans who work in Canada but live in the United States may be able to receive employment insurance regular benefits. The only restriction is that they must meet the eligibility requirements of the employment insurance program.

Another amendment introduced is a transition provision. This will ensure that claimants have sufficient time within their benefit period to receive all the additional weeks of regular benefits provided by this measure.

These amendments will ensure that all eligible long-tenured workers have full access to the extended benefits. Though technical, they are important for the success of this bill, and I am pleased that the House supported them.

By extending employment insurance for long-tenured workers, we are taking action that is beneficial for our economy and for Canadian workers. With some adjustments, they will make it back into the workforce and continue to be productive.

It is our responsibility to support our unemployed workers as they work to recover from this recent recession just as the economy as a whole must work to recover. We stand behind them. They will get through the downturn, and this Conservative government is helping them.

• (1155)

Bill C-50, a temporary measure like many of our other measures, builds on other initiatives that we have introduced in Canada's economic action plan. It is a temporary measure for a temporary situation.

Most certainly, it is a trying time for those who are unemployed. We have faith that our work as a government will work in concert with the work of Canadians throughout our economy and with people working in other countries to ensure that our economy

recovers and that our workforce is healthy, skilled and most importantly, back to work.

I want to cover a few of the measures in Canada's economic action plan just to ensure that all of my colleagues realize all the good things this Conservative government is doing for Canadians. I also want to cover some recent history. I do this not because my colleagues have not heard me and others talk about the economic action plan but because many of my opposition colleagues have a mixed record on the action plan, so they may need a refresher.

First, I would point out that the Liberals across the way supported this Conservative government and its economic action plan before they opposed it. The Liberal leader, in fact, could not find a whole lot to complain about. That was before he decided that time was up and that Canadians needed an unnecessary election. So he opposed the unnecessary election before he supported it. These are not promising signs from the Liberal opposition members. They seem unreliable and unable to make up their minds. They seem unable to decide on a course of action that is best for Canadians. They seem unable to commit. The Liberals seem to act with their own interests at heart. They seem to be in it for themselves. This is unfortunate, not for our government but for Canadians.

What is promising, however, is the support we have gained from our colleagues in the NDP on Bill C-50. Yes, we have had our differences certainly but they seem to be looking out for Canadians in the bill as is our government. NDP members seem to want to ensure that Canadians get the help they need from this bill. We agree that this help should get to Canadians, so we are glad they have decided to support the bill and our government's actions even though they were less supportive earlier in the year.

As for the Bloc, not only can they not deliver for Quebeckers, now they are simply opposing things that are good for Quebec and proposing irresponsible measures this government simply cannot support. As I said earlier, I would like to talk briefly about the measures our Conservative government has taken in the economic action plan to help Canadians.

First among them is an initiative that is complementary to the measures in Bill C-50. I am talking about the career transition assistance initiative in which we are further supporting long-tenured workers by helping them train for future jobs. Workers can get their employment insurance benefits extended up to a maximum of two years while they undertake longer term training. They could also get earlier access to EI if they invest in their training using part of their severance package or all of it. I would like to add that some of my former colleagues have actually participated in this program and shortly they will see the benefits of their commitment to their future.

Government Orders

Under the economic action plan we are providing unemployed Canadians with five extra weeks of EI regular benefits. We are increasing the maximum duration of weeks of EI regular benefits from 45 weeks to 50 weeks. We are also providing billions toward skills training both for people who are on EI and for those who do not qualify. We are also preserving jobs through the work-sharing program. We have allowed more flexibility for employers and agreements can now be extended up to 52 weeks. It supports employees who might otherwise be laid off. It allows them to continue working a reduced work week while they receive EI benefits for the days they do not work. Importantly, it will allow firms to recover quickly once demand rises again and I can speak specifically to my own experience.

•(1200)

It is important that we keep these employees who have skills, who are trained in the jobs that they have done for many years, in order to stay within a company so that when the recovery does come, and we are seeing it start already, the company does not have to hire a new group and train them, because we know this is extremely expensive, especially when we start talking about hundreds of employees across a corporation.

As of this week, almost 7,000 active work-sharing agreements across Canada are preserving the jobs of more than 167,000 Canadians. Again, this comes back to the fact that we were the latest to come into the downturn and we will be the first to come out of it. One of the reasons is because we are going to have 167,000 of these long-tenured employees who are currently in work-share programs return right back into a full work week and be able to contribute fully to our Canadian economy.

Let me refer to another program called the targeted initiative for older workers, which applies to people who are 55 to 64 years of age. Under the economic action plan, we are investing an additional \$60 million over three years to provide upgrading and work experience to help older workers make the transition to new employment. Further, we have expanded the program so that it extends access to older workers in major communities as well as smaller cities affected by a significant downsizing or closure.

We are also delivering on our Conservative government's commitment to improve the governance and management of the EI fund. We have established the Canada Employment Insurance Financing Board, an independent, arm's length body that will implement and improve the EI premium rate-setting mechanism that will ensure EI revenues and expenditures break even over time, and set the employment insurance premium rate starting in 2011.

This is important for Canadian workers because it will ensure that their hard-earned EI premiums are used to fund the EI system, and only the EI system, when they need it. EI premiums will not disappear again like they did under a previous government. EI programs will not be used for purposes for which they were not intended and will not be used on political pet projects.

However, let me return to Bill C-50. The purpose of the bill is to help long-tenured workers directly affected by the force and depth of this recent recession. As I mentioned earlier, the bill before us, Bill C-50, proposes a temporary measure that will provide some much needed assistance to long-tenured workers throughout the country.

The passage of this bill will make a difference in their lives. It will make a difference in the lives of their families and will make a difference to our economy.

It is the right and fair thing to do for these Canadian workers who have worked long and hard, and who have not asked for much help in return. Let us help them in their time of need and support them while they find jobs.

•(1205)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the Conservative member talk about the choices that his government made in favour of workers that have not received EI benefits in the last five years and in favour of Ontario auto workers. One thing he said struck me. He said that the government has delivered on its commitments. I notice, however, that it is not delivering anything to seasonal workers nor to forestry workers. With Bill C-50, the government chose to help unemployed workers in the auto sector.

Could the member explain why the Conservatives chose to exclude seasonal workers and forestry workers and to help auto workers in Ontario?

[*English*]

Mr. Ben Lobb: Mr. Speaker, maybe the member would like to discuss his party's record on its choice for helping unemployed workers.

Our economic action plan provided an additional five weeks of employment insurance and work sharing for 165,000 Canadians. We froze EI premiums for two years. We added an additional \$60 million to help older workers. The list goes on and on and on. As well, there will be extra support for long-tenured workers, as we are discussing today, for 190,000 unemployed people which is close to \$1 billion. The list goes on and on. There are the moneys that we have invested in the building Canada fund for infrastructure, the infrastructure stimulus fund to help Canadians get back to work as well as provide a cushion for them.

The member has talked about some things. Perhaps we could discuss a private member's bill that was brought to the committee a while ago, Bill C-241. The Bloc members support that bill and I wonder how the member reconciles this. The Bloc voted against every single measure I just mentioned which represent billions of dollars. The bill which the Bloc supports provides nothing to change regional differences. It has nothing to do with eligibility requirements. All it provides is two extra weeks.

Government Orders

How could the Bloc members vote against all the measures I have described but support just two weeks? What the Bloc supports does not add up.

• (1210)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am having trouble understanding why my friends in the Liberal Party will not support the bill. I am trying to figure out what principle it offends.

We are talking about five extra weeks for long-tenured workers. We are talking about measures that will affect 190,000 workers in Canada, a billion dollars.

I know the Liberals would like to see more improvements, but why would they vote against this particular bill? I am having trouble understanding that.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Mr. Speaker, that is a fair question from the member for Elmwood—Transcona.

It comes down to the fact that the Liberals are confused. Their leader would rather provide a stimulus plan for Elections Canada employees with a \$300 million election that no Canadian wants. That is what the Liberals would choose. They would choose an election that would cost \$300 million over helping 190,000 Canadians and providing \$1 billion to help long-tenured workers, those workers who have paid EI premiums for 30, 35 and 40 years in some cases and have never used employment insurance or very little.

The Liberal leader would choose a costly election, a \$300 million election. That is the only rationale I could think of. Hopefully through time the Leader of the Opposition will see the light on long-tenured workers.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Speaker, the member talked about Bill C-50, obviously, but he also talked about another bill, Bill C-241. This bill, introduced by the Bloc Québécois, was aimed at eliminating the two-week waiting period for workers who lose their jobs and must go on EI. And not only is there a two-week waiting period, but the claimant has to wait another four weeks before receiving a cheque, which means a minimum of six weeks. I am sure the member has met constituents in his riding who have told him that this two-week penalty is really unfair.

I would like the member to tell me whether he agrees that this two-week waiting period is really unfair for an unemployed worker who must wait another four weeks before receiving a cheque, which means a total of six weeks.

[*English*]

Mr. Ben Lobb: Mr. Speaker, I would like to answer the member's question with a question.

I have always thought that five is better than two when talking about numbers. In fact, our government added on five weeks at the end of the time for employment insurance benefits. The Bloc supports two weeks. It voted against five weeks to support two.

The bill in question, as I mentioned, does nothing to change the time it takes to process an employment insurance claim. If the Bloc would like to introduce a private member's bill on that, it would be something to look at it. However, Bill C-241 does not do that.

I would also like to say that in the time I have been in the House, which is just over a year, the Bloc members speak very strongly about their support for workers and all the things they are passionate about, such as employment insurance. To date however, I do not believe they have ever voted for one thing to help unemployed people, not one. This government has provided a long list, in the short time I have been a member of Parliament, of people who are going to be on, or are on, employment insurance.

The member is shaking his head. I have a list of things. If he would like a copy, I will give him one and perhaps he could tell the House later about all the things he has just uncovered.

• (1215)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a question to ask my colleague.

He started his speech by saying that Bill C-50 was an answer for all workers who had worked hard all their lives, and who had paid their premiums and their taxes.

The other workers, who are not eligible under Bill C-50 because they do not have access to the program, does this mean they are workers who have not worked hard all their lives?

Is he making a distinction between these two types of employed or unemployed people? I would like him to answer my question.

What is this government offering to all the workers who do not have access under Bill C-50 and who do not have access to employment insurance?

[*English*]

Mr. Ben Lobb: Mr. Speaker, this really speaks to the Bloc members being confused on employment insurance. Again I refer to Bill C-241. I think they are simply opposing to oppose and they are not really supporting workers.

The hon. member, with whom I serve on committee, voted for Bill C-241, which does nothing to address the issue she just mentioned. She supports a Bloc private member's bill which does nothing about what she mentioned but she votes against a bill that can affect people in her own riding. I do not know how the Bloc members reconcile this at the end of the day in their constituencies in saying that they stand up for their constituents but their voting records show that they do not.

I simply cannot understand how the Bloc members can ask questions about that when their voting records clearly show that they have voted to help no person who is currently unemployed.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is my turn to speak to Bill C-50, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and to increase benefits, and I am very pleased to do that today.

Government Orders

The Bloc Québécois has opposed Bill C-50 from the outset, as my colleagues have said several times. As we know, this bill does not in any way propose to open access to the employment insurance scheme, which has been locked up for several years, for a very long time. That is why we are opposed to Bill C-50. When, for example, we propose that the waiting period be eliminated, the reason is to offer people who have lost their jobs, to offer families, mothers with children or fathers who work for low wages, speedy access to income. Eliminating the waiting period provides them with income quickly so they can meet their needs. That is what eliminating the waiting period does. In order to receive the extended five weeks, someone still has to have access to employment insurance, and still has to run out of benefits, because those weeks are added only at the end of the benefit period.

Concerning Bill C-50, I am hearing the Conservatives criticize us for opposing a measure that could have helped some workers. I emphasize “some”.

Today I would like to take my allotted time to explain our position on this not only to the Conservatives, but also to the NDP members. We have examined the bill, we have met several times with officials from the department, and we have asked them questions. The reason we have been unable to come around to voting for the bill is, first and foremost, that we believe it is discriminatory, and thus necessarily unfair. In one way, the first goal of politics is justice, as Plato wrote and taught 2,500 years ago. I do not know whether an ideal city, or a just city as he called it, is possible, or even whether it is desirable, but I do know that to my mind, this is a principle that guides the decisions I have to make in my political career, as recent as it is.

And so I think that the yardstick to which this bill must be held up is justice, and in our view it is precisely that test that Bill C-50 fails. Our rejection of it is not based on some naïve idealism; the opposite is true. In a way, our rejection is pragmatic. If I may explain: in the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities and here in the House, the NDP has criticized us, in an analogy with bargaining between a union and employer, for rejecting what was on the table. In their view, we have to accept the improvement we are offered because we can always come back and get more later.

We think this view is very naïve, and I am sure my colleagues in the NDP suspect as much and actually know it. Whether real or phony, a matter of conviction or simply for electoral reasons, it is very naïve because it is obvious that there will not be anything else. We are already quite far into the economic crisis, at least in terms of job losses. Still, the government has not proposed anything to solve the most crucial problem facing employment insurance, that is, access, which remains under 50%. Are we going to pass a bill that will meet the needs of who knows how many employment insurance recipients simply because it is there, on the table? Are we going to pass it simply because it is on the table, telling ourselves that the government might propose something a bit later? I have a problem with that.

What is the logic in agreeing to what is proposed here? If the only argument in favour of its basically discriminatory provisions is to say that something else will come along, that is like saying this bill is unjust, unfair and discriminatory but we are confident another will

come along to magically redress the disparity caused by this one. There is no reason, though, to think this will happen, and it is obvious that the bill introduced this morning will do nothing to solve the eligibility issue.

• (1220)

We are left, therefore, with the first half of what I said, “this bill is unjust, unfair and discriminatory”.

We have also been accused of refusing to support the bill because it does not reform employment insurance from top to bottom, as we have been demanding for a number of years. That is equally false, and I could point to several changes to the employment insurance system that we would have supported: eliminate the waiting period, restore the single eligibility requirement and set it at 360 hours, increase the wage-replacement rate to 60%, put an end to the presumption of guilt for people who are related to their employer, and so on. These are steps we would have supported without a second’s hesitation, even if they were not part of a comprehensive reform.

Not that there is no crying need for comprehensive reform. We still think there is. However, we would have voted in favour of the steps I just mentioned because they are basically fair and equitable. This is clearly not the case of Bill C-50, which literally creates two categories of unemployed people: the good and the bad.

Thus, the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development said in committee that the unemployed people targeted by Bill C-50 were those who had lost their jobs through no fault of their own. Does she know that ever since the 1990s people who voluntarily quit their jobs have been unable to collect employment insurance? That is like what my colleague across the aisle said a little while ago. People who have worked hard all their lives, paid their taxes and made their contributions would qualify for the benefits provided under Bill C-50. I just wonder what these Conservatives think about other workers who have had to fall back, unfortunately, on employment insurance. Was she trying to insinuate that these people were doing all they could to defraud the employment insurance system by conniving to hide a voluntary departure? Was she trying to say that the unemployed who collected benefits in the past were guilty of having worked, for example, in plants that had to close in the summer because they did not have enough contracts? The minister’s words clearly betray the contempt this government has for people who have to fall back on employment insurance.

Passing this bill means creating two classes of unemployed workers: the deserving and the undeserving. Few, very few, are deserving. According to the deputy minister of Human Resources himself, the proposed measures would apply to no more than 6% of unemployed workers. In other words, 94% would be excluded. That is unbelievable. As we have been hearing since yesterday, it seems that the vast majority of forestry workers, whose industry has been going through crisis after crisis for years now, crises that affect hours worked and force workers to collect employment insurance benefits, would be excluded. This bill leaves out anyone who has collected more than 35 weeks of benefits over the past five years.

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It will also exclude most women. Despite the fact that women now play as great a role in the labour market as men, they will have an even harder time than men qualifying for the very restrictive criteria proposed in this bill. The same goes for young people who cannot qualify because only those who have been in the labour market for at least seven years and have paid at least 30% of the maximum contribution can collect extra benefits—for a minimum of five weeks. Let us not forget that the bill proposes between five and 20 extra weeks. Young people simply will not qualify unless they have been working full time since the age of 16.

Yet young people are among the hardest hit by the economic crisis. As the saying goes, last in, first out. In fact, student employment is in the worst shape ever since 1977, when statistics were first compiled.

• (1225)

Essentially, this is a temporary measure designed to respond to the economic crisis. As the government said earlier, the budget already includes a proposal to extend employment insurance benefits by five weeks. This government chose to add extra weeks of benefits without taking into consideration access to the EI program.

In a difficult economic situation, to help young families, young parents and low-income parents of all ages with school-aged children and mouths to feed, the government should have improved access to the EI program.

It is self-evident that Bill C-50 is discriminatory and as a result, it may divide unemployed people into two factions.

It is hard to be opposed to a change that would make life easier for someone else. But at the same time, when someone is left out in the cold, it is hard not to envy someone else who is getting a break.

Within one company, some workers will be entitled to benefits under Bill C-50, while others will not. Those who are not entitled to benefits may have worked very hard over the past five years. They will have worked hard and paid their premiums and taxes week after week. But they may have received more than 35 weeks of employment insurance and will therefore not be eligible for benefits under Bill C-50.

It is as though all members on both sides of this House were starving and had not eaten for a week and it was decided that all those with red socks would be fed and all those with blue socks would have to wait. We wonder how this criterion for selecting people was set. The ship is sinking, but there are not enough lifeboats to save everyone. Priority will therefore be given to those who paid more for their tickets. They will be saved first, and the others will have to save themselves as best they can. That is more or less what is happening with this bill.

That is why this bill has come under harsh criticism from a number of organizations dedicated to defending the rights of the unemployed. For example, Ian Forand, who is involved in the Comité chômage de Montréal, wrote this in the September 24 issue of *Le Devoir*:

The Conservative government's Bill C-50, introduced on September 14, 2009, is a bad bill, and the government is merely trying to scam people by extending the number of weeks of benefits. ...it is very sad to see the NDP critics going out to defend them, not only without stepping back to take a critical look, but often on

behalf of government ministers, and even taking credit for the initiative. ...Those who are familiar with the Employment Insurance Act and its application, those who have fought with their usual integrity and fervour—and there are many in the NDP—know that this bill is terrible and disgraceful for our citizens.

I would also like to quote the very respected Pierre Céré, spokesperson for the Conseil national des chômeurs et chômeuses:

[In this case], it is not up to us to vote on this bill [C-50] to either reject it or pass it, however, we would like to share our opinion,...

And still quoting Mr. Céré:

This bill, in its current form, is unacceptable. It is discriminatory. It does not represent the kind of constructive, positive solutions that are needed to fix the employment insurance system. We believe, perhaps somewhat naively, that policy should provide solutions to problems and that our highest legislative officials should be able to work together.

I was saying earlier that practising politics is a quest for justice, the desire to give everyone his or her fair share. However, those shares are limited by the scarcity of resources. So we have no choice but to distribute them in a certain way.

Two things are certain. First of all, we believe that not enough resources are being allocated to employment insurance to meet current needs, considering all of the government's resources.

• (1230)

Second, supposing that it were impossible to increase the resources allocated to the employment insurance system, which is obviously not true, we still believe it would be fundamentally unfair to target one category of workers to the detriment of others, more specifically to 94% of the workers. That is not all. Apparently this bill is an emergency measure to respond, very timidly I must say, to the current economic crisis.

How do we explain to a person who lost his job in October 2008, when economic troubles consequently led to colossal job losses, that he is not entitled to the extension of benefits the government is proposing here? How can the government justify a crisis measure that does not apply to all those who were affected by the same economic crisis?

Here is another anomaly. Despite the fact that workers who receive severance pay have to exhaust that money before they can receive employment insurance benefits, a worker who lost his job in October 2008, but did not start receiving benefits until February 2009, would also be excluded since, contrary to all things logical, the date of the application and not the beginning of the benefits period is considered in determining the worker's eligibility. Even in the rare cases of those who could have been eligible under the restrictive criteria, there are other discriminatory and totally arbitrary factors in place.

These are very serious reasons why we cannot bring ourselves to vote in favour of this bill. It would certainly help some unemployed people, but the adverse affects it would have and the utterly unfair principle it is based on make it totally unacceptable in our view. Supporting this principle would mean accepting that there are two classes of citizens: the deserving and the undeserving. That is something we will never accept, in the name of justice that demands equality among citizens.

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●(1235)

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague from Saint-Lambert on her speech. We both sit on the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. Therefore, she is also in a position to understand the impact of this project on the unemployed.

She also made the point that sweeping reform is required. With respect to this reform, little has been said to date in all our debates here about the situation of older workers, those 55 and over who lose their jobs. Could she tell us what happens to these people when they do not find jobs in the regions where they live?

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Chambly—Borduas for his question. My colleague has a tremendous amount of experience and I am learning a great deal from him. It is true that there is nothing for older individuals.

My colleague opposite said earlier that the government is now offering training programs for older workers who have lost their jobs. For example, a 63-year-old worker will be sent back to the classroom for training. There are no transitional measures to give these people the time to reflect and find a new path in life. There are no transitional measures like the ones that used to be included in POWA, the program for older worker adjustment.

We would like this program to be revived because it allows older workers—and especially for some much older workers—to bridge the gap from the time they are unemployed until they are eligible for their pensions. We must help these workers and not force them to immediately enter a training program that may be unsuitable, without having time to give serious thought to this decision.

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I too would like to congratulate the hon. member for Saint-Lambert. I think that members of this House, including Conservative members, will agree that she delivered a very good speech.

What is clear in her presentation is that Bill C-50 is unfair and discriminatory. Of course our colleague referred to the Bloc's position. I would like to hear her again briefly on the measures that the Bloc would have proposed to improve employment insurance and to make this legislation acceptable to us, had these measures been included in it. As we know, repetition is a pedagogical tool. It is useful in this House, and I hope that it will help Conservative members be more open-minded.

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. The Bloc Québécois would have supported any measure that would have improved accessibility to employment insurance. The 360-hour eligibility criterion, which would establish a single eligibility threshold, is one example. I should also point out that, during an economic crisis, such a measure would have been extremely beneficial.

Eliminating the waiting period—which would allow workers who just lost their jobs to quickly get some income to sustain themselves—and increasing the benefit rate from 55% to 60% are also measures that we would have supported.

There are some very disturbing things about Bill C-50. For example, I received a letter from a Nortel worker in Quebec who, after 25 years with the company, was laid off in the fall of 2008. He filed a claim for EI benefits in the fall of 2008, but because he had received a severance package, he did not start collecting benefits until May 2009. This individual paid EI premiums for 25 years, he worked hard—as my colleague said—he paid taxes and yet he does not qualify for extended benefits. I should also point out—as the hon. member for Chambly—Borduas mentioned earlier in reference to a motion that was voted on yesterday evening—that EI claimants whose benefit period will have ended two weeks before this bill receives royal assent will not be eligible for extended EI benefits. This double standard applied to unemployed workers is a concern to us.

●(1240)

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Saint-Lambert says that she is learning from me. I must say that I am also learning a lot from her, because she has quite an exceptional background. She has done a lot of work with the poor and with organizations helping the less fortunate in our society. And she shares her experience with other colleagues in this House.

She raised a very important point, namely the discriminatory nature of this bill that is based on the time worked, the contribution period and the benefit period. I would like the member to talk about those who are disadvantaged with regard to employment, because they seem to be automatically excluded from this bill, which means that they will not even be able to benefit from it.

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his pertinent question.

That is basically what I said earlier: this will not do women any good. I followed the debate from home yesterday and heard my colleague from the NDP talk about the single mothers who will have access to this program under Bill C-50. Many, if not a majority of them will not qualify for these extended benefits because they will have used too many benefit weeks while working jobs that are often part time. Using benefit weeks will disqualify them, and they may not have held a full-time job in the past seven years. As a result, they will not be eligible for what Bill C-50 provides.

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The same is true for low-wage working parents. I can put myself in their shoes and imagine them finding out that provisions of Bill C-50 apply to neighbours or acquaintances of theirs, but not to them. Distinctions are made between unemployed workers. We should also think of those who worked for the same company. Some of their neighbours might have access to the program, and others not. That is a problem. In times of economic crisis, the government has to ask itself what priority to give to workers in our society. Do they want to help those workers who lose their jobs and help their families, or only to play politics on their backs by coming up with legislation like this, geared to the needs of I do not know who, perhaps those of the auto industry in Ontario? How many will benefit? We never got an exact figure, but it is approximately 6% of the unemployed. I think that the government has to ask itself serious questions about what priority, if any, it gives to workers in our society.

• (1245)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord with a brief question.

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the member.

She and I both heard the member for Jonquière—Alma tell this House that many workers will be able to take advantage of these benefits. But when we ask him, he is unable to tell us which province and which group of workers will benefit. My question for the member is, does she think that seasonal and forestry workers will be able to benefit from the measures?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Saint-Lambert for a brief answer.

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: Mr. Speaker, that is the problem. That is what is so unfair about this bill, that it excludes seasonal workers, who are often found in the tourism and forestry industries. These workers are excluded because their employers shut down temporarily. The main problem with this bill is that it is unfair, which is why we will not support it.

Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is unusual for two members of the same party to speak one after the other. Today, some opposition members decided to pass, which gives us more time to explain Bill C-50 and its repercussions, including its negative repercussions, to people.

First, for those watching the proceedings on television, we are talking about Bill C-50, which is summarized as follows:

This enactment amends the Employment Insurance Act until September 11, 2010 to increase the maximum number of weeks for which benefits may be paid to certain claimants. It also increases the maximum number of weeks for which benefits may be paid to certain claimants not in Canada.

Before I criticize the bill any further, I would like to explain how it came to be here in the House of Commons. The Conservatives introduced the bill, which required a confidence vote. The Liberals and the Bloc Québécois voted against it. The NDP voted for it to keep the current government in power. Did the New Democrats think that this bill would help workers? NDP members said it would not, but they thought it was a first step toward helping workers. So what is it, really? *Maisonneuve en direct* aired an interview with Pierre Céré. If I may, I would like to quote a portion of that interview.

Pierre Maisonneuve: Are some of the opposition parties right? Is this a step in the right direction?

Pierre Céré: I would say that the Conservative government is playing a little political game with the opposition parties because it did not have to introduce a bill to implement this measure. In fact, the cabinet minister said that it was not going to be a matter of legislation.

Pierre Maisonneuve: In other words, the government could have gone ahead and done it without holding a vote—

Pierre Céré: Proposing a pilot project is an administrative matter, an executive decision, so at the press conference yesterday, they should have simply announced that they were introducing a pilot project that could have been brought in immediately, and there you have it, on to the next thing. With this bill, however, the opposition parties will be forced to state their position, and then debate and vote on it.

Pierre Maisonneuve: And not bring down the government.

Pierre Céré: They cannot even make a bill like this a matter of confidence, since it must be voted through several readings, passed by a parliamentary committee, be sent over to the Senate, and so on. It is a very long process, a month and a half to two months. They are playing a little political game with the opposition parties, that is very clear. So if one opposition party supports them, that party has fallen into the trap.

The Conservatives set the trap, and the NDP fell into it. Here we are today discussing a bill that offers 5 to 20 additional weeks of benefits. But who will be entitled to those additional weeks? Are they for all unemployed workers? No, it targets only a small number of people who will be able to benefit from them. Who are those people?

The Globe and Mail has said that this measure favours the Ontario auto industry. That is clear. Indeed, the Quebec forestry industry cannot benefit from it, because it lays people off every year. So this bill does not apply. If people have worked 7 years out of 10, they are eligible for the additional weeks offered by the government. This part is unclear. What is also unclear is that the government is saying that this will help many people. According to the government, this measure will cost \$935 million and will affect 190,000 workers.

• (1250)

We in the Bloc Québécois have taken steps to learn the real government figures, to find out if these figures are correct and if the bill will affect so many workers.

We asked a lot of questions in order to learn how the costs were calculated and which workers are targeted. This proposal is still unclear. Even the officials agreed that an evaluation could be made using the career transition program that was put in place as a result of the last budget. Instead of wondering about the government's estimate for this bill, the Bloc asked for written explanations of the costs arising from the bill, as well as the calculation of the number of workers affected.

We have not received any reply.

These figures are just more wild guesses by the government, which is trying to look good to the voters. Having said that, I do not believe that voters in general are the real target. In my opinion, they are trying to target people who have lost their jobs after working for 25 to 30 years. That program is called the Program for Older Worker Adjustment or POWA.

Government Orders

Let us remember that the Liberals erased that term from their vocabulary because, in the past, people aged 55 and older working in the textile industry benefited from that legislation and its funding. Today, however, we are seeing a lot of layoffs in many sectors, and even the closing of businesses. Moreover, the OECD forecasts for 2010 include more layoffs, more business failures and an unemployment rate between 8% and 10%.

The Minister of National Revenue said in the House that this was a golden bridge for older people. They will have to wait a little longer for the golden bridge. If they really wanted to help older people, the Conservatives should have first restored POWA and they would not have tabled Bill C-50. There would have been no need to debate the subject and a pilot project would have been enough.

The government only wants to look good; but it does not deserve to look good on this issue.

In my opinion, POWA is important. Here is a specific example. A person in my riding, whom I met during the last election campaign, told me that the plant where he was working was going to close. That person, who was 60 years old and had been working at the same plant for 35 years, would receive one year of employment insurance benefits. Who would hire him after that? We already know that many businesses are closing. How could that man, with limited formal education because he started working at a young age, find a new job? What could that man do? Absolutely nothing!

The Program for Older Worker Adjustment provided that a 55-year-old worker could receive employment insurance until the age of 60. Then, once the worker reached 60, the Quebec pension plan benefits would replace some employment insurance benefits and the worker would continue to receive some income until the retirement age of 65.

We see too many of these people: men and women who have worked hard all their lives to provide food for their families, to educate their children so that they could go to university and have a better life with jobs that would be safe from unemployment.

At the end of their working days, these people will end up unemployed, with children still in school and a house to pay off.

What will they do? A year later, they will end up on welfare. Is it rewarding for someone who has worked their entire life, to end up on welfare and have to use up all their assets such as their RRSPs and their little nest egg they painstakingly saved over the years to buy a cottage some day?

•(1255)

Those people will have to liquidate all the assets they saved up over their lives just to make ends meet. It is quite something to make ends meet. It is tough for someone who is used to getting a salary.

The hon. member for Saint-Lambert talked about this bill earlier and mentioned all of its negative effects. In her speech, she truly put her finger on the problem with this bill. We have to find a solution to help our seniors.

Some opposition members have said that the Bloc Québécois will never accomplish anything because it will never be in power. I am here to say that they are wrong. We have often talked about the fact

that self-employed people should have the right to opt into the employment insurance system. In fact, that is one of the Bloc Québécois' requests. Surprisingly, today, the Conservatives have decided to resolve this problem and allow self-employed people to receive employment insurance.

And so you can see the relevance of the Bloc Québécois here in this House. This party's ideas to try to help workers and all the people of Quebec are important. We see the opposition parties taking up the ideas of the Bloc as their own, and I think they are being ungrateful when they say they can do this or that. Of course, it is always easier using someone else's ideas, but there are laws such as the one on intellectual property. I think they should take time to think it over before they take up other people's ideas. They should tell people that they have taken a really good idea of the Bloc's and brought it forward in the House. From an intellectual property point of view, it seems to me it would only be fair to acknowledge such things.

But no. The Conservatives will not do it. According to the government, it is the source of everything. There are people at home who watch us debate every day. They see what goes on in this House of Commons. They can also see other parties taking all the work done by the Bloc and running with it. They must surely be saying that today the Bloc has a purpose here. It is here to protect the interests of Quebecers.

So, who benefits? According to the *Globe and Mail*, Ontario and British Columbia were likely to benefit from the Conservatives' bill. At the end of 2008, the Conference Board of Canada announced that Canada would lose 15,000 jobs in the automobile sector, which is located in Ontario.

The president of the Quebec forestry industry council, Guy Chevette, notes that nearly all forestry workers are unemployed at least ten weeks a year. It is therefore very clear that this political move by the Conservatives is aimed at drawing support from people in Ontario. When the automobile sector was in decline, the government decided to pay out billions of dollars in order to save the industry. And what did this same government do to try to save the forestry industry, which has been in decline for five years—zilch.

If I may be allowed to go further. There is \$70 million over two years for all of Canada. That makes a big difference. Counting all the provinces and territories, that amounts to about \$2 million each. Divided by two, because it is over two years, that makes \$1 million.

•(1300)

That is a far cry from the billions of dollars given in Ontario. At that point, the political intent of the Conservatives became clear, as I was saying earlier. A pilot project could have done the job and would have achieved the same end for these workers. But no, the government decided to introduce a bill, thinking it would be defeated in the House and would head to elections. The NDP, as I was saying, is hiding behind the workers to avoid an election. So the government was saved. However, is it really helping workers in these circumstances? I do not think so.

Government Orders

Is it possible to go further in this regard? Is it possible to speak for the workers who contribute to EI? It is not always easy, because these workers have a very hard time making ends meet, and the worst is yet to come. It is true not only for Quebec, but for all of Canadians, because they will not benefit from these five to twenty weeks. It is disgraceful to see that, to see a government thinking it is helping people but is not.

On August 15, Quebec's Department of Natural Resources and Wildlife released a report on job losses in the wood and paper processing industry. The report indicates that since April 1, 2005, 130 plants in this industry have closed permanently, 10,251 workers have been laid off and 89 industries have closed temporarily, affecting 5,585 workers. This means that a total of 16,000 workers have lost their jobs. Workers who have been laid off every year will not qualify for these additional weeks of benefits.

What about the automotive sector in Quebec? I will give some examples. They saved the auto sector in Ontario, but there are also auto workers in Quebec. The eastern townships have the largest concentration of jobs in auto parts in Quebec, behind the Montreal area. The manufacturer of gaskets for car doors closed its operation in the eastern townships in February 2008. The company had cut staff significantly since 2005 and laid off more than 1,500 workers. Dana, in the same region, laid off 140 employees. In Rivière-Beaudette, in the riding of Vaudreuil-Soulanges, Montpetit, a French company, has closed its aluminum engine parts plant, and 195 people will lose their jobs. In Trois-Rivières, Aleris and Dayco closed their doors in late 2008, putting more than 500 people out of work. In Quebec City, Veyance Technologies has also laid off workers. Most of these jobs were lost in late 2008. These employees will not qualify for the extended benefits proposed in this bill.

But what about the Bloc Québécois? I will tell you what the government could do. It could even appropriate the Bloc's intellectual property and come up with bills that should be almost perfect. It could introduce an eligibility threshold of 360 hours for all regions, permanently increase the benefit rate from 55% to 60%, create a POWA, increase from \$2,000 to \$3,000 the threshold of insurable earnings to qualify for benefits and allowing self-employed workers to contribute voluntarily to the employment insurance plan. We have already proposed these measures. The government could take them as its own and claim to be the saviour of the unemployed and the people of Canada.

• (1305)

Mr. Nicolas Dufour (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great attention to the remarks of my colleague, the member for Shefford. As always, he very clearly explained the position of the Bloc Québécois. He also explained why the Conservatives and the New Democrats defend the indefensible, especially concerning the utility of this bill for workers and the unemployed in Quebec. My colleague gave pertinent examples of the completely ridiculous reasoning of the Conservatives with regard to Bill C-50.

I would like my colleague from Shefford to give me his opinion of the NDP position. We know that if Bill C-50 is passed, it will be thanks to the support of the New Democratic Party. In our view, that support is completely irrational since the NDP has condemned the Conservative government for many years. It recently boasted that it has always opposed the government's plans; but we recognize now

that for electoral reasons the NDP has sold its soul to the devil for peanuts, as I said yesterday.

I would be interested to know what my colleague from Shefford thinks of the NDP support.

Mr. Robert Vincent: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Repentigny. I listened to his remarks yesterday, which were also pertinent. We see him rising in the House nearly every day to speak on behalf of the Bloc Québécois. He is a very young member who will make his mark within our party. I believe he is on the right path, and I encourage him to continue along it. That is the way to advance the ideas of the Bloc Québécois in this place.

To answer his question, I would say that he is perfectly correct. If this were not a vote with electoral impact, I do not believe the NDP would be in favour of the bill. However, the NDP is propping up the government to avoid an election. The New Democrats are hiding behind the workers. It is easy to speak with passion about working men and women. I, myself, come from the ranks of organized labour and my heart is with the workers. When it is time to defend their interests, because they are the hardest hit when they lose their jobs, I am one of the first to stand. However, I would never speak up for workers for electoral reasons, and I would never hide behind them. I would never do that. I agree with my colleague: that is a disloyal action.

[*English*]

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his intervention and speech. I will call him brother because we both come from labour movements. There is no question we represent them ably and there is no question that we stand for them. Both he and I would probably agree that when we end up going to the bargaining table, we do not get everything we want. It would be nice if we could, but there is no question about that.

To my other colleague who said that this was perhaps peanuts, I would invite him to come to Welland and talk to John Deere workers who are facing foreclosures on their mortgages because their employment insurance is about to run out, and tell them it is peanuts as they lose their home and perhaps their family breaks up. If that is peanuts, I will vote for the peanuts to ensure that families stay in their houses and that families stay together.

There is no question this does not cover all workers, and we would love it to cover all workers. I think we are in agreement with the Bloc on that fact. That is what we ultimately want to do, but those of us who come from a labour world understand that when we have demands on the table, we just do not get them all. It would be nice if we did.

The one thing about living a long time is life experience teaches us that we do not get all things when we want them. Sometimes we have to accept the fact that we only get some of the things we would like. In this particular case, only some of the folks will be covered; others will not.

Government Orders

To my colleague from the Bloc I say that there are probably members in a labour union in some places in Quebec who will get some, and there are those who will be left out, just like in my province of Ontario. Clearly, Canadians will be winners when it comes to this, in the sense that they will get coverage that they otherwise would not have. Voting it down will give them nothing.

●(1310)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Vincent: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that my colleague comes from the same background as I do—the union movement. He will agree with me that if the government really wanted to help workers it would not have introduced a bill that will take months before having an effect. That was pointless. A pilot project would have served the purpose.

And there was a trap. Some political parties must have been very reluctant to vote in favour of this bill. Yesterday, I heard a member from New Brunswick say that it was not the best bill but it was a step in the right direction. I would say that step in the right direction is being taken at the expense of workers because they will have to wait until the bill receives royal assent. Retroactivity will be no farther than January 2009. That is almost one year, if we are starting from December. This should have been passed in October. However, it was not. Why did the government again hold workers hostage for a year, when a pilot project would have done?

I thank my colleague for his pertinent question.

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I wish to congratulate the member from Shefford for his speech. We know that he is a hard worker.

We have heard some pretty large numbers on several occasions in this House when questioning the government about the number of workers who would benefit from this bill. And yet, when we ask the government which province and what type of worker will benefit from this bill, we do not get an answer.

According to the member, which regions of Canada and what type of worker will benefit from Bill C-50? Are forestry and seasonal workers excluded from this bill?

Mr. Robert Vincent: Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the Bloc Québécois critic on industry, science and technology, who is doing a fantastic job. My colleague is defending the interests of the forestry industry because of his expertise and also because the largest number of forestry workers live in his riding. That is the reason he is asking this pertinent question.

Will this bill help the many forestry workers in my colleague's riding? No, because they are laid off year after year. These laid-off workers will not have access to the 5 to 20 weeks, even if there is a plant closing, because they received employment insurance benefits previously.

I understand the pertinence of my colleague's question. He truly wants to defend the interests of the workers in his riding and I think that he is doing an extraordinary job. I encourage him to continue defending their interests because the government will not.

●(1315)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Repentigny for a very brief question.

Mr. Nicolas Dufour: Mr. Speaker, my question will be very short.

Yesterday the NDP tried to corner me, if I may put it that way, with a very poorly worded question about whether or not my constituents supported Bill C-50.

I would like to ask the same question of the member for Shefford. Have his constituents spoken to him about Bill C-50? Have they told him, as my constituents told me, to oppose Bill C-50 since it serves no purpose?

Mr. Robert Vincent: Mr. Speaker, yes, people have come directly to my office to talk to me about this bill.

I told them that, in their specific case, too much time will have passed between the time the bill is passed and the time they filed their EI claim, and they will not be covered by the bill. We cannot go back that far.

So they think the bill is pointless. They want to know why they would not be entitled to benefits, and why the cut-off would be January, when their claim went back to November 2008. They will not be entitled because the Conservatives have decided to do things that way, with a pointless bill, when they could have done things differently with a regulation. It would have served the same purpose, and this gentleman could have had his money.

This government's inaction is causing hardship for some of these workers.

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise in the House to join in the debate on Bill C-50. But before I start, I would like to take a few moments, if you will allow me, to congratulate some very deserving people.

I want to congratulate Mr. Gilles Vaillancourt, who was re-elected as mayor of Laval on Sunday, November 1. I also want to congratulate our former colleague, Mr. Réal Ménard, who was elected as mayor of the Hochelaga borough, in Montreal, and Ms. Caroline Saint-Hilaire, another former colleague, who was elected as mayor of Longueuil, one of Quebec's largest cities. I am very proud of our colleagues who decide to go elsewhere to fight other battles. When they win those battles, I am all the more proud because these people have very strong convictions that they showed here, in this House, and they were able to learn about politics and to bring this knowledge into a different level of the political sphere, that of municipal politics.

I am also rising because I listened to my colleague from Chambly—Borduas this morning. It struck me when he said that this bill was nothing but a smokescreen on the part of the Conservative government. I told myself that, once again, we have before us a bill that is just smoke and mirrors, that targets only certain people and the only objective of which is to satisfy the needs of certain people that the Conservatives would very much like to see vote for them.

Government Orders

Instead of meeting the needs of the whole population, the Conservative government is targeting certain groups, as is the case with many of the measures that it puts forward. The Conservatives are targeting specific groups, and wondering which group they will need next. For example, if they do not have enough votes in Ontario, in the north and also in the south, they try to figure out which riding they need. What are these people missing? Are they unemployed or do they want children? Do they need specific measures for their businesses? What exactly do they need? Make no mistake about it: the leader of that party is very crafty, to say the least. The measures are always very targeted and very specific so as to please a certain segment of the population and ensure that these people will vote for the Conservative government.

The only place where they are failing is in Quebec. Indeed, Quebecers are not fooled by such measures. They are not fooled because they have seen this before. In 1995, the Liberal Party decided that the employment insurance account was no longer a fund created by workers to get benefits when they would find themselves out of work. From then on, that fund would belong to the government. So, Quebecers have seen this before the previous Conservative Party, which promised them the moon, but did not deliver at all. They have also seen this with the current Conservative Party. And they are not fooled by the New Democratic Party, which barely managed to get one member elected in Quebec. Incidentally, the NDP is now losing ground because it changes its mind whenever the wind shifts direction, which is not normal.

The only party in this House that always stands up, that always has the same convictions, and that has always achieved success is the Bloc Québécois. Why? Because the top priority of Bloc Québécois members is to ensure that the people whom they represent are well represented, regardless of the riding and regardless of who may have voted for them. Once we are elected, we represent our whole population. All our fellow citizens can rest assured that we are going to fight tooth and nail for them in this House.

• (1320)

This is why, this morning, when the member said that this bill was nothing but a smokescreen, that immediately caught my attention. I thought that, indeed, this legislation is just a smokescreen. We are going through an economic period where people really need support. People really need their government to support them with true measures that will help them make it through the worst crisis ever, even worse than the Great Depression, in 1929.

The impact of this crisis is noticeable in my riding. At the Laval volunteer centre, where the Christmas basket campaign is getting underway, we help, year in and year out, 52 organizations and we distribute 540,000 kilos of food products, so that families can feed themselves. Increasingly, the people who need the food provided by the volunteer centre also rely on these other organizations. We are talking about people who work five days a week but who, unfortunately, have a spouse who has lost his job and was only able to find part-time work, at a much lower salary. These people cannot make ends meet anymore, and they do not have access to EI, because access is limited. Not all workers can qualify for EI, even though everyone pays premiums.

Because so few people can access it, many find themselves in awful situations, such as losing their house, their car, and the opportunity to send their children to school. Some people are having a hard time because they have to choose between paying the power bill and buying groceries.

These people have no choice but to take any job they can find. The problem is not that these people are lazy or do not want to work. The problem is that they cannot continue working where they used to work because there have been so many layoffs.

The hardest-hit sector after forestry and manufacturing is probably tourism. In Quebec, 30,000 businesses and 300,000 people work in the tourism industry. Most of the workers are women: 59% in food services and 71% to 72% in the travel sector.

The data suggest that these women are the ones who will suffer the most because of limited access to employment insurance. The Conservative Party introduced a bill, but it could have simply implemented a pilot project. If the Conservatives really wanted to help unemployed men and women, they would not have brought this measure in as a bill. They would have brought in a pilot project so that people could access it right away.

A lot of people might already have benefited if it were already in effect. The Bloc Québécois would have preferred to fast-track this. Unfortunately, I think that we are the only ones here who want to move things forward, who want the government to do something for unemployed workers and give them the help they need.

Unfortunately, but also fortunately, all of the stakeholders in Quebec and Canada agree with us, even Ken Lewensa, who says that these measures will not help unemployed workers, that they will only be good for a small group of people. It is now November 3 and well past October 29, when this bill should have been passed or received royal assent. People would have had the opportunity to collect employment insurance benefits for more weeks. As things stand, people who lost their jobs in January will not be eligible.

• (1325)

We know how many people have lost their jobs every month, every week, every day since January.

This government does not really want to bring in measures to facilitate access to employment insurance, as we have been calling for through the bills we have been introducing diligently and in good faith for some time now. We have been working closely with the people involved, with groups that represent the unemployed, and with groups of workers affected by employment insurance accessibility measures. We have been working diligently. In spite of that, the Conservative Party has always refused to vote with us on these bills. Yet when it was in opposition and we talked about the POWA, for instance, it agreed with us. But not any more.

Government Orders

It is always surprising that when a party moves from one side of the House to the other, it changes its ideology. It no longer believes in the same things, the same people, the same needs, but its needs change based on its political needs. It is surprising and upsetting for citizens who believe that by electing a government, they will be listened to, heard and defended.

At present, this government is not defending our citizens. Under the pretense of maintaining law and order, they are introducing all kinds of justice bills. Yes, some of them are beneficial and we are supporting them, but others are nothing more than smoke and mirrors, targeting only part of the population. This is exactly what they did with the child tax benefit. Instead of developing a network of child care centres like we have in Quebec, instead of making sure that mothers are able to work because they have reliable child care for their children, the government decided to give mothers \$1,000 a month per child.

The mothers who unfortunately could not receive preventive withdrawal benefits if their lives were in danger were probably forced to turn to employment insurance benefits to use their 17 weeks of sick leave, although they were not sick, but pregnant. If they had two children in two years, they were able to benefit from those 17 weeks twice, for a total of 34 weeks. If they were laid off for one week, they are not even eligible for the program. Yet some of them have been working for a very long time.

This bill makes no sense. It is out of touch with reality. It does not take into account the fact that people who lose their jobs will look for news one right away and not wait 20 weeks, 45 weeks or 50 weeks. They will move quickly because they need to work. They need that financial contribution. People do not work these days to buy luxury items. Both spouses go to work these days because they need two incomes. It is not because they want to live in luxury. They want to ensure that their family, their children, have everything they need for their development and comfort.

It is very disappointing to have a government that promised so much transparency and so much support offer so little. However, when it comes to defence and the oil companies, it is ready to invest. It is ready to lose money, to give out unprecedented opportunities not to pay taxes, and to give tax credits the likes of which we will never get. This government is prepared to let people who have money in tax havens get away with not paying taxes.

We need all of our money in times of economic crisis. We need to have a government that supports the people instead of its party's supporters.

● (1330)

It is clear that we will vote against this bill. Like all bills we vote against, it does not adequately meet the needs of the people we represent.

In Quebec, as I was saying earlier, people are not fooled. They know that the Bloc Québécois is here to defend their interests and that we will always do so.

[English]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague with great interest. I think we are all aware that we have a global economic recession.

Within British Columbia, we have been doubly impacted with the pine beetle infestation. I know there is also a great deal of logging in her province and people are suffering there. However, when talking to my constituents, they are very grateful for the improvements our government is making to the EI program.

I also know the colleague to be someone with heart. I have worked with her on committee. However, how can she possibly impact workers negatively by not supporting a bill that clearly is going to be of benefit to some? It might not be perfect in how she believes EI should be, but it certainly will help people in her community.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for her question. As I was saying earlier, we are voting against this bill because it does not meet the needs of the people. It meets the needs of a specific target group that the government wants in its corner come election time. That is all.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a question of my hon. colleague.

This bill is somewhat discriminatory. The way I interpret it—and I would like to know whether the member agrees or not—is that there seems to be a desire to help the most fortunate. When we talk about long-tenured workers, they are often those who started working at a young age in strong, growing and stable businesses or industries. Moreover, they are often the same people who benefited from the advantages that go with seniority in a union environment.

Those people have obviously worked hard, often with good pay and job security. The government wants to give them advantages over other people who may have been involved in a more entrepreneurial or seasonal type of work and who are said to be less deserving of help. Help is being given to those who have already benefited from a lot of advantages within the economy.

● (1335)

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Speaker, I think we should be careful when we talk about discrimination. As I said and as my hon. colleague surely knows, this bill does not meet the needs of most of the people he mentioned nor does it help those who work part time. The program is designed to target a specific, well-defined group of people in an attempt to get their vote. Those people live in Ontario. They do not live in Quebec or New Brunswick, they live in Ontario.

[English]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague a question about the dilemma of the bill, in that it does not fix the overall employment insurance program. We know and understand that.

Government Orders

There is discrimination regarding to which target group it actually gets. At the same time, it does plug the gap on some important people, for example, people in the parts manufacturing industry who are counting on this to get an extension in their EI benefits. In fact, several cases have come into my office where people will lose their houses if they do not get this increase in benefits right now.

What would my colleague say to those people? It is great to have the principle to sell them out, I suppose, but what do we do about those individuals who are on the cusp right now, those who will benefit from the bill? They would not receive it if we did not at least target this group. Some of those individuals have paid into the system for decades, but have not received those benefits. This is their time and moment because they need the help right now. Why should they be denied that help?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Speaker, first of all, they will not get this help now; second, the only real assistance that could be provided would be through a pilot project; finally, we have proposed much more concrete measures for accessibility to employment insurance.

POWA is the program that can best meet the needs of long-tenured workers who today are unemployed. They would not receive assistance for just one additional year, or six months, or five to ten weeks; the assistance would continue until they reached retirement age. That is what they truly need. Not half measures, false measures or smoke and mirrors, but real measures like the ones we have always asked for.

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when I listen to debates about employment insurance in this House, the words that come to mind are profound injustice. I cannot conceive that a wage loss replacement plan that we have paid into our entire lives is so difficult to access given that it is our due when we lose our employment. This bill applies to only a small group of people and it is truly painful to note that only those who have not received benefits for a certain number of years will be able to access employment insurance. I always find it heartbreaking to make representations on behalf of the people of my riding of Trois-Rivières who, unfortunately, have lost unstable jobs, and to be constantly demanding in this House the employment insurance they deserve.

Does my colleague not see that this government has not responded appropriately to the situation? There was an economic crisis requiring them to take swift and extraordinary action. Once again, they failed the workers. In this House we must take a balanced approach when working for the common good. Not all members are doing that.

• (1340)

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Trois-Rivières.

She is absolutely right, as usual. If they had really wanted to meet the needs of all the workers who lose their jobs, they would have done things differently and would have agreed to abolish the waiting period. That is one of the most essential and fundamentals steps to really support workers who have lost their jobs. They would have made sure there was no need to make thousands of calculations. The most demanding aspect of this bill is the need to make so many calculations that almost nobody understands it. On top of having to

struggle to maintain one's standard of living, one has to struggle to learn how to juggle figures to try to get five weeks or two weeks more, without knowing what will come of it in the end. Our jobs will not reappear, our plants will not reopen, our forestry companies will not resume operations.

That is what people are calling for, real measures that will ensure that people feel safe and stop being afraid. At present, they are afraid.

[*English*]

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her passionate advocacy on behalf of those who are unfortunate to be laid off.

During her speech she made an interesting comment about how she saw folks change in the transition from this side of the House to the government benches. I would like her to comment further on that.

When the Conservatives were on this side of the House, they said one thing about employment insurance and the Liberals were on the other side doing something altogether different. Now the Liberals have come to this side of the House, having been replaced by the Conservatives on the government benches, and now we hear the Liberals saying something altogether different.

It seems that there are only two parties in this House that actually speak for the unemployed on a consistent basis. I would commend my colleague and her colleagues in that party, as well as my own party for standing up for workers.

Would she not agree with us that what really is needed is a comprehensive review of the EI system? We need to undo what the Liberals did during the 1990s to ensure that the unemployed are protected across this country from coast to coast to coast.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Speaker, I agree with my hon. colleague that we should review the entire employment insurance program.

He has, however, left the door wide open for me to say that any party that becomes the ruling party in the House will act the same way as the others. We have already seen what these two parties have done. I do not think that, if it were in government, the New Democratic Party would act any differently from the Conservative Party or the Liberal Party.

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thériault (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague's speech and the very good answers she gave to all the questions she was asked.

I am pleased to speak in this House to condemn this bill and show that employment insurance has become a cash cow and a discriminatory system that creates two types of workers: those who are entitled to benefits and those who are excluded.

Government Orders

This supposed improvement in employment insurance will do nothing for workers who are already excluded from the program. We need a comprehensive reform that will correct the injustices committed by the Liberals, who in 1997 turned employment insurance into a tax on workers and employers. EI became PI, pathetic insurance, shafting vulnerable workers, seasonal workers and students. Everyone pays into the plan, but not everyone is eligible for benefits. The unemployed were the real victims of the war on the deficit waged by the Liberal government, which reduced its deficit by excluding workers from employment insurance.

Today, the \$54 billion that was stolen from workers must be used for the purpose for which it was intended, which is to provide the unemployed with financial support. The government must restore legislation to protect all workers who pay into the plan. To use this money for any other purpose is embezzlement. The changes in EI eligibility, which the Bloc Québécois condemned at the time, have had the expected effect. The percentage of benefit recipients dropped from 83% in 1989 to 42% in 1997. Whether the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development likes it or not, that numbers are still the same today. If the Conservatives and Liberals set out to dismantle the system, they can say "mission accomplished".

With Bill C-50, the government wants to accentuate the discrimination against workers by allowing only a portion of them—the ones known as long-tenured workers—to receive between 5 and 20 additional weeks of benefits. Oddly enough, when we look closely at the eligibility criteria, we see that this measure will benefit workers in the automotive sector in Ontario.

Furthermore, this same government would have us believe that 190,000 unemployed workers will be eligible for benefits. Once again, the Prime Minister and his Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development are trying to pull a fast one on us. That is nothing new. We are rather used to it. The Prime Minister told this house that if the EI qualifying period were set at 360 hours, claimants would receive 52 weeks of benefits. Nothing could be further from the truth. That same Prime Minister estimated that such a change would cost \$4 billion, while the Parliamentary Budget Officer put the cost at \$1,148,000,000. Obviously, the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development will repeat the same old nonsense we hear from her Prime Minister to anyone who will listen.

I wonder if the minister truly understands the act she is supposed to administer. On May 5 of this year, I sent her a letter regarding the intolerable situation facing workers of Beaulieu Canada, in my riding. In my letter I said, "If you refuse to acknowledge the figure of 40% eligibility, why are you preventing your officials from disclosing the number of people who apply for employment insurance benefits compared to the number who qualify to receive them?"

I will read the response I received from the minister on September 21, 2009. By the way, you better not hold your breath when waiting to hear back from this minister.

• (1345)

You claim that only 40% of people who apply for benefits are entitled to them. It is important to note that this number includes people who are outside the parameters of the employment insurance program, such as people who have never worked, and therefore have never paid employment insurance premiums; people who have not

worked in the past year; people who left their employment without just cause; and self-employed workers, because they do not pay premiums.

Why not add members of Parliament, senators, and even the Governor General to the list of groups that are not entitled to employment insurance?

Does the minister know many people who have never worked or many self-employed workers who try to file an EI claim? In my riding, and in any other Bloc Québécois riding, I do not know a single one. People who have never worked know they are not entitled.

Because the Minister does not know the categories of workers who pay into employment insurance, I am going to educate her by describing those who make up the 60% who are not eligible. They are workers in unstable employment, a majority of whom are women; seasonal workers in the tourism industry or the fishery; agri-food workers; and students. These are the workers who are not eligible, the same ones the Liberals excluded with the pathetic insurance their reform produced. These are the same workers that the minister has excluded, not to mention the workers in the forestry industry, who have endured repeated layoffs in the last several years because of the inaction and incompetence of her government, a government that creates unemployment and poverty.

This government has deliberately chosen to exclude the victims of the economic crisis. The Bloc Québécois advocates a realistic recovery plan. Our party is proposing several changes to employment insurance: a new approach that assumes claimants are acting in good faith and speeds up delivery of the first cheque; eliminating the waiting period, which is immediate help for workers who have lost their jobs; a 360-hour eligibility threshold that allows access to employment insurance for part-time workers; increasing weekly benefits to 60% from 55%; increasing insurable earnings to \$42,500; calculating benefits on the basis of the 12 best weeks, which would benefit seasonal workers; establishing an income support program for older workers that would bridge the gap between a layoff and payment of their pension; expanding a claimant's right to receive benefits while taking training courses; and expanding and adjusting the job-sharing program.

The measures the Bloc Québécois has proposed would allow workers who have lost their jobs to deal with the crisis and receive the support they need while they wait for the economic recovery.

Older workers are at risk of ending their lives in poverty with the measures the Conservative government is proposing. When they were in opposition, the Conservatives talked about bringing back the program for older worker adjustment or POWA. A program like that would enable people over 55 to receive income until they retire. Instead of that, the government is pushing people who lose their jobs and find themselves with no financial resources into poverty; they will have to liquidate their assets before they retire, and they will receive the guaranteed income supplement, leaving them below the poverty line.

Statements by Members

•(1350)

That is not a very nice way for people to live out their later years. This government would also prefer to keep seniors in a state of perpetual poverty rather than act on Motion M-300, which I moved last spring, and which received majority support in the House of Commons. Need I say who opposed the motion? It is not hard to guess.

Since the Conservatives came to power, Quebec's economy has come under attack by a series of regressive measures: cuts to equalization payments, a \$2.6 billion shortfall in the GST harmonization file, cuts to culture, the projected relocation of the securities commission to Ontario, which Bill C-50 just happens to support, and the planned parliamentary reform that will reduce the Quebec nation's political weight. The Conservatives' real priority is to strengthen their political base in Ontario and consolidate their votes, just like they did in Alberta.

Once again, Quebec workers, who have already suffered because of the economic crisis and this government's incompetence, are being left out. It sure looks like this government's priority is to impoverish Quebec and its workers.

We will not let this oil-soaked government reduce Quebec to a second-class state in a completely chaotic Canada.

If the Conservatives made this big a mess with a minority government, imagine what they would do if they had a majority.

We are fighting this battle alongside groups working to protect the rights of unemployed workers, such as the Sans-chemise, Mouvement Action Chômage groups and major unions. We want the \$54 billion stolen from the employment insurance fund to be given back to the workers who contributed.

When the time comes to vote on this bill, I will stand with the members of the Bloc Québécois and vote against Bill C-50. That is what we will do for any bill that is not in Quebec's best interest until the day we achieve full independence as a country.

•(1355)

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot for her fine speech.

Ultimately, the primary objective of Bill C-50 is to protect long-tenured workers, that is, workers who have received fewer than 35 weeks of employment insurance over the last five years. I wonder if she could give a general description of our industries in Quebec: forestry, agriculture, tourism, fisheries. These are industries that often provide seasonal employment to workers who are long tenured in those industries, whether in agriculture, forestry, fisheries or tourism.

I would like her to elaborate on this.

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thai Thi Lac: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his excellent question.

Indeed, the measures set out in Bill C-50 will not do enough to help workers in Quebec. For many years now, the government has been neglecting the forestry sector. A few years ago it also turned its back on the textile sector and all areas of the manufacturing sector. Many businesses cut back on production and had to resort to

temporary or permanent layoffs. We saw many workers lose their jobs and turn to employment insurance. The measures the Conservatives are proposing at this time will not provide enough assistance for those who have had to rely on employment insurance in the past five years.

I gave a list of measures that would be helpful for the workers of Quebec and Canada who work in jobs that are unstable. When we talk about workers in the textile, fishing or tourism industry, those jobs are seasonal, yet crucial. We cannot say that those jobs should be eliminated. Nor can we penalize the workers who work in those sectors, because they are important sectors for entire regions of Quebec.

The Speaker: We will now proceed to statements by members. The hon. member will have seven minutes remaining for questions and comments when the debate resumes.

* * *

•(1400)

[English]

AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORT

The Speaker: Before we go to statements by members, I have the honour to lay upon the table the fall 2009 report of the Auditor General of Canada.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(g), the report is deemed reported permanently to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

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COMMISSIONER OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The Speaker: I also have the honour to lay upon the table, pursuant to subsection 23(3) of the Auditor General Act, the report of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development to the House of Commons for the year 2009, with an addendum on environmental petitions from January 1 to June 30, 2009.

This document is referred permanently to the Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

HEALTH

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over the past few months there has been a significant focus in preparation for the H1N1 pandemic and more currently on the rollout of the biggest mass vaccine campaign in Canada's history.

With the natural concern that we all have for our family and loved ones, it is easy to lose perspective on our significant accomplishments that would have been unheard of during our grandparents' time.

Statements by Members

In a matter of months we have developed a safe, effective vaccine. We currently have more H1N1 vaccine available per capita than anywhere else in the world, and in the next months it will be available for the entire population.

My congratulations to the Minister of Health, the Public Health Agency of Canada, and the provinces and territories who are working very hard to face this extraordinary challenge. My special thanks to all the front line health care workers who, with dedication and hard work, are staffing the clinics, emergency rooms and hospitals.

We truly are fortunate to live in a time when we are able to mount a significant response to emerging viruses that threaten our communities.

* * *

BILLINGS ESTATE MUSEUM

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on October 28 the Billings Estate Museum celebrated a very important anniversary.

The 1829 Billings House, the oldest frame building in Ottawa and a designated national historic site, turned 180 years old. It was the third home of Braddish and Lamira Billings, pioneer settlers who opened up the area in 1813.

Key players in the development of an early Ottawa bridge, owners of a prominent timber business who converted much of the area's forest into farmland, Braddish and Lamira Billings and their seven children stand as a testament to the dedication and perseverance which helped to build this modern capital city.

The museum is a prominent member of the Ottawa Museum Network, which works to strengthen our 11 local museums by collectively telling the greater Ottawa story.

I am very proud to have the Billings Estate Museum in my riding of Ottawa South and I encourage all members to visit this national historic site. It represents the epic story of one of Ottawa's founding families and the evolution of the surrounding village. We stand on the shoulders of the Billings family and so many other founding families.

* * *

[*Translation*]**QUEBEC SCIENCE AND CULTURE AWARDS**

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prix du Québec, the highest honours awarded by the Government of Quebec in science and culture, will be presented today.

Among this year's recipients are filmmaker, actor and screenwriter Paule Baillargeon, who will be presented with the Albert Tessier award in cinema. Actor, screenwriter and playwright Roland Lepage will receive the Denise Pelletier award in performing arts in recognition of his 60-year career.

The Athanase David award in literature will go to poet Denise Desautels, the author of some 30 works; the Georges-Émile Lapalme award for promoting the French language will be presented to

lexicographer and terminologist Monique C. Cormier; archeologist Marcel Moussette will be honoured with the Gérard Morisset award in heritage; and photographer Gabor Szilasi will receive the Paul-Émile Borduas award in visual arts.

I would also like to mention the recipients of the science awards: André Gosselin, Otto Kuchel, Gilles Bibeau, Victoria Kaspi and Luc Vinet.

The Bloc Québécois congratulates all the honourees on their creative and scientific genius.

* * *

[*English*]**HEALTH CARE**

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this year marks the 25th anniversary of the Canada Health Act, the foundation of our universal public health care system.

The CHA was passed unanimously by Parliament, a remarkable collaborative achievement with the NDP's Bill Blaikie working closely with the Trudeau Liberal government and health minister Monique Bégin to ensure that quality care would be available to everyone irrespective of their financial status.

Now, 25 years later, the CHA is under attack and the Conservative government is just standing by and doing nothing.

Canadians were outraged this week to learn that private clinics in Toronto and Vancouver were providing a queue-jumping service to the rich for the H1N1 vaccine. This access by wealth is just one more example of creeping privatization and a government that refuses to stop it.

New Democrats, along with the Canadian Health Coalition and concerned citizens everywhere, will continue to fight against two-tier health care and the erosion of the Canada Health Act as we have for 25 years.

Today we celebrate not only the act but Canada's fierce commitment to Tommy Douglas' dream for medicare.

* * *

● (1405)

CAPITAL EXPERIENCE

Mr. Barry Devolin (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is a special group of students here today. They are participating in a program I call a "Capital Experience", where two student leaders from each of the seven high schools in my riding come to Ottawa for three days each year to learn about career opportunities in public life.

They have visited Parliament, Amnesty International, the Department of Foreign Affairs, the CHUM television station, the Press Gallery and Summa Strategies.

I wish to thank those who shared their time with these students, and to thank the businesses and service clubs that sponsored them.

Statements by Members

Today I welcome to Parliament: Chris Oag and Sarah Hutchings from Brock; Jacob McKend and Matthew Godja from Crestwood; Jacob Nicholls, Kyle Gavin and Riley Wilson from Fenelon Falls; Graeme Lloyd, Kurran Devolin and Kyla Suchovs from Haliburton; Emily Seabrook and Iain Becking from I.E. Weldon; Graham Batty and Jacqui Van Warmerdam from L.C.V.I.; and Ashely Obress and Emily Champagne from St. Thomas Aquinas.

I ask my colleagues to join me in wishing these young people all the best as they make decisions regarding their future careers.

* * *

EMERGENCY WORKERS

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to join Reverend Lisa Vaughn and the Anglican Parish of St. Timothy and St. Paul in my riding to recognize the vital work of emergency workers in our communities.

On October 25 services were held in Terence Bay and Hatchet Lake marking Emergency Workers Appreciation Sunday.

I ask the House to join me in applauding all of Canada's firefighters, paramedics, RCMP officers, police officers generally, and community volunteers for their ongoing dedication.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Bob Dechert (Mississauga—Erindale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to report on the unprecedented amount of infrastructure funding that has been delivered to the city of Mississauga.

Mississauga and the region of Peel have received federal, provincial and municipal funding for 158 infrastructure projects under our infrastructure stimulus fund. Under the recreation infrastructure program, the city will upgrade six local swimming pools located throughout Mississauga.

Through the knowledge infrastructure program, the University of Toronto Mississauga campus received \$70 million in joint funding for its new instructional centre which is well under construction. Soon, Sheridan College will break ground on its new Mississauga campus with over \$31 million in funding.

Recently, city councillor and former Liberal MP Carolyn Parrish said:

The recent infusion of infrastructure stimulus dollars from several different programs is the largest pot of money ever bestowed on the City of Mississauga and the Region of Peel by our two senior levels of government.

I am pleased to see all levels of government working together to provide important job creating stimulus to the city of Mississauga.

* * *

[*Translation*]

AWARD-WINNING VINEYARD

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to recognize an outstanding vineyard in my riding of Beauharnois—Salaberry, the Vignoble du Marathonien on highway 202 in Havelock.

Owned by Jean and Line Joly, this vineyard has won dozens of medals in the past 15 years in prestigious competitions in Quebec, Ontario, British Columbia, the United States and France.

Moreover, last weekend, at the Montreal wine show, the vineyard won four more gold and silver medals for its late harvest and ice wines.

Today, I want to pay tribute to Jean and Line Joly for their constant concern for quality and their great respect for wine drinkers. Despite the modest size of their vineyard, which contains 7,000 vines, the owners have turned it into one of the real success stories of Quebec's wine industry. They deserve our congratulations and our admiration.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that this morning our Conservative government is introducing a bill that will allow all self-employed workers to have access to special benefits under the employment insurance system.

For the first time in history, self-employed workers in Quebec will receive sickness benefits and compassionate care benefits. They can rest assured knowing that they can take leave if they are sick or if they need time to take care of a family member who is suffering from a serious illness. Some 500,000 workers will be pleased to hear this good news.

I am sure they are just as anxious as I am to see whether the Bloc will be in favour of these proposals or whether it will choose, as usual, to vote against the interests of workers. Let us not forget that the Bloc did not fulfill its role by voting against Bill C-50, which aimed to provide direct financial support to Quebec workers in the manufacturing and forestry sectors who so desperately needed it.

* * *

[*English*]

HUNTINGTON SOCIETY OF CANADA

Mr. Francis Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, November is Amaryllis Month and I would encourage my colleagues in the House to join me in supporting the Huntington Society of Canada.

Huntington's disease is an inherited brain disorder that affects both body and mind. It affects thousands of Canadians across the country, leading to profound cognitive and emotional impairment and eventually incapacitation and death. The disease remains incurable, and there are no known effective treatments.

Statements by Members

The amaryllis flower is the signature flower for the Huntington Society of Canada, whose volunteers have been selling amaryllis plants since 1985 and have raised over \$1 million for the fight against this terrible affliction. This month's Inspire Hope amaryllis campaign will support today's vital programs for family services for people coping with Huntington disease and crucial research to find a cure for tomorrow.

I encourage my colleagues in the House to please join me in wearing an amaryllis lapel pin to support this campaign and to spread the word about this devastating disease.

* * *

• (1410)

NATIONAL 4-H MONTH

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, November is National 4-H Month. As many Canadians know, 4-H stands for head, heart, hands and health, and its mandate is to inspire youth to become leaders in their communities.

The Government of Canada has invested in the Canadian 4-H Council since it was established in 1933, and we have just recently announced an additional \$3 million in support for 4-H.

Thousands of Canadians, including me and many of my rural colleagues, were given opportunities through 4-H to compete, to grow and to enhance our lifelong learning. 4-H has a long history of developing responsible citizens and building confidence in our youth.

Canada's economic action plan also focuses on our young farmers through changes to the Canadian Agricultural Loans Act to improve credit access. The Government of Canada is proud to be a long-standing supporter of 4-H and its contribution toward Canadian agriculture.

I would like to congratulate all 4-H members and the 4-H Council for their great work.

* * *

GINO FRACAS AND TONY TOLDO

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, two champions of Windsor sadly passed away last week.

Gino Fracas, member of the Canadian Football Hall of Fame and two-time Grey Cup champion, was one of the most respected individuals in the sport. He was the founding head coach of the University of Windsor Lancers football team, a position he held for the next 20 years, leading it to its greatest successes. As a professor and a coach, Gino Fracas mentored countless students over the course of almost three decades.

Tony Toldo, a recipient of the Order of Canada, came to this country as an immigrant and built manufacturing companies that employed thousands. He donated almost \$10 million to improving the lives of those in his community, and created an institution that will live on in the Toldo Foundation.

From both of these men we have learned lessons: from Tony that success includes giving back to our community, and from Gino that

high achievement is truly fulfilled when the accomplishment is shared with others.

I say to Josephine and the entire Toldo family, and to Leona and the entire Fracas family, that their husbands and fathers will be missed by the entire community. They made life better for many, and their respective legacies will inspire future generations.

* * *

BILL C-56

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to announce that this morning our Conservative government introduced legislation that will provide maternity and parental, sickness and compassionate care benefits to self-employed Canadians on a voluntary basis. Our government is not only delivering on its campaign commitment to small business, entrepreneurs and family, it is exceeding it.

Members of the House know the challenges of balancing work and family. This legislation means that self-employed Canadians no longer have to miss those important family moments, whether it is spending time with a new baby or an elderly relative. Everyone in the House knows that in life it is all about family, and our government is taking responsible steps to help more Canadian families.

Now 2.6 million more Canadians who are so vital to our economy will no longer have to choose between their families and their business responsibilities. I just hope that for once the Liberal leader will put aside politics, stop trying to obstruct all the good work our government is doing and help us pass this important bill.

* * *

[*Translation*]

DEATH OF THREE MINERS

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last Friday evening I was shocked and saddened to learn of the disappearance of three miners at the Bachelor Lake mine in Desmaraisville in my riding.

Bruno Goulet, 36, Dominico Bollini, 44, and Marc Guay, 31, were working in one of the mine shafts when it flooded. The three men had descended around 11:30 p.m. to levels 11 and 12 of the mine, or roughly 485 metres below ground. Help was sent immediately when the elevator that carried them came back up empty.

Unfortunately, the three miners have since been found dead.

This is a terrible tragedy and there are no words to describe what all of Abitibi is feeling.

All of my colleagues in the Bloc join me in expressing our sympathy at this difficult time to the families, co-workers and friends of Bruno, Dominico and Marc.

Oral Questions

ORAL QUESTIONS

•(1415)

[English]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, increasingly Canadian and international issue action groups use full and partial nudity of female employees, models and former celebrities as part of their fundraising and publicity campaigns. This is indeed a very disturbing trend.

Lush Cosmetics recently used an employee of the company to pose nude in a public area of downtown Toronto to promote one of the company's product lines. While the employee herself was nude save for makeup, the company attempted to wrap itself in a cloak of virtue with a thinly veiled association with marine mammal populations.

Other activist organizations such as PETA, competing with other groups for donations, regularly use attention-grabbing female nudity to draw attention to themselves. Former B movie celebrities are contracted as prime spokespersons. They are often people whose only achievements have been simply to surrender themselves to public female objectification.

I would like to remind the House and all Canadians that treating women as objects is wrong, and exploiting women by presenting them as nude objects of attention purely for commercial purposes and without any overarching artistic merit is wrong. It is vile.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Andrew Saxton (North Vancouver, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government continues to implement Canada's economic action plan to help combat the effects of the global recession.

Infrastructure projects across the country are up and running, and 4,000 have begun in the first six months of our 24-month plan.

We have reduced taxes on families and businesses and implemented measures such as the home renovation tax credit and the first time home buyers' tax credit. We are helping the unemployed by extending EI benefits, making it easier to qualify and expanding EI training programs. All these measures and programs are to help steer Canada through the global recession. This is what Canadians want and expect.

What they do not want is constant mudslinging, constant threats of an election and massive new spending that can only be paid for through tax hikes. These are the priorities of the Liberal leader and the Liberal Party.

We are putting the country first, and Canadians can count on us to get the job done.

[English]

HEALTH

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today we learned from the Auditor General that for its entire time in office, the government has failed to develop any national emergency preparedness plan. That includes planning for epidemics and pandemics like H1N1. Does that not begin to explain why the government's response to this crisis has been so slow and so confused?

We have heard from the Minister of Health. When will we begin to hear from the Prime Minister? When will he stand up, take responsibility for the government's mistakes and correct the situation?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me dwell in the realm of facts. The fact of the matter is that six million doses of H1N1 vaccine have already been delivered to the provinces and territories. That is enough for all the priority groups that have been identified by public health officials.

We currently have more H1N1 vaccine per capita than any other country in the world. The vaccine is being distributed as quickly as it is being produced, and there will be sufficient H1N1 vaccine available in Canada for everyone who needs or wants to be immunized.

Those are the facts on the ground. In fact, we are working with provincial and territorial officials.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if there is all this vaccine about, why are there eight-hour lines? Nobody can understand the gap between what the minister is saying and what Canadians are actually experiencing.

Not only did the government not have a pandemic plan, but it also did not have any plan for a national emergency. That is what the Auditor General is saying. Now that we are seeing these vaccine shortages across the country, and families waiting in line, how are we supposed to believe the government when it says that there will be sufficient distribution and supply of vaccine in the weeks ahead?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact I can use the hon. member's home province as an example. Some 2.2 million doses have been distributed already in the province of Ontario. In fact, that is the case per capita with the rest of the provinces as well.

The fact of the matter is that the vaccine is being produced. It is being distributed. As I said, over six million doses have been distributed to date. This is simply week one of the most massive immunization campaign in the history of this country. It is a campaign in which we are working with health officials across the country.

Oral Questions

• (1420)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the federal government is responsible for ordering vaccines. It is also responsible for coordinating the distribution of these vaccines. Providing information is another federal government responsibility.

But all we see is a vaccine shortage, long lines and confusion. The government needs to stop blaming everyone else, take responsibility and do something about the situation.

What is the Prime Minister—and not the Minister of Health—waiting for to take action?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that 6 million doses of vaccine have been sent to the provinces and territories. Now, there are enough doses for all the priority groups. We have more doses of the vaccine per capita in Canada than in any other country in the world.

[*English*]

We are working with our provincial and territorial counterparts. We are working with the public health officials. I hope that the hon. member is not trying to politicize the issue, because that would surely be beneath him.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, leadership is the key to disaster management, with a clear chain of command and defined roles. We are currently in response mode for H1N1.

Where is the Prime Minister on this issue? Why has the Prime Minister not spoken directly to Canadians to reduce their anxiety, confusion and mounting frustration? Why has he not made available the \$400 million from budget 2006 for pandemic response?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we do have a pandemic response. As the Minister of Health, I was pleased to revise the pandemic response program that was done by previous governments to make sure that it was the most modern, most up to date and most consistent with the World Health Organization as well as our continental pandemic planning.

That is what has been done by this government in anticipation of any pandemic. We are proud of that record, but right now we are focused on working with public health officials and provincial and territorial authorities to do the right thing for Canadians, and that is exactly what we are doing.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the second wave of H1N1 arrived in some parts of Canada before the vaccine.

The government cannot tell us how many people were actually vaccinated the first week and there are shortages this week. The Conservatives are telling us that it will take until Christmas to have enough vaccine for all Canadians, but health experts predict the second wave of H1N1 may peak well before Christmas.

How did the Conservative government get it so wrong?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): In fact, Mr. Speaker, we operate with the best advice in the country from public

health officials from across the country and from the Public Health Agency of Canada.

That is why we in a very important way and in a controlled way made sure the vaccine was safe for Canadians, made sure it was tested, made sure it was allocated according to a plan. That is what we have done. We have worked with the provinces and territories and the best public health officials in the country to make sure it was the right thing to do.

If the hon. member has a problem with that, she should say so, but if she does, she is politicizing the issues.

* * *

[*Translation*]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Parliamentary Budget Officer has said that the government is on the wrong track when it claims that economic growth alone will bring down the deficit. That is true but that does not mean however that they should stick with ill-advised measures such as those of the Minister of Finance who, in his economic update, indicated that he plans to take \$19 billion out of the employment insurance fund by 2015.

Will the government admit that, in the end, its plan is to have the unemployed pay for the deficit?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government made the difficult decision of incurring a deficit. Why? To look after the economy, the unemployed and the people in need. If the Bloc had its way, we would be holding an election right now. There would be no economic action plan and no assistance for the unemployed. The leader of the Bloc should explain to the unemployed in Rivière-du-Loup, for example, why he opposes Bill C-50, which would extend employment benefits by 5 to 20 weeks. That is what the unemployed are waiting for.

• (1425)

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, let the Prime Minister come to Rivière-du-Loup to have a debate and explain that seasonal and forestry workers do not qualify and that all benefits will go to southern Ontario. I am up for that any time.

Rather than going after the unemployed, why does he not go after the oil companies, those that have the means, the big banks? Why does he not eliminate tax havens? Why does he not stop handing out presents to oil companies? Why does he not impose a 1% surtax on those who have taxable income of \$150,000 or more? I am prepared to debate these measures in Rivière-du-Loup but not measures that serve Ontario and western Canada to the detriment of Quebec. He is welcome to do so any time.

Oral Questions

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the question is, why does he not stop the fearmongering? I will say one thing. The Parliamentary Budget Officer said and I quote: "...the Canadian economy has weathered the global recession better than most economies, posting the second strongest performance among the G7". That is action, not an election that no one wants.

I will again ask the leader of the Bloc to go and explain to the unemployed in Rivière-du-Loup why he opposes extending unemployment benefits by 5 to 20 weeks.

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EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we will do it anytime.

Instead of making unemployed workers pay down the deficit by stealing \$19 billion from the employment insurance fund between now and 2015, the government should improve the employment insurance system. It is urgent that we make the system more accessible and improve benefits. For example, we have to eliminate the waiting period and increase coverage from 55% to 60%.

When will the government realize that employment insurance needs a complete overhaul?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is odd. We have Bill C-50, which will give between five and 20 extra weeks of employment insurance benefits to long-tenured workers. These are people who have rarely collected employment insurance benefits.

First they ask our government for help, then they turn around and vote against it. At the same time, they stand up and ask for employment insurance measures. This is the fourth measure we have announced, and today, we announced two more for self-employed workers in Quebec who can now collect sickness benefits and compassionate care benefits. Is the party her going to vote against that too?

Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec's self-employed workers already have access to the Quebec parental insurance plan. Now more than ever, we need a complete overhaul of the employment insurance system to help seasonal workers, young people, women in unstable jobs and self-employed workers.

If the government really wants to help unemployed workers in Quebec, it should propose comprehensive changes and promise to compensate the Government of Quebec for the parental benefits it already provides to self-employed workers. When will it take action?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, I must inform the member that today, we announced new measures for self-employed workers, including 15 weeks of sickness benefits that Quebec's self-employed workers will be able to collect. We are also making six weeks of compassionate care benefits available to self-employed workers in Quebec if they are interested.

I should also point out that we are compensating Quebec for what it offers in terms of maternity, parental and paternity benefits because, instead of paying the \$1.73 contribution rate, they pay \$1.36. That has already been done.

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[English]

HEALTH

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General says that the government cannot plan for disasters. The people standing in line for vaccine must be saying to themselves, "No kidding".

Let me offer a constructive suggestion. Under the plan that is available for financing of natural disasters, the federal government steps forward with 90% of the cost so that the people locally do not have to worry about how they are going to pay for it to get the job done. Why not do that for H1N1 and do it now?

[Translation]

Will it cover the cost of H1N1 vaccination?

● (1430)

[English]

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are actually focused on the results on the ground. The results on the ground are that there have been six million doses thus far that have been allocated to the provinces and territories, that have been delivered to the provinces and territories thus far. That is enough for all of the priority groups in and of itself. It is more per capita than any other nation that is distributing the vaccine. The vaccine is being distributed as quickly as it is being produced.

There will be a time and a place for his discussion. It is not now. Our responsibility is to help our public health officials deal with this situation and that is what we are doing.

* * *

TAXATION

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government's obsession with lowering corporate taxes means that the effective tax rate in Canada is dropping below the rate in the U.S. What that means is that any money in American companies—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. Order. The hon. member for Toronto—Danforth has the floor. Please, we will have some order.

The hon. member for Toronto—Danforth.

Hon. Jack Layton: Mr. Speaker, the result is that any money that American companies might save by not paying Canadian taxes, they give to the U.S. treasury. That policy is shortchanging the Canadian treasury. This is a new study from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives which says that \$4 billion to \$6 billion are being lost from the Canadian treasury under this plan. They make clear it is not good for Canadians. Why are the Conservatives giving tax dollars away and charging HST to Canadian—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Industry.

Oral Questions

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fact that the hon. member fails to understand consistently is that if we overtax, we lose jobs, we lose opportunity, we lose economic development. We have realized that. That is why we are proud to be a low tax jurisdiction while still making sure that the services Canadians demand from the federal government are taking place. We have two people to thank for this, the Prime Minister and our Minister of Finance.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we can thank the same two people for the HST that will be coming for B.C. and Ontario families in the next few months.

Let us compare and contrast. In Nova Scotia the NDP government is taking the HST off home heating fuel. The Prime Minister is slapping home heating fuel with a new tax in B.C. and in Ontario. Why is he doing this? If he is not willing to listen to working families, will he at least listen to his old friends from the National Citizens Coalition who are saying “no” to the HST, or is he abandoning them as well?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that through four budgets and through two minority Parliaments, this Conservative government has lowered taxes in every single budget we put before Canadians.

The member talks about the importance of low sales tax. The reality is that this Conservative government lowered the GST twice. Those members voted against it every single time. The inverse reality is equally true. When the NDP was in power in British Columbia, all it did was raise taxes constantly and take the fastest growing economy in British Columbia and put it from first to worst. That is the record of the NDP.

I will stand proudly with the Prime Minister and compare our record of low taxes against the high tax record of the NDP.

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[Translation]

HEALTH

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our neighbours to the south ordered H1N1 vaccines from five different suppliers. Why did this government choose a single supplier? Did they not realize that this would lead to a shortage?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, 6 million doses of the H1N1 vaccine have already been sent to the provinces and territories. That is now the reality.

[English]

The hon. member has a question to ask about the contract. It was signed in 2001. Maybe he should ask members of that government.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, not only did they order the vaccine from a single supplier, but they also ordered it three months late. They did nothing in May, June or July.

The inaction of this Conservative government is directly responsible for the current shortage. What measures have they taken to increase production of the vaccine?

• (1435)

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that Canada has more doses per capita than any other country in the world. That is the reality.

[English]

That is the reality on the ground. That is what Canadians care about. That is what they should care about. That is why we are working with public health officials, the provinces and territories to deal with this situation to the best of our ability. The hon. member is simply playing politics if he wishes to dispute that.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the role of pandemic planning is backup, backup, backup.

The U.S. government ordered vaccine from five companies: Sanofi Aventis, CSL Limited, Novartis AG, GlaxoSmithKline and MedImmune.

Why did the Conservative government order two different vaccines and limit Canada to just one supplier? Why did the government make things worse by interfering in the supplier's production plan?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member and her caucus still refuse to accept the reality on the ground that we have more vaccine per capita than the United States, than the U.K., than Japan, than anywhere else in the world.

Six million doses have been distributed to date. That is the reality on the ground. That is what Canadians care about. That is what we care about and that is what we will continue to care about.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government claims six million vaccines have been shipped, but Canadians are wondering where they are. The anxiety they face would be greatly alleviated if these six million vaccines meant six million Canadians had been vaccinated, but something has gone wrong, because the federal government failed to live up to its federal responsibility when faced with a pandemic.

When will the Conservatives release the \$400 million set aside for pandemic response to get Canadians vaccinated as fast as possible?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should know better than most that this is week one of the largest mass immunization campaign in the country's history, week one. The hon. member knows better than most that it takes eight to twelve weeks to distribute, deliver and access that vaccine for all 33 million Canadians. Those are the facts on the ground.

We have allowed to be distributed six million doses. That is more than enough for the priority groups that are the first groups in week one and week two. The member should be applauding the public health officials rather than criticizing this program.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, federal authorities have acknowledged that they were poorly prepared and that some clinics will have to close because of a lack of vaccine. My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources who, speaking about the current Minister of Health, said: “I really hope she never gets anything hot”.

Would the Minister of Natural Resources not agree that the Minister of Health's behaviour is confirming her worst fears?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, 6 million doses of the vaccine have now been sent to the provinces and territories for public health. That is now the reality in Canada. Canada has more doses of the vaccine per capita than any other country in the world. That is the reality.

[English]

We are proud to work with all public health officials and public health agencies across the country and with all provinces and territories to protect the health and safety of Canadians.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, while the government pretends to have a handle on the H1N1 crisis, the Auditor General is criticizing the government for not having an emergency response plan for things like pandemics. Since 2004, the federal government has failed to produce an emergency response plan that allows the departments to communicate with one another.

Will the Conservatives admit that, in the case of the current crisis, they have been caught with their pants down?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reality is, once again, that our government announced a new action plan in 2006 to deal with the flu and pandemics. This is our record.

[English]

We have done this in consultation with the provinces, the territories and public health officials. We did that back in 2006. We are proud of that record. However, right now we are focused on ensuring that all parts of the country get the vaccine they need.

* * *

● (1440)

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Canada is once again under fire from the executive secretary of the Rio climate convention, Yvo de Boer, who has accused developed countries of not being ambitious enough with their greenhouse gas reduction targets. Canada is the worst of the bunch, with a reduction target of only 3% by 2020.

How can Canada be happy with such pathetic reduction targets, when we need reductions of 25% to 40% by 2020 in order to prevent the dramatic and irreversible effects of global warming?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not the case. If there is an isolationist party in this House, it is the Bloc Québécois. It proposes an emission exchange, a

carbon exchange with European targets, when we know that the Americans are not interested. Experts agree that a carbon exchange without the United States is doomed to failure. The Bloc Québécois should work with the government to combat climate change.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we do not need any lectures from a government that received a Fossil of the Day award today in Barcelona. That is quite something.

African nations have issued an ultimatum, demanding that developed countries set specific greenhouse gas reduction targets for 2012-20. Instead of toadying up to the oil companies, which think Canada is already doing too much to reduce greenhouse gases, why is the minister not instead listening to those who think that Canada is not doing enough?

[English]

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, these are some of the toughest environmental negotiations with which Canada has ever been involved. Canada wants to see a successful international treaty negotiated in Copenhagen. This government will have tough, capable negotiators at the table. We will not be boy scouts. The Liberals tried that. That is how we ended up with a Kyoto protocol with unattainable targets.

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[Translation]

HEALTH

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' inaction on H1N1 speaks volumes about their priorities. Spending \$45 million on 6,000 propaganda posters is more important to them than the influenza. This is backwards. People should come before politics.

Why are the Conservatives putting politics ahead of the health of Canadians?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, from coast to coast to coast in Canada, 6 million doses of H1N1 vaccine have now been sent to the provinces and territories.

[English]

That is the reality on the ground. We have been working and constantly conveying our messages to the people of Canada about the importance of preparing for this second part of the outbreak. That has been the responsibility of the Minister of Health and she has been doing that, along with the Chief Public Health Officer. They have been working on behalf of Canadians. The hon. members opposite should do so as well.

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the reality on the ground is in my riding. Due to a lack of public information and a dwindling vaccine supply, Kevin Lawrence has been unable to get his young children vaccinated. At first, he lived between two jurisdictions where there were clinics. Now in New Brunswick clinics have been shut down altogether.

Ensuring adequate supply of vaccine is the job of that government, not any other. What am I to tell Mr. Lawrence about when his kids can get vaccinated? Do not tell me that Christmas is good enough.

Oral Questions

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would encourage the hon. member and hon. members opposite to speak about the realities, like six million doses already being distributed, more than enough for priority groups, which is the focal point of public health officials over the next couple of weeks.

The hon. member could tell his constituent that in New Brunswick 129,000 doses have already been distributed.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, how could that minister be so pompous? Worse, with Canadians worried about their health, the Conservatives paint the GO Train with wasteful blue ads, \$46,000 for eight weeks of Conservative propaganda. What are Canadians to think, watching that train go back and forth? This is \$46,000 that could have been used for more vaccine or public health information.

Are Canadians to wait for the minister's latest guess, "Wait till Christmas and you may have your vaccine?" This is unacceptable and it is arrogant on the part of the government. When will it act—

• (1445)

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. Minister of Industry.

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would only encourage the hon. member and members opposite to listen to public health authorities who had a plan for inoculation. They had a plan to ensure that priority groups were in fact distributed to first and other groups would then get the distribution of the vaccine in the weeks ahead.

That is the plan of the public health authorities. I think it is a fair and reasonable plan. I encourage the hon. members opposite to support a fair and reasonable plan.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Look at the facts, Mr. Speaker. From listeriosis, a national food safety issue, to H1N1, a national health concern, the government's incompetence knows no bounds.

In P.E.I., with some schools facing 35% absenteeism, parents and children await the vaccine shot, but now it is not available. Yet the government's propaganda machine wastefully drives in action plan signs from everything from doorknobs to air conditioners.

Will the Prime Minister stop this waste and instead deliver on his public health responsibilities?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would only again convey to the House that Canada currently has more H1N1 vaccine per capita than any place on this planet. That is a testament to all the public health authorities working with us and working with the provinces and territories.

For the record, the province of Prince Edward Island already has 29,000 doses available.

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[Translation]

CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, why do the Bloc members remain seated here in Ottawa when the time comes to stand up for Quebeckers? We increased employment insurance benefits by five weeks; the Bloc voted against that. We set

the job-sharing period to 52 weeks; the Bloc voted against that. We froze employment insurance premiums; the Bloc voted against that. Yesterday, we extended benefits for long-tenured workers by from five to twenty weeks; the Bloc voted against that.

Why are the Bloc members voting against Quebeckers when our Conservative government is taking action for workers and the unemployed in Quebec and across the country?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Lévis—Bellechasse is right to wonder why. Indeed, why did the leader of the Bloc and his party systematically vote against the unemployed and their families? The only answer I can come up with is that the leader of the Bloc and his party are very negative. They have been here for 18 years and they have done nothing but criticize. They no longer see good measures that are valid and beneficial for the unemployed. The people of Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup might want to keep that in mind on Monday and send an 11th member of our party from Quebec here to Ottawa.

* * *

[English]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last year the government issued almost 400,000 temporary foreign worker permits. Today the Auditor General said that these permits were issued without proper strategic planning, without due diligence, without knowing whether the employer or the job even existed.

What is going on here? Skilled workers in Hamilton Centre are looking for work and the government is bringing in temporary workers for jobs that do not even exist.

When will the Conservatives start doing their job and focus on developing long-term sustainable jobs for Canadian workers?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are doing just that with all the measures in our economic action plan, which the NDP has voted against.

It requires two weeks of advertising for a Canadian employer to obtain a labour market opinion. Our immigration department then often does further verification.

Employers in the member's riding, tens of thousands of employers in the country would go under if they did not have access to labour for positions that were not being filled by Canadian residents or citizens.

In a recession we need to ensure that businesses that are surviving have the labour they need to do the job. We are proud to be working in co-operation with them.

Oral Questions

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government is rushing in hundreds and thousands of temporary foreign workers only to leave them completely vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Most have no hope of a future in Canada. The government has no idea or even cares if the workers are mistreated by their bosses. It is open season for temporary foreign workers. It is a scam.

When will the government abandon its just use them and toss them out policy and take serious action to stop the exploitation?

•(1450)

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the tone of that question is absolutely irresponsible.

Tens of thousands of Canadian businesses would go under if they did not have access to hard-working individuals who come to this country to fill jobs for which Canadians are not applying.

We do not want to put Canadian businesses out of work and out of business during this difficult economic time by denying them access to hard-working individuals who are willing to contribute to the Canadian economy.

This government has brought in important regulatory changes to work with the provinces and the labour ministries to ensure that the tiny number of abusive employers do not have access to this program in the future.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism is so short of arguments to justify his decision to impose visas on Mexican and Czech visitors that he has resorted to inventing stories and misleading this House by claiming that his decision was justified and requested by the Government of Quebec.

How can the minister say such a thing when, in a letter dated July 24, 2009, four ministers from Quebec condemned the devastating impact of this decision on Quebec's economy?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

I have here a letter dated May 26 signed by Sam Hamad, Minister of Employment and Social Solidarity of Quebec, who demanded that the government take action to help Quebec, which is facing an increase in the number of asylum seekers. He indicated that the costs associated with last resort financial assistance rose from \$14.1 million in 2006 to \$82 million in 2008-09, and he demanded that the government take action to control the number of asylum seekers coming to Quebec.

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec was not calling on the government to impose visas.

The minister needs to stop putting the blame for the decision on the Government of Quebec, which was not even consulted. What minister Sam Hamad does say is that the Government of Quebec needs additional funds to cover the extra costs associated with asylum seekers.

When will the minister stop imposing this irresponsible decision, and when will he release the additional funds the Government of Quebec is requesting?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Hamad said that when they extend their stay, asylum seekers in Quebec put growing pressure on Quebec's services and public finances. I have a question for the member. Why is he not concerned about the pressure on social services on behalf of Quebec taxpayers? Why is he complaining on behalf of special interest groups instead of taxpayers? Why is the Government of Quebec defending Quebec's interests? We acted to defend Quebec's interests by imposing these visas.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: Lies, lies.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Not so—

[*English*]

The Speaker: The hon. member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl.

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EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General revealed today that Public Safety Canada has a budget of nearly \$60 million for emergency management, yet the government has used less than two-thirds of that money in the past two years.

The AG says that Public Safety Canada is unable to develop its capacity for emergency management. This is not about a lack of money, it is about a lack of leadership.

How could the Conservatives pretend they were well prepared for an emergency when the Auditor General says they were not?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, we have actually been making considerable progress in preparing for emergency management. In fact, to quote the Auditor General, she said, "Public Safety Canada has made considerable progress in improving federal emergency coordination through its Government Operations Centre".

Indeed, our plans continue to be prepared. We have worked well with the provinces and territories who, of course, we know are primarily responsible for the delivery of emergency and disaster management. Our coordination has worked well, as we saw this spring with the floods in Manitoba, and we will continue to improve and enhance and build our emergency management capacity.

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, seven hour lineups tell the tale, do they not?

Oral Questions

The Auditor General said the federal emergency response plan has not received formal approval by the government. The AG states that until the government endorses the plan, it will be difficult for Public Safety Canada to fulfill its mandate to combat emergencies such as the pandemic Canadians are now facing.

Why, after four years, has the government refused to complete and endorse the federal emergency response plan?

• (1455)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, perhaps I should first help my friends on the other side to understand the difference between the pandemic management plan and the federal emergency response plan. They are two entirely different documents. Canada is operating right now under the pandemic management plan.

The federal emergency response plan is prepared. It exists and continues to be developed. The Auditor General has asked that we take it to cabinet to have it endorsed there. We are going to do that. We think that is a good suggestion so that it does have that forum, but we will also continue to work to evolve it, to make it better all the time.

As we see, every time something happens we can always do better, but it has been working well, as we saw this spring with the floods in Manitoba.

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HEALTH

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today the Auditor General reported that the federal emergency management committee, which is supposed to coordinate the response to the H1N1 virus pandemic, did not bother to meet during half of the six most recent emergencies. She warned of conflicting messages, gaps in the system and failed communication and coordination efforts.

This is disturbing news, obviously, given the current H1N1 crisis, and it confirms what people are experiencing, confusion and a lack of coordination. Why can the government not get its act together?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again I have to emphasize that the opposition has to realize that there are two different plans.

The federal emergency response plan is aimed at natural disasters, and in the event that a pandemic reached the level where it required public safety intervention, it would be managed under that plan, but we are operating right now under the pandemic management plan, updated by this government in 2006, and the North American pandemic plan, which our government has also put in place. That plan is working well. As a result, we have available the most doses per capita of any country in the world. That is a sound accomplishment. Canadians have gotten the message that they have to get the vaccine and they are going out—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, maybe if the committee had met even once, it would have come across this disturbing fact.

The contract for pandemic vaccine for 10 years was awarded by the Liberal government to a single company in 2001, Shire Biologics, which was, in turn, sold to GlaxoSmithKline. Getting 50 million doses from one company is like trying to fill 50 million cups of water from the same tap.

The Prime Minister's old friend, Ken Boessenkool, is now a lobbyist for GSK. Is he the person who has been reassuring the government that GSK would have no problem delivering a speedy supply of the vaccine?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what Canadians care about is the availability of the vaccine. Six million doses have already been distributed throughout the country, through the provinces and territories, and that is enough vaccine for all of the priority groups. That is more per capita than any other country in the world.

But we are not resting on our laurels. We continue to distribute the vaccine as it is produced. That is our role and responsibility, along with the provinces and territories. We are working with the public health officials. That is what people expect of us and that is what we are doing.

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EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today our Conservative government introduced the Fairness for the Self-Employed Act. This bill would provide self-employed Canadians with access to maternity, parental, sickness and compassionate care benefits on a voluntary basis.

This is yet another way our government is supporting Canadian families. Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of HRSDC please explain to this House how this bill will help self-employed Canadians balance work and family?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government believes that self-employed Canadians should not be forced to choose between their family and business responsibilities.

That is why for the first time in history, self-employed Canadians will have access to all special benefits under the EI system. There are 2.6 million self-employed Canadians who have long asked for this support, and for 13 long years the Liberals completely ignored them.

Self-employed Canadians now have a Conservative government that takes action and continues to stand up for Canadian families.

* * *

• (1500)

FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's small businesses are being squeezed at the worst possible time.

Points of Order

Despite the recession, credit card companies and banks have rapidly raised their rates and have set their sights on the debit market. The Retail Council of Canada claims that these new cards gouge merchants hundreds of millions of dollars more each year.

The Conservatives are proposing nothing but a voluntary measure. Does the government really believe that credit card companies and banks will give up all that money voluntarily?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is not a one-day issue for the typical sort of one-day conference treatment that the Liberal Party gives to issues that are very important to Canadians.

We have been working on this issue of credit cards and debit cards all year. We have already promulgated some regulations as we said we would under the economic action plan in January. Most of those regulations come into force on January 1, in less than two months. There will be better disclosure for Canadians, and that will certainly help them to choose from among various credit cards including a low-frills, low-cost credit card.

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[Translation]

PARLIAMENTARY BUDGET OFFICER

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government is intent on undermining the work of the Parliamentary Budget Officer. In addition to refusing to provide the information he needs, the government is refusing to ensure that the Parliamentary Budget Officer has adequate funding.

This government refuses to give the facts on the state of public finances and has made every effort to get rid of an embarrassing officer of the House. Today, Kevin Page is asking us to eliminate his position or to fund it.

When will this government stop playing games and give the Parliamentary Budget Officer the means to do his work in a completely independent manner?

[English]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Parliamentary Budget Officer reports to the Parliamentary Librarian, and the Parliamentary Librarian reports to you. The hon. member is accusing you of underfinancing the Parliamentary Budget Officer. I want you to know that I will not countenance any accusation of any kind against you, and I will defend your honour.

On this side of the House of Commons, we are working on the economic action plan, which creates more jobs and builds a brighter future for communities through construction projects, lower taxes and a very successful home renovation tax credit.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is very clear

in the Standing Orders that members in the House cannot call out or yell out and accuse each other of lying or being a liar. During the responses to the questions from his party by the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, the leader of the Bloc called out to the minister and accused him of being a liar on at least four occasions and more like six. I would ask him to respectfully withdraw the remarks that he made here in the House of Commons.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I did indeed say, about six times, "lies, lies, lies" or "mensonges". It is permissible. You regularly allow us to use the words "mensonges" or "lies" in our questions. We cannot say that the person who utters—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: They do not want to listen.

We cannot say that those uttering lies are liars. It is not permitted to say that there are liars in the House. Outside the House, it can be said, but not here. However, we can use the words "mensonges" and "lies". You have regularly allowed them in questions. I said, "lies, lies, lies", "mensonges, mensonges, mensonges". I am not withdrawing my words. They are permitted, Mr. Speaker.

• (1505)

[English]

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Mr. Speaker, it is very clear. A number of members on this side of the House heard exactly what the member said. He used the word "liar" directly at the minister while he responded. I am simply asking him to acknowledge it.

Mr. Speaker, you have said on many occasions that the decorum in the House needs to improve. The leader of the Bloc has an opportunity to stand in his place today to show that the decorum must change and withdraw the remarks that he made. They were unparliamentary.

The Speaker: I could not hear any of the language being complained of.

[Translation]

What the leader of the Bloc Québécois said is that he used the word "lies". I heard nothing like that, but if he did use this word and it was not in reference to the statements by the minister, it may be acceptable.

I encourage hon. members to avoid using these words altogether. Whether it be in reference to everyone, to documents or to whatever, it is not the thing to do in the House.

I heard nothing. I will see what we can see on the video of today's proceedings.

[English]

If there is a problem, I will come back to the House on the point of order raised by the hon. member.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a separate point of order.

Privilege

[Translation]

During question period, I quoted a letter I received from the Quebec minister of employment and social solidarity, Sam Hamad, and I would like to table it in the House. I am seeking leave of the House to do so.

The Speaker: The minister may do so without leave. He has considerable power in that regard. The document is received.

[English]

The Chair has notice of a question of privilege from the hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore and I will hear his point now.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

COMMENTS REGARDING MEMBER'S POSITION ON FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is actually the first time in my 12 and a half years that I have had to rise on a question of privilege in the House of Commons.

When somebody sends something into a riding, it must be based on facts. It must be based on debate that happened in the House of Commons and it must be based on the truth. I received something in my riding that caused much grief to many of my supporters, because it was an outright fabrication of the facts. I cannot say one of the words we talked about earlier, but that is exactly what it is. What I received was deliberately misleading to my constituents with regard to something I have worked towards reversing for 12 and a half years.

I find it unacceptable that the member of Parliament for Saskatoon—Wanuskewin would use such an opportunity to deliberately impugn my reputation and impugn the work that I have done on a particular piece of legislation that is before the House of Commons.

It is intolerable and I have asked that the member, if he wishes this thing to end, stand in the House of Commons and apologize not just to me, but to my constituents for the deliberately misleading article that went to my riding.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I guess, first off, on the subject of ten percenters, I want to quickly refer to a ten percenter that came to my riding this past week. It refers to the PM's to-do list and, among other things, it states, "Break up family reunions and wedding receptions. Cripple the tourist industry at the height of summer". These are ten percenters that came courtesy of the leader of the NDP, compliments of, actually, an acting Speaker in the House.

Moving on, I would encourage the member to actually take it back to his own caucus services, in terms of nuancing, and getting this stuff right, too, because he can imagine how upset I felt when that kind of trash or garbage came into my riding.

However, to the point, and very specifically on the matter of the ten percenter that he refers to, which, at least in part, states, "Your Member of Parliament, "the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore", worked to support the registry and end the amnesty". This particular statement was in regard to a Bloc Québécois motion, which stated:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should not extend the amnesty on gun control requirements set to expire on May 16, 2009, and should maintain the registration of all types of firearms in its entirety.

I would just simply say, to the member's credit, actually, the member absented himself on that occasion. It probably took courage because it was a whipped vote. So, I want to give the member credit where credit is due. It actually does speak something in terms of this individual's convictions on the matter.

Actually, ending the amnesty would have had the effect of prosecuting law-abiding gun owners and hunters. So, to his credit, he absented himself on a whipped vote, and I do thank him for that.

However, let it be said in this place, I will concede that in terms of the totality, this context aside, the hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore has supported the scrapping of the gun registry, and I want to thank him for that.

I also want to thank him for the work that I understand he has probably done within his own caucus to bring this to a free vote. We are appreciative of the fact that it is not only walk but it is talk, but it is going to be walk tomorrow, and we do thank the member.

We trust that there will be others that he has convinced within his own party to do the right thing, as this member is clear on the record, and all members will have a clear opportunity tomorrow night, once and for all, to vote yes or no with respect to the scrapping of the long gun registry.

I believe that the member opposite, who I know to be an honourable person, will do the right thing and I believe he will convince many of his other colleagues as well to vote in favour of Bill C-391. So, I thank the member for that.

● (1510)

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if it is a private member's bill and it is a free vote, why are the Conservatives whipping all of their members in the House of Commons tomorrow to vote in favour of keeping the registry?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. Question period is over. We are dealing with a point of order and I do not think this has much to do with the point of order raised by the hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore.

So, in the circumstances, the Chair will examine the statements made by the hon. member for Saskatoon—Wanuskewin and the hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, and the ten percenter that the hon. member forwarded to the Chair with his letter indicating he wanted to raise this matter. I will get back to the House in due course and clarify the matter.

[Translation]

Is the hon. member for Lévis—Bellechasse rising on a point of order as well?

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same point of order raised by my colleague from St. Catharines.

We do not have to read all of Marleau and Montpetit to know that common courtesy is required here in this House. We can debate ideas, but today we have had another example from the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie of a childish lack of manners. This, by the leader of a Quebec political party brings shame on Quebecers. And it is not the first time.

On October 20, the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie called our Minister of Justice a liar. He did not say “lies”, he said “liar”. That is appalling. Is the leader of this Quebec political party tired? Is he fed up with being in Ottawa after spending 17 years doing nothing but shouting out stupid remarks at the parties and people who govern? That is unacceptable.

My colleague from Beauport—Limoilou was called a hypocrite, and I demand an apology. Apologies are required for unparliamentary language that is disrespectful of our Quebec and Canadian colleagues. It is unacceptable. I demand an apology. I demand civil behaviour in the House, even though we may not always agree on ideas. We are entitled to disagree, but basic respect is a must in this House.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord on the same point.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, with respect, earlier, in response to the last comment made by the member for St. Catharines, you said you would review the blues, listen to the recording and then be able to make a ruling.

I think that the purpose of the last comment made by the hon. member for Lévis—Bellechasse was simply to raise the same matter again, even though you stated earlier that you would take the matter under advisement.

If that is the case, I might as well ask every one of my colleagues from the Bloc Québécois in this House to rise one after the other to elaborate further.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that you noticed that the member for Lévis—Bellechasse was attempting to change the subject just to score a petty political point.

I defer to your decision, Mr. Speaker, which I hope you will come back with at your earliest convenience.

•(1515)

The Speaker: I agree. I will come back to the House as soon as possible with a ruling on this matter.

Government Orders

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-50, an act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and to increase benefits, be read the third time and passed.

The Speaker: Before question period, the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot had the floor and was on questions and comments. She still has seven minutes.

The hon. member for Kitchener—Conestoga.

[*English*]

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been over an hour since we heard the speech from the member, but if one could judge from the volume of her speech it is certainly obvious that she is very passionate about this issue.

It is important to remind Canadians that Bill C-50 proposes to add an extension of between 5 to 20 extra weeks to help long-tenured workers access employment insurance benefits.

All Canadians would agree that the best way to help unemployed Canadians is to help them get back to work. We have initiated a number of plans: \$500 million for training long-tenured workers, \$1.5 billion for those on EI who would not normally qualify, and many others.

How can the member opposite look into the eyes of those in her province who are unemployed, who have in some cases worked for many years, some decades, who would qualify for employment benefits under this bill and say, “I’m sorry. You don’t qualify because I voted against the measure?”

I would like her answer to that.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to tell my colleague across the way that if we are strongly opposed to this bill, it is not so much because of what is in it but because of what is not in it, all that there could be for people who are excluded, who will not qualify for these benefits. The bill adds between five and 20 additional weeks for people who already qualify. What does it do, though, for the 60% of people who do not qualify for even one week of employment insurance?

When people are denied eligibility, it increases the fiscal burden on the Quebec nation. They have to apply for last resort assistance, which is provided by the Government of Quebec. I heard the finance minister say in an economic update that he would take another \$19 billion from the employment insurance fund by 2015, even though the government does not put anything into this fund at all any more. It is working people and their employers who contribute to it.

Government Orders

Rather than stealing from the unemployed like the Liberals before them—under their plan, more than \$75 billion will have been taken from the fund—the Conservatives should get money from the banks and oil companies, to whom they give tax breaks. They should also eliminate the tax havens and the various measures to help rich people, who do not need them. All of the employment insurance claimants could be helped. This is the kind of assistance the unemployed need.

I look into the eyes of people who knock on my door and who say that although they worked, they did not get employment insurance when their company closed. The government refused to help their company when it was in difficulty and instead gave tax credits to profitable firms. We should always remember that tax credits apply to companies that are already making a profit.

• (1520)

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member and I have worked together on committee and I know she is very committed and knows her facts, and I thank her for that.

Much of the debate that went on during report stage and today during third reading went back to the same points about the many sectors in the economy: forestry, fisheries, tourism, and automobile. These industries have associated with them seasonal work and an attachment to the EI system to support the necessary industries because they are seasonal by their nature to some extent or because like the auto industry where there may have to be retooling or refitting of a plant or a layout which may require employees to be laid off.

However, the minister told Canadians that the bill was going to treat all Canadians equitably and fairly with regard to these enhanced benefits under prolonged service. I would ask the member, does she believe that the government has delivered on its promise to make this a bill that is for the benefit of all Canadians, not just some Canadians?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thériault: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for his excellent question.

Currently, with the bill it introduced, the government is casting aside an entire class of workers, which includes seasonal workers, part time workers, and women. Currently, most of those excluded from this plan are men and women in precarious jobs, who are paying into the plan like any other worker. The fact is that workers start contributing from hour one on the labour market, but a great many of them are excluded when the time comes to claim benefits. Entire regions are penalized by these measures.

There are regions that depend on tourism, agriculture or fisheries. The workers whose employers cannot provide employment on a yearly basis will be penalized. Not only will they not get between 5 and 20 additional weeks of benefits, but there is no guarantee that, from one year to the next, they will meet the eligibility requirements if only to put in a claim and receive a single week of benefits. I think it is shameful for a government to jeopardize economic recovery by mortgaging the future of the workers who find themselves jobless.

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is with great interest that I rise to participate again today in the debate on Bill C-50, which seeks to increase the number of weeks for which benefits may be paid, but only to certain claimants.

I am taking part in the debate because my riding, like many other regions, has been hit hard in recent years with the permanent or recurring closure of manufacturing and forestry industries which, unfortunately, have had a great deal of difficulty, while also suffering from a lack of support on the part of government.

As the member for Berthier—Maskinongé, I really wanted to address Bill C-50 and to say how deeply disappointed and even outraged I am when I look at this bill and at the measures that it includes.

As a responsible party that is always defending Quebec's best interests first and foremost, the Bloc Québécois cannot support this bill, because it does not deal with the employment insurance issues. We have had many debates on the EI program since I first came here, in 2004. Moreover, many studies were done with a view to reform the employment insurance system. But today, we are finding out that what the Conservative Party is proposing does not in any way help the majority of workers who lose their jobs. Bill C-50 does not deal with the real problem, which is of course the accessibility issue.

Did this Conservative government really want to help the thousands of workers who need support during a crisis such as the one that we experienced and that we are still experiencing? According to the OECD, the crisis is far from being over. The unemployment rate could still go up a few points before the end of 2010. The government is not helping these workers, because it is not ensuring greater accessibility to the EI program with Bill C-50. Over 50% of those who lose their jobs do not have access to that program. It is shameful. It is shameful to see all that money being spent on federal programs. Right now, the government is spending billions of dollars. For example, there is a conflict in Afghanistan. These are necessary expenditures, but we are talking about a lot of money. Currently, money is being spent on all sorts of programs, but the government is forgetting a group of people who are facing serious socio-economic needs and who have a hard time feeding their families.

As regards the EI eligibility issue, when these workers apply for benefits, too many of them—even though they paid premiums—are told by Service Canada's employment insurance office that they do not qualify for the program. When Quebecers are not eligible for that program, what other option do they have?

Government Orders

• (1525)

Seasonal workers have worked a significant number of hours. They have worked for many weeks. However, they are not eligible for employment insurance, even if they have paid premiums. Fifty percent of these workers are not eligible for the employment insurance program. What are they to do? They find themselves without income to provide for themselves and their families. They find it impossible to pay for their homes or to meet their financial obligations and their responsibilities to their children. So, they must turn to welfare. It is a disgrace. It is often painful to see these people who must turn to a last-resort solution, when they have worked for many weeks and, in some cases, for many years.

Many times in our riding offices we have met with people who are in this situation. On those occasions, we have worked with them to try to find ways of overcoming the crisis they are going through because they lost their jobs. It is also a family and social crisis because they have no income to meet their needs. This situation is unacceptable.

Bill C-50 does nothing to solve this fundamental and unfair problem that thousands of working men and women face every day in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada. The employment situation remains very difficult, especially in the regions. For example, in the Mauricie, the unemployment rate has increased by 1.6%. It rose from 9.2% in September 2008 to 10.8% in September 2009. That is an increase of almost 2% in employment insurance benefits. If we believe the figures we have received, and which no one in this House questions, only 50% of these people will have access to employment insurance.

Our regions are withering because of this. People are becoming poorer. The most recent statistics show that Canada and Quebec are losing ground as poverty levels increase here.

I said earlier that very significant activity sectors in my riding and elsewhere in Quebec have been affected. I am talking about the forestry and manufacturing industries that occupy a very large place in the Quebec economy. These sectors have been hard hit by the current crisis but ignored by this Conservative government.

The NDP unfortunately supported Bill C-50, which really surprised me. I have been a member of this House since 2004. I always thought that the NDP was truly a party that defended workers, that it had some serious demands with respect to the employment insurance program and that it wanted to improve that program. We are still talking about abolishing the waiting period, which is something the NDP supports.

With Bill C-50, as proposed by the Conservative Party and supported by the NDP, a new category of unemployed people is created. We are talking here about good unemployed people and not so good unemployed people. Those who were lucky enough to have permanent employment for many years but unfortunately lost their jobs are entitled to employment insurance. And let us generously give them that employment insurance.

• (1530)

However, we must not exclude other types of unemployed people who have lost their jobs a number of times over the past few years. They work in the sectors most harshly affected these past few years

by the crisis related to globalization and the crisis in the manufacturing sector. They have lost their jobs or have been going through repeated periods of unemployment for years. Workers in the forestry sector are one example.

In rural areas, a number of workers in the tourism sector, a seasonal sector, have lost their jobs. Why would they not be entitled to a generous employment insurance support program? There is no shortage of money in the employment insurance fund. Nearly \$60 billion has been accumulated by the Conservative government, with the help of the Liberals, thanks to the contributions from workers and employers. They have cut off access to employment insurance.

It is not right that, in times of crisis, all this money be taken away from workers, workers among the less well-off in society, workers who have been having trouble finding jobs and whose companies have faced economic difficulties. They have had to rely on employment insurance from time to time. Those who go on EI do not have large incomes. They need support. Bill C-50 ignores these workers who need money to support their families.

In my riding, communities like Saint-Gabriel-de-Brandon, Mandeville, Saint-Alexis-des-Monts or Saint-Mathieu-du-Parc, which are rural municipalities, are experiencing job losses in the forestry sector. The Bloc Québécois has repeatedly called for programs to be put in place to support the forestry sector. Unfortunately, the government, supported by members from Quebec, preferred to invest money to support the auto industry in Ontario, while the people of Quebec were going through a serious crisis in the forestry sector. That is sad to say, but it has to be said.

Many people in my riding have been affected by the crisis in the forestry sector. The measures proposed in Bill C-50 will not help these workers. The president of the Quebec Forest Industry Council, whom we know very well, confirmed it when he said that, in recent years, the majority of forestry workers had been unemployed at least ten weeks per year. These are seasonal workers with below average income.

Did the government think about these workers when it drafted Bill C-50, a bill which, as was pointed out in the House, could have been replaced by a simple pilot project? The Conservative Party preferred to defy this House with a vote of confidence. So, it sought the NDP's support to prevent a so-called election. The bill could simply have been made into a pilot project to help the auto workers. Instead, they wanted to put on a show of support for the unemployed in Ontario. They have major electioneering interests in Ontario right now. That is why they introduced Bill C-50.

Everyone pays taxes and everyone pays into the EI system.

Government Orders

●(1535)

My problem with Bill C-50 stems from the fact that this is an issue of personal interest to me, as a social worker and community organizer who worked for years with disadvantaged groups. This is about fairness and justice for all. This should be a fundamental right for every individual in our society. It should be a duty for all parliamentarians in this House to think about this when they pass legislation, when they implement a measure to support those who have health problems, who lose their jobs, or who live in extreme poverty. We are saying that we must be fair and just to all those in need.

This bill is not fair and just to all. It favours a specific group of unemployed people, because the government thinks they should be entitled to five or twenty additional weeks of benefits, since they meet certain criteria or standards that it defined as being appropriate. As for those other unemployed people who were laid off repeatedly and who had to rely on employment insurance, they do not need additional support, based on this government's values. We cannot propose such things. I hope that those who proposed this bill, and those who supported it, will have a talk with some of their fellow citizens when they go back to their ridings.

There is something in which I have a great interest regarding the EI program. Let us take the example of those who work, but who do not have a health care insurance plan or a wage loss plan, as is the case for many non-unionized workers, such as in the manufacturing sector. If these people have cancer or some serious illness, they are only entitled to sickness benefits for a period of 15 weeks under the EI program. It is shameful. How often do we meet, in our riding offices, workers who just found out that they have cancer, for example? When one has cancer, one must get treated. This means radiotherapy, chemotherapy. It is a long process which cannot be completed in 15 weeks. Yet, these people are only entitled to 15 weeks of EI benefits. What are they going to do after?

Battling an illness involves additional expenses. There are costs related to the cure and the recovery. These people are entitled to 15 weeks for radiotherapy or chemotherapy. If, at the end of that period, they cannot go back to work, what are they going to do if they no longer have any income? They will have to rely on social assistance and they will get poorer. They will have to go into debt. Not only will they have to get treated, but they will end up on welfare and get poorer. Their stress level will increase. It is shameful.

Yet, as I always say in this House, huge surpluses have been accumulated in the employment insurance account. The government has wasted money on all sorts of things and activities which, sometimes, are far removed from the interests of workers. That is deplorable.

Of course, we in the Bloc Québécois refuse to support these mean-spirited, demagogic measures that the Conservatives, with the NDP's support, are trying to impose. The bill proposes discriminatory and partisan measures. A bill was not required. It could simply have been a pilot project. This is petty politics at the expense of the unemployed. This policy is unfair and unjust to those who need help. Therefore, as a member who cares about the needs of the people I represent, I absolutely cannot support a bill that is

incomplete and discriminatory as this one. All Bloc Québécois members will oppose this legislation.

●(1540)

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my hon. colleague's speech and I am surprised that he wanted to force the country into an election. I do not think that it would make any concrete difference, or put any food on the table for our workers.

Our government is offering measures to help workers. We are reaching out to the opposition, to make concrete changes and improvements. For instance, we included the five-week increase in benefits in our economic action plan; we allocated \$500 million for career transition; and we are ensuring simplified, quick and efficient employment insurance services. We have trained new employees to deal with the increased demand in that area.

Not only did my colleague oppose that, but he also opposed the idea of keeping workers employed for up to one year, which could be extended to two years. We want to keep people employed and help employers keep their workers through work-sharing and training programs. The Canadian government has made significant investments to help workers.

Why does my colleague refuse to support these measures? Why did he refuse to support the additional 5 to 20 weeks yesterday? Instead of always criticizing, why does he not support these bills, and when they are being studied in committee, why not make recommendations to go along with these goals? Why not vote when we can make concrete changes to help Quebec's workers and unemployed workers?

●(1545)

Mr. Guy André: Mr. Speaker, when our colleague across the way talks about plunging the country into an election campaign, he should not forget last year when the Conservative members flouted a law they themselves had passed and plunged Quebec and Canada into an election.

When our colleague talks about helping Quebec workers, there is a serious problem. I believe it was an article I read in the *Globe and Mail* recently that said Bill C-50 was obviously intended to provide further support for workers in the Ontario automobile industry. Unfortunately, these people have lost their jobs. They too need help. This is a program focused much more on supporting people in Ontario. In voting for the bill, the hon. member from Quebec is forgetting that there are forest workers, seasonal workers and workers in manufacturing in his riding and all over Quebec—there are some in the Quebec City area—who have lost their jobs.

What they want is the elimination of the waiting period for employment insurance and improvement of the system. Why are these workers not entitled as well to another 5 or 10 weeks of employment insurance? They are being neglected.

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[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, I spoke at report stage on Bill C-50 and dwelled a little on some of the macro issues, many of which the member talked about. Some industries are reasonable by nature. Other industries are cyclical.

I think others have talked about tourism. They have talked about forestry in Ontario. The auto industry substantively relies on and has a linkage to the EI system. Due to the nature of automobile manufacturing, it has to retool when it changes models, all of that. People get laid off and they collect EI for a period of time. The member has made the point well. Some areas do not have the same pattern of long tenure as others.

Specifically, could the member inform the House a bit more about the specifics of the forestry industry? I have always indicated that it falls almost like a hybrid. In some areas of the province or other provinces, forestry may be a year-round business. However, as I understand it, there are seasonal industries in remote areas of Quebec.

Could the member confirm for the House the facts about the forestry industry in Quebec and whether the bill will help all of it?

[Translation]

Mr. Guy André: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his excellent question. I would say that the crisis in the forestry sector also poses a serious threat to the survival of many rural municipalities.

The forestry sector has gone through a lot of crises. We well remember softwood lumber. An agreement was signed with the United States but there were still a lot of difficulties for the industry. We know very well that the economic crisis eventually led to various other difficulties because of the reduced demand for lumber.

This sector has had a lot of problems and most areas in it have experienced numerous job losses, over and over for many years.

We looked at this aspect before making our decision about Bill C-50, but it does nothing to help these people access employment insurance. Accessibility is a major problem for them because they are seasonal workers. Not only does Bill C-50 fail to improve the employment insurance system for them, it also does nothing to improve their situation and make employment insurance more accessible.

There are many seasonal workers, therefore, in the forestry sector and elsewhere who have to fall back on social assistance at the end of the month or end of the year.

• (1550)

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I congratulate my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé for his excellent presentation. I would like him to clarify one thing. Earlier, the Conservative member for Lévis—Bellechasse attempted to talk about all the government's good measures. However, the forestry workers, seasonal workers, those who work in tourism and agriculture are simply asking, particularly with regard to employment insurance, that the program money—the \$54 billion surplus that both the Liberal and Conservative

governments used for other purposes—be used to establish a real program to get through the crisis. That is what the Bloc Québécois has always called for. The forestry industry must be given the same kind of help as the auto industry.

I listened to the Conservative members boasting about how good Bill C-50 will be for the automotive sector.

I hear the member for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean saying that the market was the problem. I would say to him that the market was also the problem in the case of the automotive sector. American cars were not selling and governments decided to help that industry.

Why are we helping the auto industry and not the forestry industry? I would like my colleague to explain the Conservative position on this issue.

Mr. Guy André: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent question.

I think this is clearly a right-wing government that is insensitive to the plight of workers. This government would rather focus on tax havens for big corporations. They see no problem there. Even if we lose billions of dollars in revenue, they do not question it. But they will go after the poor workers who are losing their jobs.

Even though billions of dollars accumulated in a fund, they say that they do not have the money to help workers. This government says it does not have the means to improve access to the EI program. We can see how little this right-wing government cares about human beings. In all of its plans and approaches, this government shows that it is opposed to resolving the climate change issue and opposed to supporting workers. Now, with the H1N1 crisis, we can see how ill-prepared the Conservatives were to put truly effective measures in place to vaccinate the public.

The Bloc Québécois wants the 360 hours for everyone, so that workers can qualify for EI. We want the waiting period to be eliminated, and we want benefits to be increased to 60% of income. That is not outrageous, and we believe that the government has the means to implement these measures.

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-50 at third reading.

I had the opportunity to speak yesterday when the bill was at report stage. The report stage motions were carried and the bill has not been reprinted, but I do not think it is consequential to the points that I want to make in summation with regard to Bill C-50.

The Liberals will not be supporting Bill C-50 because it does not deliver what was promised. I should explain.

The Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development sold the idea that the government was going to enhance EI benefits for all Canadians. EI was going to be available equitably to all.

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The criteria were set out in a fashion which clearly worked to the advantage of certain kinds of workers who may find themselves unemployed at this time. I looked again at yesterday's debate and I noticed that one of the Conservative members said, "Earlier we heard the member for Mississauga South allude to the forestry sector as being seasonal, which goes a long way to explaining what the Liberals understand about the forestry sector".

I specifically asked the question just a few moments ago of the hon. member who just spoke. He explained that the forestry industry across Canada is not homogeneous. There are aspects of the forestry sector that do have seasonality.

I also had an opportunity today to ask another member from the Conservative Party whether that member thought this bill was clear as to who was going to benefit and how, and how it was going to roll out. The member's reply is kind of interesting and I think very reflective. He said that one has to have a lot of letters behind one's name to understand how this works.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, a member said that was a cheap shot. It is simply a point to suggest that I do not think many people in this place understand exactly who is going to benefit and how they are going to benefit.

If we do not understand it and we are debating the bill and we are going to vote on a bill that is going to supposedly assist some 190,000 people over the period for which these extended benefits are going to be permitted, how could we expect that those people would understand?

I came to the conclusion that it did not matter whether the people understood because it was not sold on the facts and the details of the technical part of the bill. It was sold as a concept that there are people who are hurting in this environment and the government is going to do something to give them temporary enhanced EI benefits. That is saleable. It is not what is going to be delivered but the concept is saleable. It is politicking. It is not legislating. That is the reason the Liberal Party will not be supporting the bill. It does not deliver what was advertised.

It does not matter to the government. The government really does not care. It does not care whether or not we understand that it is basically a very narrow benefit program and it is going to be extremely difficult to deliver. No one is going to be able to figure out whether or not they qualified and so they will have nothing to complain about.

It is a perfect scenario. It is kind of the perfect storm for a bill. The bill can be made so complicated that no one understands it and no one is going to be able to complain.

I listened to the debate. I spent all day yesterday listening to the debates at report stage. After the bill came back from committee there were three inconsequential report stage motions. They were voted on as a block.

The speeches that were given yesterday were speeches on the bill. Many of the members raised the same point that the human resources minister laid it out that it was a simple puzzle, but this is a complex puzzle.

● (1555)

There are a number of industries across the country which have an attachment to the employment insurance system necessarily because they are seasonal by nature. Examples would be the tourism industry to some extent, some aspects of the forestry industry, and certainly the automobile industry, where a plant will shut down for a month while it is retooled for another model. It is part of the system in which we operate. We need those people to be ready to come back to the job whenever the work is ready to go again.

We also have industries like the petroleum industry. The petroleum industry was booming. The price of oil skyrocketed. The commodity prices were going up, but all of a sudden, maybe as an overall consequence of the economic scenario we are in, commodity prices started to fall. All of a sudden the production of petroleum and gas products, in the west particularly, started to drop off and people started to be laid off. People in that industry had never been laid off before. The petroleum industry always had been a stable, secure employment base. As the rapid massive growth was experienced leading up to the commodity prices going up and the price of a litre of gasoline and the cost of a barrel of oil were going through the roof, more and more people started to leave other areas of the country and they migrated toward Alberta and Saskatchewan. House prices went up. The crime rate in those provinces started to go up because there were many more people, but the provinces did not have the social services, the policing or other things to keep up with the demand for those services. There were a lot of problems. They are still having a lot of problems. That is what happens when there is a severe economic shift and all of a sudden there is a massive movement.

This particular bill definitely will be of significant benefit, of anywhere from five to twenty weeks of additional employment insurance benefits for those who worked in the petroleum industry. They did not have a reliance on EI during their careers. There was always work. It was not seasonal work; it was around the clock, every day, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The petroleum industry was cranking it out. That is why, when we consider the availability of this benefit, it is clear that this particular bill will be most attractive to people in the petroleum industry, which is mostly in Alberta and Saskatchewan and which is mostly where the government support is.

I am not cynical; those are just the facts, and that is pretty good, but I wonder if the rest of the Canadians understand that of the money that will be spent to pay for the benefits that the bill will provide, it is disproportionately going to people who probably do not really need it. They probably do not need it. Even though they may have been laid off, they had secure full-time employment and no layoffs for years and years because there was no seasonal component. There was no layoff component. People had lots of high paying work.

The equity within the employment insurance system is being tampered with by the bill. It is not how the EI system works today.

Having said that, I would like to make a comment or two on the speech of the Bloc member who just spoke. He referred, as many members have, to the significant employment insurance surplus which exists. Members will know that back in—

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Mr. Gerald Keddy: You guys spent it.

Mr. Paul Szabo: The member said that we spent it. I think it is important to explain that and I hope it will help the member understand what my understanding is.

• (1600)

Back during the Mulroney governments, the two successive majority governments, up to 1993, the EI system was operating at a deficit. It was paying out more benefits than it was taking premiums in. In fact, it was over \$12 billion. There was a separate EI account. The government had to continue to fund the overdraft in the separate account. The Auditor General of the day said that because it is a government program it should be included in the consolidated revenue fund or the whole government—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Paul Szabo: That was the Conservative Mulroney government, Mr. Speaker, and—

• (1605)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Members will have 10 minutes for questions and comments. If members could just hold off a bit longer, I would be happy to recognize them and they can ask whatever questions they might have.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

Before you ask the member for Mississauga South to re-engage in this stimulating debate, one that has been informative so far, I wonder if you could advise members opposite that in referring to legislation established during the Mulroney years, they cannot use the word “stolen” when they are talking about funds that are part of the consolidated revenue fund. That is expended for government programs which have been approved by the House.

I think that the words “stolen funds” are absolutely unparliamentary. Those members should be embarrassed about exposing themselves to such criticism.

I think, Mr. Speaker, you need to rule on that right now, otherwise the debate will be one where we on this side of the House are speaking to ourselves because the other guys do not understand the language.

The Deputy Speaker: I do not see a member from the other side rising. I did not hear anything that was specifically unparliamentary that would impugn the motive of a sitting member of the House of Commons. Having not heard anything unparliamentary, we will go back to the member for Mississauga South.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, I always appreciate it when members stay in the House when I am speaking.

Canadians understand as well that there was a separate bank account for EI, and it was operating on an overdraft basis; it was in a deficit scenario. The Auditor General told the government that it was a government program, that the financial performance of a government should include all its programs, and that this one shouldn't happen to be set up as a separate bank account. They rolled it into the consolidated revenue fund so that if EI operated at a deficit and everything else broke even, there would be a deficit in the government's financials for the end of the fiscal year on March 31.

Then the Liberals came to power and inherited the \$42.3 billion deficit in 1993 from the previous Conservative government. It took three years to balance the budget. Then, all of a sudden, we had 10 years of balanced budgets with no recession. Growth was positive, employment reached a 30-year record, and EI premiums went down for 10 years in a row, year after year. The surplus money coming in was more than the benefits being paid out, and it continued even though the rates were going down. Why? It was because the economy was so healthy and because the job situation was so good for those years between 1993 and 2006.

Yes, there was an EI surplus, but it was a notional surplus, and there is legislation that guides how to deal with it. The legislation says that if there is a surplus in the EI account, or now in the notional EI account, we must do one of two things: either we must reduce premiums paid on a current-year basis or we must increase programs and benefits under the EI fund.

Some of those things happened. As a matter of fact, one of them was my own initiative, which was to extend maternity and parental leave in Canada from six months to a full year. That cost money, and it came out of the notional surplus, but there was still—

Mr. Gerald Keddy: What are you talking about?

Mr. Paul Szabo: I was in the government of the day. It was my private member's item.

I appreciate the member's intervention.

Because it is all in the consolidated revenue fund, there is no money in a bank any more. It has been used to support government programs and services. It has been used to reduce the amount of borrowing that the government had to do in terms of the national debt. Because of the debt scenario, we were saving money, but the rules of the game for operating the notional EI account also said that they will keep track of not only ins and outs of cash in terms of premiums and benefits, but also of the interest, and that was still a credit. All that money belongs to the employers and the employees who put money into it.

Now the current government has decided to scrap all that. We are going to throw all this notional surplus, we are going to take away the \$50 billion that was collected in excess of benefits paid out, we are going to put it in our pocket and we are going to pay for the programs the Conservatives have been spewing out the money for.

How are they going to deal with EI in the future? In the last budget they said we are going to have an EI commission that is going to get \$2 billion as start-up money. It will be a separate company, and all premiums and all payouts of benefits are going to go through that commission. In fact, we will go back to the same system we used to have.

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Now we have a problem. Why? The Parliamentary Budget Officer said just yesterday in his report, which Canadians can read on his website, that we are in a structural deficit and that we will remain in a structural deficit until at least 2013-14, which means that if Conservatives proceed with setting the EI commission with \$2 billion and think they are going to balance the books of that separate off-balance-sheet commission by handling premiums coming in and paying out extraordinarily higher benefits, it is going to force the government to start streaming cashflow into it just to hold it solvent and capable of meeting the benefit requirements.

• (1610)

We have come full circle. Brian Mulroney was operating exactly the way the current government wants to go.

The Auditor General has said that is not reflective of the true economics of a government that is using taxpayers' money to operate programs on behalf of the people and that we have to put it all in one big basket. Now the government has passed legislation that is going to unravel this. It is going to pocket the surplus that it collected from Canadians and accumulated in a notional surplus over the 10 years leading up to when the Conservatives took government. The Conservatives are going to just pocket that.

The situation could have been much worse. If the government had to take the \$54 billion and put it into this new commission, \$54 billion would be added to the current year's deficit. Then we would have a \$100 billion deficit in the current year, rather than the \$50 billion that it appears we are going to have, and it is growing.

Unemployment is not going to go down very quickly. We were over 9%; we dropped to a little less than 9%. The experts are saying that we can still go to 10%, that these recoveries are fragile, and the Prime Minister is already setting us up for that.

Members have to understand EI has a history to it. EI is an important tool for the government, but EI should not be used as a political prop, and that is exactly what this bill would do. Bill C-50 would not equitably benefit Canadians who have to participate in the EI benefit program that they paid into. They deserve to receive those benefits equitably. That is the reason I do not want to support the bill. My party will not support the bill, and I know that others will not either.

I hope that explains to the member that this is not just trying to make up stories. These are the facts. The current Conservative government inherited a \$13 billion surplus from the previous Liberal government and it has been totally squandered. We now find ourselves facing a \$50-\$60 billion deficit in Canada due to economic mismanagement by the Conservative Party of Canada.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the previous speaker has talked about squandering the surplus. Only a Liberal could talk about paying down debt as squandering the surplus. We paid down \$37 billion in debt, and he continually refuses to acknowledge that.

How can he vote against these measures, which would definitely help people who have paid into EI for 20 or 30 years and who actually deserve these benefits if they are now looking for jobs? He knows that in this environment it takes longer to find a job, so adding these extra weeks is certainly going to help them.

I would like the member to respond to that.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives inherited a \$13 billion surplus. It went to pay down debt, yes, but that had nothing to do with the Conservative government. The election was in January 2006. In the Conservatives' first year of government, the House did not even start until April, after the end of the fiscal year, so the surplus for the year that ended March 31, 2006, was a Liberal surplus, not a Conservative surplus.

If the member is not going to be honest with the House, I do not care to answer his questions on anything.

However, as I have said, I will tell him that yes, some people will benefit from this measure. The point is—and the Bloc has made this point, and the NDP has made this point too—that it is not an equitable program. In fact, it disproportionately benefits some Canadians over others. That is the problem, that is the political stunt, and that is why we will not support the bill.

• (1615)

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think it is important that the member for Mississauga South, who is obviously learned in the issues of EI and the way benefits are both accrued and received, give us an indication, if he can. Typically these kinds of things are provided by a government that wants the House of Commons to support its legislation, but we do not have that. Perhaps he could provide them for us, if in fact he had access to them.

Typically what would happen is that the government would say, "Support this bill, because this number of Canadians will be helped by these measures". That number is usually specific, or else a range is given.

I know the member tried to educate the members on the government side on the way EI works, but they were not listening. Perhaps they already have some information that goes beyond talking points and lines, but perhaps the member of Parliament for Mississauga South would share with us again how people who have already been using the EI system as part of the economic plan of particular industries to keep an ongoing business afloat will now be able to access the benefits under Bill C-50 when the minister has put in place a prohibition for anyone who has already used the system.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, the member understands and he has explained it very well.

I do not have the kind of information that I wish I had to be able to do the job.

The last issue we dealt with on EI had to do with considering a base benefit requirement, a criterion of 360 hours, to qualify for benefits. The government and the minister specifically and explicitly said that it was too expensive and that we could not do that. I think it was \$4.2 billion to have a 360-hour base.

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Then as time went on, the government said it was only \$2.5 billion, but this was after it had been pooh-pooed. Lo and behold, the Parliamentary Budget Officer finally came to the rescue of Canadians again and said that it was only \$1.3 billion.

Had the government and the minister been honest with Canadians and honest with Parliament, we would have had significant EI reform, which would have been to the benefit of all Canadians fairly and equitably.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Speaker, it is obvious government members feel too embarrassed to defend legislation that is so faulty and so blatantly partisan in its politics.

Therefore, on behalf of the public, I have to ask the member for Mississauga South to explain to all Canadians, including the members on the government side, as dogmatic as they might be on the bill, why the legislation will do absolutely nothing to rectify the underlying problem that generated the bill.

To wit, there have been in excess of 500,000 jobs lost in the course of the last 10 months under the stewardship of the Conservatives. Those are 500,000 jobs that are no longer contributing to the gross domestic product of this nation. Those 500,000 jobs represent 500,000 families that now have to go begging because their stewardship has seen the demise of industries in lumber, auto, manufacturing and other industries.

There are 500,000 families now looking for a solution to a problem that the Conservatives created when they took the government, not when other people were in government. Where have the 500,000 jobs gone? The government has introduced a \$60 billion deficit. What has it got to show for it besides 500,000 families that can no longer expect to work? The industries that they had have eroded to near zero and have no hope of coming back, especially under Bill C-50, which does nothing from an economic perspective.

It does not alleviate temporary loss. Nor does it build toward the future. What did the \$60 billion of deficit do? Perhaps the member for Mississauga South, using his experience and expertise, can do the job of the members of Parliament from the government side and explain the unexplainable, that \$60 billion of deficit and 500,000 jobs lost do not translate into any benefits for the 500,000 families that look to Parliament and the Conservative government for any solution or hope for the future.

I hope people in the gallery recognize that when it comes to stewardship, management of the economy and care for the public, they should not look in the direction of the Conservatives. Maybe the member for Mississauga South will enlighten them as to why the government has been derelict in its duty.

• (1620)

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, when one considers what the government has or has not done under the tragic circumstances of the H1N1 preparedness program, all I can say is it is not getting the job done. Consider what it is doing on EI, where those who least need it are being disproportionately benefited. With regard to EI, it is not getting the job done.

When the financial crisis came about and people started losing their jobs, everybody agreed that the first thing to do was to try to save existing jobs to the extent possible. Second, was to try to invest

in those areas that offered the greatest possibility for employment creation. Third, was to properly manage the resources.

What happened? The government did not get it. It let infrastructure money lapse last year. It did not get it out on time. It is always behind. People have lost their jobs and then it offers money for a project that it cannot get going for two years. Again, it is not getting the job done.

I would like to ask for the unanimous consent of the House to have an additional 10 minutes to complete my comments for the members so they can understand clearly that they are not getting the job done.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to extend his speech by 10 minutes?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I must enter into the debate, especially since we have deprived my hon. colleague an opportunity to extend the debate by 10 minutes. Again, this is an indication, and this is for the public, of the government trying to control the message and shutting down debate. It has a very poor understanding of parliamentary purpose. I say this especially for the new members who already sit in cabinet. Parliamentary purpose suggests that ideas and plans are put forward. The government proposes and Parliament disposes.

The unfortunate fact is the government has proposed nothing from an economic point of view. Everyone who is watching this debate ought to ask one very simple question.

We have Bill C-50. This is supposed to be such a great bill. It saved the hide of Conservative members, but how many jobs? Some members actually get the point. How many jobs would Bill C-50 create? How many people can go back to work? How many industries are now in a position where they can begin or recommence a business enterprise that will engage people and draw upon the human resources potential of our country? I mean the country, not Conservative ridings. I mean every man and woman who wants to get a job in whatever industry, be they seasonal, be they ongoing, be they in the area of skills development, research, manufacturing or agriculture.

We want to know, we should know and the Canadian public should be advised by government members about the number of industries that now will be more fluid and will be in a position to put up a "help wanted" signs to engage Canadians who want to contribute and who want to earn money so their families can continue both with their future and with the opportunity to build the country.

I have gone through every line of the bill, and I keep asking myself this. Where are the jobs? Where are the industries? I would like to hear the name of one. There is not a single one. This was prompted in part to see if the government could assuage the desires of some members of all caucuses who are in towns that have one industry only, particularly in the lumber industry in northern Quebec, northern Ontario, the interior of British Columbia, parts of Alberta and even parts of Saskatchewan.

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I have not referred to the Atlantic provinces just yet, but there are some 350 communities in the country that are dependent on the lumber industry alone, pulp and paper and the like.

Members can look through the bill and I challenge them to once find the word “lumber”, to find the words for “pulp and paper”, to find the words “developing new markets for Canadian products”.

Those of us who believe in building the country, and I hesitate to say Liberal because it would mean we are arrogant because we want to build the country, have always bristled at the accusation that we are hewers of wood and drawers of water. However, in today's economic environment, brought about by a Conservative government, would that we could hew some wood so we could supply the appropriate marketplaces in emerging economies elsewhere around the globe.

There is nothing like this in Bill C-50. There is nothing for those 350 communities on which families depend on the lumber industry. There is nothing for those families that are unemployed, because of the mismanagement perpetrated by the government, in a time of crisis for them to draw on the EI system. Why? Because they have already drawn on it.

The conditions built into Bill C-50 by the minister and her cabinet tell us that those 350 communities around the country and others that have other businesses as well are fresh out of luck because that is the mantra by which the government operates, “If you're not on our side, too bad”.

• (1625)

Do we want to have management of an economy? The Minister of Foreign Affairs says that it is a synchronized global recession. Please. What happens? Everybody in the world says that at 10 o'clock sharp we all will go into a recession and Canadians can then use that as an excuse for not doing anything. I have never heard so much junk in my life. When the government is doing well, what does it say is happening in the rest of the world? Nothing. Only in Canada do things go well. That is nonsense too.

The fact is the Conservatives were elected to govern and they decided not to do that. What is the first thing that Canadians want from a government? They want it to manage the economy and to provide for their future. That is the only rationale.

The one job that we have in the House is to approve expenditures to achieve that objective. That expenditure is often attached to getting the rest of the collective to make contributions.

We would be delighted to support a bill that could illustrate that such a plan were in place. Bill C-50 does not have such a plan. It does not help those people who need it most because of the government's mismanagement. It does not help those industries that want to get off the ground.

Things have been going not too badly in Saskatchewan, but there was a time when things were not going that well at all. In a province of one million Canadians, people in Saskatchewan have to think about what they need. They need contributions and management of an agricultural system and an agri-produce system access to markets both to the south and east-west and then beyond. Saskatchewan needs a gateway strategy that would give it an opportunity to access

emerging markets and emerging demand elsewhere. That is what is needed in Saskatchewan. As well, Saskatchewan needs the opportunity to develop the petrochemical industries and the big petroleum potash industries that have developed over the course of the last several years.

Is there anything for those industries and those enterprises in Bill C-50? I challenge not only everybody in the House, but anybody watching the debate, to find something for those industries in the bill. They are not going to find a thing.

Why should we support a bill that has nothing for the grand economic scheme of the country? Why should we support a bill that leaves Canadians hanging out to dry? We should not because there is nothing there.

A big fraud is being perpetrated under the bill that suggests the government will actually do something for the unemployed. There are seven conditions and they are associated with period of time, with engagement. All of them really say that anyone who is unemployed can access the employment insurance fund.

The fact is none of the 500,000 unemployed will be able to access the fund. None of those industries, especially the ones in the Golden Horseshoe in southern Ontario, will be able to access the fund. None of the employees of those manufacturing enterprises are going to be able to access greater funds, greater time under Bill C-50.

Members of the government stand up almost boldfaced and say that the bill is the next best thing since sliced bread. I ask them to tell us how many slices there are in this loaf. I ask them to tell us how many jobs will be created. I ask them to tell us the amount of money that will come out. I note there are no dollar values associated with the bill. There is nothing whatsoever.

• (1630)

[*Translation*]

What they are doing is asking all of the opposition members just to accept that the government is right when it says that it knows what is best for the country. But what is that, exactly? What is the plan? Where are the numbers? Where are the dollar amounts? Where are the employment, job creation, economic stimulus and new market development strategies? There are none. There is just a question: will we support the government? What a question.

We were elected to the House of Commons to help ordinary Canadians achieve their ambitions, to give them a voice. That voice says that we have dreams for our families, that we demand plans, education, training, human resources development, export development, and community development. None of that is in this bill.

How can anyone support a bill that has nothing to offer in terms of ideas, plans, numbers or dollar amounts? Clearly, people need more than that. People deserve more. Real Canadians want, demand and have the right to more from their government. All they have right now is a fraud. Bill C-50 is nothing but a fraud. It contains neither substance nor ideas. It is nothing but subterfuge.

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•(1635)

[*English*]

Parliament is not built on subterfuge. Parliament is built on the ambitions of real live Canadians to affect the future for their friends, their community, and members of family to ensure that a society that we perpetuate, that we promote, is seen as a beacon worldwide, and such used to be the case. It used to be that Canada regularly ranked number one in the human rights index all over the world.

Everywhere it was said Canada was the best place to live, the best place for people to effect the possibility of realizing their personal and community ambitions. They would do that because governments were engaged with people. They would do it because there were not media lines to offer as a substitute for answers to questions on substance. The lines, if they were provided, would have said under Bill C-50 these are the number of jobs that will be created and these are the number of industries that are going to be able to function.

Perhaps without introducing a moment of levity, even though we had a great and attentive audience the moment that Conservative members spoke up, they said that is it, we do not want to have an interruption. So it is unfortunate that the public reacts the way that I do. They vote with their feet. They get up and leave at the first expression of life by a member of the government side.

Unfortunately, that first expression of life was one that expressed surprise at being alive. Now if we can take them to the next step, we can say now that we have their awakened attention, perhaps we can repeat some of those questions because it is only by repetition that people will recall their function. The function as members of Parliament is to represent their people and to represent their ambition, not their own. It is their function to deal with them in a fashion that will allow them to use their own talents, their own expertise to realize an activity, an entrepreneurialism that gives them satisfaction, and, yes indeed, a reward that they can share with those that they hold most dear.

However, Bill C-50 does nothing of that sort. In fact, Bill C-50 is such a crass and void of substance bill that it really insults Canadians. It says, "Please accept the principle that we are the best thing that could happen to the Parliament of Canada and do not ask any questions". That is what the Conservatives asked. Note that members on this side are the only ones who have been asking questions in debate, aside from some snarky comments, and who actually offer a position, one that does not come from the lines that have been dictated by the Prime Minister's Office.

I imagine it would be rather humbling, rather than say humiliating, for members who sit on the cabinet benches or even in the backbenches of the government side to be greeted at the door and given a little pamphlet because it appears now we have gone into government by pamphlets. Pamphleteers have become the government of the day. Here is the pamphlet from which members shall read and read nothing else.

I know you are an avid historian, Mr. Speaker, but it is a little bit like Mao's little red book which was the doctrine of the day. Imagine an entire country in excess of one billion people having to read a little red book.

The Conservatives have reduced that. The Prime Minister's Office has said, "No, our people cannot read that much, they are given a little pamphlet which is a fold-over. That is the sum total of the lines and if you cannot read those lines you cannot offer an opinion".

•(1640)

So here we are in a situation now where the government by pamphleteers is faced with a situation where it cannot explain to the Canadian public why Bill C-50 should be supported. I wonder if the pamphleteers would send out pamphlets saying, "The 500,000 people who had a job before the last election and are no longer employed have the government to thank".

I wonder if those pamphleteers would say those 500,000 families, which now must rely on the munificence of government programs, can no longer do so, because the government of pamphleteers says, "We do not really believe in government engagement in the personal lives of individuals. Let them fend for themselves". I wonder if the government of pamphleteers might dare to send out messages saying, "Your industry has gone under, thanks to the government's action or inaction on a global scale or even on a local scale".

I will resist the temptation to delve in detail, but it will serve the purpose to simply say, "If we cannot put a cheque in front of your enterprise, we are not going to be interested in whether it survives or not". Such is the government of pamphleteers that would have this House accept Bill C-50 as an effective agenda for developing this country.

It is an embarrassing issue to ask members of Parliament to support a bill devoid of numbers, dollar amounts, job training facilities, job opportunities, employment strategy, developing of industries that have gone under and not likely to recover soon. Then to say that it is all as a result of the international devil called synchronized recession. And if it cannot cope, it would be embarrassing for any government to say it cannot cope. That is what the government is asking the House of Commons to approve. That is the principle that Conservatives are asking opposition members to say yes to when they ask us to support Bill C-50.

I do not think there are members on this side of the House who have intervened in debate who want to give the government approval for that principle.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Before moving on to questions and comments, 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 Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, Canada Media Fund; the hon. member for Mississauga South, Natural Resources.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Brome—Missisquoi.

•(1645)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is a shame to interrupt the member for Eglinton—Lawrence's tirade, but I would like to ask him a practical question.

Government Orders

Earlier, a member opposite said that providing extended employment insurance benefits will give unemployed workers a better chance of finding work because these days, people need more time to find work. That is true, but just a few months ago, people collected, on average, 17 weeks of benefits. Now it might be 20 or 21 weeks. I do not think that we have reached a point where we need to select a few individuals and give them benefits for a longer period.

I would like the member for Eglinton—Lawrence to explain why the Conservatives think that this will help people find jobs.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question. I also note that it is once again an opposition member who cares about the future of his constituents, the future of Canadians.

I think the answer is simple. The bill introduced by the government contains no plan. When talking about a plan, it is not a question of selecting certain individuals; we are talking about a plan that applies to anyone. The plan should be for everyone, the entire community. The plan should help individuals, and groups of individuals; it should help industries and help the community get through tough times, and it should always focus on a plan for the future. This bill contains no plan for the future. It merely suggests that the government could perhaps help people. What people? What families? Where are those people and those families?

Perhaps the members are a little restless, but it is a serious question. The member who asked the question knows very well. This is not a matter of democratically choosing one person and rejecting another. We are elected to this House to create programs that apply to everyone. Where is everyone in this bill? The member understands that the bill contains no plan and does not benefit everyone.

[*English*]

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

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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: The recorded division on the motion stands deferred until the end of government orders today.

ELECTRONIC COMMERCE PROTECTION ACT

The House resumed from November 2 consideration of the motion that Bill C-27, An Act to promote the efficiency and adaptability of the Canadian economy by regulating certain activities that discourage reliance on electronic means of carrying out commercial activities, and to amend the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission Act, the Competition Act, the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act and the Telecommunications Act, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise this afternoon on debate at the third reading stage of Bill C-27, the Electronic Commerce Protection Act, the ECPA.

It has been estimated that spam costs the Canadian economy about \$3 billion a year. It costs the economy through the use of such malicious means as malware, spyware, phishing, worms and viruses such as Trojan horses which enter computers. It costs the economy in terms of sapping Canadians' trust in electronic commerce.

Bill C-27 will protect Canadian consumers and businesses from the most damaging and deceptive forms of electronic harms and provide a regulatory regime to protect the privacy and the personal security of Canadians. The rules will encourage confidence in online communications and e-commerce.

The bill before us provides the CRTC, the Competition Bureau and the Office of the Privacy Commissioner with the tools they need to pursue those who would undermine the online economy and to work with one another and with their international counterparts.

The bill provides sharp teeth: administrative monetary penalties of up to a maximum of \$1 million per violation for individuals and up to \$10 million for businesses.

The bill before us is the result of a great deal of work by several different sources. On the one hand we have the recommendations of the 2005 report by the task force on spam. The bill has also benefited from Bill S-220 introduced in the other place by former Senator Goldstein.

Some features of the bill before us differ from what the former senator proposed. Perhaps one of the most important is using the CRTC, the Competition Bureau and the Office of the Privacy Commissioner to enforce the provisions rather than using law enforcement agencies as proposed by Bill S-220.

The RCMP has other urgent law enforcement responsibilities. We should not redirect their resources to the monitoring of unsolicited commercial e-mail.

I believe that both this House and the other place see the wisdom in using regulatory authorities rather than law enforcement agencies to combat spam. The regulatory agencies would be consistent with the regimes that have been put in place in other countries. This system would help promote international cooperation among the various agencies responsible for combatting spam.

Government Orders

In drafting Bill C-27 we have also looked at the experience of other countries in combatting spam. The bill draws upon what has worked in New Zealand, Australia and the United States. We have benefited from their experience, and the bill before us is based on the best and most effective aspects of the legislative initiatives from around the world.

Finally, the bill as amended, which is before us today, has benefited from the work over the past months of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology of which I have been a member.

As a result of the committee's work, several key elements of the bill have been strengthened and clarified without diminishing the core principles.

As hon. members know, Bill C-27 adopts an express consent regime designed to give businesses and consumers control over their inbox and over their own computers. It requires that an individual's consent be obtained in order to permit an ongoing commercial relationship. Once consent has been expressed by an individual, it remains until the individual opts out or revokes that consent.

The committee took a careful look at how to ensure that companies that use email to keep in touch with customers do not inadvertently find themselves in violation of the law. The implied consent provision has been expanded to include the conspicuous publication of an electronic address. If one publishes one's email on a website or in a print advertisement, one is considered to have consented to receiving unsolicited commercial messages, provided that the sender's message relates to the business or office one holds. Consent is also implied when one gives out a business card or provides an email address in a letter.

Similarly the amended bill clarifies that when a business is sold, the purchaser has implied consent to contact the customers of that business.

The period of implied consent has been expanded to two years from eighteen months following an initial transaction. This gives businesses an extended period in which to obtain someone's express consent to receive further commercial messages.

● (1650)

We heard from a number of different witnesses in front of committee. This may not have been what some wanted. They might have wanted a longer term, but the two years was agreed upon by the committee, and it was felt to be a reasonable amount of time.

Another area where the bill has been amended is in ensuring that updates to computer programs are not adversely affected by the protections we have put in place against malware and spyware. The committee looked at the impact the bill would have on the installation of computer programs. It has been amended such that the installation of updates is understood as a part of the original contract under which the software was installed.

Most of these programs call for automatic updates that take place daily or weekly to such things as antivirus software. A fresh consent will not be required each time one of these updates takes place. Programs such as JavaScript or Flash will also not require express consent each time they are run.

Let me say a few words about the private right of action included in this bill. Some hon. members have questioned whether a private right of action is needed. A private right complements the enforcement efforts of the CRTC, the Competition Bureau and the Office of the Privacy Commissioner.

I would remind the House that this feature has been very effective in the United States at shutting down those such as spammers who cause harm to the electronic economy. I believe it will be very effective here in allowing groups or individuals to pursue violators. The private right of action will allow individuals and businesses who suffer financial harm an avenue of recourse through which to be compensated and awarded damages.

Let me reiterate some of the things this bill does. The purpose of the amendments is to clarify some elements of this legislation and to address concerns that were brought forward from the witnesses during the testimony in front of the industry committee. The proposed amendments clarify the concept that legitimate online commercial messages are not prohibited, while reinforcing the vigorous safeguards for businesses and consumers in this bill.

The legislation is about reducing spam and other computer-related threats that discourage the use of electronic commerce and undermine privacy. This legislation restores consumer confidence in online commerce by protecting both consumers and Canadian businesses from unwanted spam. The Government of Canada is delivering on a key commitment that the Prime Minister made to Canadians and Canadian businesses back in the fall of 2008.

The proposed electronic commerce protection act will discourage the use in Canada of the most dangerous, destructive and deceptive forms of spam. Our goal is to ensure confidence in online commerce by addressing the privacy and personal security concerns that consumers associate with spam and related threats which deter consumers from participating in the online marketplace.

The bill proposes that all forms of commercial electronic messages will be treated the same way. Unsolicited text messages and cell phone spam are also prohibited by this legislation. Spam and related online threats can be reduced only through a concerted, cooperative approach aimed at undermining spammers, using a combination of public and private efforts. The Government of Canada continues to work closely with our domestic and international partners to address threats to online commerce.

The proposed government legislation affects the legislative recommendations of the task force on spam, which are a product of extensive consultations with businesses and other stakeholders during the task force's mandate. The legislation allows for administrative monetary penalties to be imposed upon those who violate the law by sending false and misleading email and who attempt to steal personal information.

The legislation also proposes this private right of action, which will allow businesses and individuals to take civil action against those who violate the law. All parties in the House have expressed their desire to strengthen confidence in online commerce. All parties are opposed to spam and see the dangers of it.

Government Orders

•(1655)

We have studied this bill at great length in committee. We have emerged with important amendments to clarify the bill. The time has come to pass the third reading of this bill in order to protect all Canadians.

•(1700)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wonder what the implications of the bill and its rollout are going to be to small businesses across the country that have had to deal with the implementation of the do not call list over the last couple of years, and the Privacy Act changes. A lot of small businesses find this very disruptive.

Does the government have any plans to communicate to small business and any plans to help them in any way, through information programs, perhaps using some of that government advertising to advertise that these changes are in the works? Are there any plans in this regard, regarding this particular initiative?

Mr. Gordon Brown: Mr. Speaker, I am glad to see that the hon. member sees the usefulness of government advertising in helping to inform Canadians of important changes and programs of the Government of Canada.

I know that is one of the things that has been looked at with the rollout of this bill, if in fact it does pass through the House. The government and the committee have looked at all of the different implications of this bill. As a businessperson, I understand the need to communicate with customers.

The hon. member mentioned the do not call list which has been in effect. I know Canadians have been happy to have the opportunity to put their name on a list that should cut down on those calls that they do not wish to receive. This bill goes such a long way, in terms of cutting down on that spam that so many are forced to endure on their computers.

I want to thank the hon. member for that question. I know that this is something that is going to be very important for Canadians.

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would certainly like to thank the member for Leeds—Grenville for a very informative speech and for what he has been able to share with us on the anti-spam legislation. With electronic commerce being what it is and what it is becoming, it is very important that we are very clear on where we are headed, to help businesses do a better job of electronic commerce.

His speech was really informative and I apologize if he did cover this already, but I need to ask him, will the government be exempting research and survey firms in this legislation, as has been done in some other places and in the do not call legislation?

Mr. Gordon Brown: Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member stands up for his constituents, in terms of their concerns, especially on this proposed legislation.

His question was a very good one. We did hear from representatives from survey and market research groups, and those that expressed their concerns that such an exemption was not necessary, as long as they were not trying to sell something.

This entire bill is coming forward for those businesses that are trying to sell something. They have to live up to the regime that is being proposed in the legislation. So, those survey and market research firms would be exempted from this legislation. I want to thank the hon. member for such an excellent question.

Mr. Jim Maloway: Mr. Speaker, the member, in his presentation, mentioned that a private right of action was included in Bill C-27, and I noticed that was in there when I read it. I would like to know what sort of arguments there were against having that in the law. It seems to me that is something that should be an absolute, that it be in there. I would like to know what sort of arguments were raised against having it in there?

Mr. Gordon Brown: Mr. Speaker, those who came in front of the committee felt that it should be in there. However, some of course were concerned that there may be times when inadvertent communications were sent by email. If in fact there was an inadvertent situation where an email was put through, as long as it was not the intent to go against legislation, there would be some protection there.

The private right of action is there, but there is protection for those who would send an inadvertent email message or a cellphone text. However, they would only be able to get away with that inadvertence for a very limited time because we do need to ensure that this protection is in place to protect Canadians.

•(1705)

The Deputy Speaker: It is the Bloc's turn in the rotation.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Berthier-Maskinongé is ready to deliver his speech.

The hon. member for Windsor West will be next.

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is with great interest that I rise in this House. In politics, one has to adjust quickly at times. I may not necessarily have been ready, but I had made some preparations.

I am addressing today an issue which, as we all know, concerns a vast majority of the people we represent.

Nowadays, emailing is increasingly widespread in our societies, particularly among young people. Internet use is increasingly popular among youth and adults like us as well. I am myself an avid user of email.

Electronic mail is a relatively simple and inexpensive means of communication. It allows messages to be sent simultaneously to a large number of recipients at any time of day or night, basically anytime at all. It makes it easy to send messages to people anywhere in the world.

Government Orders

We can therefore communicate with family, friends or colleagues anytime, day or night, which increases communication between everyone on this planet. In addition, electronic mail allows us, as parliamentarians, to efficiently stay in touch with our fellow citizens. We now have several tools available to us. We have our electronic mail, our websites, Facebook and so on. These tools allow us to communicate with the various stakeholders in the community or our ridings, and with our office staff, whom I greet and whose excellent work I commend.

We used to work with letters written on paper and telephone calls, but emailing is widespread today, and electronic mail is very easy to access and use.

My remarks today concern Bill C-27, to promote the efficiency and adaptability of the Quebec and Canadian economy by regulating certain fraudulent commercial activities using electronic mail, commonly known as spam. That is what it is called in everyday language nowadays.

Unfortunately, using the Internet is not always advantageous. We have seen on occasion that this mode of communication—we have all experienced this—can cause us some difficulties. Anyone who uses email regularly receives spam, in other words, unsolicited electronic commercial messages, the purpose of which is to encourage participation in a commercial activity, such as buying a product, or in a competition or game of chance.

Let us hope that this new legislative measure, Bill C-27, which we in the Bloc Québécois all support, will have the same effect as the legislative measure on the do not call list that regulated telephone solicitation.

It goes without saying that the vast majority of email users that I know would greatly appreciate such a measure.

Over the years, unsolicited commercial electronic messages have become a bigger and bigger problem and more widespread as a result, in large part because sending email is free.

Spam has become a real nuisance, damaging computers and networks and representing a significant economic cost. It contributes to fraudulent commercial practices—we are talking more and more about cybercrime—and it often invades people's privacy.

According to a recent Industry Canada study, 80% of email worldwide consists of spam.

●(1710)

That is a very high percentage. Here in the House of Commons, our staff spend quite a bit of time sorting through all these unwanted email messages. It is becoming increasingly important to take action on this, which is why Bill C-27 targets unwanted email.

Spam has huge financial consequences, including the labour costs associated with sorting through all these unwanted emails we receive. Of course, spam occupies a lot of Internet bandwidth, and service providers have to pay exorbitant amounts to filter spam messages. They then pass these costs on to their clients.

We have only to go to places that sell software such as Norton to see that new software is being created every day to deal with all these messages and the viruses that are passed on through spam.

Spam is widespread because it is easy and cheap to create and it works. It is effective. According to some statistics, 80% of the email messages we receive are unwanted. And unwanted email is a growing problem on our networks.

With just one click, it is possible to send millions of messages at such a low cost that the operation remains profitable even with a low rate of return. Unfortunately, some people do respond to email solicitations, which leads to major problems with their computer system. Most spam is advertising. We see it when we surf the Internet. It appears as ads, as pornography, unfortunately, as scams and in all sorts of other forms. Pornographic spam, for example, accounts for much of the concern we have as parents about letting our children use email. Often, we see them surfing the Internet and receiving all sorts of solicitations. They see all sorts of pornographic images and receive all sorts of unwanted invitations. Sometimes, these messages are harassing and even criminal. Spam not only threatens the viability of the Internet as an effective means of communication, but undermines the confidence we as consumers have in legitimate electronic commerce.

In recent months, the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology has worked very hard to draft this bill and has heard from many witnesses. Everyone believes in the merits of this bill and I think the House is unanimous in that regard. Preserving the efficiency of legitimate electronic commerce is a vital and pressing issue and the Bloc has worked constructively to have this legislation implemented as quickly as possible.

Not only are legitimate commercial emails sent with the prior and ongoing consent of the recipient important to electronic commerce, but they are also essential to the development of a strong and productive online economy.

●(1715)

We must not forget that spam constitutes a considerable burden not just for consumers but also for our small, medium-sized and large businesses. As I said earlier, these companies spend considerable time managing these unwanted emails that can have disastrous consequences for the management of our Internet services.

Spam wastes time and reduces productivity at work. It obstructs networks and affects the security of computers by forwarding viruses and phishing emails that result in significant losses for businesses.

For all these reasons, the Bloc Québécois and a number of socio-economic players have for years been asking the federal government for legislation to regulate unsolicited commercial email.

Government Orders

We must not forget that service providers, network operators and consumers are all adversely affected by this problem, which is growing rather than diminishing in spite of all the antivirus software and the fact that computer technology is getting better and better. Nevertheless, our networks are facing increasing problems and experiencing more and more situations where they become inefficient. In addition, there are many viruses in our computer systems.

The task force on spam, which was created in 2004, has been calling for such a measure for over five years now. So, taking its inspiration primarily from the final report of the task force on spam released in May 2005, the purpose of Bill C-27 is to establish a framework to protect electronic commerce. As we know, it is a growing business. Internet-based trade and financial transactions are becoming more and more important and increasingly common. We must protect this network. The purpose of this bill is to protect and promote efficient electronic commerce.

To do this, the bill would amend the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission Act, the Competition Act and the Personal Information Protection Act. Furthermore, Bill C-27 would enact the new electronic commerce protection act, which would make it illegal to send spam to any electronic address. The only circumstances under which it would be allowed is when the person to whom the message is sent has explicitly consented to receiving it. In addition, the message must be in a form that conforms to the prescribed requirements and must include an unsubscribe mechanism.

The bill would allow the recipient to indicate, through an email address or hyperlink, that he or she does not want to receive any further commercial electronic messages from the sender. Finally, the proposed legislation makes those who send spam subject to hefty financial penalties. There must be consequences for this kind of behaviour on the Internet. The bill would allow individuals and companies to sue spammers and hold any businesses whose products and services are promoted using these means partially responsible for spamming activity. That is crucial, of course.

It is important to note that the bill stipulates that certain commercial messages would not be considered spam.

● (1720)

These commercial messages include: messages sent by an individual to another individual with whom they have a personal or family relationship; messages sent to a person who is engaged in a commercial activity and consist solely of an inquiry or application related to that activity; messages that are, in whole or in part, an interactive two-way voice communication between individuals; or messages sent by means of a facsimile to a telephone account. In all of these cases, the bill would not prohibit the sending of these messages.

As a number of my colleagues have already said, this is an important bill, but it will be quite complex to enforce. That is why the Bloc Québécois supported the bill in principle. But the Bloc thinks it is unbelievable that the legislative process took four years. Four years is a long time. Four years after the report was presented by the task force on spam, the federal government finally introduced a new bill, here in the House, on electronic commerce protection,

which was becoming more and more necessary. Bill C-27 imposes even more controls on spam networks, and this problem will only get worse in the coming years. Four years was much too long.

Computer technology is changing rapidly, and people who want to send spam are unfortunately always finding new ways of doing so. We have to be able to protect ourselves better. Obviously, we want to hear and consult witnesses to ensure that this bill really meets needs and can really help consumers, businesses and companies do business on the web.

We also wanted to know whether the bill will make effective changes to combat the spam consumers receive. Introducing a bill is not enough; we have to be able to meet with witnesses and gauge the effectiveness of the measures contained in this bill.

After a serious study in committee, we still believe that this proposed new legislation will be effective in combatting spam.

In addition to the legislative and legal framework, which is necessary and essential, an education campaign will be needed. It is important to introduce legislation and try to find technical ways to prevent spam, but it is also important to raise public awareness and warn people, especially our youth, about spam, which is often fraudulent and sometimes dangerous.

Consumers know that users have a certain responsibility for controlling spam. We need to start with a public education campaign. We know that our young people are particularly vulnerable to scams and questionable messages they receive by email. International cooperation will also be needed if spam is to be eliminated.

Spam is not just a problem in Quebec and Canada. It is a global problem. Consequently, we need to keep working to harmonize anti-spam policies and to encourage countries to develop and enforce anti-spam legislation.

● (1725)

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wish to associate myself with the sentiments expressed by the member for Berthier—Maskinongé because I found that his speech made a great deal of sense. He presented facts which give us pause to consider the principles of this bill.

I, too, believe that we must defend legitimate commercial activities of businesses while protecting ourselves from spam and those who abuse a technology that has a great deal of benefits.

I would like to know if the member has already come up with some ideas and amendments that he will attempt to present during study in committee.

Mr. Guy André: Mr. Speaker, there is a task force that has studied spam, as my colleague surely knows. The task force recommended that a centre be established to coordinate the various government anti-spam initiatives. This is a very good proposal. This centre's responsibilities would include coordinating policy, conducting education campaigns and providing support to enforcement agencies. It would also accept complaints and compile statistics on spam.

I believe we should also establish a mechanism to monitor the evolution of this bill. It could assess the impact of these measures in the next few years and determine if the measures implemented actually benefit our email networks.

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one thing that has not been talked about, but I think is important to raise, and I raised it during committee, is people buy their own computers, they buy their own software, they maintain their own software and they also provide the Internet service. Therefore, sending someone an electronic advertisement through this medium should be a privilege, not necessarily a right. That should be the premise in preparing the bill to ensure there is balance. Once again, people invested in the physical hardware, the software, the maintenance of it and also the capacity to bring it across the Internet.

Does my colleague agree with the presumption? A number of amendments were attempted in committee. One was to allow companies to spy on a person's computer, which was defeated. I want to ensure we support the premise that people have rights first, and it is a privilege, not a right, to send advertisements to someone's home.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André: Mr. Speaker, I am in total agreement with my colleague. This bill to prohibit spam and protect personal information is important. Hence, I agree with our NDP colleague on this matter.

* * *

[*English*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-50, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and to increase benefits, be read the third time and passed.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at the third reading stage of Bill C-50.

Call in the members.

• (1755)

[*Translation*]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 123*)

YEAS

Members

Abbott

Ablonczy

Government Orders

Albrecht	Allen (Welland)
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Anders	Anderson
Angus	Ashfield
Ashton	Atamanenko
Benoit	Bernier
Bevington	Bezan
Blackburn	Blaney
Block	Boucher
Boughen	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Cadman
Calandra	Calkins
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)	Carrie
Casson	Charlton
Chong	Chow
Christopherson	Clarke
Clement	Comartin
Crowder	Cullen
Cummins	Davidson
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)
Day	Dechert
Del Mastro	Dewar
Dreeschen	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dykstra
Fast	Finley
Flaherty	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Glover	Godin
Goldring	Goodyear
Gourde	Gravelle
Grewal	Guergis
Harris (St. John's East)	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hawn	Hiebert
Hill	Hoback
Hoepfner	Holder
Hughes	Hyer
Jean	Julian
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Layton
Lebel	Lemieux
Leslie	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunn
Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Maloway
Mark	Marston
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Masse	Mathysen
Mayes	McColeman
McLeod	Menzies
Merrifield	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Mulcair
Nicholson	Norlock
O'Connor	O'Neill-Gordon
Obhrai	Oda
Paradis	Payne
Petit	Poilievre
Preston	Rafferty
Raiitt	Rajotte
Rathgeber	Reid
Richards	Richardson
Rickford	Ritz
Savoie	Saxton
Scheer	Schellenberger
Shea	Shipley
Shory	Siksay
Smith	Sorenson
Stanton	Stoffer
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Thibeault
Thompson	Tilson
Toews	Trost
Tweed	Uppal
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Verner
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Wasylycia-Leis

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NAYS

Members

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Beaudin	Bélanger
Bennett	Bevilacqua
Bigras	Blais
Bonsant	Bouchard
Bourgeois	Brunelle
Byrne	Cannis
Cardin	Coady
Coderre	Cotler
Crombie	Cuzner
D'Amours	DeBellefeuille
Demers	Deschamps
Dhaliwal	Dhalla
Dion	Dosanjh
Dryden	Duceppe
Dufour	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Easter	Eyking
Faille	Folco
Foote	Freeman
Fry	Gagnon
Garneau	Gaudet
Goodale	Guarnieri
Guay	Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-
Côte-Nord)	
Hall Findlay	Holland
Jennings	Kania
Karygiannis	Kennedy
Laforest	Laframboise
Lalonde	Lavallée
LeBlanc	Lee
Lemay	Lessard
Lévesque	MacAulay
Malhi	Malo
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	McCallum
McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Ménard	Mendes
Minna	Mourani
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)	Murphy (Charlottetown)
Murray	Nadeau
Neville	Oliphant
Ouellet	Pacetti
Paillé	Patry
Pearson	Plamondon
Pomerleau	Proulx
Ratansi	Regan
Rodriguez	Rota
Roy	Russell
Savage	Scarpaleggia
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PAIRED

Members

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Asselin	Bellavance
Cannon (Pontiac)	Desnoyers
Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	
Miller	
Paquette	Prentice— 10

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I declare the motion carried.

(Bill read the third time and passed)

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

MADE IN CANADA ACT

The House resumed from September 18 consideration of the motion that Bill C-392, An Act respecting the use of government procurements and transfers to promote economic development, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): When the House last considered this business, the hon. member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River had four minutes remaining.

The hon. member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the House for the opportunity to speak again to this bill. I would also like to thank my colleague, the member for London—Fanshawe, for this opportunity to speak.

We are talking about 50% of content being Canadian.

I would like to give my personal opinion so that everyone in the House can hear it. If taxpayers' money is being used to purchase something, I think it should be 100% Canadian content. Bombardier train cars are built right in Thunder Bay. If you can find a product like that and you are spending taxpayers' money on it, then it seems to me that we ought to be working towards 100%. This bill is talking about 50%.

I talked about our natural resources. I talked about our highly skilled workers when I talked about Bombardier. Let me talk about the forestry industry for a second.

What has happened in the forestry industry in Canada, particularly in Ontario, is that aside from all the closings, secondary manufacturing has disappeared south of the border. In many instances, particularly in Ontario and British Columbia, whole trees are cut and shipped south of the border for secondary manufacturing.

If the Government of Canada is going to buy wood products— toilet paper, for example—it seems to me that they ought to be made in Canada. It seems to me that 100% of that toilet paper should be made in Canada.

The sad fact of the matter is that toilet paper used to be made in my riding and the riding next to it, but those plants are closed. If the Government of Canada and the other provinces made an effort to have Canadian content of 50%, or 100% in the case of toilet paper, that would be wonderful.

It is all about making life affordable, keeping highly skilled workers working right across Canada and allowing them the opportunity to raise their families.

Private Members' Business

When I spoke during my first six minutes of debate, I believe I mentioned the harmonized sales tax, and I would like to revisit that issue again for a minute. In terms of making life more affordable, this tax is going to be a huge blow to people who live in Ontario. CARP, the association for retired persons, did a survey. It estimates that the new harmonized sales tax would probably cost the average senior about \$2,100 a year. This is a senior who is not on a fixed income, but who has a small RRSP and some small investments. That is going to be the extra cost for that senior.

I speak to seniors in my riding. Some of them have told me that they cannot pay their electricity bills. The last time I was in Atikokan I was chatting with one senior who is well into his 80s. He said he lives with one light bulb and he still cannot afford to pay his electricity bill.

Ensuring that the Canadian government purchases items with Canadian content of 50% to 100% would keep people employed and would make life more affordable for all Canadians.

● (1800)

Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to respond to the hon. member's Bill C-392 now before us.

Let me be clear. The bill is yet another protectionist measure emanating from the benches opposite. It would require that every department and agency of the Government of Canada give preference to Canadian products when purchasing goods and services and when transferring funds to the provinces, municipalities and private parties. It would apply not only to every department and agency of the Government of Canada, but to any crown corporation and any foundation with 75% of its income or funding from the government.

The best way to promote jobs and growth in our country is not by protecting Canadians from foreign competition. Canadian workers and Canadian businesses can compete with anyone in the world. The best defence is always a good offence. Ask my London Knights. The best way to create jobs and growth is to guarantee that our products and services have access to markets worldwide. How do we do that? By ensuring world markets, including our open, stay open to competition.

The bill runs completely counter to world trends and the work of the last 20 years to guarantee Canada's access to international markets.

Beginning with the landmark Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, signed in 1988, the Government of Canada has entered into many free trade arrangements to ensure this access. These included agreements with Mexico, as part of the North American Free Trade Agreement, with Chile, Israel, Peru and Costa Rica and with Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland, as part of the agreement of the European Free Trade Association.

As we look forward, we know that as a small market economy, Canada's future growth depends on our ability to reach markets beyond our own borders. That is why at the Canada-European Union Summit in Prague earlier this year, the Prime Minister announced the historical launch of negotiation toward an economic partnership between Canada and the 27 member states of the European Union.

Canada is and always will be a trading nation. Many of the first nations people who populated this land in early times were traders. When the first Europeans arrived on these shores, they traded manufactured goods for furs. Voyageurs paddled their canoes deep into the interior to trade with aboriginal peoples, while other first nations traded at outposts set up by the Hudson's Bay Company. The fur trade shaped the social, economic and political history of our country.

Make no mistake, today, trade continues to dramatically our lives. One in five jobs in Canada is linked to international trade. Why would any member opposite want to kill good Canadian jobs? Seventy per cent of our gross domestic product is dependent on it.

We are the second most open economy to trade in the G8. Consider, for example, the significance of our trade with the United States. Canada and the United States are each other's most important partner in economic growth. It is a partnership that has developed and grown over the last 20 years and, frankly, over its history.

Since the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement was signed in 1988, and then NAFTA in 1992, our bilateral trade has been one of the major components of economic growth. During those two decades, Canada-U.S. trade has tripled. Investment flows have also increased substantially. Two-way trade crosses the Canada-U.S. border at the rate of \$1.6 billion a day. That is well over \$1 million per minute.

Close to my city of London, trade over the Ambassador Bridge, connecting Windsor and Detroit, is greater than twice the value of all U.S. exports to Japan.

There are now over 40,000 exporting enterprises in Canada in areas ranging from information and cultural industries to finance and insurance and from construction to manufacturing.

An estimated three million jobs in Canada depend on our trade with the United States.

Given this scale of success, it is clear that protectionism is not Canada's friend; it is our mutual enemy. In fact, it is a threat to our economic recovery, a recovery that is nascent but remains fragile. Indeed, restrictions on trade could stifle the recovery that has just begun. That is because these restrictions reduce real growth prospects in both the developed and developing world, alike.

Protectionist policies might superficially look like an effective way of supporting economic growth, but our companies cannot compete if they are coddled. In fact, such actions prepare Canadian businesses not to compete on the world stage at all, but to fall behind.

In addition, we are committed to respecting and upholding our trade commitments with our partners, and we expect our partners to do the same.

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Our government is committed to building to Canada's capacity to successfully participate in the ever-changing global economy. Through our Advantage Canada initiative, we have taken important steps to create the right conditions for Canadian businesses to compete here and abroad.

Our plan lays out five key advantages that make up the groundwork for even greater prosperity for Canadian businesses and individuals, both today and in the future. Key among these are our tax advantages. A competitive business tax system that is responsive to changes in the economic environment is important to encourage investment, growth and job creation in all regions of Canada.

To come out of this global recession, we need to continue trade as free of barriers as possible. We just have to look at our history. If the great depression taught us anything at all, it is that the downward spiral of protectionism only leads to a more dire situation. That is why our economic action plan protects Canadians during the global downturn, not by restricting trade but by promoting it.

● (1805)

Our Budget Implementation Act revoked additional tariffs to increase international trade. This plan works to create new good jobs for the future and to equip our country for success in the years ahead.

We are acting through the most appropriate means to protect our economy and Canadians affected by the downturn. That includes the tax system, the employment insurance program and direct spending by federal and provincial governments. It includes lending by crown corporations and partnerships with the private sector.

The plan, which is among the largest fiscal stimulus packages in the world, is working. For the first time in a generation, Canada's unemployment rate is a full percentage point less than the United States rate.

Furthermore, the International Monetary Fund forecasts that Canada will be among the least affected by the global downturn this year and our recovery will be one of the strongest among G7 countries in 2010.

What our plan leaves behind is protectionism in the dustbin of history where it belongs. Canadians know we cannot build a fortress and lock ourselves inside. We must continue to engage with the world and work together to solve common challenges.

I believe the evidence before us can only lead to one conclusion. For the sake of Canada, for the sake of our families and the sake of our kids, I call on my colleagues in the House to oppose the bill.

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-392, An Act respecting the use of government procurements and transfers to promote economic development.

Let me begin by recognizing the good and honourable intentions of the member for London—Fanshawe in drafting this legislation.

The purpose of the legislation, as stated in its summary, is to promote employment and economic development in Canada. This is a goal we can all support. Strengthening Canada's economy in order to provide Canadians with meaningful, good-paying jobs is a top priority of members on all sides of the House. However, to achieve

this goal we need responsible public policy that acknowledges and addresses the reality faced by Canadians. The reality is that Canada has a small population that relies on international trade for our collective prosperity.

We produce far more than we can consume, and this is the source of much of our wealth. Put another way, Canada is our classic small, open economy. When we consider the value of our exports and imports together, this represents more than two-thirds of Canada's GDP.

Approximately three-quarters of Canada's trade is with the United States. That is about \$1.6 billion in two-way trade between Canada and the United States on a daily basis. That is the largest bilateral trading relationship in the world. No existing Canadian trade issue or policy area is as important or complex as Canada's relationship with the United States. The level of integration between our economies requires that we constantly build and strengthen that relationship, especially during times of economic uncertainty.

It is true, with so much of the Canadian economy depending on trade with a single partner, it does leave us vulnerable to protectionist provisions like buy American.

It is also true that buy American is killing Canadian jobs. Workers across Canada have watched their shifts disappear as Canadian manufacturers lose contracts in the United States. For example, Cherubini Metal Works in Atlantic Canada has had to lay off workers, blaming between 30% and 40% of its slowdown on buy American. Canada needs an exemption from buy American provisions. It is in the best interests of both Canada and the United States.

Unfortunately, the Conservative government has been late to act on the file. The Conservatives lost precious months after the U.S. stimulus package was passed when they tried to convince Canadians there was not a problem instead of working to solve that problem.

The Conservatives were wrong to declare victory over buy American when the United States amended the stimulus package in the U.S. recovery act to ensure it respected U.S. trade obligations. Their premature declaration of victory showed they did not understand our trade agreements. U.S. stimulus money is being spent by its state and local governments, and this spending is not covered by our trade agreements.

When buy American proposals first took shape, the Canadian government should have immediately sat down with the provinces to work out a proposal for an exemption that extended coverage of Canada's trade agreements with the United States to provincial, state and local governments. Instead of doing this immediately, the Conservatives waited. In the meantime, a number of Canadian manufacturers gave up on our federal government and began moving both their operations, and the Canadian jobs that go with them, to the United States.

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A recent CIBC report blames U.S. protectionist provisions like buy American for slowing down Canada's recovery in 2010, so there is no question that buy American is hurting our economy. We owe it to Canadians to work on responsible solutions to the problem.

Bill C-392 certainly appears to be a reaction to the buy American provisions in the United States. Yet reacting in kind is not the answer. Here is what Gary Shapiro, president of the Consumer Electronics Association, said about buy American.

The "Buy American" provisions...will signal to our trading partners around the world that the United States is returning to the bad old days of protectionism and economic nationalism.

Why would we want to do the same in Canada?

● (1810)

Bill C-392 not only will not work, it would actually worsen the problem. While we work to address a growing number of trade irritants with the United States, like buy American, country of origin labelling, and the western hemisphere travel initiative, we must not lose sight of the fact that the Canadian and U.S. economies are still highly integrated. We do not simply trade with each other, we build things together.

One-third of Canada-U.S. trade is between divisions of the same company. Two-thirds of Canada-U.S. trade takes place within established supply chains. Over 3 million Canadian jobs rely on trade with the United States. Implementing protectionist provisions here at home would put these Canadian jobs at risk.

The unintended consequence of this legislation would be to hurt Canadian companies that have U.S. companies as part of their supply chain. These consequences have been identified by prominent leaders, such as Leo Gerard, president of the United Steelworkers of America. In a written submission to the Congressional Steel Caucus, he said:

Because we are an International union, and because Canadian and US manufacturing is so integrated, we encourage you and other members of the Steel Caucus to approach your counterparts in Canada to discuss a coordinated approach for the North American industry to strengthen its ability to create and preserve these good jobs in both countries.

American manufacturers often use Canadian suppliers. When American manufacturers are shut out of the procurement opportunities, their Canadian suppliers lose out too. This hurts Canadian workers.

Each additional barrier to trade along the 49th parallel increases the cost of doing business in North America, both in Canada and in the United States.

Instead of reacting to the rising U.S. protectionism with our own Canadian brand of protectionism here at home, instead of erecting trade barriers and contributing to the global trade war of the likes of Smoot-Hawley during the Great Depression, we should focus our efforts on removing trade irritants and bringing down unnecessary trade barriers, particularly between Canada and the United States.

In the face of increased competition from emerging markets like China and India, the best way to grow the Canadian economy is to work closely with our largest trading partner, the United States, to improve our competitiveness and make our shared market the best, most efficient place to grow our business.

To summarize, while I recognize that Bill C-392 is motivated by the best of intentions, it does not reflect or address the realities of the Canadian economy. A recent statement made by Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty highlights this fact. He said:

Closing the border to companies south of the border is not the way to combat American protectionist policies.

McGuinty told the delegates at the Association of Municipalities of Ontario that the best way to ensure both countries enjoy a strong and sustained recovery is if they work together. He called on municipal leaders and politicians to reach out to their counterparts across the border.

Bill C-392 will not do this. Instead, it would in fact achieve the opposite of what the member for London—Fanshawe intends to achieve by needlessly risking Canadian jobs. It is not in Canada's interest to contribute to global protectionism.

Instead, our federal government must focus on gaining and securing access for Canadian exports to foreign markets, so that Canadians can sell their goods and services to businesses and consumers around the world. That is the most effective, most responsible way to protect and create Canadian jobs.

● (1815)

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have listened with great interest to my colleagues from both the Liberals and the Conservatives talk about this in a protectionist sense. They ought to open up their eyes because the world has been doing it for years and continues to do it.

The most recent piece about the buy America act simply highlighted what has been going on for the past 55 years. In fact, it is slightly more than that. The buy America act was enacted some 50-odd years ago. It is not new. It is not an Obama situation.

The reason that folks finally paid attention is because of the economic downturn and the huge number of dollars that the federal government in the U.S. pushed into its system and said to give it to state and local governments to decide what to do. The 50 U.S. states have a buy America act. Their local governments buy local.

The reason Bombardier has a plant in Plattsburgh instead of the Americans importing from Thunder Bay is because New York State has a buy New York State policy when it comes to buses. That is why the Plattsburgh plant and the supplier park that surrounds it has thousands of jobs that should be in Canada where Bombardier is the home company.

However, because of the decision it made a long time ago, that is exactly where the plant relocated and it is not alone. The European consortium that builds buses also happens to be in Plattsburgh, just down the road from the Bombardier plant.

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With regard to how much of the economy we are talking about, my friends on the other side of the aisle and down the way think that the whole economy is about to be protected. We are talking about 23% of the total economy. Those are the latest numbers for what local, provincial and territorial governments would buy via their procurement policies, which leaves 77% of the economy open to be governed by international trade deals.

It is really transparent, it seems to me, in the NAFTA accord where chapter 10 talks about there not being any provisions to stop local governments from having local procurement. They can make the decisions.

In the province of Ontario local government is mandated by the provincial government, having been a member of municipal government previously, to develop its own procurement policies and the policies are entirely written up by the local government.

I had the great pleasure, starting about two years ago, of travelling to meet with nearly all of the municipal governments in the Niagara region and asking them to consider procurement policies that looked at buying Canadian. Basically, all of them agreed because it really boils down to one common element.

When it comes to government, it collects money. It does not sell things to people. It does not make things for sale. It taxes people and collects their money. People entrust it to government and then they want it to appropriate that money and spend it wisely.

One of the questions I put to mayors in my region was this. If they are collecting money from their neighbours, why would they not spend it on them? It is their money, after all. Why would they give it to some foreign national? Why would they send it across the way? Of course, most say they get a better price there, it is more competitive, and that is how they drive the competitiveness. My reply to that is, how much was saved? Usually it is pennies. If they are lucky, it is a penny on the dollar.

If people are laid off because we decided to buy what they make somewhere else, what is the cost to the municipality? Initially, it is EI, so it is a cost to the federal government, which really is all of us in this country. At some point in time, if that person does not get a job, people go on social assistance, which in Ontario is borne by the municipality.

If we look at the true cost of what these things really do and factor that into the whole equation, we will find that buying local is not only smart but it builds community. It does not put us at a disadvantage. It does not hamper us from getting good quality materials. It does not hamper our competitiveness. When it comes to large purchases involving hundreds of millions of dollars, when it comes to infrastructure for buses and rail cars, if we decide to buy somewhere else, Europe for instance, it is our workers who are laid off.

As we have seen in this country, 400,000 manufacturing jobs have disappeared. None of them have been replaced. It was not about a sense of being competitive and replacing those jobs with something else. They are gone.

● (1820)

We, in this House, are all too well aware of what has happened to the economy of this country. If we do not decide to invest in our own, who will? Who will if not us? We speak for all Canadians. We speak for all of those who have come here and if we are not going to speak for them, it is hard for me to imagine that Nokia is going to speak for them in Finland, or that some plant and some manufacturer in Stuttgart is going to speak for Canadians from there. Canadians are looking to us to speak for them and we should. That is our job. That is the role we play.

We are not looking at closing, putting up walls and closing doors, and saying we do not wish to trade with the rest of the world. We understand we are a trading nation. The world understands we are a trading nation. In fact, the world looks at us and says the Canadians really do not get it, so let us sell our stuff to them because they do not have procurement policies.

Every major manufacturing country in this world has a procurement policy, whether it is Mexico, Japan, Germany, U.K., or whether it is the Americans who we trade nearly 80% of our products with. All have inside their walls, inside their country, local procurement policies. Yet, we refuse in this country, at least at the federal level to this point in time, to acknowledge that. At the local level across this country there are quite a few municipalities which are saying they are going to take the initiative because one of the fallacies about the NAFTA was that somehow provinces and municipalities could not enact buy Canadian. How wrong they were. Of course, they got that advice from the federal cousins. Their federal counterparts said they cannot do that, NAFTA says no.

Of course, when the buy American act raised its head and all that money poured in, all of a sudden it became oops, now we need to change it. Now we see the Minister of International Trade down in the U.S. cap in hand, trying to say, "Let us do something about the buy American act". We are trying to negotiate a deal with nothing in our hand. We have an empty cap, hoping for coppers to be placed in that cap. That is not what we ought to be doing. We should be fighting for Canadian jobs because it really is about making sure they are protected.

What do municipalities buy? In my riding a town called Thorold enacted a buy Canadian policy. In fact, when officials go to the local hardware store just to buy a shovel, they make sure it is a Canadian shovel. Their lapel pins have "Made in Canada", contrary to what we have received as part of our allotment of Canadian pins made in China. There is a community that understands about standing up for its citizens, its workers. What do their citizens say about that resolution? They are in full support.

One survey asked about municipal transit buying buses. Specifically, 9 out of 10 Canadians surveyed said we should buy Canadian buses if they are made here. Just so everyone knows, we make buses in this country. We make very good buses in this country. But I guess the Minister of National Defence did not think we made good enough buses to give to the defence department, to give to our brave soldiers overseas and our soldiers who are here in this country. He decided to buy them from Germany. We could have made them in Chatham, no more than five or six hours drive from here. We could have made those buses, but instead we shipped them over and allowed the Germans to make those buses.

If we had said we will like to build buses for the German army, imagine the response of the chancellor of Germany. I am sure she would have said, "Not on, we will make our own buses, thank you very kindly, for our troops" and that is exactly what we should have done. The difference in what it cost for those buses in Germany versus here was infinitesimal. Add in the cost of what happened to the workers in that plant in Chatham who are now laid off and the cost now is disproportionate because it would have been cheaper to make them in Chatham than have them shipped from Germany. The same quality buses, the same type of things that we were looking at, and that situation can be extrapolated across this country into municipalities, into the provinces, so that we will put our workers back to work.

We are going to collect their money as I said earlier and it is their money. If we are going to make an investment in anyone, it ought to be them because it is their money after all. They would be grateful for the fact that we thought it was important to invest in them and not send it overseas.

• (1825)

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank all the members who have made a contribution to this debate.

This bill, my made in Canada bill, will go a long way toward building new markets for Canadian suppliers, strengthening sustainability and fulfilling our environmental commitment while encouraging Canadian entrepreneurship. This bill will help support sectors in crisis, including the auto, steel and forestry sectors, and replace the government's ad hoc approach with a consistent policy.

Local spending of stimulus investment is necessary for effective job creation and job protection. Canadians expect their government to invest their tax dollars wisely. By investing in our communities, we can support local jobs and generate more tax revenue which in turn supports our families and national services.

Though successive federal governments have given away many rights under different trade agreements, such as NAFTA and the WTO, they have also explicitly maintained rights in regard to some areas of procurement. The exceptions include federal transfers to provinces and municipalities which do not fall under international trade agreements.

There are also two broad areas of exemptions under NAFTA, one for purchases of goods for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Department of National Defence, and the other for goods related to general federal government procurement, including things such as shipbuilding and repair, urban rail and transportation equipment and

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materials, communications equipment, research and development, health and social services, financial and related services, utilities, and agricultural products.

Despite these exemptions, millions of tax dollars have been spent on acquiring goods and services from foreign countries.

A case in point is that in 2006 the federal government approved nearly \$13 billion in defence and aerospace purchases mainly from the United States. The 2006 Canadian census was outsourced to an American company, Lockheed Martin, which is part of the American military industrial complex.

In 2007 the federal government purchased new intercity buses from Germany, bypassing two highly qualified Canadian firms.

In 2008 the uniforms for our Canadian Olympic team were outsourced to China.

Between April 1, 2007 and March 31, 2008, there were 466 contracts under the NAFTA threshold of \$28,000 that were awarded to vendors in the United States. In the same time period, the federal government awarded 47 competitive contracts valued at \$47 million to vendors in the United States for communications equipment, equipment which is exempt from NAFTA.

Our lack of a made in Canada policy shuts out Canadian workers from the jobs that should be created in Canada by Canadian companies, jobs that should go to workers in London, Winnipeg, St. Thomas, Montreal, Vancouver and Halifax.

I want this House and the members herein to know that I am proud of this bill and feel privileged to be able to present it to the people of my riding on behalf of the many Canadians who have lost jobs and have been forgotten by the government. They have been forgotten and discounted by a government that prefers to acquiesce to trade rules that undermine Canadian sovereignty. It has actually made a point of telling Canadians that despite the fact that our trading partners—the United States, Japan, China, Mexico and most European countries—understand that investing in local communities makes good economic sense, it will not stand on the side of Canadian workers and Canadian companies.

It is the absolute obligation of this House and its members to bring forward legislation, whether it be government legislation or private members' bills, that ensures the security and safety of each member of our society. That security is a singular trust. No citizen of this country should ever suffer because of legislation that is driven by self-service or that is designed to appeal to any narrow or hurtful motivation.

Everything we bring to this place must serve this country and its people. That is what my bill is about. It goes to the core of the reason I chose to offer service to the people of London—Fanshawe and to all the people like them who built this country by their labour, their ingenuity and their commitment to community.

Adjournment Proceedings

I ask members of this House to show commitment to community and to pass this made in Canada bill for the people of the present, for the people of the future, and for the sake of this country.

● (1830)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): 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 Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, a recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, November 4, 2009, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*Translation*]

CANADA MEDIA FUND

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, thank you for giving me the floor during the adjournment debate so that I can follow up on a question that I asked a very long time ago. On June 2, 2009, I asked the parliamentary secretary a question because he had said that Télé Québec was going to be excluded from the media fund. I asked him to clarify the situation.

However, the situation was never really clarified, and now the media fund is really a serious problem. This is an issue that needs to be dealt with right now. Some people think that it is over with and will not come up again until next spring when it is time for the next round of decision-making, but this is a hot topic right now, and people are very worried about the future of the media fund.

This morning in *La Presse*, there was an article by Nathaëlle Morissette. It is so well-written that I would like to read it to the parliamentary secretary, who is listening right now, so that he understands the problem as Quebecers see it.

This is what Nathaëlle Morissette wrote, and it will take about two minutes to read:

Original network television programming is being threatened. [Those are not my words. That is really what it said in the paper.] At least that was the message sent yesterday by the Association des producteurs de film et de télévision du Québec (APFTQ) president, André Provencher, who is very concerned about the uncertainty surrounding the Canada Media Fund.

Next fall, original programs such as *Aveux* and *Yamaska* might give way to foreign concepts that have been adapted for a Quebec audience, such as *Tout le monde en parle* or *Le banquier*, the Quebec version of *Deal or No Deal*, which are considered sure bets and ratings generators.

If the new media fund (which will replace the Canadian Television Fund in April) puts the emphasis on audience ratings—as many producers fear—the 2010-11 season will suffer, says André Provencher.

Mr. Provencher, also the president of La Presse télé, shared his concerns in a speech delivered yesterday to the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television. “The BBM report for the week of September 28 to October 4, 2009, showed that close to half the Quebec shows in the top 10 were in fact shows based on foreign ideas and formats”, he said.

“Making the allocation of these funds subject to ratings and reinforcing that specific criterion will prompt broadcasters to turn to blue chip productions,” he added at the end of his remarks. “Formats previously tested on other markets present less risk. There will be a narrower creative space.”

It will be March before producers are told based on what criteria programs will be subsidized under the new media fund. Such uncertainty will likely compromise several projects scheduled for the fall, and next September's programming schedule may well include much fewer new shows than this year's, indicated Mr. Provencher.

“Programs to be put on the air by next September require a production cycle slightly longer than four and a half months,” pointed out APFTQ director general Claire Samson. “This year, we will have to cope with a two-month delay over the usual timeframe.”

Mr. Provencher agreed, saying “Getting new products funded by the media fund and finding a spot for them in the fall programming schedule will cause many problems and challenges to the networks, in my opinion.”

● (1835)

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to have the opportunity to speak about the Canada new media fund, a great fund that supports Canadian production and creation, a fund worth over \$300 million, jointly contributed to by broadcast distribution undertakings, BDUs, cable and satellite providers in this country and the Government of Canada. It is worth about \$180 million from the BDUs, and about \$126 million from the Government of Canada. It is a very important fund.

I am happy to say that educational broadcasters, like Télé-Québec, will continue to benefit from the Canada media fund. The Canada new media fund will support all kinds of programming that Canadians from all walks of life are looking for, including educational programming, produced with the financial participation of Télé-Québec.

The renewal of the government's contribution and the creation of the Canada new media fund set the stage for Canadian content in the digital age.

The member is quite right in some respects. This government does believe, as did previous governments, as there were similar requirements in any former Canadian television fund, that quality, diverse content and audience success go hand in hand. That is why the government believes in Canadian content and in the talents of those who create it. We believe that we should reward audience success.

Adjournment Proceedings

Over the last five years programs broadcast by Télé-Québec have benefited from \$34.8 million from the Canada television fund including a \$7.7 million envelope this year. Support for Télé-Québec will continue under the Canada new media fund.

[Translation]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary said that the media fund is an excellent fund, but we still do not know how it will work. We do not know how it will be managed or what the criteria will be. The only thing we know is that, last spring, the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages said that the government would subsidize what Canadians want. Going for ratings at all costs often has a negative impact on creativity, innovation and novelty. Creativity, innovation and novelty are exactly what produce wonder and enthusiasm, as well as ratings based on quality.

That is why I am urging the parliamentary secretary to pay close attention to the criteria I am proposing now.

• (1840)

[English]

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Mr. Speaker, as I said, educational broadcasters, such as Télé-Québec, will continue to be eligible under the criteria established by the Canada media fund. The member has no concerns there.

I would also like to reiterate the government's position regarding audience success. In the government's view, quality, diverse content and audience success all go hand in hand. The government is confident that educational broadcasters, such as Télé-Québec, will continue to benefit from the Canada media fund. The design of the Canada media fund is aligned with the government's strategy to secure a more effective investment on behalf of all Canadians.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the story is well known. It appears the Minister of Natural Resources utilized the services and resources of the Toronto Port Authority. The executive assistant to the president and CEO sent out emails to solicit and to promote a fundraiser for the minister. The Toronto Port Authority is a federally controlled authority and its resources cannot be used for any unauthorized purposes.

The name on the flyer was Michael B. McSweeney, a registered lobbyist for the Cement Association of Canada. The fax number to send the order form for the minister's fundraiser happened to be the fax number for the Cement Association of Canada.

It is pretty clear that when a registered lobbyist does a fundraiser for a minister, whom he has registered to lobby, there is something wrong.

There are all kinds of potential breaches, but the most important has to do with the Prime Minister's code of conduct for ministers. The Prime Minister says:

I cannot stress enough that implementation of the *Federal Accountability Act* and associated Action Plan is not simply a matter of compliance. At least as important is our commitment to a culture of accountability in everything we do—that is, to uphold the highest standards of probity and ethical conduct in recognition of the fact that it is a privilege and a trust to participate in the process through which Canadians govern themselves.

He goes on to say that these measures complement the Conflict of Interest Act and establish the most rigorous conflict avoidance regime in Canada.

Annex H in the Guidelines for the Political Activities of Public Office holders, of which the Minister of Natural Resources is one, states:

—a public office holder should not participate in a political activity where it may reasonably be seen to be incompatible with the public office holder's duty, or otherwise be seen to impair his or her ability to discharge his or her public duties in a politically impartial fashion, or would cast doubt on the integrity or impartiality of the office.

Finally it states:

Compliance with these Guidelines is a term and condition of appointment. Before appointment, a public office holder shall certify that he or she will comply with these Guidelines.

These are the Prime Minister's guidelines for ministers. The Ethics Commissioner has no jurisdiction over these. These are the private guidelines of the Prime Minister.

We used to have an ethics counsellor who was between the Prime Minister and the code of conduct for ministers. We no longer have one. The only person who can sanction a minister under the Prime Minister's code of conduct is the Prime Minister himself.

Why is it that a minister who has so blatantly breached the Prime Minister's guidelines for his ministers not had any sanctions against her for violating virtually all of the provisions of Annex H of that code?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, allow me to begin by thanking the member for Mississauga South and the chair of the ethics committee for his intervention today.

Our government takes the allegations seriously. This government prides itself on accountability and ethics. That is why we strengthened the powers and responsibilities of those arm's-length agencies that are charged to investigate such matters.

The Minister of Natural Resources continues to co-operate fully with the Ethics Commissioner. The minister is following and will follow the commissioner's ruling and guidance.

The issue is still being examined by the Ethics Commissioner and therefore it would be inappropriate for me to comment.

• (1845)

Mr. Paul Szabo: Here is the problem, Mr. Speaker.

The Prime Minister's message accompanying this code says that it complements the Conflict of Interest Act, which is the purview of the Ethics Commissioner. The Ethics Commissioner has no purview whatsoever over the Prime Minister's code of conduct for his ministers. The Prime Minister is the only one who can provide sanctions. It says that compliance with these guidelines is a condition of appointment. In other words, it is like an undated letter of resignation.

It is up to the Prime Minister to judge his own ministers. This is the rule that he has set. It complements the Conflict of Interest Act.

Adjournment Proceedings

To suggest that we should wait for the Ethics Commissioner is irrelevant. The Prime Minister has to decide. When is he going to decide?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, our government takes these allegations very seriously. This government prides itself on accountability and ethics. That is why we strengthened the powers and responsibilities of those arm's-length agencies that were charged with investigating such matters.

The Minister of Natural Resources continues to cooperate fully with the Ethics Commissioner. The minister is following and will continue to follow the commissioner's rulings and guidance.

This issue is being examined by the Ethics Commissioner and, therefore, it would be inappropriate for me to comment.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:47 p.m.)

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