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(HANSARD)

Wednesday, March 28, 2012

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, March 28, 2012

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1405)

[*English*]

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

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

KRAFT HOCKEYVILLE COMPETITION

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am thrilled to stand in the House today and congratulate the Prince Edward—Hastings towns of Bancroft and Stirling for their outstanding community effort to win \$100,000 in arena upgrades in the Kraft Hockeyville competition.

Across Canada, Bancroft made it into the final 15 and I am extremely happy to report that Stirling has made it into the top 5 finalists. This achievement came about because of the tremendous teamwork and community spirit shown by so many people.

This was typified by Stirling resident and musician Freddy Vette, whose theme song and video, *Stirling Hockeyville*, went viral and galvanized everyone to get involved, vote online and share Stirling's excitement with everyone in the area.

On behalf of the residents of Prince Edward—Hastings, I congratulate everyone in the town of Stirling and wish them good luck. On March 31, as we await the results on *Hockey Night in Canada*, we will all feel as if we are from Stirling.

We must remember that, no matter what the outcome of the results, Stirling has, without a doubt, proven itself to be the little town with the big heart.

[*Translation*]

RECONSTRUCTION OF HAITI

Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week, I went to Haiti with some ParlAmericas colleagues. We were able to see first-hand Canada's commitment to the reconstruction of this devastated country. The people of Haiti are very grateful for the generosity and solidarity shown by foreign governments, which have saved many lives. Nevertheless, the extension of emergency aid is creating a climate of dependency and thus negatively affecting the Haitian economy and society.

After meeting with members of Haiti's parliament and people from local NGOs, I realized just how excluded the people of Haiti are feeling when it comes to the reconstruction of their own country. Canada is facing a major challenge—to inspire a new direction in international co-operation.

We must promote independent and sustainable economic development and always encourage grassroots participation. The people of Haiti must be allowed to take charge of their own destiny in the rebuilding of their country.

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[*English*]

YOUNG HUMANITARIAN AWARD

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Winnipeg South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today inspired by the work of two young boys who live in my riding. Brothers Freddy and Kevin Noriega-Gomez of École St. Avila have been recognized over the years for their humanitarian work in Winnipeg.

In 2011, Kevin and Freddy were recognized as the year's youngest Young Humanitarian Award winners ever, an award that highlights that education is so much more than academic studies, athletic ability and school involvement.

Aware of the subject of the needs of women and children who experience domestic abuse, the boys approached the school in efforts to help raise funds for the Osborne House, a safe place for women and children. Working with their school's vice-principal, they developed a presentation about the needs of the facility and the families that use it, encouraging their classmates to bring items that would be helpful to women and children.

Kevin and Freddy's efforts resulted in collecting over 100 boxes and bags of toiletries, clothes, blankets and toys, a huge help to the shelter during the holiday season.

Statements by Members

I congratulate both Kevin and Freddy.

* * *

[Translation]

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, public transit is key to alleviating urban congestion, the negative effects of air pollution on human health and the climate-altering impacts of greenhouse gas emissions.

[English]

There is perhaps no place in Canada with a greater need for improved public transit than the West Island of Montreal. Currently, the West Island is forced to tolerate a commuter rail service hampered by the necessity of sharing the same track as freight trains.

[Translation]

Over a decade ago, I had the opportunity to work on a local task force my predecessor, Clifford Lincoln, launched to implement his vision for better commuter rail service for West Islanders.

[English]

Clifford Lincoln continues to spearhead this vision, which is today known as the Train de l'Ouest project.

The Quebec government has already committed \$200 million to facilitate expanded rail transit from the West Island to the city's downtown core. It is time for the federal government to express its support for the Train de l'Ouest so that improved daily rail service can become a reality for thousands of West Island commuters.

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ONTARIO MEDAL FOR FIREFIGHTER BRAVERY

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on March 9, a daring rescue took place on Kempenfelt Bay. Twenty-seven fishermen, including a 12-year-old boy, were sent adrift after a two kilometre piece of ice had broken from shore.

The OPP chopper began by airlifting a man to hospital who had crashed his ATV on the ice in a failed attempt to reach shore. In spite of dangerous conditions, an emergency team of Barrie firefighters made their way onto the ice. Their biggest challenge was to try and stay out of the water themselves. They could have easily been swept under the ice or crushed in-between the massive slabs.

I am happy to report that the rescue was a success. There were no fatalities and only one injury. The rescue involved some 20 firefighters, 15 police officers and 12 Simcoe county paramedics.

I am especially proud of the five Barrie firefighters nominated for the Ontario Medal for Firefighter Bravery. This award was established in 1976 and only 195 people have ever received it.

I rise today to salute Captain Keefer Hood and firefighters John Cargoe, Matt Monkman, Scott Ellis and Ben LaRoux for their bravery, valour and courage.

● (1410)

[Translation]

COMMUNITY ACCESS PROGRAM

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the saying goes, “never put off until tomorrow what you can do today”.

The Minister of Industry is embroiled in controversies and must regret his procrastination. In early 2012, several organizations in my riding wrote letters to the Minister of Industry about the importance of renewing the community access program, CAP, and its youth initiative.

The Maison de jeunes Kekpart, Le Trait d'Union community centre, the Centre des générations de Boucherville, and the Centre communautaire des aînés et aînées de Longueuil wrote to him three months ago and have not received a reply or even an acknowledgement. These programs are vital because they help youth find that first job and help seniors end their isolation. The program's funding runs out on March 31, which is this Sunday.

The Minister of Industry must reassure our organizations and the people involved in this important and worthwhile program and must provide them with sustainable funding.

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[English]

BIRTHDAY CONGRATULATIONS

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with best wishes that I stand today to tell hon. members about the oldest living person in Canada, Cora Hansen of the city of Medicine Hat in my riding.

Cora turned 113 years old on March 25. Born in 1899, Cora is thought to be the last person born in the 19th century still to be living in our country. This is a great milestone.

Cora's family were Norwegian immigrants to Minnesota in the 1800s and they moved with her to Jenner in 1912 during the great land rush. They rode into Jenner on a horse-drawn carriage. Simply to imagine all of the societal and technological advancements that Cora has lived amazes us all.

At her 107th birthday, Cora was interviewed by the *Medicine Hat News* about what her secret was for her very long life and she said, “The key is in God's hands. I have lived a plain life. I did not drink or anything like that”.

I wish Cora all the best in the coming years and wish her a very happy 113th birthday.

* * *

OYEN, ALBERTA

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all members of Parliament can share a tale or two about how Canadians rise up to face the challenges of our winter weather.

Statements by Members

In our Crowfoot riding in east central Alberta, the good people of Oyen are still being applauded for responding to an emergency on March 19 when a heavy snowstorm shut down most highways throughout central Alberta, leaving many folks stranded in bitterly cold icy conditions with zero visibility.

Oyen mayor, Paul Christianson, implemented the disaster plan to help those who were stranded due to numerous road closures in the area. The local police and fire department, the Oyen Ministerial Association, town staff and many volunteers dropped everything and scrambled to serve the stranded travellers. Even the Oyen Legion emptied to join the brigade. Mats, blankets, food and beverages were on hand at three schools in Oyen for the cold, tired and shaken-up travellers.

The great Canadian winter challenges Canadians and brings out the best in all of us from coast to coast. I am very proud to recognize my constituents in Oyen, Alberta for their brave response to a winter emergency.

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[Translation]

AVEOS WORKERS

Mr. François Pilon (Laval—Les Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, on Parliament Hill, a number of my NDP colleagues and I showed our support for Aveos workers, many of whom live in my riding of Laval—Les Îles.

I find it absolutely appalling that the Conservative government forced Air Canada employees back to work, claiming that the economy was at risk, and then, one week later, did not even lift a finger when 2,300 people in the Air Canada fold lost their jobs. Does this mean that the Conservatives think that the jobs lost by Canadian families are not important enough to the economy?

This is another example of the government's total lack of respect for Canadian families. Only the NDP has the interests of Canadians at heart. Do we have to buy sleeping bags or go hunting with the Minister of Industry in order for our workers to keep their jobs?

* * *

[English]

ECOLE ROBERT H. SMITH SCHOOL

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was my pleasure on March 2 to attend the community breakfast held by Ecole Robert H. Smith School in my riding of Winnipeg South Centre.

Over 1,000 people attended. Students cleared tables, guided guests and showcased their talents. Teachers, families and friends in the community joined in with the students to make the event a reality.

Under the leadership of Principal Tom Rossi, the students chose the charity of their choice, Winnipeg Harvest, for any surplus the event might achieve.

Given the generosity of the business community to support the breakfast, the students were able to raise over \$13,000 in support of Winnipeg Harvest.

I compliment the staff of Ecole Robert H. Smith for guiding students to become philanthropists. With students like these leading us to tomorrow, the future is in very good hands indeed.

* * *

● (1415)

[Translation]

GENDER PARITY

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, at a time when many entities have a gender parity policy for the selection of senior managers and board members, the Conservative government is showing no leadership in this regard.

A number of studies have shown that there is no longer any question about the benefits of parity. What we need to do now is find ways to achieve parity.

To that end, I would like to acknowledge the efforts made by the Quebec City chamber of commerce, which recently won the 2012 equality award from Quebec's status of women office for creating a charter for parity in governance.

Together with the Quebec YWCA, the chamber of commerce invites organizations in the region to sign the charter and provides them with a list of worthy female candidates.

I urge the Conservative government to show its support for parity by doing something tangible. That is why I am calling on the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities to appoint a woman to the board of directors of the Quebec Port Authority, which is currently an all-male board.

* * *

[English]

MACEDONIA

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this winter much of Europe experienced unseasonably cold temperatures which led to many injuries and deaths. Temperatures plunged to -35°C. Some areas received over one foot of snow, leaving roads cut off and people stranded. Many countries were hard hit, including the Republic of Macedonia. Many villages are experiencing continued disruptions to their water and electricity access. These extreme conditions increase the risk of exposure among vulnerable groups, while blocked roads have caused shortages of food and medical supplies in affected areas.

Canada responded in solidarity with our Macedonian friends by providing the Macedonian Red Cross with supplies to 5,100 people over a period of three months. This meant distributing basic food and non-food items such as blankets, clothes and hygiene parcels to affected families who were braving the harsh conditions that the winter storm brought.

Oral Questions

Canada and Macedonia have a long history of co-operation and friendship. We look forward to maintaining this relationship in the future.

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ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on March 9, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination completed its most recent review of Canada's performance in combatting racism. Its central observation is a call to action. Canada needs a comprehensive strategy on indigenous issues.

Last month I wrote to CERD and urged members to consider the government's failure to meaningfully consult with aboriginal peoples as required under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the systemic underfunding of essential services like education and child welfare.

The UN committee has called on Canada to establish a comprehensive strategy, including a national plan of action on aboriginal gender-based violence and measures to prevent excessive use of incarceration of indigenous peoples.

The Conservatives must take substantial concrete steps beginning with tomorrow's budget to close the unacceptable gaps by including funding for education and water infrastructure.

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AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have some great news to bring to the attention of this House. Because of investments our government made to ensure increased productivity and greener production, Toyota Canada is investing in Woodstock in my riding. Production of their Rav4 crossover vehicles will see 400 new jobs in the Woodstock area early next year. Production will increase by 50,000 vehicles at the plant. Toyota Canada's chairman, Ray Tanguay, is optimistic that the market is coming back. Previously they announced that their first electric vehicle in North America will be built at the Woodstock plant beginning this year.

Our Conservative government is focused on Canadians' top priority: jobs, growth and long-term prosperity. Our plan is working for the hard-working families in Woodstock, across my riding and all across Canada.

* * *

● (1420)

ELECTIONS CANADA

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, over two weeks ago the NDP motion giving the Chief Electoral Officer more power passed this Parliament unanimously. Mr. Mayrand believes these powers would "substantially enhance transparency and accountability". We are still waiting for the government to honour its vote and bring in the actual legislation that will give the CEO the power he needs to do his job.

To make matters worse, Conservatives are now playing games with the Chief Electoral Officer. Mr. Mayrand asked to come before Parliament and report on his investigation into allegations of coordinated voter suppression by Conservative operatives. However,

the Conservatives used their majority to force Mr. Mayrand to testify tomorrow, on budget day, when almost every journalist on the Hill will be locked up in a room without even their BlackBerrys.

Talk about the Prime Minister's dream democracy: an electoral process the Conservatives can manipulate, our Chief Electoral Officer with no powers and all the journalists locked up.

* * *

[*Translation*]

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Chris Alexander (Ajax—Pickering, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, the new leader of the NDP delivered a speech that showcases his extremist views.

[*English*]

Before the budget is even tabled, he says he will attack our Conservative government's low tax, low debt plan for jobs, growth and long-term prosperity. He has already set his face against a road map that has brought Canada out of the recession sooner and stronger than other advanced economies, putting over 610,000 Canadians into new jobs in the process.

The NDP has already opposed stable, sustainable and record investments in health transfers, support for seniors, including the largest increase in the GIS in over 25 years, and every tax cut and credit introduced for hard-working Canadian families.

Instead, this NDP has a new plan to create a new carbon tax, a second GST that would kill jobs and raise the prices of almost everything.

[*Translation*]

The NDP is opposed to the responsible development of our natural resources and the creation of hundreds of thousands of good jobs in the Canadian energy sector.

[*English*]

Canadians simply cannot afford the NDP and their—

The Speaker: Order, please. We will move to oral questions. The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*Translation*]

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on June 7, 2011, Jack Layton asked the Prime Minister the following question:

Oral Questions

What services will Canadians have to do without when the Prime Minister is finished his cuts?

The Prime Minister gave the following categorical answer:

This government has been very clear. We will not cut pensions. We will not cut transfers to the provinces for major programs such as health care.

Our question is just as clear: tomorrow, will the Prime Minister keep his word or break it?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government, every year since taking office, has increased support for the provinces for health care, which is a huge priority for middle-class families. Every single time we have stood in this House to raise funding for health care, the NDP has voted against it.

We are not doing what the previous Liberal government did. We are increasing support for health care. In fact, those increases this year will be higher than most provinces are making. That is the priority this Prime Minister is making to health care, honouring our commitments to Canadian families.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the very next day, June 8, 2011, Jack Layton asked this question of the Conservative Prime Minister, "...will the Prime Minister commit today not to cut services that are key to Canadian families?"

The Prime Minister's answer was again categorical, "Mr. Speaker, of course we will not cut such services..."

Would the government tell us whether or not the Prime Minister's word will be respected tomorrow, yes or no?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this Prime Minister has been very clear when it comes to middle-class families. They can count on this government to support their key priorities, whether that be health care, which is so important to middle-class families; whether that be education, which is so important to middle-class families.

This government is not only holding the line on low spending, we are actually providing more support to the provinces on those key areas. That is what middle-class families voted for in the last election. That is why this government will continue to pursue a low tax, low debt plan that will create jobs, hope and opportunity.

• (1425)

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the whole pyramid of public administration exists to do one thing: deliver services to the public. That is the last thing that should be touched, especially when people need help, as now.

These cuts will hurt Canadians by denying them the services they need. They will hurt the economy, especially in regions where public servants have a huge impact on the local economy. Does the Conservative government not understand? Or is that it just does not care?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is the member of this House of Commons who, when he was minister of the environment of Quebec, cut spending, slashed spending by more than 15%. Now he is going to lecture this government.

Let me say this. Members will be pleased to learn this. The Minister of Finance will present a budget tomorrow. That budget will help create jobs for Canadians. It will help the middle class by ensuring the long-term prosperity of this great country. It will support the priorities of working families, creating an environment for job creation, supporting health care, supporting education. It is going to do great things over the next year on this plan.

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HEALTH

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives promised more jobs. Instead, they are slashing vital services like medicare. Five million Canadians do not even have access to a family doctor.

The Prime Minister made a single health care promise in the last election: to protect federal transfers. Yet, it took him just eight months to break that promise. Why should Canadians trust a Prime Minister who cannot even keep such a basic promise? Why is he turning his back on Canada's most cherished institution? Why is he abandoning medicare?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have announced a long-term stable funding arrangement with the provinces and the territories. The transfers will reach an historic level of \$40 billion by the end of the decade. My goal is to ensure that Canada's health system is more sustainable and accountable to Canadians.

Let me just list a few things that the NDP voted against in the last budget: significant funding to assist the homeless, mental health program funding that would increase health infrastructure for first nations, funding to help treat and prevent those with drug addictions—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Vancouver East.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister promised Canadians that he would protect health care, but now he is ready to slash it. The Conservative plan shortchanges provinces by a whopping \$31 billion. It forces cash-strapped provinces to gut front-line health care services. Who pays the price? Seniors who will not be able to live with dignity and comfort and anxious parents who will not be able to find a doctor to see their sick children.

Why is the Prime Minister turning his back on his promise to protect health care services?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government recently announced long-term stable funding in December with the finance ministers to a historic level of \$40 billion by the end of the decade.

Oral Questions

Again, let me go through the list of all the programs that the NDP voted against that would increase health transfers to provinces: significant funding to assist homeless people and mental health programs; funding for the Rick Hansen Foundation; funding for first nations health initiatives; funding for first nations health infrastructure; funding to help treat and prevent those with drug addictions upgrade; increased funding to Telehealth; enhanced safety measures for labs; CIHR funding. Those are all—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Toronto Centre.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the medical officers of health of three provinces, British Columbia, Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan, as well as perhaps one of Canada's leading public health experts, Dr. Evan Wood, have just written an article which states categorically that Canadian drug policy is going in absolutely the wrong direction. It is not based on evidence, it is not based on science, it is not based on reducing harm and it is not based on having a good effect.

Why do the Conservatives still not have a good policy on addiction and on mental health? Why do they have a failed policy and why do they only have a jail policy?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government has taken substantial efforts to try to curb smoking. One of the things we will not do is try to legalize marijuana. We think that is not in the best interests of middle-class families across the country. We believe we should get tough on drug dealers, people who sell drugs to our children. We believe this is very important.

If the Liberal Party saw this as a huge priority, why did it not campaign on it in the last election campaign?

• (1430)

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us have an honest conversation on this issue. The most dangerous drug in the country today, according to those health experts and everyone else who has studied the problem, is alcohol. We tried prohibition on alcohol. It proved to be a disastrous and expensive failure.

The Minister of National Defence just announced yesterday that Canada would now join the war on drugs in Central America and Latin America, just at a time when the leaders of those countries are saying clearly and categorically it is the wrong direction for Canada, it is an expensive direction for Canada and it will not work.

Why does the minister persist in this dangerous—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government will fight people who want to sell drugs to our children in Canada. We will fight drug violence anywhere in the world to try and support families. If the Liberal Party wants to legalize marijuana, wants to legalize drugs, the leader of the Liberal Party should be honest, stand in this place and tell Canadians this is its big priority.

Our priority is jobs, hope and opportunity, the long-term economic prosperity of our country. That is where this government is focused, that is our mandate, and we are pleased with the 400 new jobs at Toyota that were announced just today.

[*Translation*]

ETHICS

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since the Prime Minister is not here, I will direct my question to the Minister of Industry.

When the Prime Minister was in opposition, he said on several occasions that it was a clear question of integrity and that it was important to do the right thing. When ministers found themselves in situations of questionable ethics, the leader of the opposition at the time called for their resignation.

So why does the minister not tender his resignation to the Prime Minister of Canada immediately?

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for the Liberal Party and all members of the House, the Minister of Industry has always represented Canada and Canadians with great integrity. As far as I am aware, the minister was not lobbied by Mr. Aubut on any government business. The minister has pointed out very clearly that he paid for his own trip.

* * *

[*Translation*]

AEROSPACE INDUSTRY

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow's budget will be about choices, and the government must choose something other than abandoning Canadian workers.

This government has boasted that it has all the tools needed to protect the 2,600 Aveos workers and to ensure that they do not lose their livelihood.

When does the government plan to use those tools? When will this government take steps to protect Canada's aerospace industry? When will the government do its job, so Aveos workers can keep theirs?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course, we recognize just how much job losses affect workers and their families.

However, I would remind my hon. colleague that, since coming to power, our government has invested more than \$600 million in the aerospace industry in the Montreal region alone. More often than not, the NDP voted against those investments.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us look at the facts: 130 jobs lost at AstraZeneca; 500 jobs at EMD; 500 jobs at Transcontinental; 700 jobs at Mabe; and of course, the 2,600 jobs at Aveos. And I could go on.

The youth unemployment rate is 15% and 400,000 jobs have been lost in the manufacturing sector.

Oral Questions

What does the minister have to say to the families that are paying the price for this government's bad decisions? Why not put employment and public services first in tomorrow's budget?

[English]

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we put first Canadians who are looking for work, and there are still too many Canadians who are searching for jobs. That is why the budget that will be tabled in this House tomorrow will actually continue on the path we have started, which is promoting jobs, the economy and a strong, prosperous future for Canadians. It is important for Canadians to find work. We would certainly hope the NDP could see its way clear to support a new plan for jobs and growth.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us see how the government did on the old plan.

The IMF says that in 2011 Canada finished 130th in economic growth worldwide. In 2012 the figures are even worse. Canada will be 152nd according to projections by the IMF.

Almost 700,000 more Canadians are worse off under the government. They are unemployed. They have given up searching for work or they are in part-time jobs and looking for full-time jobs. That is the real Conservative record. There is \$10,000 a year less for Canadians who have new jobs. That is the Conservative record.

Why does the government not bring—

• (1435)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of State for Finance.

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I sense the excitement in the his voice. He is looking forward to hearing a budget he can support. I would encourage him to listen very closely, because I think there will be a lot in the budget he can support.

One is financial literacy, and we are moving forward on that. The hon. member obviously could use a few lessons because he is comparing developing countries to those that are developed. I would encourage him to go back to the school books to figure out the massive difference.

We would be looking for support, and so would Canadians, for a jobs, growth and prosperity budget.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what so many Canadian families are looking for from the government is job literacy because its record has been so poor. The latest of those who have been sacrificed are the Aveos workers.

Last year the former minister of transport told the House:

There will not be any job losses. Air Canada has said that it is going to maintain the overhaul centres in Winnipeg, Mississauga and in Montreal. It has to do so by legislation.

Why is the government breaking its promise to 2,600 Canadian families? Why does it not act to save those jobs? Why does it not stand up for Canadian workers and do its job so Aveos workers can go back to doing theirs?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, like I said before, we recognize the loss of these jobs are devastating for families.

As I said yesterday, and will repeat now, this is ultimately a private sector issue between the two companies. We will not manage any companies of our country. We respect that, so we are not contemplating a bailout for Aveos or Air Canada. That is very important for us.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Conservatives just do not seem to care, and what are the results?

Canadian income inequality is growing faster than ever before. Since September 2008, 700,000 more Canadians have seen their situation worsen under the Conservatives. The Conservatives have abandoned manufacturing. We have lost 400,000 jobs in that area. We have youth unemployment rates of 15% and a crushing level of debt that Canadian families have never before experienced.

Why do the Conservatives not listen to families across this land? Why do they not produce a budget that puts job creation and Canadian families first for a change?

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, speaking of change, it would be nice if the NDP would change its position and actually vote for some initiatives that we put forward that actually produced jobs, over 610,000 net new jobs. He can throw out all the strange numbers he wants, but what matters to Canadians is there are 610,000 Canadians working today who were not working in July 2009. I think what matters to Canadians is the fact that the NDP has already decided it will stand and vote against Canadians.

* * *

PENSIONS

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Conservatives talk about jobs and instead they are planning to slash medicare and public pensions. Provincial government experts and Canadians know that cutting OAS is wrong. Conservatives are downloading costs to the provinces and leaving seniors even more vulnerable. All the while, the Parliamentary Budget Officer says the OAS is viable going forward.

If the Conservatives really thought there was a crisis with OAS during the election, why did the Prime Minister not mention it even once? What were the Conservatives trying to hide from Canadians?

Oral Questions

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will not speculate on the budget, as I mentioned yesterday and the day before. I will say, though, that old age security will be unsustainable in the years ahead. The NDP knows the numbers and that is why it is so concerned about it. We are concerned about future Canadians and ensuring they have the retirement benefits they deserve.

We are focused on ensuring that seniors today and future Canadians have the benefits they deserve. I wonder why the NDP never wants to support seniors.

• (1440)

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, all of the experts say that the old age security program is viable. That is pretty straightforward. The parliamentary secretary is also well aware that not everyone is in a position to plan for retirement. If the government scales back the old age security program, many people will suffer.

Yet the Conservatives say that, for the sake of future generations, they have to scale back this program, which is essential to Canadians. Well, I can tell you that my generation wants the program to remain as it is.

Future generations want the Conservatives to tackle climate change, not attack the old age security program. Why make cuts to a program that works well as it is?

[English]

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us do some simple math. Today, four people support every one senior. In the future, 20 years from now, two people will support every senior. This system is simply unsustainable. That is why this government is moving forward to ensure we have a sustainable system in the future so OAS will be available to people my age, her age and everyone else's age.

* * *

[Translation]

THE BUDGET

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government is about to cut public services and penalize thousands of workers. Now it has decided, for the first time in history, to exclude people representing workers who want access to information that affects them directly and affects services that Canadian families need.

The government should have nothing to hide. Why is it suddenly changing the rules of the game, and why is it preventing those representatives from being part of the closed-door session?

[English]

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we will be proudly introducing in the House of Commons tomorrow budget 2012, an economic action plan for jobs, growth and long-term prosperity. We welcome all Canadians to tune in and

listen to all of the very interesting and positive news that the Minister of Finance will deliver tomorrow.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a closed shop in this case. It is wrong to cherry-pick stakeholders and those guys know that. Why are the Conservatives cutting out access to six unions that will be locked out of the budget lock-up? That was the question. They are shutting the door on accountability and on participation.

Public servants are worried about their future. They are worried about the services they deliver to everyday Canadians. Why are the Conservatives keeping them in the dark?

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is the House of Commons and we welcome any interested member of Parliament and the media to get involved in the lock-up so they get a prelude of what is in the budget. However, it will be delivered in the House to every Canadian.

* * *

41ST GENERAL ELECTION

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, recently revealed court records filed by Elections Canada show that RackNine had a contractual agreement to work only with Conservatives. It does not even publicly advertise its services. The court records also reveal that when Pierre Poutine set up his account with RackNine, he said that he was referred by a well-connected Conservative in order to access the company.

What steps has the government taken to make the Conservatives reveal the name of this well-connected party official? If the answer is “nothing”, when will we get a royal commission?

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to see the Liberal party endorsing the term “royal”. Of course, we reintroduced that term into the military with much fanfare this past summer.

On Saturday, April 30, 2011, at 1 o'clock the Liberal party ran a tutorial on, and I quote, “robocalls”. On 5 o'clock that same day there was an illegal call placed in the riding of Guelph by the member of Parliament for Guelph. We have in fact written to the CRTC and Elections Canada about this illegal call, which used a bogus number, a bogus individual, and a bogus message.

Liberals have a lot to answer for. We hope they will co-operate with Elections Canada in this regard.

* * *

[Translation]

AIR CANADA

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, by now, Aveos employees should have received their final paycheques. They have not received those cheques. Aveos was supposed to appear before the Standing Committee on Transport, but refused to show up.

Oral Questions

In 2011, the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities said that jobs would be protected until June 2013. Now the current minister is refusing to get involved. If the Minister of Transport cannot do his job, I call upon the Prime Minister to go to court to enforce the law instead of continuing to play Air Canada's game. Aveos is obviously in bed with Air Canada.

What will the government do to protect the workers?

• (1445)

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we said yesterday, witnesses will appear before the Standing Committee on Transport tomorrow, as part of this process. The member will be able to ask all his questions then. This is a matter that concerns two private-sector companies, Aveos and Air Canada, that have a business relationship. Our government respects that relationship.

* * *

[English]

PENSIONS

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow is budget day, and Canadians are rightly afraid, because the Prime Minister plans to balance the books on the backs of low-income seniors and baby boomers. He says tax dollars are better spent on jets, jails, and multi-million dollar fake lakes. He says seniors need to work harder and longer to pay their share.

This is not the Canada that we built and that we have been so very proud of. This is a mean-spirited attack on those most vulnerable. Will someone, absolutely anyone over there, just stand up, show some backbone and fight for some Canadian seniors?

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said, OAS in its current direction is unsustainable.

However, let us be very clear about seniors and the support the government has provided for seniors. Whether it be the largest increase in GIS in the last 25 years or the increases in GIS in 2006, 2007 and 2008, these are all things we have done for low-income seniors. I wonder why the opposition has never supported those things?

* * *

[Translation]

ETHICS

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Industry is living in a parallel universe. He goes to a hunting camp that looks like a castle, and he tells us that he brought his own lunch and sleeping bag.

We do not want to know if he used the Minister of National Defence's personal helicopter to get there. Instead, we want to know if he is finally learning something at the school of ethics.

He has already violated the Conflict of Interest Act. A second investigation is under way and there may be yet another. When will he finally realize that he has lost the trust of Canadians and resign?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I did not hesitate to confirm that I went to Marcel Aubut's hunting camp, which does not look like a castle. I am saying this because the member's statement is completely false. I used my own car to get there, and I used my own equipment. Mr. Aubut did not lobby me at any time before, during or after the trip. It is that simple.

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the fact that the minister drove his own car to a party does not make it acceptable to be in a position of conflict of interest.

When the Conservatives were in opposition, they did not believe that breaking the law was acceptable if a person brought no-crust sandwiches to a party. Far from it.

In 2002, they called for the resignation of a Liberal minister for actions similar to those of the Minister of Industry. At the time, the Prime Minister even said that it was the only honourable thing to do.

Will the Minister of Industry honour the words of the now Prime Minister and show that he is an honourable man by tendering his resignation?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, this incident does not mean anything. The NDP is once again trying to invent conspiracy theories and throw mud everywhere.

I have been clear: yes, I went to Mr. Aubut's hunting cabin. I went there with my own vehicle and my own equipment. I was never lobbied in any way.

After that, we all know the rest of the story about the coliseum. The Government of Canada did not get involved. It said that it would be fair to all cities and that it would not get involved in professional sport. That is the end of the story.

[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when did the Conservatives turn into everything that they used to hate?

We are really trying to help this Minister of Industry crawl out from his sleeping bag and face the brand new day. He was caught red-handed accepting a trip to an exclusive lodge while being lobbied for millions of dollars.

His excuse that "Hey, I brought my own bag of marshmallows with me" just does not cut it. Is this the new ethical standard for Conservatives, that they can be lobbied by millionaires as long as they bring their own sleeping bag?

It is not okay. He has been busted once. Why is he still in cabinet?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is a typical question with a conspiracy theory and mud being thrown everywhere.

Oral Questions

I was clear: I went there on my own to Mr. Aubut's cabin. I went there on my own with my own equipment, and I was never lobbied before, during or after the trip.

After that, we all know the federal government did not get involved in coliseum. In that regard, we have no involvement in professional sport. That is the end of the story.

• (1450)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is not the end of the story, because the minister has already been busted once and the Conservatives are looking after him for two other investigations. Conservatives just do not seem to understand that there is actually an ethical guide that ministers must meet.

To help him, I would like to read a simple quote:

Does the minister not understand why the right thing to do is to resign?

Who said that? It was the Prime Minister when he was in opposition, when he had very strong views on the old Liberal gang breaking the rules.

When did they decide it is okay for Conservative ministers to act like the old sponsorship gang and blow ethical accountability out the window?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I went to Mr. Aubut's hunting cabin. I assumed my own costs. I went there on my own with my own equipment. There was no lobbying.

After the fact, there was no involvement by the Government of Canada in the coliseum in terms of funding, which the NDP favoured.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, each and every day members of the Canadian Forces do the jobs we ask of them, whether it is protecting Canadians at home from the effects of natural disasters or promoting Canadian ideals abroad.

Can the Minister of National Defence tell us what the government is doing to ensure that Canadian Forces members are receiving the fair compensation they deserve?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are responsibly managing the economy and making prudent choices in the upcoming budget.

Our government also recognizes and appreciates the remarkable contributions made by the Canadian Forces and their families every day. We are committed to ensuring that all Canadian Forces members receive some of the best compensation in the world for their hard work defending Canadian interests.

I am pleased to tell the House today that effective April 1, 2012, the Canadian Forces will receive a pay increase, similar that awarded to the federal public service recently.

As a government, we are committed to ensuring that our Canadian Forces members are provided with a rewarding career, outstanding training, new equipment, compensation, pay and benefits, and—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, clearly, this government misled Canadians about the F-35s.

The Associate Minister of National Defence keeps telling us that he will stay within the \$9 billion budget to replace the CF-18s. We now know that \$9 billion is not enough to purchase 65 F-35s. We also know that the F-35s do not even come close to meeting the minimum criteria set by this government. The government has not just misled Canadians, it has also misled our troops.

We have had enough of meaningless talking points. When will we get real answers? When will there be an actual tendering process, one that is credible and transparent?

[*English*]

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said many times and I am pleased to repeat, we will ensure that the replacement for the CF-18s will meet our standards and the needs of our air force.

To this end, Canada has not signed any agreement as yet to buy or purchase. We remain committed to the joint strike fighter program along with our partners. We will continue to act responsibly on all of these matters.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us see if we can follow this.

The Minister of National Defence says that the F-35 is the only plane that meets the mandatory requirements. His parliamentary secretary says it does not: it is a developmental project. The Associate Minister of National Defence says, yes, it does. But he is off looking for alternatives.

We know that the process has been rigged in favour of the F-35. My question is simply, how did they mess it up so badly?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the member opposite is entitled to make whatever criticisms he chooses, he is not entitled to invent his own facts. On that issue, once again he is wrong.

We remain committed to the joint strike fighter program. A budget has been allocated; a contract has not been signed. When all is done, we will ensure that the air force and Canadians receive the best quality for their money.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Talking about messing it up badly, Mr. Speaker, you should see their record on the environment, and it just gets worse.

The Conservatives want to use this budget to help their oil industry friends by gutting environmental protections, such as by clawing back first nations consultations, shutting Canadians out of environmental reviews and rubber stamping major projects without any consideration of the impacts.

The Conservatives are trying to bury their anti-environmental agenda deep in the budget where no one will see it.

Canadians want accountability and they want debate. Will the minister agree to propose these changes in a stand-alone bill?

• (1455)

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government makes no apologies for finding more cost-effective ways of protecting both the environment and jobs and the Canadian economy, but I did find a very interesting quote the other day. It says:

People in politics tend to see successes in terms of increasing the budget, but when I was minister of the environment, I reduced by 15 per cent the budget....

Who said that? The newly minted leader of the NDP.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Natural Resources has repeatedly and brazenly undermined the process reviewing the northern gateway pipeline project, actually attacking Canadians who had the audacity to stand up for our homes and our land, calling them radicals.

Now he is proposing a Republican-style rider in the budget that would further undermine the few environmental protections that Canadians have.

Is he planning to further undermine this process by changing the rules mid-stream, or will he finally respect the fact that when Canadians raise their voices in defence of their homes and their land, it does not make them radicals; it makes them Canadians.

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, resource development can be advanced while protecting the environment. We can generate hundreds of thousands of jobs, trillions of dollars in economic development, billions of dollars for governments to support social programs and, at the same time, make sure that every project is safe for Canadians and safe for the environment.

We can and we will. Why will the NDP not join us in this nation-making effort?

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my friend, the Associate Minister of National Defence.

I am still trying to sort out the contradictions here. The Prime Minister said there is a \$9 billion limit on the budget. That is the budget. We do not know what the price per plane is for the F-35s. It will certainly be more than the much vaunted number of \$75 million. We will not have 65 planes.

Therefore, my question for the Associate Minister of National Defence is, how will you square this circle? How can you help us clear up this situation? What planes will we get, at what cost and when will they be delivered?

Oral Questions

These are the questions that have—

The Speaker: I will just remind the hon. member for Toronto Centre to address questions through the chair and not directly at ministers.

The hon. Associate Minister of National Defence.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. associate minister has the floor.

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the hon. member opposite that we will find the best solution to replace our aging CF-18s—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The member for Toronto Centre has asked a question, the minister is answering it and the member for Toronto Centre's colleagues should let the minister answer it.

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Speaker, as indicated, Canada is a partner in a joint strike fighter program developing an aircraft.

We will continue to be committed to that program and when things are settled and according to the kinds of standards and expectations we have here in this country, a decision will be made as to what we will do next.

* * *

[Translation]

YOUTH

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the first time in seven years, the government will talk about young people in its budget. Unfortunately, that is because it is shutting down Katimavik, our biggest youth service program.

[English]

We know that the Conservative government does not care about empowering or investing in our youth, but does the minister realize that by cutting Katimavik he is also hurting thousands of community organizations in hundreds of towns across the country?

Every year because of Katimavik thousands of young Canadians get to serve their country, get to learn how to build a better Canada one community at a time. Apparently, that does not matter.

[Translation]

Will the minister be honest enough to admit that the government does not care about young people?

• (1500)

[English]

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have a strong record in supporting kids and that will continue.

Oral Questions

My colleague will have to wait for the budget tomorrow, but I know that he is very anxious to please Canadians. I think the best way for him to please Canadians would be on Saturday night when he gets into the ring, if he keeps his hands nice and low and keeps his chin nice and high, he will be giving Canadians the greatest show we have been waiting for.

* * *

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, earlier this week, there was one. Now there are two: two unilingual anglophone immigration board members in Montreal. Do I have to point out that Montreal is in Quebec, and that the Quebec nation is francophone? This situation is unacceptable not only on the surface, but at the core, because it makes the board members' work inefficient, questionable and perilous.

When will the government fix the problem and show this country's francophones the respect they deserve?

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

The Immigration and Refugee Board complies with the Official Languages Act. It holds hearings in the applicants' chosen official language before a board member who speaks that language.

In Montreal, 21 board members are bilingual, nine are unilingual francophones and two are unilingual anglophones. Thirty percent of applications are submitted in English, and those hearings are held in English. There is no problem in Montreal. The board provides services in the applicants' chosen language.

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member says there is no problem in Montreal. So why did the Supreme Court quash one decision?

Bilingualism is considered merely an asset when people are applying for the job. It should be an essential requirement for the Montreal office. In this kind of environment, language skills are extremely important. One cannot understand a case if one cannot read the file. That seems pretty straightforward to me.

When will the Conservatives respect both the letter and the spirit of the Official Languages Act?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the spirit and letter of the Official Languages Act require us to provide services in the official language of choice of Canadians, or refugee claimants in this case. There are nine unilingual francophones in the Montreal office.

Is he suggesting that we should dismiss the nine unilingual francophones? No, because Canada is a bilingual country. We respect the rights of francophones and anglophones, both the 30% of claimants in Montreal who file their claims in English, and the nine decision makers who are unilingual francophones.

[English]

HEALTH

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians across the country are concerned about drug shortages. These have been caused in large part by sole-source supply agreements entered into by provincial and territorial governments and their drug purchasers.

Could the Minister of Health please give the House an update on what she has been doing to deal with this very important issue?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member has pointed out, this is a difficult situation caused by sole-source drug supply agreements with provinces and territories. I have strongly encouraged them to consider alternate arrangements that provide for multiple suppliers in the future.

Health Canada has provided provinces and territories the names of companies in Canada that are already licensed to produce the drugs that are in shortage. We have approved six drugs and are expediting the review of more. We are working around the clock to play our part in dealing with the important issue. We have also offered the provinces access to the national emergency stockpile system.

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FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is not a fisheries group in Canada that supports the elimination of the owner-operator fleet separation policy. I introduced a motion to have the fisheries committee hear from the people who would suffer the most when these policies are removed.

Did the government vote this motion down because the inshore fishers have something that the corporate sector wants? Why is the government going to sacrifice communities in Quebec and Atlantic Canada just to satisfy corporate greed?

● (1505)

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member obviously has a crystal ball, but I do not.

The member opposite has been in the House for some 25 years and knows full well that committees answer to the House and that a committee's business is the committee's business.

As for the government's interest in the matter, as I said before, we are looking for input from fishermen to listen to their ideas about the future of the fishery.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADA POST CORPORATION

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is scandalous that more Canada Post corporate outlets are being closed. We have learned that one of the few remaining corporate outlets, on Boulevard Sainte-Foy in Longueuil, will soon close.

This bad decision has consequences for the people in my riding. They will have to travel as far as Brossard, or even to Montreal, to obtain postal services, and this is very worrisome for our seniors. It also means that jobs are in jeopardy.

Will the minister assume his responsibilities and maintain public services? Will he stop further job losses?

[English]

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to universal, effective and economically viable postal services for all Canadians. That is why we introduced the Canadian postal service charter and we are protecting all rural post offices from closure.

Canada Post is experiencing changes as the economy changes. Decisions have been made in some urban centres to realign post office hours, times and locations. However, may I say that they are working very hard and Canadians have never had better postal service than they do today.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the media is reporting that the Canadian government is requesting that Omar Khadr, convicted murderer and terrorist, be returned to the United States to serve out the rest of his sentence.

Could the Minister of Public Safety please advise the House and all Canadians on the progress of this file?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Omar Ahmed Khadr has pleaded guilty to very serious charges in the United States, including the murder of a medic. At this time, Canada has not received a formal application for transfer. If an application were received, it would be determined in accordance with the law. No decisions have been made at this time.

Let me be clear. Canada has not made a request for Omar Ahmed Khadr to be returned.

* * *

[Translation]

INDUSTRY

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first there was trouble at the White Birch mill; now Veyance Technologies, located in Quebec City for 60 years, may move to the U.S. This puts 115 jobs in jeopardy. However, a Quebec firm was interested in buying Veyance Technologies and keeping those jobs in Quebec City. If nothing is done, 115 jobs may be lost and exported to the United States.

Is the government waiting for all the good jobs to move to the United States before taking action, or will it take the lead and keep our jobs here?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we recently learned that the union has, fortunately, voted in favour of the company's most recent offer. I can confirm that the transaction can now be reviewed under the Investment Canada Act. There is no cause for speculation about this specific issue for the time being.

Routine Proceedings

AIR CANADA

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when Air Canada workers wanted to exercise their constitutional right to strike, the Conservatives did not hesitate to intervene and pass an unfair law. But when Air Canada disregards its legal obligations to keep the maintenance centre for its aircraft in Montreal and this results in the loss of over 2,000 jobs at Aveos, the Minister of Transport hides behind the pretext that this is a private company and washes his hands of the situation.

Rather than playing the role of a Conservative Pontius Pilate, will the minister enforce the law? If not, then he should resign immediately, for heaven's sake.

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member must know that 2,300 maintenance workers are still working for Air Canada. The business relationship between Aveos and Air Canada is in the private domain; it is between the two companies. We have said it many times, and I will say it again: the law is the law and, under that law, we will ensure that Air Canada respects the Air Canada Public Participation Act, as it did initially, and ensure that its overhaul centres remain in Montreal, Mississauga and Winnipeg. Air Canada can choose which company will do that work or whether it will do the work itself.

* * *

• (1510)

[English]

POINTS OF ORDER

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during statements by members today, I made a comment that was very inappropriate for the House and I apologize unreservedly for doing so.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for that.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the 2011 annual report of the Canadian Human Rights Commission.

[Translation]

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

Routine Proceedings

[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 three petitions.

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INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association respecting its participation in the first part of the 2012 ordinary session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe held in Strasbourg, France, January 23-27, 2012.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights in relation to its study on the state of organized crime in Canada.

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

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to comment on the report that was just presented on organized crime.

The New Democrats, since 2009, have been working collaboratively with other parties on the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights with the objective of recommending new strategies. There are, in fact, some 699 criminal organizations in Canada, 83% of which are engaged in illegal drugs, such as cocaine, cannabis and synthetic drugs, in that order. We have consistently promoted an effective and balanced approach to combatting organized crime.

In that regard, although we support most of the 35 recommendations in the report, we supported, along with the government, passing Bill C-2, the megatrials bill, in June 2011.

However, we do have some concerns about this report, which is why we have filed a supplementary report suggesting that the government has proven, unfortunately, that, with overreaching bills such as Bill C-10 and Bill C-30, it is putting overreaching ideology ahead of level-headed legislation.

We are opposed to the mandatory minimums proposed in the report and we are concerned about the lawful access provisions that support Bill C-10. We are concerned about the lack of judicial oversight recommended and the unnecessary expansion of powers that are contained in the report.

However, regardless of that, we do support, in general, the report but have filed a dissenting report.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the eighth report of the

Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights in relation to the main estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2013. The committee has studied the main estimates and reports the same.

● (1515)

HUMAN RESOURCES, SKILLS AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities in relation to "A Framework for Success: Practical Recommendations to Further Shorten the Foreign Qualification Recognition Process".

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts in relation to its study of chapter 2 G8 legacy infrastructure fund of the 2011 spring report of the Auditor General of Canada.

Pursuant to Standing Order 109 of the House of Commons the committee requests the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the official opposition, it behooves me to speak to this particular report and point out a couple of things that the Auditor General said about the G8 legacy fund, the border infrastructure fund. One is that the Auditor General said, "rules were broken" during his investigation of the G8 legacy fund, which was money that was pushed into the border infrastructure fund.

What we heard was Parliament saying one thing about where the money was but the reality of what happened to the money was altogether something else.

Even when some money was moved later on into the estimates, the Auditor General said, "...this is still not clear because it suggests that these projects were somehow related to border infrastructure, which was not the case". So, even after he had moved it once, he actually moved it again and still could not get it clarified.

More important, perhaps I should quote what the Auditor General said about documentation. One of the things we heard from the minister was that there was no documentation. We found out later on that there was a trail at the municipal level. The Auditor General said, "We did approach the minister's office to request any documentation that was available in the minister's office or in the constituency office to explain how the projects were selected. We received a small amount of documentation which wasn't directly relevant to the question of the project selection and we therefore concluded, as we did in the audit, that it didn't exist".

We then found out that was not true. There was some sort of trail of documentation and that ended up being what we found out through access to information at the municipal level.

I have been on the public accounts committee since the last Parliament and it is really disappointing that, in this particular case, we did not have the opportunity to interview the Auditor General personally on this particular chapter. Every other chapter we have ever done we have had that opportunity. That was denied the committee in this particular case, which is extremely unfortunate.

One of the recommendations we have, and we have a few, is to go back and revisit that chapter and have the Auditor General present so we can get a fulsome report and fulsome answers to all the questions we still have.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Restricted by the majority of the committee to being able to file a report or a dissenting report of just two pages in reply to the majority's report of the G8 legacy fund, it is quite regrettable that the Liberal Party of Canada had to file a dissenting report in the matter concerning the management and practices of the Government of Canada with regard to the G8 legacy fund.

Quite frankly, by restricting the dissenting reports to just two pages, I find that a denial of basic rights of members to speak their minds about issues affecting the governance and accountability of Canada.

What I also find very reprehensible, as my colleague just pointed out, the Auditor General, despite past practices of always being called—

The Speaker: I hate to stop the hon. member but I had recognized him on a point of order and I have not yet heard what his point of order may be. He may not realize it but only the official opposition can provide a dissenting report when reports are tabled. If he has a point of order I would like to hear it so I can rule on it and then we can move on.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: Mr. Speaker, the fact that the Auditor General was not invited to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts should be a matter that this entire Parliament is seized by. It is against convention and against our traditions. Therefore, I request an emergency debate.

The Speaker: The normal channels for requesting an emergency debate have not been followed, but if the member wants to write me a letter I can certainly look at the question.

• (1520)

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 104 and 114, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 17th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding membership at committees of the House.

If the House gives its consent, I intend to move concurrence in the 17th report later today.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources in relation to the main estimates for 2012-13.

Routine Proceedings

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the House gives its consent, I move that the 17th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, presented to the House earlier today, be concurred in.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PETITIONS

ASBESTOS

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions today.

I am honoured to present yet another petition today from my home town of Hamilton. Canadians are noticing that the government has completely abdicated its leadership role on all environmental matters. Specifically, the petition I am tabling today is calling on the government to ban, on an urgent basis, asbestos in all its forms, and to institute a just transition program for workers in the asbestos industry.

The petitioners express their regret that Canada continues to be one of the largest producers and exporters of asbestos and demand that the government stop the subsidies that continue to this day for asbestos. Moreover, they call on the government to stop blocking the international health and safety conventions designed to protect workers from asbestos, such as the Rotterdam Convention.

I am delighted that support for this ban keeps growing and I hope the government is listening to Canadians on this very important issue.

GASOLINE PRICES

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, petitions also keep pouring in from my riding calling on the government to take action on the price of gasoline by adopting my bill, Bill C-336.

The petitioners know they are getting hosed at the pumps but, as it stands now, they can only complain to each other because there is no official avenue through which they can seek redress.

The petitioners are calling for the speedy passage of my bill, Bill C-336, which would establish the oil and gas ombudsman. The ombudsman would be charged with providing strong and effective consumer protection to ensure that no big business can swindle, cheat or rip off hard-working Canadians.

The petitioners are demanding a meaningful vehicle for having their complaints taken seriously, with effective mechanisms for investigation and remediation to help consumers fight the squeeze.

Routine Proceedings

I just want to—

The Speaker: Order, please. I will stop the hon. member there. She has had the floor for a minute and a half now and there are other members who want to declare petitions.

The hon. member for Okanagan—Coquihalla.

WINE INDUSTRY

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, further to all party support that I have been honoured to receive in this House, I rise to present a duly certified petition of 157 signatures of people from my riding of Okanagan—Coquihalla who support my private member's bill, Bill C-311, to end wine prohibition in Canada.

Free trade in wine should not be a crime.

CHILD AND YOUTH NUTRITION PROGRAM

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to present this petition regarding access to healthy food, which is critically important for a child's development but is often limited for Canadian children who live in poverty.

Child and youth nutrition programs are a cost-effective way to encourage the development of lifelong healthy eating habits, support Canadian farmers and food producers in the development of local markets and reduce future health care costs.

Petitioners call upon Parliament to provide national leadership and support for child and youth nutrition programs through the Departments of Health and Agriculture, develop a child and youth nutrition strategy with stakeholders across the country and develop partnerships with farmers and food producers to stimulate economic development.

PUBLIC SERVICES

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, normally I would say that I am pleased to present a petition but I am saddened today because this petition contains 4,000 signatures of people who are very fearful of the cuts to public services because that is a major contributor to their security and safety.

The petitioners are calling upon the government to stand back from the proposed cuts in the budget, which we are hearing will be anywhere from \$4 billion to \$8 billion, that will reduce our public services and the workers' ability to take care of Canadian citizens.

As one can see, it is a comprehensive 137 pages with 4,061 signatures.

•(1525)

CRIMINAL CODE

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have before me a petition from hundreds of people across the country who are asking the government to request that Parliament amend the Criminal Code to decriminalize the selling of sexual services, criminalize the purchase of sexual services and provide support to those who desire to leave prostitution.

The second petition also addresses the issue of targeting the people who purchase sex in terms of the Nordic model and make the victims of sexual exploitation victims, not criminals.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I also have hundreds of petitions that have come forward requesting that the government put in a national action plan to support victims of human trafficking, which is critical. I am pleased to say that our government is in the process of doing that.

These petitions are in support of that national action plan.

HOUSING

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present two petitions. One petition is particularly timely as we look at what is on today's order paper. The hon. member for Shefford has put forward Motion No. 331 relating to housing.

The first petition is on point. It is from members of my community in Saanich—Gulf Islands, particularly from Salt Spring Island who recall that there used to be tax rules that encouraged the building of purpose-built rental units to become part of the affordable housing solution.

Supporting the recommendation of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the petitioners ask that we restore, perhaps in tomorrow's budget, the measures that would encourage purpose-built apartment units as rental housing.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the second petition I present this afternoon, I am so pleased to see that residents of Toronto, Saskatchewan, Winnipeg, as well as some from Vancouver, have banded together to encourage the House to insist on fair due process, no jumping to conclusions, or jumping to pipelines and supertankers in this case. The petitioners ask that the Government of Canada cease and desist from prejudging the matter and allow the voices of those who oppose supertankers to be heard. This relates to the Enbridge proposal.

VIETNAM

Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I stand today on behalf of many Calgarians to present a petition stating that the communist government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam continues to violate the basic human rights of its people.

The communist government arrests and detains its citizens whose only crime is to expose to the people of Vietnam the current situation of the country, namely, corruption and the Chinese occupation of the Paracel and Spratly islands. The communist government also arrests and detains religious dissidents whose only crime is practising their religion and promoting freedom of religion for the people of Vietnam, both Buddhists and Catholics. The communist government also arrests and detains political dissidents whose only crime is petitioning for political reform, justice and democracy for the people of Vietnam.

The petitioners request that our government call upon the Government of Vietnam for the release not only of the detainees, but all the prisoners of conscience in Vietnam.

41ST GENERAL ELECTION

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I present a petition that has been signed by a number of people from Manitoba regarding the robocalling that was done and the concerns that have been expressed by over 30,000 Canadians who have actually contacted Elections Canada.

The petitioners hope that the government would recognize the value of attempting to restore public confidence in the electoral system and allow for direct action by Elections Canada and, I would also suggest, by having a royal commission investigate the whole matter and come up with recommendations.

* * *

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.

* * *

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

● (1530)

[Translation]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie has given the Chair notice of a question of privilege.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

QUESTION Q-410

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I rise on a question of privilege related to question Q-410, which I submitted on December 14, 2011. You will recall that I already raised this question in a point of order on March 14, out of concern that the government would not provide a response to my question within the deadline of 45 sitting days, as per Standing Order 39(5). The deadline was Friday, March 16. Having received no indication from the government that it would provide an answer to my question, I am rising today to speak to this troubling matter.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that you look at the following three pieces of evidence when you review my request. First, I ask that you look at the question that I submitted to the government. Second, I ask that you look at the answer the government provided to my question.

Privilege

Third, I ask that you also look at the procedural aspects of this question, what procedural experts have said about the matter, and the troubling precedents being set with regard to written questions.

The question I asked concerned the office of religious freedom that the government had announced it was creating. In order to simplify the question for the government, the question was divided into 21 sub-questions, as is the norm for written questions. I will not read the entire question to the House, since you can find it in previous order papers. However, I will give you some examples of the level of specificity of the sub-questions.

For example, I asked, “when did the government decide to establish an Office of Religious Freedom and at whose request?”. I asked, “who was consulted regarding the creation of the office?”. I asked for the names, positions, and religious affiliations of the guests who attended consultations on the new office of religious freedom in October 2011. I asked what discussions were held at DFAIT about inviting Amnesty International and why this organization was not invited.

As you can see, Mr. Speaker, I asked specific questions to which there are certainly specific answers. The list of people who attended a meeting held months ago should be available. Nonetheless, on March 12, the government provided the following answer, which is worth reading aloud, especially since it is not very long. In fact, it is shorter than the question. The answer I was given is the following:

The promotion and protection of human rights is fundamental to Canada's foreign policy, and the Government of Canada believes strongly in the ability of all people to be free to practise their religion of choice. Canadians enjoy the rights and privileges that come with living in a free and democratic society in which human rights are respected. The government is also keenly aware of the struggles that religious minorities face around the world. During the Speech from the Throne on June 3, 2011, and again at the United Nations General Assembly, the Government of Canada committed to creating an office of religious freedom.

At this time, no formal announcement has been made and work is ongoing. It is expected that the office will focus on areas such as advocacy, analysis, policy development and programming related to protecting and advocating on behalf of religious minorities under threat; opposing religious hatred; and promoting Canadian values of pluralism and tolerance abroad. The budget for the office will be \$5 million per annum for the next 4 years. The government expects to have more to say about this important initiative shortly.

These are fine words, but they do not answer my questions. I would remind members that I had specific questions, such as who attended the October 11, 2011, meeting.

The government has made absolutely no effort to even attempt to answer the 21 sub-questions I submitted.

● (1535)

The government claims that it answered some of my sub-questions and that my dissatisfaction is merely a matter of opinion. I am not asking you to judge the quality or lack thereof of these minor elements. What I am asking you to do today, Mr. Speaker, is rule that the government's refusal to answer most of the sub-questions in my written question constitutes a violation of my rights as a member of Parliament.

According to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, page 517, the purpose of written questions is described as follows:

Privilege

...written questions are placed after notice on the Order Paper with the intent of seeking from the Ministry detailed, lengthy or technical information relating to "public affairs".

In Chapter 7 of her November 2004 report, entitled "Process for Responding to Parliamentary Order Paper Questions", the Auditor General wrote:

The right to seek information from the Ministry of the day and the right to hold that Ministry accountable are recognized as two of the fundamental principles of parliamentary government.

Written questions are one of the tools that Canadians, via their elected representatives, can use to force the government to be accountable.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that you will consider this matter seriously and recognize that it involves a *prima facie* breach of my privileges as a member of Parliament. None of the information that I requested in my question is to be found in the government's response. A comparison of the question and the answer in the March 12 *House of Commons Debates* shows that the answer is, in fact, shorter than the question.

On March 14, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons told the House:

What the government has done is respond to the member's question within the 45-day time limit. I think the answer is self-explanatory, which is that there will be further information coming in a short period of time. We expect that should satisfy the member's concerns.

Yet he went on to say that:

Further information will be forthcoming and it should be done soon in an appropriate period of time.

I have no doubt that, in the coming weeks, months and years, the government will come up with other talking points on the office of religious freedom, but I would argue that it has not responded, nor is it ready to respond, to the specific questions I asked in Q-410, questions that it could have responded to, since it had the information. I believe this constitutes a breach of my privileges and an insult to all members.

I would like to refer to a Speaker's ruling from December 16, 1980, found on page 5797 of the *House of Commons Debates*. The Speaker stated:

...it would be bold to suggest that no circumstances could ever exist for a *prima facie* question of privilege to be made where there was a deliberate attempt to deny answers to an hon. member.

I would also refer to the twenty-first edition of Erskine May, which describes contempt as follows:

...any act or omission which obstructs or impedes either House of Parliament in the performance of its functions, or which obstructs or impedes any member or officer of such House in the discharge of his duty, or which has a tendency, directly or indirectly, to produce such results may be treated as contempt even though there is no precedent of the offence.

I would like to emphasize the word "omission".

The government can try to muddy the waters on this by repeating that it has already answered my question, but in fact it has not.

Mr. Speaker, I am simply asking you to examine my question, look at the minister's response and reach a decision. If you do find a *prima facie* case that my parliamentary privileges have been breached, I will move the appropriate motion in due course.

● (1540)

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member has made much of the answer being shorter than the question. My response here may be somewhat shorter than her intervention as well.

However, the rules here are quite clear and spelled out in our authority for Standing Orders, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, Second Edition, O'Brien and Bosc. At page 522, we find the following, "There are no provisions in the rules for the Speaker to review government responses to questions."

I will say that again. "There are no provisions in the rules for the Speaker to review government responses to questions." This is, of course, what you, Mr. Speaker, are being asked to do. It goes on to say:

Nonetheless, on several occasions, Members have raised questions of privilege in the House regarding the accuracy of information contained in responses to written questions; in none of these cases was the matter found to be a *prima facie* breach of privilege. The Speaker has ruled that it is not the role of the Chair to determine whether or not the contents of documents tabled in the House are accurate nor to "assess the likelihood of an Hon. Member knowing whether the facts contained in a document are correct".

That is not the role of the chair. It is set out quite clearly here, though speakers have in the past provided some helpful advice. I notice the member did read the entire answer in, and it was very lengthy, which gives some indication of how long the question was.

There were very good reasons why some parts of the question were not responded to. The government has stated orally in the House that much of what was asked was premature. Such information did not exist. The helpful advice that has been provided by speakers in the past might be the kind of advice you, Mr. Speaker, would give again, as indicated here in footnote 221, "The Speaker has also suggested that if a Member is not satisfied with a response, the Member could resubmit the question for placement on the Order Paper."

The question could be resubmitted in a different form to recognize changing situations as the office is being evolved and developed. However, quite clearly here, there is no role for you, Mr. Speaker, in assessing the adequacy of the answer here.

The same, of course, is the situation for questions in the House. That does not prevent members of the opposition from asking questions again that they have asked in the past. They seem to do that repeatedly. That would seem to be an invitation that has been offered in the past.

Quite clearly there is no role in assessing the adequacy of the answer. I think the answer was a quite full and lengthy one as it was read in the House. As the office is established by the Department of Foreign Affairs over time, more information will obviously be available in response to future questions.

The Speaker: I thank both members for their contributions and will get back to the House in due course.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

FINANCIAL SYSTEM REVIEW ACT

Hon. Peter Van Loan (for the Minister of Finance) moved that Bill S-5, An Act to amend the law governing financial institutions and to provide for related and consequential matters, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by asking for unanimous consent to split my time with the member for Etobicoke Centre.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to allow the parliamentary secretary to split his time?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to speak to Bill S-5, the financial system review act at third reading. This bill would reinforce stability in Canada's financial sector, fine-tune the consumer protection framework and adjust the regulatory framework to new developments.

Since the onset of the global financial crisis of 2008, our government has remained committed to strengthening the framework overseeing the financial sector. Our focus has been to provide the best consumer protection environment possible, one in which there is competition, information is disclosed and consumers are able to make informed choices. Bill S-5 does just that.

Bill S-5 proposes to improve the consumer protection framework by enhancing the supervisory powers of the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada, FCAC. FCAC is mandated with ensuring that federally regulated financial institutions adhere to the consumer provisions of the legislation set out to govern them. In addition, FCAC is the government's lead agency on financial education and literacy. It has moved forward with an array of excellent initiatives in recent years. FCAC has developed innovative tools to help Canadian consumers, such as a mortgage calculator that quickly determines mortgage payments and the potential savings resulting from early payments.

FCAC has also been instrumental in leveraging and coordinating private sector and voluntary sector initiatives on financial literacy already under way across Canada. Financial literacy among Canadians will pay dividends for future generations. That is why, in budget 2009, we established the task force on financial literacy, to make recommendations on a cohesive national strategy to improve financial literacy in Canada.

The task force had 13 members drawn from the business and education sectors, community organizations and academia. The task force delivered its final report, "Canadians and Their Money: Building a brighter financial future", on February 9, 2011. It outlined 30 recommendations to improve the financial literacy of Canadians. I am pleased to note that the proposed financial literacy leader legislation before Parliament now responds to a key task force recommendation for the need for dedicated leadership. That legislation, as the name suggests, would provide the framework

Government Orders

for the appointment of a financial literacy leader. This financial literacy leader would be mandated to work with stakeholders to support financial literacy initiatives and would continue the progress achieved by the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada.

Informed consumers are the very foundation of a solid financial system. Indeed, a country's prosperity is ultimately the sum of the financial successes and related decisions of all its households. However, we have done more.

In 2009, our government acted to protect Canadians who use credit cards. We want to ensure that Canadians understand their obligations in advance of signing up for and using these purchasing instruments. To that end, the measures we introduced, which are in effect today, mandated clear and simple information on credit card application forms and contracts, and clear and timely advance notice of changes in rates and fees. This initiative provides Canadian consumers with precisely the kind of improved financial information that leads to better decision making.

Also, to protect consumers, in August 2010, we put into effect the code of conduct for the credit and debit card industry. The code was developed in consultation with small business. Under the code, merchants will be provided with clear information regarding fees and rates, given advance notice of any new fees and fee increases, able to cancel contracts without penalty should fees rise or new fees be introduced, and given new tools to promote competition and in particular the freedom to accept credit payments from a particular network without the obligation to accept debit payments and vice versa.

This code has been widely applauded, especially among small business. I will quote at length what the Canadian Federation of Independent Business had to say. It stated:

The Code of Conduct's biggest achievement has been to protect Canada's low-cost flat-fee debit system.... the Code's other big accomplishment is providing merchants with some power in their relationship with credit card companies, banks and card processing companies.

Merchants have new powers under the Code that have helped them achieve tangible results in their dealings with the industry. This simply wouldn't have happened without the Code.

• (1545)

I encourage all members to take the time to review the code and discover how it will contribute to a better system for both merchants and consumers. Before I conclude, let me very quickly highlight some of the other measures in today's legislation which, I believe, other speakers will address in greater detail.

Government Orders

Bill S-5 would update financial institution legislation to promote financial stability and ensure Canada's financial institutions continue to operate in a competitive, efficient and stable environment. It would improve the ability of regulators to share information officially with international counterparts. It would change the priority status of segregated fund policies in insolvency situations that would facilitate timely transfer, consistent with life and health insurance policies. It would clarify that Canadians are able to cash government cheques under \$1,500 free of charge at any bank in Canada. It would promote competition and innovation by enabling co-operative credit associations to provide technology services to a broader market. It would amend the Payment Clearing and Settlement Act to remove the requirement that there must be at least one bank involved.

In all, the measures proposed by the bill would further strengthen our system by reinforcing stability in the financial sector, fine-tuning the consumer protection framework and adjusting the regulatory framework to adapt to new developments.

Canadians should be justifiably proud of our financial services sector. It employs over 750,000 in good, well-paying jobs. It represents about 7% of Canada's GDP. It is a world leader in the use of information technology.

Over the past four years, the World Economic Forum has ranked our banking system as the soundest in the world. *Forbes* magazine has ranked Canada number one in its annual review of the best countries to do business. Five Canadian financial institutions were named to Bloomberg's most recent list of the world's strongest banks, more than any other country.

Recently, a Financial Stability Board peer review praised the government's response to the global financial crisis. It highlighted the resilience of Canada's financial system, calling it a model for other countries. The FSB review said that "the strength of Canada's economy and its financial system meant that no Canadian financial institution failed or required government support in the form of a capital injection or debt guarantees during the global financial crisis."

By updating the financial legislation framework, we would continue to ensure that Canada's financial institutions operate in a competitive, efficient and stable environment that would help Canada maintain its well-earned reputation as a global leader in financial services.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for the time I was given to participate in today's debate and to recommend the timely passage of Bill S-5.

● (1550)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed the member's speech on Bill S-5. The concern we have had on this side of the House is how improvised the Bill S-5 process has been.

This is something the government knew about years in advance, the revisions of the Bank Act. It did not make it public and did not call for real, sincere public input into Bill S-5. It was brought forward by the Senate first. It was brought into the House of Commons at a late date and the government did not allow the finance committee to do a thorough vetting.

Of course, consumer groups are very concerned because no issues were able to be raised in any fulsome manner with these revisions to the Bank Act. Now we are pressing for a deadline. We have to get this bill through in the next few days.

My question to the member is simply this: Why did the government botch this process? Why did it improvise all the way along, so we are now moving to rush the bill through Parliament to meet a deadline that the government knew about years in advance?

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased that the NDP member actually stood up and asked a question on financial literacy. He is quite right, this is mandatory legislation. The premise of his question is false. As he should know, we did extensive consultations. The process was on September 20, 2010. The government launched the five year review of the federal financial institution legislation. The government invited the views of all Canadians on how to improve our financial system. Approximately 30 submissions were received from a range of stakeholders. Everyone had the opportunity to contribute.

The proposed bill takes into account the concerns of the major interest groups, including consumer groups, stakeholder and policy-holder groups and financial sector industry associations.

I think we have done a very good job here. I think this is something all of us can be proud of. We can be proud of our financial institutions because, as I said in my speech, we have been number one. That is something all Canadians should be proud of.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to follow-up on that question. What we have witnessed over the last number of months, since the Conservatives have had a majority government, is they tend to want to prevent and downplay the importance of procedures in the House in allowing for adequate debate and so forth. As has been pointed out, we have known about the need for the bill for a long time. It was interesting that the Conservatives chose to introduce it through the Senate as opposed to the House of Commons.

This bill comes up every four or five years under review. Could the member affirm if this is the first time it has been introduced through the Senate? If so, why did the government choose to go through the Senate as opposed to the House?

● (1555)

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, as my colleague should know, we are mandated to review it. It is mandatory legislation and it can be through either the Senate or the House of Commons. As the member says, we are a majority government and we have been busy doing the work Canadians are expecting us to do. As opposed to other governments in the past that liked to dither and waste time in the House and in the Senate, we are committed to following through on commitments to Canadians.

Government Orders

Our financial sector is the best financial sector in the world, and this needs to be done by April 20. We are committed to getting it done on time and we are very open to anybody who wants to have input into it. We have had a good consultation process.

As I said, our government is moving forward on all these things because we want Canadians to understand the importance of financial literacy. We want them to have the tools so they can save into the future. This is about the economy and jobs. That is what we are committed to, that is what we ran on and that what we will continue to do.

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am thankful to speak to the third reading stage of Bill S-5, financial system review act.

I thank the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health for his comments, especially those on financial literacy. They are a cornerstone for all Canadians to understand their institutions. This would help the jobs and economy of our country to continue to grow.

The bill is significant legislation because, although it is purely technical, it would guarantee the long-standing strength and security of Canada's financial institutions. Our government will make a series of changes to various legislation that govern Canada's financial system, including the Canadian Payments Act, about which I will speak in greater detail in just a few moments.

First, I want to emphasize for members of the House, and Canadians watching at home, that the Financial System Review Act is a mandatory and routine legislation. Canada's financial system is the safest and most secure in the world, and that is a direct result of mandatory five-year reviews. That kind of vigilance has been absolutely critical to maintaining our economic strength in our financial institutions. As the hon. member before me pointed out, much of the world has lauded that, understands that and has given Canada credit for it. Thanks to the greatest finance minister on the planet, the hon.—

An hon. member: Paul Martin

Mr. Ted Opitz: No, absolutely not.

However, that is why we have our system. In fact, it is a long-standing tradition in Canada to conduct mandatory five-year reviews of Canada's financial sector legislation. I should point out that this most recent review process was officially launched in September 2010, when our Conservative government launched the public consultation process open to all Canadians.

I am sure most members of the House are familiar with the World Economic Forum, which has ranked Canada as having the soundest banks in the world for four years running. What is more, Canada's safe and secure financial system is the envy of the world.

I will quote from the United States Congressional Research Service report which explains how Canadian banks offer a model to the United States and other countries on how to avoid a future financial market crisis. It states:

Canada's financial system, in particular, garnered attention, because it seemed to be more resistant to the failures and bailouts that have marked banks in the United States and Europe...

As my hon. colleagues are no doubt aware, Canada's credit unions offer important and valuable services as part of our banking sector. Indeed, more than five million Canadians and business owners are the grassroots shareholders of co-operative financial services in Canada and one in three Canadians is a member of a credit union or *caisse populaire*.

In recent years, our Conservative government has demonstrated its commitment to credit unions by supporting a federal credit union charter to accommodate growth and expansion of the Canadian credit union system. These actions will ensure that those credit unions, which choose to pursue business ventures out of the province, will not be constrained by outdated rules on provincial incorporation. Furthermore, this will also give credit unions a means of diversifying sources of funding and spreading their geographic risk exposure. Similarly, in order to provide federal credit unions with a greater leverage of the Canadian Payments Association, today's legislation would amend the Canadian Payments Act so that credit unions would be classified under the co-operative class in the act instead of the bank class.

At the same time, credit unions will still employ the long-standing, well-understood and robust governance, liquidity, clearing and settlement frameworks in use today. While this may sound like nothing more than a technical change, it is nevertheless fundamentally important. This change would continue to promote a level playing field within the financial sector which would foster competition among players and would ensure a stronger, more stable overall system.

This is what the Credit Union Central of Canada, the national association for credit unions of Canada, had to say about this modification. It said:

—we want to note our support for the proposed amendments...Placing the federal credit union in the cooperatives class will preserve and strengthen the credit union system representation at the CPA. It will ensure that a federal credit union will be represented by a director, who speaks for the interests of cooperative financial institutions in CPA matters. A strong advocate at the CPA is important for the credit union system's ability to advocate on behalf of credit unions and to continue to operate payments facility efficiently and cost effectively, which has a direct impact on overall credit union system competitiveness.

I will remind everybody that CPA is the Canadian Payments Act.

● (1600)

I am certain all members of the House would be in agreement that a stronger credit union system can benefit all Canadians.

Finally, as I mentioned at the outset of my remarks, I would like to speak to a piece of the financial system review act that would make improvements to Canada's payments system, something Canadians deal with almost each and every day. Indeed, every year, Canadians make 24 billion payments, which in total are worth more than \$44 trillion. These payments allow us to run our businesses, sustain our households and allow governments to fund essential programs.

Government Orders

Canadians use various payments instruments to purchase goods and services to make financial investments and to transfer funds from one person to another. These instruments include cash, cheques, debit and credit cards. With the exception of cash, payment instruments have typically necessitated a claim on a financial institution such as a bank, credit union or *caisse populaire*. Therefore, banks and credit unions must make arrangements to transfer funds among themselves, either on their own or on their customer's behalf.

A payments system is set on instruments, procedures and rules used to transfer these funds. In Canada our national systems for clearing and settlement of payments are run by the Canadian Payments Association, or the CPA, a not-for-profit organization of federally regulated financial institutions.

Our government knows that no modern economy can reliably function without a payments system that is sophisticated and secure. However, the payments landscape is changing. For example, experience in Canada and abroad since the 1990s demonstrates that clearing and settlement systems do not always include banks as direct participants. That is why Bill S-5 seeks to amend the Payment Clearing and Settlement Act to remove the requirement that there must be at least one bank involved in a payments transaction. These new rules will allow more flexibility in establishing systems to clear complex financial instruments like over the counter derivatives, or OTCs. This adjustment will permit the Bank of Canada to monitor payments that could pose systemic risks to the financial system.

Canada's leadership in reforming the global financial system through membership and international organizations, such as the G20, is well-known and a source of pride for Canadians. What Canadians may not know is that one important commitment we have made to our G20 partners is that all our OTCs will be cleared through central counter parties by 2012. This is an important step for the resilience and stability of our financial system.

To meet our G20 commitments, it is critical that Canadian prudential and market conduct regulators have the necessary authority, tools and information to regulate the Canadian OTC derivatives market on an ongoing basis. This means coordinating activities across current federal and provincial jurisdictions as well as with foreign regulators.

This is the kind of evolutionary change that demonstrates the importance of regular reviews in our legislative framework to maintain Canada's leadership in financial services. For these reasons, I urge the members to support passage of this largely technical but immensely important bill, which would help to ensure the continued functioning of Canada's payments system.

•(1605)

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have raised this issue before in debate on Bill S-5. The matter came up recently this week in the media regarding the Ombudsman for Banking Services and Investment, which is a voluntary dispute resolution organization that was set up back in 2002. Two of the big major banks have withdrawn from that organization and no longer participate in it. The ombudsman has said that has effectively made the organization almost useless.

Could the hon. member explain what the government will do to ensure there is the kind of independent analysis and dispute resolution for these matters that was normally provided by that organization?

Mr. Ted Opitz: Mr. Speaker, I did not hear that direct comment in the media at the time. However, nothing here is invalidated, so I reject the premise of the hon. member's question. As I indicated in my speech, there are independent bodies that provide this advice.

We have consulted widely with Canadians as well as to what they want in this legislation, including all the credit unions and *caisses populaires*. Those independent factors and experts in the industry are available to us to refer to and to provide comment on this at any time.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, I would like to follow up on the point I made about the Ombudsman for Banking Services and Investments. There was an article in the *Globe and Mail* on March 27.

The organization was set up to provide independent complaint-handling dispute resolution on behalf of customers and clients of the banks. It was to be dealt with in an independent manner. It has been clearly stated that in fact the organization's effectiveness has been lost because two of the big banks are no longer participating. It is a problem when customers and consumers do not have the opportunity to receive an unbiased independent review of their particular complaints. The minister and parliamentary secretary said that they were going to do something about it, but nothing has transpired.

Why does the member think that an independent arbiter representing customers and consumers is not a good idea?

Mr. Ted Opitz: Mr. Speaker, nobody has said that independence is not a good idea in the financial field. It is there and the ombudsman remains in his position. It is essentially the same question the member asked me a moment ago and the answer remains the same. There is independence in the structure. Consumers still have a right to redress and recourse, and that will be provided throughout the process.

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to commence debate for the official opposition this afternoon on Bill S-5. Our finance critic will be participating in the debate later on.

At each stage of the bill it we have said that we will be supporting it. We tried to make some amendments at the committee stage. We thought they would make proper adjustments to the various changes that have been made. We thought they would add to the bill and would not in any way detract from it or cause any problems. We wanted to ensure that the scope of the minister's approval was properly reflected to represent the interests not just of the banking industry, but also took into consideration the concerns of the country's economy as a whole. Unfortunately, those amendments were not deemed to be acceptable and they were voted down.

Government Orders

Nonetheless, we recognize that this is an important process in respect of the Canadian financial system. Some would say it represents the strength of the financial system that we have built into the law a periodic review of the Bank Act every five years. The government will take time to go through this process and ensure that the people participating in financial services in the country are being properly represented and also ensure that the agents, the bankers, the operators, the financial institutions, are operating correctly.

There is no question of the strength of the Canadian banking system. Its ability to withstand the economic chaos which the United States, Iceland, Europe, and various countries within the global community experienced in 2008 was because of the fact that historically over generations this country has developed proper and standard regulation.

In the 1990s under the Liberals, there was an attempt to deregulate the financial industry, to open up our financial institutions to foreign control, but Canadians spoke up and said that was not the way they wanted to go forward. I was glad to see that happen.

It causes me some concern when I hear members opposite in the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party take credit for the state of Canada's financial system. They want to take credit for the fact that it is in good shape. I would suggest it is not the Conservatives and the Liberals alone, it is not the people in this House alone who have made the wise decisions. In large part, it is Canadians, the people who send us to this place who let us know how they think their financial system should be regulated, that they want less speculation and more control and more conservative management of the system. That is a good thing. That is something we should acknowledge and respect.

● (1610)

While this review is an important strength of the banking system, we think that this time around in particular, the government missed an opportunity to make some changes that were sorely needed. We have talked about the measures to reinforce demutualization regulation to prevent predatory practices, measures that could enhance the co-operative credit movement as financial institutions that prioritize serving their communities, as opposed to short-sighted speculation and exorbitant executive bonuses, and more comprehensive consumer protection measures.

For example, we look at the problems that are facing consumers as a result of exorbitant ATM fees and hidden fees in a whole myriad of banking services. We would like to see full and complete disclosure of fees that are charged to Canadians who use the banks and other financial institutions in this country. Unfortunately, the government decided not to do that. When members opposite get to their feet and speak to this legislation, it is too bad that all they want to do is boast and take credit for the strength of the financial system. All Canadians should be proud of Canada's financial system.

We have to pay close attention to ensure we do not go down the wrong road, that we do not miss things, that we do not disrupt the rules and regulations that are in place in order to provide protection and sound governance.

In that regard, the member who spoke earlier suggested that there was wide consultation with Canadians across the country. That could

not be further from the truth. There were requests for participation and consultation. It was by invitation only. I believe that 32 submissions were made and that was it. Even all of those were not made public. As I said in debate at report stage, members talk about this being a technical bill and that we need to recognize it is too detailed for Canadians. That shows a level of disrespect for Canadians which they do not deserve. In Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, for example, there are a lot of constituents whom I have talked with about the need for consumer protection and for greater protection against demutualization. Constituents of mine and Canadians in general know a great deal about these issues. These issues are not too technical for them.

This bill and any review of financial institutions, of the Bank Act, would benefit greatly from a comprehensive, exhaustive consultation with ordinary Canadians. Maybe then members opposite would have a greater appreciation for the challenges and concerns Canadians are facing, and not just the executives of banks and financial institutions. Banks are making tens of billions of dollars in profits every year, and executives are making millions of dollars in annual salaries and bonuses, while consumers whenever they have contact with a financial institution, are being nickel-and-dimed at every opportunity. That causes some concern.

● (1615)

I think that if we had an open process that provided Canadians with the opportunity to share their opinions, knowledge, and experience with the members opposite, it would be of considerable value.

It was in that regard that I raised a couple of questions with the member who spoke before me, and have talked about this before. I am concerned about the Ombudsman for Banking Services and Investments, a voluntary organization established in 2002 as a result of discussions among government, industry and consumer groups to improve consumer protection and financial services. It was established as a result of section 455 of the Bank Act, which provides all sorts of opportunities to establish dispute resolution processes.

However, these processes are in the complete control of the financial institutions. The whole idea of the Ombudsman for Banking Services and Investments was to have a voluntary organization that was independent. It was set up as an independent service for conflict resolution, with the condition that all banks participate. It was set up to establish procedures for dealing with complaints made by persons who had requested or received products or services in Canada from a bank.

Through the Bank Act each institution has the opportunity to have that kind of service. While that is all good, what the banks, government and consumer groups have recognized is that it is not good enough. That is why the service I referred to was set up. Again, it is not mandatory but voluntary and, unfortunately, two of Canada's largest banks, RBC and TD, left that service.

Government Orders

When I raised questions with the banking association representative at committee, he told me that it was okay because each bank had its own service and own individuals responsible for dealing with complaints. I am not suggesting for a second that he was engaging in any kind of misrepresentation. It was just the situation, and I appreciate the fact that that is what he said and what the banks are doing. Good for them. Unfortunately, it was determined back in the early 2000s that it was not good enough: Consumers and government recognized that there had to be something more, that there had to be an independent body.

I also raised this question at committee with the parliamentary secretary. I was told that the minister intended to bring forward and set up some other kind of independent service. The government has been saying that now for upwards of a year. Even the banks are wondering what the government will do in this regard.

It is all about independence, consumer representation, fairness, and ensuring that consumers have appropriate representation when dealing with the banks.

● (1620)

As I said, the financial institutions in this country operate within a regulatory framework that provides them with a great deal of protection against competition and their services being challenged and so on. Unfortunately, this approach does not provide consumers with the same level of support, frankly, that my colleagues and I on this side would like to see.

I recognize that the government has gone some distance in fulfilling its responsibility to conduct this review, but the way it did so was to wait until this fall. The government knew that the review was coming forward but waited until the fall to bring forward Bill S-5. It did not introduce it here in the elected chamber for debate and discussion, but in the Senate. That is not to say that senators have not provided some valuable input, but this is the elected chamber. This is where legislation should at least begin. We have been imbued with the concerns, the wishes and the advice of our constituents, and we bring that to bear in debate. We did not have the opportunity to do so.

In short, the bill was discussed, debated and went through some process within the Senate. We did not see it until, I believe, early this year. We have not had much time to deal with it. We know that it has to pass here by April 20 in accordance with the regulations.

If there had been matters that were particularly egregious and we had put up a stink or had wanted to engaged in lengthy debate on them, we would have been accused of putting the whole process in jeopardy as the deadline would be missed. The pressure would have been on.

● (1625)

As a result of the way it was introduced and the timelines used, we did not have the opportunity to have a fulsome discussion with Canadians and in the House on the amendments that we wanted to introduce. That is unfortunate. I believe that very much underlines the way the government tends to view this chamber and the democratic process. We see that here and we see it in committee, as the government is in a hurry. While it was only elected by 39% of the population, it feels that every Canadian out there believes, accepts

and agrees with everything it says. The government will not tolerate any conflict, any discussion or opposition. That is unfortunate.

As we know, 60% of Canadians did not vote for the Conservatives. In much of what they told Canadians in the election, Conservatives assured Canadians, for example, that they would not attack their pensions, and yet they are now doing that. The government made commitments not to attack public services, but has been doing that since. The budget is coming down tomorrow and Canadians are going to see firsthand that what the government said to them to get elected was completely to the contrary of what it would do.

That is another slap in the face of democracy and the kind of issue we have been dealing with.

● (1630)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): 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 Scarborough—Rouge River, Post-Secondary Education; the hon. member for Manicouagan, Aboriginal Affairs; the hon. member for Windsor West, Canada-U.S. Relations.

[*English*]

Questions and comments. The hon. member for Brossard—La Prairie.

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his speech and his great work. It is a pleasure to have him on the finance committee, where he has been a very good addition to us as the deputy finance critic.

We have not had much time to look at this in the finance committee, and I deplore the fact that the government had really improvised with this.

What could the government have done better in protecting consumers from the banks?

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, the member is a co-chair of the finance committee and our critic for national revenue. He has been doing an extraordinary job at staying focused and keeping all of us focused on these important issues.

I spoke earlier about the fact that I thought the government could do a lot more. We thought the government could do a lot more in providing for consumer protection in terms of ATM fees, full disclosure of bank charges, and making sure that the ombudsman and financial services organization was properly established. As I mentioned, according to the ombudsman, right now the organization is basically about to be disbanded because two of the big banks have pulled out.

Those are the kinds of consumer protections that I believe should have been dealt with in this bill.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed the member's remarks in the main, but he made a fairly major error when it came to talking about the previous Liberal government's position on the banks. He indicated that we wanted to deregulate the banks. We did not. In fact, we ensured that we did not.

Government Orders

I sat on a committee of Liberal backbenchers when the whole bank merger issue arose and when the banks themselves, the CEOs of the banks, wanted to expand into the U.S. and merge with a lot of the American banks, which would have caused us the same kind of turmoil that befell the Americans. Along with quite a number of other colleagues, I sat on that internal committee and we held hearings across the country. We met with the banks and made recommendations to Prime Minister Chrétien and Minister of Finance Martin. They accepted our recommendations and we did not allow the banks to deregulate. That is why we have the sound financial system we have today, which the Prime Minister tries to take credit for.

Therefore, I would like to correct the record in that regard for the member.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comment by the member for Malpeque. The point is that under a great deal of pressure from within and without, the government he refers to was forced to back off from that decision.

It was as a result of Canadians standing up and saying they did not want to go in that direction that the Liberal government finally came to its senses and recognized the right way to go. That is why I have concerns, whether it is the Liberals or the Conservatives who are trying to take credit for a system developed over generations as a result of Canadians saying we need to support these standards and ensure they stay in place.

•(1635)

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to the hon. member's speech, since his knowledge in this area far surpasses my own.

I agree with his criticism about the minimal amount of public consultation—the Conservatives could have easily done better than making a few telephone calls—and, after reading various documents, I would like to get his opinion.

I would like to make a comparison, even though sometimes comparisons can be clumsy. There was a time when the decision was made to separate church and state because these two entities should not sleep in the same bed. But, when I read that decisions on major foreign acquisitions will now be made based on ministerial approval rather than on approval by the Superintendent of Financial Institutions, it seems as though we are back to square one and that these two things should not sleep in the same bed either.

I would like the hon. member to clarify his position on that.

[English]

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely correct. It is a concern that my colleagues and I raised in committee and, likewise, in debate in the House. We told the minister, the parliamentary secretary and the members opposite that we were concerned with the level of involvement of the minister, that the final decision would be left with the minister with absolutely no constraints. We suggested, on a few occasions, that we needed to introduce, at the very least, more broad conditions that relate to the economy of this country and the circumstances facing Canadians that the minister would need to take into consideration when this

decision was being made. Unfortunately, the government decided that the minister will be right and will have all the power in this respect.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are speaking in the context of the aftermath of the U.S. financial crisis and, in order to avoid what happened there, we need to avoid doing what the Americans did. They turned their mortgage system into a social program over a 30 year period, during which the government first invented sub-prime mortgages, encouraged banks to offer them, ensured those mortgages through Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae and then, ultimately, compelled by force of law financial institutions to provide those sub-prime mortgages to literally millions of Americans who could never dream of repaying them. This represented a \$4 trillion government invasion into the private sector that distorted the entire U.S. mortgage market and had the effect of lending millions of dollars to people, who could never repay the money, so they could live in homes they could never afford to buy.

I wonder if the hon. member would agree that we need to be vigilant to ensure that CMHC and other arms of the Government of Canada never grow into the enormous interventionist beast that the American government became, which brought about the U.S. financial collapse.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of things I would say in this respect. One is that the government does not seem to want to ever acknowledge that it spent \$75 billion buying suspect mortgages from CMHC. We need to remember that the government also waded in when there was trouble. It was not as bad as it was in the United States but there were troubles here and the government has not acknowledged it.

Number two is in regard to CMHC. CMHC is an organization that has an opportunity to play a major role in the development of desperately needed social and affordable housing in this country and the government has not properly supported that organization, continues to turn its back on it and on Canadians from one end of this country to the other who cannot afford a decent place to live, and that is a shame.

•(1640)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will begin by providing some clarity on what is a bit confusing at times, I am sure, for many.

Whether it is members from the Conservative Party proclaiming that we have the best Minister of Finance in the world, implying that is the current Minister of Finance. I hear a member applauding but he might want to hold his applause for a little while on that particular point. Then we have the New Democrats who believe they can rewrite history, not by saying it once or twice but even going beyond that. The other day we heard a New Democrat saying that it was the New Democrats who saved the banking industry in Canada. They may be a little more generous by implying that there might have been some Canadians also involved.

Government Orders

However, I do think it is important to get the record as clear as possible so members can be a little more forthright about what history actually was back in the 1990s. At the time, I was a member of the Manitoba legislature and I recall the debate on deregulations versus having a regulated banking industry. I had met with TD Bank representatives at a special event where there was a discussion on it. Therefore, I am somewhat familiar with the issue and, like many Canadians, have followed it.

It is important to recognize that there was a great deal of pressure being applied around the world by the financial industry which wanted to see deregulation and many countries succumbed to that.

In Canada, Jean Chrétien, the prime minister at the time; the minister of finance, Paul Martin; and the cabinet were able to resist the pressure that many governments caved in to. They recognized the value of having a regulated financial industry with respect to the banking industry specifically.

Because of the efforts and actions of those two individuals in the cabinet at the time, we have what has been classified as one of the greatest and healthiest banking industries in the world. It had nothing to do with the current Minister of Finance or the Prime Minister.

The first major policy announcement from the government related to the banking industry was that we would allow for 40 year mortgages. The current Prime Minister and the current Minister of Finance can take full credit for that. We all know that turned out to be a dud of an idea. Not one Conservative member will now stand in his or her place and say that the Conservatives brought out the 40 year mortgage. The simple reason is that they recognize now that it was a bad idea to do that.

We have a Minister of Finance and a Prime Minister who like to travel the globe and assume credit for the health of the banking industry in Canada. However, I would suggest that the real credit should be going to Jean Chrétien, Paul Martin, the member for Wascana and many other members who made up the cabinet back in the nineties and resisted the world pressure to deregulate.

What role did the New Democrats play in it? Some might argue that they played a bit of a role. I do not know what it is. I never detected any significant role. It was a Liberal majority government throughout that period and I believe there were 13 New Democratic members, although I could be wrong. However, I do not believe they played any role whatsoever in regard to protecting the banking industry, as much as they would like to claim that they did play a role.

● (1645)

Just the other day we heard New Democratic members of Parliament trying to take credit. However, that was the reality of history and I think it is important to accurately reflect why it is we have a relatively healthy banking industry, especially in comparison to other countries throughout the world.

This is not just something the Liberals recognize. Even the Conservatives, the New Democrats and, I would suggest, leaders around the world have recognized the valuable role that Canada has played in terms of demonstrating leadership on our financial industry as a whole. We should all be proud of that. There is no doubt whatsoever that through the process we have been able to generate

the regulations because these ideas and needs of average Canadians come through our constituencies.

I would agree with one of the statements my colleague made, which is that Canadians as a whole understand and appreciate the importance of the industry.

In doing a bit of research, it was interesting to find out that it was Michael Quinn, a Canadian member of Parliament back in 1897, who came up with the idea that we needed to do something to protect consumers. Ever since then, and possibly even before then, governments have recognized the valuable role they play when it comes to monetary policy and the financial industry in our country. That particular member of Parliament, who happened to be from the province of Quebec, highlighted the importance of interest rates. He felt at the time that interest rates were too excessive, that individuals were being charged not 100% but close to 1,000% in some situations. He felt that it was unrealistic to put people who were in relatively poor economic situations and exploit them through high interest rates.

There has always been a high level of interest in the House of Commons in terms of protecting the consumer and in terms of the financial market as a whole. I will spend a little bit of time speaking to that because it is an important issue.

We talk about tomorrow, which is our budget day. Members should not kid themselves. Many people within the financial institutions or the hierarchy throughout the world will be watching the government to hear the types of expenditures, the sorts of revenues that will be generated and what the potential is for Canada into the future. Many individuals and stakeholders throughout the country, everyone from the consumer in Labrador to B.C. to Winnipeg and in our territories are very much interested in what sort of budget we will see presented. It will have a very significant impact on our financial institutions.

Here we have a bill that is designed to protect the integrity of that financial system but I will talk about how government has a direct impact. One thing that needs to be talked about is the government's own debt situation. It was not that long ago, almost six years ago, when the Prime Minister took office and he had some \$13 billion-plus in surplus.

● (1650)

If we fast-forward six years, we find that the government has now exceeded \$150 billion in terms of new debt. When a government takes that sort of action, many vested stakeholders throughout will stand up and take note, and it will have an impact.

On the macro scale, it does have an impact in the overall debt that we have as a nation. It is something of which we have to be aware. However, the government has not really done a good job on this, and the numbers speak for themselves.

Government Orders

There are other things that we look to the government to demonstrate leadership on because they have a direct impact in regard to our financial institutions. I will give a specific example. We talk about the retrofit program. In a retrofit program where government sees the value of getting people to invest in their homes, quite often that means government support goes toward it and also financial institutions will get directly involved in those types of programs. I bring this up because it is important for us to recognize that the role the government plays in our financial institutions is significant.

It is very important that when we have legislation such as this, we provide the opportunity for members of Parliament to have good thorough debate and provide the opportunity for a bill such as this to go to committee. Actually, this is the type of legislation in which we should be encouraging Canadians to directly get involved in because it affects each and every one of us. It affects our pocket. Therefore, Canadians have a vested interest.

We have to look at the process. What has the process been like for the Conservative government on Bill S-5? Members will notice it is called Bill S-5, as opposed to Bill C-5, meaning it had to go through the Senate. This is something the Prime Minister wanted to do. If it were Bill C-5, that would have implied it would come through the House of Commons.

Ever since the Prime Minister has been given a majority government, he feels he has the authority and mandate to ride roughshod over anything that happens inside the House. He has acquired, in the very short time since he had a majority government, record high introductions of time allocation to prevent members of Parliament from engaging in debate on legislation. The attitude or disregard for this fine and wonderful institution is amazing.

Through this institution, Canadians are afforded the opportunity to voice their concerns through their elected officials. However, day in and day out the Prime Minister seems to ignore the rights and what is important for members to truly engage on legislation that is brought forward and which we are asked to pass. The Prime Minister, for whatever reasons, and he will have to explain them at some point, chose to go through the Senate.

Then we have the issue of the Prime Minister being fully aware months ago of the need pass the bill by April 20. The Prime Minister, as he has done with other legislation, seems to drag his feet. After all, he believes that, through his majority government, he can push things through. Now we are in a situation in which there are some serious time concerns. As a result of those concerns, we will be unable to have the type of debate that is important.

• (1655)

In principle, the Liberal Party supports the bill and we have been very clear on that. We recognize the value of it, but many Canadians have issues about which they want their members of Parliament to speak. This would have been a wonderful opportunity to hear many of those contributions to debate.

As an example, it is estimated that the average Canadian now spends well over \$120 or \$130 annually on banking fees. There is a great deal of concern over whether there is anything the government can do to watch the whole ordeal, to have take some kind of action

or have a plan to provide assurance to Canadians that it truly cares about that issue, that it wants to move toward more transparency on the whole issue of banking fees. What about issues such as interest rates?

Another important issue in my riding has been that of bank closures. In Winnipeg North, a number of banks have closed over the last number of years. It has had a very significant impact. For seniors who live on McGregor or on Selkirk in Winnipeg's north end and have had banks in their community close down, there is a real impact. Many of our senior population do not have Internet. They are not going to do banking on the Internet. They want to go to their local bank. It is great in many ways where we have had credit unions. Recently, Assiniboine Credit Union opened up, I believe on McGregor, to try to meet the demand that was created because of banks leaving.

These are real issues that affect Canadians. Whether the government is allowing for adequate and proper debate in the House or providing the opportunity in committee, we need to have this type of discussion so we can share some of the details of the issues that face us. We know there are explanations of how banks will try to justify the narrowing of the gap in interest rates between loans and deposits. That is one of the primary reasons why banks will say that they have to rely more on banking fees in order to cover costs. We are very much aware of that issue. However, I am also aware that banking profits are at all-time record highs and Canadians are aware of that fact. The government needs to develop a plan that ultimately will deal with the wide variety of issues within our financial markets.

Direct banking is one of them. We could talk about the financial institutions of our insurance companies. There is a wide spectrum of issues that are of critical importance. If we do not do it properly, then people are right to be concerned. Not long ago we witnessed the crashes that happened in the United States, in particular. A number of people virtually walked away from their homes. This crisis took place because banks closed down in countries throughout the world.

It is of the utmost importance that we have ongoing reviews. That is why the Liberal Party supports the principle of Bill S-5. We recognize the value of monitoring our financial markets and ensuring we have good, sound regulations. However, we also recognize the importance of Canadians and consumers and we want to see a government do more to address these issues. Whether it is credit card interest rates or the amount of banking fees, consumers want us to be talking about it this.

• (1700)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Governor of the Bank of Canada, Mark Carney, has said that household debt, which has reached a record high, is the biggest threat to our financial institutions. Consumer debt has reached a record level of 151% of disposable income. The NDP is very concerned about the lending practices of banks and other lending institutions when it comes to mortgages and home equity lines of credit. These practices are becoming increasingly risky.

Government Orders

Is the Liberal member also concerned about the Conservative government's lack of vision in this bill governing financial institutions? When it comes right down to it, Canadian and Quebec families are sinking further and further into debt.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, we, too, share the concern with the level of debt. The leader of the Liberal Party started off the session last fall by saying that the important issue for our party was jobs, jobs, jobs.

Over the last number of years, a number of full-time jobs have been lost and that has impacted our economy, which has added to a lot of the debt we have today. Individuals are unable to maintain the types of loans they have because it is difficult to get the same kind of quality jobs. That is one of the reasons why it is important for us to fight for those good quality jobs.

We know what is taking place with Aveos in the province of Quebec. These are jobs that Canada, as a whole, cannot afford to lose. They are worth fighting for. We look to the government to take Air Canada to court on it to protect those jobs because that does have an impact on the amount of money people borrow and on their ability to even pay for loans.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed the debate on the bill. It is one that I support. Bill S-5 would modernize a number of elements. It could have gone further.

However, I have enjoyed the “me-firstism” of every party. The Conservative Party wants to take credit for the fact our banking system withheld the recession so well. The New Democrats, apparently, feel they are responsible. I would like to add, as leader of the Green Party of Canada, we had absolutely nothing to do with protecting our banking system.

We all owe a thanks to previous Liberal finance minister, Paul Martin.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I guess I might have spent a bit too much time at the beginning of my comments trying to clarify the record. I genuinely believe that, in reviewing and listening to a lot of the debate of the bill, individuals like Paul Martin, the former minister of finance, and Jean Chrétien did protect the industry by ensuring we had those regulations in place.

My concern was not as much as trying to assume credit for those two individuals, but rather that we do not try to rewrite history when others members stand and try to assume the credit when it is not true.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my hon. colleague's speech today. I also appreciate the intervention by the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands in relation to Mr. Martin, who certainly played a very important role in maintaining the independence of our banks and maintaining banking regulation. I was a member of Parliament at that time. I can tell her that in fact Liberal MPs were overwhelmingly against the idea, and I want my hon. colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour to hear this, of deregulation of banks or of mergers of banks.

It concerns me because the New Democrats came to Ottawa after last May, saying that they were going be different, with a different approach to Parliament. The NDP put on that coat, or perhaps the new beard, but it is the same old face sometimes. Those members are

trying to carry on with this myth that there is no difference between the Conservatives and the Liberals.

On this issue, it would be more reasonable and more in keeping with the coat they are trying to put on if the New Democrats would actually give credit where it is due and admit that on this issue there is a huge difference with the Liberal government. Liberal MPs overwhelmingly insisted that we maintain independent banks, maintain non-merged banks and regulation of banks and that the 40-year mortgage, for example, which the Conservatives brought in, was a disaster.

However, I am going to give the NDP credit for participating with the Liberals during the minority governments, ensuring the Conservative government did not deregulate, as it would have liked to have done.

• (1705)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, it is nice that we have virtually unanimous support that the regulations in place during the 1990s are in essence what saved our banking industry, to the degree that it is now the envy of the world. All members recognize that, although it might have taken some a little longer to accept.

At the end of the day, we will have some issues which we will all agree on, and some not. There will be some issues the Liberals will not support, such as increasing the number of members of Parliament from 308 to 338. The NDP is in agreement with the Conservatives in wanting to increase the size of the House of Commons. Sometimes there is a crazy mixture of agreement. This time around, it is nice to see that all of us support a regulated banking industry.

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one thing I will not try to do is rewrite history. I will agree the reason we have a sound financial system is not because of the Conservatives and because of the regulations that were put in place by the previous government.

One thing was of interest to me. My colleague mentioned he supports consumers in terms of banking, and mentioned credit cards. I wonder if he agrees with the NDP proposal, that was part of our campaign, to cap the credit card rate?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I do not want to proclaim that I know all the answers. However, I do know a lot of the issues. One of the issues that I believe many Canadians, including myself, share, is a concern about the amount of banking fees and the level of interest rates. I believe Canadians want us to deal with these.

I can assure the member that all political parties will at some point make it very clear what they would like to do. I would like to think that I am with my constituents, the consumers, on the issue. I want to wait and see what ultimately happens. However, something needs to be taking place.

Government Orders

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to share my colleague's comments that it is really a stretch to watch the Conservative government stand in the House and claim credit for the banking industry's strength over the last recession. It was the Conservative Party members in the 1990s who pushed for deregulation, bank mergers and the ability of banks to sell other financial products. It was resistance to those pushes that caused our banking system to be strong today.

I must say to the Liberal Party though, that the fact there was a debate at all in the 1990s reflects the schizophrenic quality of the Liberal Party. We never really know where it stands. People in the Liberal Party were pushing for those same things. I will give the Liberal Party credit at the end of the day. It resisted those urges, but there were many members, including John Manley and other famous Liberals, who were pushing just as hard as the Conservatives.

That is why the Liberal Party has gone from 172 seats in 2001 to 135 seats to 77 seats to 34 seats over the last 10 years. Canadians never really know where the Liberal Party stands on an issue. It said it would bring in a national child care program. It did not. It said it would bring in a national housing program. It did not. It is this schizophrenic quality that has Canadians quite rightly concerned about the Liberal Party.

Maybe my friend could address the fact that Canadians do not seem to know whether Liberals are on the right side or the left side of the spectrum and that is why it finds itself with 34 seats today.

• (1710)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the member did make a fair comment in regard to the Conservatives. However, it was the Reform and Canadian Alliance, from which many Conservatives originate. Many would say a vast majority of them would have advocated for deregulation. I am glad they have changed their minds since then.

In regard to the other issue, I can assure the member, when he makes reference to the child care program, which was a Liberal Party commitment, had the NDP supported the Liberals we would have had that in place. It was part of the budget. Unfortunately, because the NDP worked with the Conservatives and defeated the Liberals, we lost that particular issue.

However, I can assure the member that, on issues such as old age pensions and all those good social programs, it was a Liberal administration that brought them through.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Resuming debate. Before I recognize the member for Brossard—La Prairie, I will just remind him that at 5:30 p.m. we will come to the end of government orders, so he may want to take that into consideration. The hon. member for Brossard—La Prairie.

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am rising today to speak on Bill S-5.

We have had some good debates today. At the finance committee, we had the chance to look at the bill. One of the first things that we realized was that we did not have much time to actually study the bill. As members know, the bill came from the Senate. Members know we are trying to abolish the Senate, but that is not the issue. The issue was the fact that the study was done very quickly. There

were approximately 30 emails or briefs sent through the website. That was pretty much it.

We are talking about the bill, and how every five years we have to look at the financial institutions and banks. Within the last five years there was a global financial crisis. We have talked about sub-primes and paper-backed products. There was a crisis in the U.S. and there was a crisis here. There are some arguments about why we survived the crisis. As I mentioned, it was not because of the Conservatives. It was because of the previous government that had sound financial regulations.

My problem is that, within the last five years, we could have looked at what was happening in the U.S. and overseas, and at what is happening here. Instead, we have a small bill that looks at technical issues. However, there are issues that are taken care of, and that is why we will be supporting Bill S-5.

What we are saying is that we missed an opportunity. What we do not like in the bill, and this was raised in committee, is the fact that we are giving all the power for approving the purchase of foreign banks by Canadian banks to the minister. The Minister of State for Finance came to committee and explained the bill. The response was not good enough.

The way the system is working right now, the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions looks at transactions and gives a recommendation on whether or not to approve the merger or acquisition. Now the minister will have the final say. Even in a case where the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions says that it is not good for Canadian institutions, the minister can say, "We do not mind. Just go ahead and move forward with that transaction."

That is of concern for us, especially knowing that a lot of the ministers, as we see with the Minister of Industry, have conflicts of interest. There may be a problem in terms of judgment. In this case, there may be some problems with the minister being too close to financial institutions. That is a big concern that we raised. Unfortunately the government did not answer it.

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Brossard—La Prairie for his excellent speech.

My colleague did a very good job of explaining what we like about this bill. However, I would also like him to comment further on what is not in the bill but should have been in the bill to make it comprehensive: regulations governing financial institutions and big Canadian banks. Neither Canadian families nor the middle class will benefit from this bill, which was introduced in the Senate. Only the big banks and Conservative Party cronies will benefit.

I would like to know what the member thinks about measures that could have helped Canadian and Quebec families in a tangible way but that are not in the bill.

Mr. Hoang Mai: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord for his question.

Government Orders

We would have liked to see measures in the bill that would really help consumers, but the bill contains no such measures. The NDP proposed caps on excessive credit card interest rates. That is one example of what the government could have done. The government also failed to regulate banking fees.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Brossard—La Prairie.

My question is simple. I completely agree that the government missed an opportunity with this bill.

[English]

If we had a chance to do it again, what does the member think is the number one thing that would improve our banking system from the point of view of consumers: banking fees, greater transparency or both?

Mr. Hoang Mai: Mr. Speaker, it would be both. However, one thing New Democrats have clearly proposed was to put a cap on credit card fees.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, could my friend comment on what he thinks about other banking fees? I appreciate that the NDP wants to put a cap on the level of interest. Could he provide some sort of an idea of the kind of cap he is referring to? Is he saying it should be a 10% or 15% cap? What percentage cap would he like to see put on credit cards?

Mr. Hoang Mai: Mr. Speaker, we want to look at sub-prime plus a percentage cap.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday one of the member's colleagues considered the strength of OBSI in order to protect consumers. I am not sure if that is why OBSI was set up in the first place. It is an intriguing concept, I agree, but would FCAC not be a better avenue? I am looking for an explanation on the role of OBSI in dealing with this particular issue.

Mr. Hoang Mai: Mr. Speaker, OBSI actually plays a really important role. Unfortunately, now with the banks giving out, there is an issue. We are not sure what the future of OBSI is. However, right now OBSI is doing a good job.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week the banking ombudsman was saying, basically, that he does not want the job if it is not going to be mandatory for the banks to listen to what he says. We have seen no indication from the government that it is going to make it a mandatory process, where, if consumers have complaints against banks, they can go to the ombudsman and the ombudsman will make a decision that is enforceable. As it is, it has been a voluntary system. RBC and TD both withdrew from the system in recent months. The ombudsman is saying he is going to quit unless this is enforced.

I would like my hon. colleague's thoughts on this issue.

• (1720)

Mr. Hoang Mai: Mr. Speaker, we also raised this issue in committee. We believe it should be mandatory.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): 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. Bruce Stanton): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Call in the members.

• (1810)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 175)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Alexander	Allen (Welland)
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambler	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Andrews	Angus
Armstrong	Ashfield
Ashton	Aspin
Atamanenko	Aubin
Ayala	Baird
Bateman	Bélanger
Bellavance	Bennett
Benoit	Benskin
Bernier	Bevington
Bezan	Blanchette
Blanchette-Lamothe	Blaney
Block	Boivin
Borg	Boughen
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brisson	Brosseau
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Butt	Byrne
Calandra	Calkins
Cannan	Carmichael
Caron	Carrie
Casey	Cash
Charlton	Chicoine
Chisholm	Chisu
Chong	Choquette
Chow	Christopherson
Clarke	Cleary
Clement	Coderre
Comartin	Côté
Cotler	Crowder
Cullen	Cuzner
Daniel	Davidson
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)
Day	Dechert

Private Members' Business

Del Mastro	Devolin	Sitsabaiesan	Smith
Dewar	Dion	Sopuck	Sorenson
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly	St-Denis	Stanton
Doré Lefebvre	Dreeshen	Stewart	Stoffer
Dubé	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Storseth	Strahl
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Sullivan	Sweet
Dusseauult	Dykstra	Thibeault	Tilson
Easter	Eyking	Toet	Toews
Fantino	Fast	Toone	Tremblay
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Flaherty	Trost	Trudeau
Fletcher	Footé	Truppe	Turmel
Fortin	Freeman	Tweed	Uppal
Galipeau	Gallant	Valcourt	Valeriote
Garneau	Garrison	Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Genest	Genest-Jourdain	Vellacott	Wallace
Giguère	Gill	Warawa	Warkentin
Glover	Godin	Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Goguen	Goodale	Sky Country)	
Goodyear	Gosal	Weston (Saint John)	Wilks
Gourde	Gravelle	Williamson	Wong
Grewal	Groguhé	Woodworth	Yelich
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Harris (St. John's East)	Young (Oakville)	Young (Vancouver South)
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hassainia	Zimmer — 291	
Hawn	Hayes		
Hiebert	Hillyer		
Hoeppner	Holder		
Hsu	Hughes	Nil	
Hyer	Jacob		
James	Jean		
Julian	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Nil	
Karygiannis	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)		
Kellway	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)		
Kent	Kerr		
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)		
Lake	Lamoureux		
Lapointe	Larose		
Latendresse	Lauzon		
Laverdière	Lebel		
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)		
Leef	Leitch		
Lemieux	Leslie		
Leung	Liu		
Lizon	Lobb		
Lukiwski	Lunney		
MacAulay	MacKay (Central Nova)		
MacKenzie	Mai		
Marston	Martin		
Masse	Mathysen		
May	Mayes		
McCallum	McColeman		
McGuinty	McLeod		
Menegakis	Menzies		
Merrifield	Michaud		
Miller	Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)		
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)			
Moore (Fundy Royal)			
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)		
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)		
Mourani	Mulcair		
Nash	Nicholls		
Nicholson	Norlock		
Nunez-Melo	O'Connor		
Oliver	Opitz		
Pacetti	Papillon		
Paradis	Patry		
Payne	Péclet	Ablonczy	Adams
Penashue	Perreault	Adler	Aglukkaq
Pilon	Plamondon	Albas	Albrecht
Poillievre	Preston	Alexander	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Quach	Rae	Allison	Ambler
Rafferty	Raitt	Ambrose	Anders
Rajotte	Rathgeber	Anderson	Andrews
Ravignat	Raynault	Armstrong	Ashfield
Regan	Reid	Aspin	Baird
Rempel	Richards	Bateman	Bélangier
Rickford	Ritz	Bennett	Benoit
Rousseau	Saganash	Bemier	Bezan
Sandhu	Savoie	Blaney	Block
Saxton	Schellenberger	Boughen	Braid
Seeback	Sellah	Breitkreuz	Brisson
Sgro	Shea	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Shiple	Shory	Brown (Barrie)	Bruniogo
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)		Butt	Byrne
Sims (Newton—North Delta)		Calandra	Calkins

NAYS

PAIRED

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.
(Bill read the third time and passed)

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

NATIONAL FLAG OF CANADA ACT

The House resumed from March 14 consideration of the motion that Bill C-288, An Act respecting the National Flag of Canada, be read the third time and passed.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at third reading stage of Bill C-288 under private members' business.

● (1815)

(The House divided on the Motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 176)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Alexander	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Ambler
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Andrews
Armstrong	Ashfield
Aspin	Baird
Bateman	Bélangier
Bennett	Benoit
Bemier	Bezan
Blaney	Block
Boughen	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brisson
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruniogo
Butt	Byrne
Calandra	Calkins

Private Members' Business

Cannan	Carmichael
Carrie	Casey
Chisu	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Coderre	Cotler
Cuzner	Daniel
Davidson	Dechert
Del Mastro	Devolin
Dion	Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Dykstra	Easter
Eyking	Fantino
Fast	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Flaherty	Fletcher
Footé	Galipeau
Gallant	Garneau
Gill	Glover
Goguen	Goodale
Goodyear	Gosal
Gourde	Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hiebert
Hillyer	Hoepfner
Holder	Hsu
James	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Karygiannis
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kent	Kerr
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lamoureux
Lauzon	Lebel
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	Leef
Leitch	Lemieux
Leung	Lizon
Lobb	Lukowski
Lunney	MacAulay
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Mayer	McCallum
McColeman	McGuinty
McLeod	Menegakis
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
Oliver	Opitz
Pacetti	Paradis
Payne	Penashue
Poillievre	Preston
Rae	Raitt
Rajotte	Rathgeber
Regan	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Rickford	Ritz
Saxton	Schellenberger
Seeback	Sgro
Shea	Shipley
Shory	Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind- sor)
Smith	Sopuck
Sorenson	St-Denis
Stanton	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Tilson	Toet
Toews	Trost
Trudeau	Truppe
Tweed	Uppal
Valcourt	Valerioté
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John)	Wilks
Williamson	Wong
Woodworth	Yelich
Young (Oakville)	Young (Vancouver South)
Zimmer— 187	

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Angus
Ashton	Atamanenko

Aubin	Ayala
Bellavance	Benskin
Bevington	Blanchette
Blanchette-Lamothe	Boivin
Borg	Boulerice
Boutin-Sweet	Brousseau
Caron	Cash
Charlton	Chicoine
Chisholm	Choquette
Chow	Christopherson
Cleary	Comartin
Côté	Crowder
Cullen	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Davies (Vancouver East)	Day
Dewar	Dionne Labelle
Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre
Dubé	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseau	Fortin
Freeman	Garrison
Genest	Genest-Jourdain
Giguère	Godin
Gravelle	Groguhé
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Harris (St. John's East)
Hassainia	Hughes
Hyer	Jacob
Julian	Kellway
Lapointe	Larose
Latendresse	Laverdière
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	Leslie
Liu	Mai
Marston	Martin
Masse	Mathysen
Michaud	Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Mourani	Mulcair
Nash	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Papillon
Patry	Péclet
Perreault	Pilon
Plamondon	Quach
Rafferty	Ravignat
Raynault	Rousseau
Saganash	Sandhu
Savoie	Sellah
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	Sitsabaiesan
Stewart	Stoffer
Sullivan	Thibault
Toone	Tremblay
Turmel— 103	

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.
(Bill read the third time and passed)

* * *

● (1820)

[Translation]

CORRECTIONS AND CONDITIONAL RELEASE ACT

The House resumed from March 16 consideration of the motion that Bill C-350, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (accountability of offenders), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading stage of Bill C-350 under private members' business.

● (1825)

[English]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

Private Members' Business

(Division No. 177)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy
 Adler
 Albas
 Alexander
 Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
 Ambler
 Anders
 Andrews
 Armstrong
 Ashton
 Atamanenko
 Ayala
 Bateman
 Bellavance
 Benoit
 Bernier
 Bezan
 Blanchette-Lamothe
 Block
 Borg
 Boulerice
 Braid
 Brison
 Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
 Brown (Barrie)
 Butt
 Calandra
 Cannan
 Caron
 Casey
 Charlton
 Chisholm
 Chong
 Chow
 Clarke
 Clement
 Comartin
 Cotler
 Cullen
 Daniel
 Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
 Day
 Del Mastro
 Dewar
 Dionne Labelle
 Doré Lefebvre
 Dubé
 Duncan (Etobicoke North)
 Dusseault
 Easter
 Fantino
 Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
 Fletcher
 Fortin
 Galipeau
 Garneau
 Genest
 Giguère
 Glover
 Goguen
 Goodyear
 Gourde
 Grewal
 Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
 Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
 Hawn
 Hiebert
 Hoepfner
 Hsu
 Hyer
 James
 Julian
 Karygiannis
 Kellway
 Kent
 Komarnicki
 Lake
 Lapointe

Adams
 Aglukkaq
 Albrecht
 Allen (Welland)
 Allison
 Ambrose
 Anderson
 Angus
 Ashfield
 Aspin
 Aubin
 Baird
 Bélanger
 Bennett
 Benskin
 Bevington
 Blanchette
 Blaney
 Boivin
 Boughen
 Boutin-Sweet
 Breitzkreuz
 Brosseau
 Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
 Bruinoooge
 Byrne
 Calkins
 Carmichael
 Carrie
 Cash
 Chicoine
 Chisu
 Choquette
 Christopherson
 Cleary
 Coderre
 Côté
 Crowder
 Cuzner
 Davidson
 Davies (Vancouver East)
 Dechert
 Devolin
 Dion
 Donnelly
 Dreeshen
 Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
 Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
 Dykstra
 Eyking
 Fast
 Flaherty
 Foote
 Freeman
 Gallant
 Garrison
 Genest-Jourdain
 Gill
 Godin
 Goodale
 Gosal
 Gravelle
 Grogulé
 Harris (St. John's East)
 Hassainia
 Hayes
 Hillyer
 Holder
 Hughes
 Jacob
 Jean
 Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
 Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
 Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
 Kerr
 Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
 Lamoureux
 Larose

Latendresse
 Laverdière
 LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
 Leef
 Lemieux
 Leung
 Lizon
 Lukiwski
 MacAulay
 MacKenzie
 Marston
 Masse
 May
 McCallum
 McGuinty
 Menegakis
 Merrifield
 Miller
 Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
 Moore (Fundy Royal)
 Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
 Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
 Mourani
 Nash
 Nicholson
 Nunez-Melo
 Oliver
 Pacetti
 Paradis
 Payne
 Penashue
 Pilon
 Poilievre
 Quach
 Rafferty
 Rajotte
 Ravnat
 Regan
 Rempel
 Rickford
 Rousseau
 Sandhu
 Saxton
 Seeback
 Sgro
 Shipley
 Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)
 Sims (Newton—North Delta)
 Sitsabaiesan
 Sopuck
 St-Denis
 Stewart
 Storseth
 Sullivan
 Thibeault
 Toet
 Toone
 Trost
 Truppe
 Tweed
 Valcourt
 Van Kesteren
 Vellacott
 Warawa
 Watson
 Sky Country)
 Weston (Saint John)
 Williamson
 Woodworth
 Young (Oakville)
 Zimmer — 291

Lauzon
 Lebel
 LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
 Leitch
 Leslie
 Liu
 Lobb
 Lunney
 MacKay (Central Nova)
 Mai
 Martin
 Mathysen
 Mayes
 McColeman
 McLeod
 Menzies
 Michaud
 Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)

Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
 Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
 Mulcair
 Nicholls
 Norlock
 O'Connor
 Opitz
 Papillon
 Patry
 Pécelet
 Perreault
 Plamondon
 Preston
 Rae
 Raitt
 Rathgeber
 Raynaut
 Reid
 Richards
 Ritz
 Saganash
 Savoie
 Schellenberger
 Sellah
 Shea
 Shory
 Smith
 Sorenson
 Stanton
 Stoffer
 Strahl
 Sweet
 Tilson
 Toews
 Tremblay
 Trudeau
 Turmel
 Uppal
 Valeriote
 Van Loan
 Wallace
 Warkentin
 Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to

NAYS

Nil

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

Private Members' Business

(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

The Speaker: It being 6:26 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

* * *

[*Translation*]

HOUSING

Mr. Réjean Genest (Shefford, NDP) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should: (a) keep with Canada's obligation to respect, protect and fulfill the right to housing under the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; (b) support efforts by Canadian municipalities to combat homelessness; and (c) adopt measures to expand the stock of affordable rental housing, with a view to providing economic benefits to local housing construction businesses.

He said: Mr. Speaker, nearly one-third of Canadian households and 40% of Quebec households rent their residences. Rental construction over the past 15 years has accounted for only 10% of all housing starts. Given that the loss of existing housing is greater than the construction of new housing, the rental housing stock in the private sector is eroding.

In the meantime, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation estimates that there will be 50,000 new rental households a year over the next decade.

Low supply places upward pressure on rents and makes it harder to find affordable housing. It is not complicated: expensive housing construction is outpacing affordable housing construction. In most of our municipalities, the trend is to build condominiums, luxury housing and, as a result, the people who—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

● (1830)

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I would ask members to take their conversations to their respective lobbies while the member is speaking.

The hon. member for Shefford.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réjean Genest: Madam Speaker, people who live in affordable housing often have it taken away. Tenant households usually have lower than average incomes, and homelessness is often the only alternative when they do not have access to affordable rental housing. We just have to go into our big Canadian cities to see that there are an increasing number of homeless people. The major problem is that they do not have access to affordable housing.

Rental housing also plays an important economic role. Investing in rental housing is an effective means of stimulating the economy because these low-income families can then purchase more consumer goods. In addition, labour mobility is much greater among renters, although high housing costs can prevent people from leaving less expensive markets. Investing in rental housing has positive effects on labour productivity. On the other hand, the limited availability of affordable rental housing makes it more difficult for companies to recruit workers.

When rents are too high in one municipality, people usually will live much further away. This results in public transit problems in large cities. Often, in cities across the country that have no affordable housing, businesses, restaurants and stores that usually pay low wages have trouble hiring because workers cannot find affordable housing. A town that does not invest in affordable rental housing is less likely to attract businesses or manufacturers with employees who would rent these units and provide affordable labour.

The recession has resulted in the under-utilization of resources in the construction industry. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities estimates that 50,000 jobs have been lost in this sector based on previous average levels of employment. Investing in rental housing is therefore an effective way of supporting tenant households and stimulating the economy.

We have just experienced a recession. Those 50,000 additional unemployed workers include construction workers who have found themselves without jobs because there is less construction. There was a government program to encourage homeowners to invest in renovations and other similar projects but no such programs were available for rental housing. Few apartment buildings have been built. In some cities, there are apartment buildings where the rent is \$2,000, \$3,000 or \$4,000 a month, when almost no affordable housing has been built.

Some cities are already taking steps to increase the number of affordable rental housing units and to improve existing units. Let us look at Montreal, for example. When rental complexes are built, the City of Montreal requires that a certain percentage of the units be rented at modest or affordable prices. Most cities in Canada should follow this example and require any large rental housing complexes to offer units at different rental rates.

● (1835)

That would prevent the formation of ghettos. Without such measures, we will end up with cities where the very rich live in one part of town, those who can pay for slightly more expensive housing live in another, and, as has been pointed out, manual labourers are once again forced to live out of town in the suburbs, in places where the rent is more affordable.

Federal housing policies support home ownership and social housing, but they ignore the private rental housing sector. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities has proposed a number of highly effective, low-cost measures that the federal government could implement to strengthen the rental housing sector.

The government has initiated a number of programs to boost the economy. These programs could be extended to include affordable rental housing.

The New Democratic Party has a strong record on housing and has good relationships with stakeholders in the housing sector. This motion would enable us to make the case for our positions on housing and support our municipalities.

The Conservative government invested public money in housing through Canada's economic action plan, but those measures were only for homeowners and the social housing sector. There was nothing for the private rental sector. The motion will force the government either to respond to Canadian municipalities' calls for investments and intervention in the area of affordable rental housing, or to publicly refuse to take action in this matter.

The Conservatives also hesitate to recognize that housing and poverty are human rights issues. The motion reminds them that Canada has a legal obligation to respect the right to suitable housing under the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to which Canada is a signatory.

Everyone has the right to adequate housing in which to live.

The motion comes in response to a report by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, which has worked very hard to get this government to support rental housing. During a meeting with the NDP's housing critics, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities indicated that an issue is considered a top priority only when it is considered important in all regions of the country and in all towns and cities, large and small. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities' campaign focuses on the urgent need to address this issue across the country. Affordable rental housing is not just a local problem; it is a problem across Canada.

Nearly half of all single-parent households headed by women are tenants. In 2006, 45.3% of these households spent at least 30% of their income on housing. This determines the level of housing affordability. Considering that in the manufacturing sector, in the service industry and even in the agricultural sector, people usually earn minimum wage, just imagine how easily rent could eat up half or sometimes even two-thirds of one's income.

• (1840)

Women living alone also seem more likely than men living alone to devote over 30% of their income to rent. It is a well-known fact—we have heard it before—that, in general, women earn less than men.

It is important to remember that housing is an important human right. This right is compromised by the lack of rental housing, and homelessness then becomes people's only alternative. I know something about this. As a result of certain events in my life, I lost everything and I was homeless for a certain period of time before I was able to get back on my feet. That is why this issue is so close to my heart: I have lived it.

Investments in housing also constitute an important economic stimulus measure. These investments support the construction industry and local businesses that hire employees. They also stimulate the economy because families that live in affordable housing units can spend more on other things. There is an old expression that says that when construction is booming so is the economy. This is therefore a good way to stimulate the economy. It is not enough to promote home ownership. The government must also promote access to affordable housing for all social classes.

Private Members' Business

The number of private rental housing units is shrinking but demand is expected to increase in the next 10 years. We heard it said earlier that only 10% of new builds will be affordable rental housing units. Yet, we know that, in the next 10 years, there will be demand for 50,000 a year. That is a lot. It would not cost very much if the government followed three good suggestions: loans with low interest rates; a tax credit to protect rental housing; and a retrofitting tax credit. That way, those who have renovations to do will be able to continue to provide low-cost rental housing instead of turning their units into condos.

[*English*]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Madam Speaker, the government spends \$1.7 billion a year on existing social housing in support of some 615,000 households. Canada's economic action plan provided \$2 billion over two years to build new and renovate existing social housing, plus another \$2 billion in loans to municipalities for them to put money into related infrastructure projects for social housing. Under the current infrastructure affordable housing framework, the government is spending \$253.1 million a year in affordable housing.

We have put this forward in a number of budgets. Why has the member always voted against it?

• (1845)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réjean Genest: Madam Speaker, the tax credits we are asking for would cost about \$250 million. In addition, encouraging energy retrofits would cost about \$150 million. That is much less than the government has already invested in housing and affordable housing. We must not forget that investing in rental housing would be one way to achieve our goal of not spending a fortune on so-called social housing.

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for this excellent motion.

I would like to share with you the situation in my riding of Chicoutimi—Le Fjord. It is a rural riding, but in the city of Saguenay—which includes Chicoutimi and La Baie, among others—approximately 875 families are spending more than 80% of their income on housing. These people obviously live in rental housing. I am pleased to vote in favour of this motion because it will help families that unfortunately must spend much less on food, clothing and medicine.

I would like to ask my NDP colleague in what other ways this motion would benefit low-income families, of which there are far too many in all ridings across Canada.

Private Members' Business

Mr. Réjean Genest: Madam Speaker, the first reason is quite simply that everyone has the right to adequate housing. The second reason is that when adequate housing is expensive, there is not enough money left over to put food on the table, and that is a problem. I have had that experience. I was rather poor. I went to soup kitchens and food banks in our neighbourhood in order to feed my children who were living with me.

I find it difficult to understand how people can spend 80% of their budget on housing. It is indecent to live in a country as rich as ours and allow this to happen.

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to commend the hon. member and thank him for this excellent motion. I would also like to thank him for so generously sharing parts of his life with us. It helps us to better understand what can happen when there is no affordable housing available.

We know that the government has invested \$1.7 billion in housing. That is a good thing. However, there are still 1.5 million Canadian households in dire need of housing and over 150,000 homeless people in Canada.

I would like hear more about the positive effects that appropriate government investments in affordable housing and the fight against homelessness can have on a society.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member has 30 seconds to respond to this question.

Mr. Réjean Genest: Madam Speaker, the positive effects are simple. If people are happy and they see that the government is taking care of them, then they will applaud the government and think of it every four years.

[English]

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased today to speak to Motion No. 331 and to indicate our party's support for this motion.

I thank the hon. member for bringing this matter before the House. It gives me the opportunity to talk about the unprecedented investments our government has made to improve access to affordable housing and to address the issue of homelessness in communities across the country.

I hope the member across the way is aware that our economic action plan invested record amounts in social housing, creating hundreds of thousands of jobs in over 10,000 projects. This is in addition to the extension through 2014 of the homelessness partnering strategy, where we are working with communities, both urban and rural, to prevent and reduce homelessness.

Through these investments, we are helping to expand the stock of affordable rental housing across Canada, while creating jobs and stimulating demand for Canadian made building products and services.

I do not believe there is a person in this chamber who does not recognize the importance of housing. We can all agree that everyone in Canada deserves a stable, safe and affordable place to call home.

Prior to coming to this place, I was the president of the Greater Toronto Apartment Association and spent close to 20 years in the

property management and rental housing sectors. I have seen federal housing programs first-hand and can tell the House that no other government in that time has done more, provided more local flexibility and maintained stability in programs like this government.

Having access to stable affordable housing is a foundation for healthy living and a building block for success in so many other areas such as education, the labour market, personal relationships and community engagement. This is why we have a range of policies and programs in place to support Canadians from all walks of life and in all parts of the country in accessing housing that meets their needs. This includes providing housing assistance for those whose housing needs cannot be met in the marketplace, including low-income families, seniors, people with disabilities and first nations people on reserve.

In fact, our government has made unprecedented investments in housing over the past number of years. Since 2006, we have invested an estimated \$12.5 billion in housing programs. These investments have improved living conditions for tens of thousands of Canadians, helped build stronger communities and created thousands of jobs across Canada.

Sadly, these investments were opposed at every opportunity by the opposition parties. The official opposition and the third party stood against budget measure after budget measure that funded these projects. However, our unprecedented investment in housing programs happened in spite of the opposition.

Even though his party voted against the money, I am sure the hon. member across the way will be pleased to know that we continue to invest heavily in housing. This year, through CMHC, the Government of Canada will invest approximately \$2 billion in housing. Of this amount, \$1.7 billion will be spent in support of almost 615,000 households living in existing social housing to ensure they can continue to afford their homes.

I recently visited two federally funded co-operative housing complexes in my riding of Mississauga—Streetsville, and I can report to the House the very successful operations at Tecumseh and Meadows Co-ops and what these projects mean to the people who live there.

We will also spend more than \$250 million this year to continue to reduce the number of Canadians in housing need. This is part of a commitment we made in 2008 to invest \$1.9 billion over five years in housing and homelessness programs.

● (1850)

As a first step in delivering on this commitment, the affordable housing initiative and the federal renovation programs for low-income households were extended for two years. In July 2011, federal and provincial housing ministers announced the investment in affordable housing 2011-2014 framework agreement to guide the deliver of federal investments in affordable housing off reserve over the final three years of this five year commitment.

Private Members' Business

The overall objective of the framework is to reduce the number of Canadians in housing need by improving access to affordable housing that is sound, suitable and sustainable. It is being implemented through bilateral agreements with each province and territory that are best positioned to design and deliver programs to address housing needs and priorities in their respective jurisdiction.

Under these arrangements, federal funding will be matched by the provinces and territories. When these contributions are included, the new framework provides for a combined investment of \$1.4 billion over three years toward reducing the number of Canadians in housing need.

Over and above these investments, our government will spend about \$407 million this year to address housing needs on reserve. This funding is used to subsidize existing rental housing, build new homes and renovate existing houses that are in need of repair.

The homelessness partnering strategy was renewed at \$134.8 million per year until March 2014. So far this money has supported over 2,900 projects across Canada. I have seen, first-hand, in Toronto how successful the HPS is through its funding of the internationally recognized streets to homes program.

In his motion, the hon. member also calls on the government to expand the stock of affordable rental housing. Again, he will be pleased to hear that our government offers strong support for this housing option. The federal investments I have already mentioned go a long way in helping to make affordable rental housing available to Canadians.

For example, an estimated 5,000 new affordable housing units were created through the two year extension of the affordable housing initiative. More than 50,000 units have been created since this initiative was established, and we expect that that thousands more will be created under the new investment in affordable housing framework agreement.

Renovation assistance is also available from CMHC for repairs to rental properties occupied by low-income tenants, including rooming houses. CMHC also supports the conversion of non-residential properties into affordable self-contained rental housing units or bed units, and provides financial assistance to assist in the repair of existing shelter housing and the creation of new shelters for victims of family violence.

CMHC's Affordable Housing Centre also facilitates the development of affordable housing solutions that do not require ongoing support from government. In addition to providing guidance and expertise to project proponents, the centre offers seed and proposal development funding to help get projects started. In 2010 the centre facilitated the creation of close to 2,900 new affordable housing units and projects across Canada.

Our government provides other support for rental housing. For example, CMHC is the only mortgage loan insurer for large, multi-unit rental properties, nursing and retirement homes. Mortgage loan insurance from CMHC is critical to ensuring these housing options continue to be available to Canadians. Without it, many large rental housing projects simply would not get the financing they need to be affordable.

The motion currently before the House also calls on the government to ensure that federal housing programs provide economic benefits to local housing construction businesses. Our government recognizes that housing is an important source of job creation in Canada. That is why investments in social housing were a key element of Canada's economic action plan.

● (1855)

As hon. members will recall, the stimulus phase of our economic action plan included an additional \$2 billion over two years to renovate existing and build new social housing. This funding has supported more than 14,000 social housing and first nations housing projects across Canada. If I had the time I would point out some of the great things about these 14,000 projects.

In conclusion, our government is proud of its housing record. We will be supporting the hon. member's motion.

● (1900)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is with pleasure that I address the motion before us. Affordable housing has been an issue for a long time.

The member referred to CMHC which is one of the cornerstones in terms of providing affordable housing for all Canadians. It was created shortly after World War II. As soldiers returned and started families, the need for additional housing was recognized. CMHC in essence set the groundwork. Nothing has changed. Whether it was after World War II or today, there has always been a very high demand for housing.

With respect to this motion, most people would recognize that we need to support the housing industry in a very direct way. I would like to provide a different perspective. I was housing critic for the Liberal Party a number of years ago. I have some fairly hard thoughts and opinions about our housing situation. In some provinces there is virtually a housing crisis. In some corners of Canada there are housing crises, and they vary. On many of the first nations reserves there is a huge demand not only for houses but for houses to be fixed. In municipalities of varying sizes it becomes an issue of affordability because of the cost of housing, especially in some of the larger cities, where there is a need for the government to get directly involved.

There are many different ways in which the government could help with housing. Shelter allowance programs have always intrigued me. They were initially talked about by Lloyd Axworthy in the late 1970s. He advocated for the establishment of shelter allowances for renters. He focused on seniors and families. There is a strong need today to support programs of that nature. It is one of the ways government could work with the private sector to ensure there are more affordable housing units. That would go a long way toward addressing the needs of many, whether they are homeless or individuals who are living in other situations who are trying to find a place they can call their own.

Private Members' Business

There are many different organizations. What I like about Winnipeg North is that it spans the spectrum. There are the wartime houses that were built, and just a few weeks ago I was talking to members from St. Mary The Protectress Villa, a wonderful Ukraine-run community housing facility. It was created because of the Ukrainian community in Winnipeg. It has provided homes, apartments with balconies, for a number of people in Winnipeg North. Its members have done incredible work in providing alternative housing for seniors who live in the north end. Not only did the members build the facility, but today they are looking at expanding it. They are looking for some support from the government, federal, provincial or municipal, to enable them to do that.

That is the type of housing we should be looking at. We should be looking for organizations that are prepared to get involved with the communities, whether it is being involved in the expansion of a project or developing new projects or something of that nature. What I especially like about St. Mary The Protectress Villa is that it is managed by individuals primarily from the Ukrainian community. They have provided shelter for a good number of years.

● (1905)

I could talk about Ivan Franko Manor, St. Josaphat Selo-Villa, or the Canadian Polish Manor on Selkirk Avenue. These are wonderful housing facilities, many of which rely on the Government of Canada to subsidize the units.

When we talk about the \$1 billion-plus that has already been spent on housing, that is not new money. We have been spending billions of dollars annually to subsidize literally tens of thousands apartments and housing units across the country. This is an ongoing expense.

Quite often there are agreements between provincial jurisdictions where the federal government subsidy is somewhere in the neighbourhood of 80%, and I suspect it varies at times maybe even between provinces. In reality, individuals who live in such a community are obligated to spend somewhere around 30% of their household income on rent and the government covers the rest. This way individuals are able to have shelter. They can establish homes for their families and hopefully become more engaged in the economy. They might eventually be able to search for a permanent home and afford to buy a house.

It is more than just the issue of money. We need to look at many of the tens of thousands of units. Why are we not investigating ideas such as converting some of that housing stock where the government is the landlord and citizens are the tenants to ones that are tenant managed or housing co-ops? I would love to see the government play a leadership role and look at ways in which that could take place. There are so many units and it would be wonderful to look at the possibility of converting them into housing co-ops.

There are other ways in which government could directly get involved. We have seen in the past things such as infill housing. The housing stock has a profound and dramatic impact on an entire community. Two or three houses that are boarded up on one block have a negative impact on the whole block. Quite often a boarded-up house will catch fire or be torn down. This is where the government can play a role and provide the incentives, where possible, for infill

housing. New houses pop up in some of the older communities which have a great deal of heritage and character. To do things of that nature would do wonders.

When we talk about providing more housing for our population and supporting low-income renters, we have to take a broader look and develop an overall strategy that takes into consideration things such as direct subsidies. This is a non-profit housing complex in which government provides the money to housing co-ops, to 55-plus lease programs, to the idea of infill housing. Also, there is the idea of shelter allowances, where the government would provide dollars for individual renters to look to the private sector for housing.

In conclusion, there are many different options. We need to see strong leadership from the national government and a sense of commitment that goes beyond the status quo in fulfilling what it is already obligated to fulfill. That is the money that has been spent to date. That is the status quo.

● (1910)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to commend and thank the hon. member for Shefford, which is the riding next to mine, for his excellent initiative in moving this motion. I know that all my colleagues have an interest in housing but to see one of them show such an interest as to move a motion on this issue is a great honour for me in my capacity as housing critic for the official opposition. Clearly, I support this motion on housing and homelessness.

Since I was elected last May, I have met with many people in the course of my duties: representatives from community organizations who are particularly committed to housing issues and the fight against poverty and homelessness; people who are affected by homelessness; private housing providers, co-operatives and others; and provincial and municipal officials and RCM Reeves. All of them, without exception, told me that they are concerned about the way Ottawa is ignoring the issues related to the current housing crisis.

They have good reason to be concerned; their fears are quite legitimate. That is why this motion is more than welcome.

On February 16, I introduced my very first bill, which proposes a national housing strategy and seeks to ensure that all Canadians have safe, adequate, accessible and affordable housing. As we speak, Canada is still the only G8 country that does not have a national housing strategy.

This motion moved by the hon. member for Shefford complements my bill and shows how desperate the need for housing is. The municipalities and provinces that have the burden of housing without the appropriate resources need support from the federal government. We know that since 1993, the federal government has been increasingly abandoning its responsibilities for housing, and the provinces and municipalities can no longer pick up the slack. They need support, help, money and resources.

Private Members' Business

The current housing crisis exists across the country in small municipalities like Saint-Hyacinthe in my riding and Granby in my colleague's riding and in big cities like Montreal, Vancouver, Halifax and Toronto. The waiting list for social housing gets longer every year, and the inflated price of housing does not allow everyone to live in decent housing.

As my colleague was saying earlier, under the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, access to housing is a right, not a privilege. The Conservatives' funding and strategies are inadequate, given the urgency of the situation. My colleague said earlier that the government invests roughly \$1.7 billion a year in housing. That is a good start, but it is not enough and the need is there.

Right now, about 1.5 million Canadian households have an urgent need for housing, which means that they are hanging by a thread. Many of them spend as much as 80% of their income on housing that is too small, unsanitary, or inadequate for their family's needs. To make ends meet and enjoy a decent standard of living, families should not spend more than 30% of their income on housing. When families spend 80% on housing, they have less to spend on food, clothing and everything else because they need a roof over their heads.

People with urgent housing needs are at risk of becoming homeless and ending up on the streets. This includes single people, families and seniors. The situation is serious.

•(1915)

What is more, 30% of aboriginal households on reserves live in substandard housing. That is a problem too. People with reduced mobility do not have access to housing that meets their needs. People in wheelchairs who live in housing that is not accessible have a very hard time. Currently between 150,000 and 300,000 Canadians live on the streets, and that number is increasing. I know that I did not give an exact number, but as I have often said, people who are homeless do not usually fill in their census forms and report that they are homeless. That is why it is tricky to determine how many of them there are, and that is why we do not have an exact number. All we know is that their numbers are growing and they need help. We need government funds to fight homelessness.

For example, last winter in Montreal, large homeless shelters provided 10% more services and still had to turn away people who needed help. As a result, there were people sleeping on the streets in January when it was -20°C. Words fail me. I will give my colleagues a chance to think about that.

We also know that we do not have nearly enough rental housing in all regions of Canada, including in the Prairies, where development is somewhat accelerated right now.

What I would like to say here today is that the Conservatives have a duty to help those who are less fortunate. We cannot accept that people live on the street. We cannot accept that 1.5 million households are at risk of becoming homeless and winding up on the street. The government must take action. As I just said, it has a duty to do so. Having decent housing is a right, not a privilege.

The government must act now. It must support this motion and implement its provisions as soon as possible.

[English]

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to respond to Motion No. 331, proposed by the hon. member for Shefford. Our government supports this motion because the actions of our government have addressed and continue to address the content of the motion.

As a government, we have made unprecedented investments in helping Canadians find the housing they need. We have invested significantly in programs that offer a way out for those who want to break free from the cycle of homelessness and poverty. We have established and empowered local communities, both rural and urban, to set the priorities for combatting homelessness in their communities.

Let me give the House a concrete example of what our government is doing to assist people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Just a few months ago, in December 2011, we celebrated the opening of the Aboriginal Mother Centre in Vancouver. This facility will help aboriginal women and children who are in need to access housing and support services. Over \$370,000 in funding was used for the project by the Lu'ma Native Housing Society. The funds helped renovate and refurbish a building to provide transitional housing, meal services and a daycare centre. This funding was provided through the federal homelessness partnering strategy.

As my hon. colleagues may know, the homelessness partnering strategy, HPS, was launched in April 2007. It is a unique program aimed at preventing and reducing homelessness by providing direct support and funding to communities across Canada. At the community level, our government has partnered with leaders in the social services sector to set local priorities for combatting homelessness. These local priorities are then used to set the criteria for funding in that community through this program. This approach has been a cornerstone of the federal government's response to homelessness, and a key ingredient of its success.

The causes of poverty and homelessness are complex and differ from one community to another. We believe that communities play a critical role in addressing the problem, as they are the best place to identify and address their own local needs. This approach ensures that federal funding will go to where it is most effective. For these reasons, the homelessness partnering strategy encourages people and organizations with an interest in homelessness to work together to determine their local priorities. This is why the homelessness partnering strategy has strong support from communities, who appreciate the flexibility it offers as well as its recognition that they are key partners in the fight against homelessness.

Private Members' Business

Since the HPS was launched, a total of 2,900 projects have been approved, with funding totalling over \$637 million. To date, HPS investments have enabled communities across Canada to create more than 5,000 new beds in emergency, transitional and supportive housing facilities. In addition, since the HPS was started, more than 35,000 individuals have been placed in more stable housing.

Of course, people who are homeless or at risk need more than just a place to live. They often require a variety of services to help them overcome certain challenges and to start a new life. This is another feature of HPS. For example, as part of the support services it funds, a total of 9,500 people have started a part-time or full-time education or training program.

Let me remind the hon. members that in September of 2008, our government committed to investing more than \$1.9 billion over five years in housing and homelessness. As part of this commitment, we have renewed the HPS at the current funding level of \$134.8 million per year until March 2014. This funding will ensure that we can continue to assist people who are homeless or at risk, including low income Canadians, seniors, people with disabilities, recent immigrants and aboriginal people in need of support. We are working with provinces, municipalities and charitable organizations to develop ways to improve the effectiveness of federal investments in the area of housing and homelessness.

● (1920)

Over the years, our government has also made significant investments in affordable and supportive housing. Canada's economic action plan built on these investments with an additional one-time allocation of more than \$2 billion over two years in new and existing social housing, and by making available loans of up to \$2 billion over two years for housing related infrastructure projects.

These investments helped complete over 14,000 housing projects. There were over 1,300 projects to renovate existing social housing and over 400 projects were funded to help people with disabilities. In the north, over 200 social housing projects, including many multiple units, were funded.

Sadly, every investment our government has made to help the most vulnerable Canadians was opposed by the official opposition, and often with the support of the third party.

I would like to conclude by paying tribute to our community partners. All across the country there are dedicated people, both professionals and volunteers, who are working with us to get their fellow citizens off the street and into a stable home. By providing essential services, they are enabling vulnerable individuals to achieve self-sufficiency and full participation in society. The fact is, we are making a difference in the lives of tens of thousands of vulnerable Canadians.

We are pleased to support this motion today. Our government has given unprecedented support for housing and homelessness over the past years, and will continue to do so.

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan. I should tell her right at the beginning that I will have to interrupt her at 7:29 p. m.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to rise to speak to Motion No. 331

introduced by the member for Shefford. I want to congratulate him on the good work he has done on this motion and his deep understanding of the challenges facing many Canadians.

I am not going to read the motion, but there are two things I want to discuss. One is that the motion is about respecting and protecting the right to housing under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the good work that the Federation of Canadian Municipalities has done on rental housing. I am going to refer specifically to its report because it sets the background for why this motion is so important.

Members opposite continue to talk about how New Democrats voted against every measure. Of course, they fail to tell Canadians listening that was in the context of a budget bill, certain measures of which we simply could not support. They are being disingenuous by cherry-picking one aspect of a budget.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities produced a report called "The Housing Market and Canada's Economic Recovery". That report indicated:

For many Canadians, the cost of buying a home has become prohibitive. Average costs for single detached homes doubled between 2001 and 2010, while household incomes have not kept up...

We have entered a period during which a growing number of Canadians will need access to rental accommodation.... New demographics include young people entering the rental market; new immigrants, who are sorely needed to fill labour gaps; a more mobile labour force; and Canada's aging population, which is projected to downsize and save for retirement.

It goes on to indicate:

...on average tenants make up almost one-third of all households: 4 million dwellings with over 10 million people.

The rental sector plays a critically important role in Canada's housing system. Reflecting transitions in life, many tenants are young, creating new tenant households when they leave the family home. Others are older, seeking apartment living when they no longer need or want to maintain larger family homes. Similarly, immigrant households, a critical component of labour market supply, initially rent before they transition to ownership.

These are important factors. Madam Speaker, you come from Victoria and I am from the riding of Nanaimo—Cowichan. Both of us have significantly larger than provincial averages of seniors. That is the one piece that I want to speak to at this moment. I have been conducting seniors' forums throughout my riding of Nanaimo—Cowichan. I have been to Mill Bay, Duncan, Gabriola, Ladysmith, Chemainus, Nanaimo and Lake Cowichan. A common thread throughout all of those forums was the fact that many seniors are no longer able to live in affordable housing.

Some seniors own homes. What I heard from them is that they are asset rich and cash poor. Their incomes no longer keep pace to allow them to pay for the maintenance and municipal taxes on their homes. They are caught in a bind because in my riding of Nanaimo—Cowichan there has not been significant rental housing built for many years. Seniors are able to look after themselves and are still physically fit, but they need to get out of their homes because they either cannot afford them or cannot continue the upkeep. They are now faced with having to leave the riding because they cannot find any affordable housing.

Adjournment Proceedings

I know there are many seniors in Victoria who are in exactly the same spot. Victoria is far more expensive to live in than Nanaimo—Cowichan, whether it is the cost of renting or home ownership. The member for Shefford is saying that we need to look at an affordable rental stock that accommodates seniors, immigrants and new young families. It is interesting that in Canada we do not have a national affordable housing strategy which would include things like affordable rental housing stock.

Members opposite have talked about the fact that they have invested all of this money in housing, but what they have not said, and this is again from the report of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities:

- (1925)

Expiring federal operating agreements—which will see a growing reduction in federal annual housing expenditure, reaching \$500 million by 2020—further threaten the viability of one-third of Canada's social-housing stock. Most low-income tenants live within the private-housing sector, and there is a need to preserve and enhance the affordability of this part of the housing system.

Accordingly, the federal government will not be spending \$500 million a year on affordable housing stock by 2020. Yet it still claims that it is investing in such housing to make everything okay for all of those folks who cannot afford a decent place to live.

We would not even put our dogs in some of the rental housing stock available for seniors. There are cockroaches. The water does not run regularly. There is noise and they are dirty. There are drug problems in that housing and we would not allow anyone to live in that housing stock.

I believe that we have an obligation in Canada to acknowledge the UN convention and the point that housing needs to be protected, that it needs to be a right. We need to ensure that Canadians have access to affordable safe housing. We need to ensure that young families when they are starting out, and seniors when they are ready to retire, can find a place to live.

- (1930)

The Deputy Speaker: I am afraid I must interrupt the hon. member. She will have four minutes remaining for her intervention when this motion returns to the order paper.

[*Translation*]

The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the parliamentary secretary for taking the time to be here tonight.

We are here tonight to discuss the cost of post-secondary education in Canada. Tuition fees across the country are at a record high, and it does not look like they will decrease any time soon. On average, Canadian students are graduating with a debt of over \$25,000, and tuition fees are still rising at four times the rate of inflation.

In February, students across the country gathered and took to the streets, calling for action to reduce tuition fees and the ever-rising student debt load.

Education is the key to moving our economy forward. The government has done nothing to make university and college more affordable. Every dollar it claims to have spent has been clawed back by tuition fee hikes.

Rather than assisting the already cash-strapped provinces, the government is pushing a prisons agenda and downloading the costs of this program onto the provinces as well. Yet every time we bring up the ever-rising costs of tuition and the growing gap between those Canadians who have real access to post-secondary education and those who do not, the government talks about tax credits.

How do tax credits make tuition fees more affordable? How do tax credits make post-secondary education more accessible? The government loves tax credits. We see this all the time. We saw it with daycare and we saw it with children's arts and sports programs.

The government claims it is improving Canadians' access to these programs, but it really is not. All it is doing is making these programs cheaper for those who already have access, making them cheaper for those who already can afford these programs.

A tax credit does not help a single low income parent pay to go back to school to improve his or her skills. It does not help that parent access daycare while at school. Why, one might ask? It is because a tax credit does not give them access to the funds now, today, when the funds are needed to pay for their education. It just gives the parent a rebate in April when they file their taxes.

That is not true access. True access comes from reduced tuition fees so that all who wish to pursue post-secondary education can. True access comes from providing programs that will assist those Canadians improve their skills.

An educated population is key to our development and success as a nation. It is paramount to our international competitiveness. It is essential to our economic recovery and economic vitality. It is imperative to our social development.

Therefore, I will ask my question again. When will the government work with the cash-strapped provinces to make post-secondary education more affordable?

- (1935)

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to respond to the member for Scarborough—Rouge River on the issue of affordable post-secondary education.

Adjournment Proceedings

Our government recognizes the vital role that post-secondary education plays in our country's economic success. Over the past six years, our government has done more for students than any government before it. We are aware of the rising cost of education and the challenges students are facing. To ensure higher education remains affordable and accessible to Canadians, we put concrete measures in place to help students reduce and manage debt.

To start, we introduced non-repayable grants. In the 2009-10 academic year, nearly 300,000 students received close to \$600 million in grants. These grants are aimed at students who need it the most. For example, students from low-income families received an average of \$1,900 in grants last year.

Grants are not the only measure we have introduced. Student loan borrowers who have difficulty repaying their loans can turn to the federal government for support. We introduced repayment assistance plans to help borrowers who are having trouble making ends meet. Under this plan, no student will have to pay more than 20% of their income toward their student loan and no borrower will have a repayment period of more than 15 years, or 10 years if the borrower has a permanent disability.

For many of these borrowers, they will not be required to make any payments until their income increases. This plan has already helped 160,000 student loan borrowers in the last academic year. Of those, 90% did not have to make any payments at all.

[*Translation*]

Our government is doing its part to ensure that Canadians have access to post-secondary education and that they have the means to pursue that education.

[*English*]

We set out new measures for students in budget 2011 and we are acting swiftly to implement them.

First, we have eliminated the interest on part-time student loans while students are in school.

Second, we are increasing the income threshold used to determine eligibility of part-time Canada student loans and grants. This will allow more part-time students to qualify for financial assistance.

Finally, we have increased the amount full-time students can earn, from \$50 to \$100 per week, without affecting the eligibility of their loans.

I would like to remind the member for Scarborough—Rouge River that provinces and territories are responsible for tuition levels and the federal government provides funding to the provinces and territories in support of post-secondary education through the Canada social transfer, which ensures that they have the flexibility to manage their own spending.

Our government is working diligently to make post-secondary education accessible and affordable for Canadians. We are committed to having the most educated and skilled workforce in the world. We have put forward more measures to help students in order to ensure this occurs, and we have done it in spite of the opposition voting against all of these measures.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: Madam Speaker, the government can talk all it wants about the tax credits it has implemented, or the half measures with loan repayment assistance, or making loans more available for students and perhaps the infrastructure programs it has implemented that allows for more buildings to be built on campuses across the country, but at the end of the day, the government has not helped increase access to post-secondary education.

I have already established that a tax credit does not make tuition more affordable and many of these nice new buildings across the country are sitting vacant because there are not enough students and instructors to fill them. I have visited many campuses across the country where presidents and vice-presidents are telling me this is their problem.

We need accountability with regard to the funding that the federal government already provides each province and territory for education. As the parliamentary secretary mentioned, we need to ensure that the money earmarked for post-secondary education is actually being spent on that.

Yesterday's Ontario budget, with no investment in post-secondary education, proves that point further.

That is why, on this side of the House, we presented a bill to create a post-secondary education act in Canada that would ensure—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources.

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Madam Speaker, in reply to the member for Scarborough—Rouge River, I would like to highlight the measures in place to help post-secondary education students pay for their education, once again.

In the 2009-10 academic year, nearly 300,000 students received Canada student grants. That represents an increase of 150,000 compared with the previous year.

Canadians received up to \$600 million in grants to help them pay for their education. That is money students do not have to pay back.

Furthermore, through budget 2011, the government is continuing to invest in financial assistance for post-secondary students. For example, more part-time students will be eligible to receive loans and grants and they no longer have to pay interest on their loans while they are in school.

We have doubled the amount full-time students can earn while studying without affecting their eligibility, from \$50.00 to \$100.

● (1940)

[*Translation*]

We are providing students with more funding and with even more flexibility.

[*English*]

My apologies for my French.

Post-secondary education is a priority for our government, and I assure members our commitment to Canadian students is steadfast.

Adjournment Proceedings

[Translation]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to take advantage of this evening's late show to explore certain issues that I brought up in my initial speech about the living conditions of Attawapiskat residents. I would like to express some criticism regarding the government's wilful blindness to findings that have an undeniable impact on efforts to revitalize the social fabric of aboriginal communities in Canada.

The Conservative system, which is highly regulated but dehumanized, was unable to adequately deal with the media frenzy surrounding the living conditions of the Cree people in Attawapiskat. One of the government's major mistakes was its lack of on-site intervention and its unwillingness to implement culturally appropriate socio-economic rehabilitation measures. Third-party management is a prime example of an uninspired solution and demonstrates the failure of the government's blind delegation policies and of the fiduciary relationship between the Crown and Canada's aboriginal groups.

For two years, I worked for my own band council in Uashat, and I know that the federal government makes sure that it has specially selected representatives on the band councils and within the communities. The power of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development is now at the point where the federal government already has its pawns in place. Given that such is the case, the only alternative is to stand up to the federal government by invoking this principle of law that applies to all Canadians: No one can plead his own turpitude.

Through its wilful blindness, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development has allowed a number of harmful situations to continue in aboriginal communities throughout the country. Believe me, the embezzlement, white collar crime, influence peddling and insider trading that interfere with the decision-making processes of tribal management entities—the band councils—have been reported by Canadian intelligence agencies. By way of information, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development sent workers into the community of Attawapiskat 10 times in the past year. The department was thus well aware of the deterioration of the social fabric and the problems related to housing and education, among other things.

This situation leads me to think that many aspects of socio-cultural dysfunction that can be seen on reserves in this country are in fact exacerbated by the importance placed on the extraction and wholesale use of the natural resources that are plentiful on our traditional lands, at the expense of any real implementation of culturally integrated intervention measures in communities that are struggling socially.

Indeed, when aboriginal people live in problematic situations and must focus all of their efforts on trying to find solutions to daily problems related to housing, for instance, their attention is turned away from their traditional lands, where mining exploration and huge forestry projects are under way at this time.

All of this distress and turmoil in communities allow the industry to focus its efforts on extracting resources from the land.

That is my submission.

Mr. Greg Rickford (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise to respond to the question asked by the hon. member for Manicouagan. Let me begin by assuring my hon. colleagues that our government continues to work with willing partners across a broad spectrum of initiatives to improve the quality of life of aboriginal people. We have made significant, targeted investments in first nations priorities, including education, water and housing

We recognize the importance of safe and healthy communities, and we are actively supporting first nations by strategically planning investments that will support infrastructure projects that address these needs. Since fiscal year 2006-07, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada alone has allocated approximately \$1 billion to on-reserve housing. And over the last two fiscal years, that is from 2009 to 2011, \$150 million was provided through Canada's economic action plan, to support new housing construction, renovation, lot servicing and market-based housing on reserve.

The Government of Canada as a whole makes significant investments in infrastructure in first nations communities. Specifically, we provide approximately \$1 billion in funding annually for community infrastructure. This includes housing, water and wastewater systems, education facilities and other infrastructure. In fact, between 2006 and 2013, the Government of Canada will have allocated over \$2.5 billion in water and wastewater infrastructure alone in first nations communities.

Our government has shown its commitment to first nations through significant investments and concrete actions to enable them to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from Canada's prosperity.

Let me assure my colleagues that we will continue to work with first nations communities to address their infrastructure issues and support their well-being and prosperity.

This government is working with first nations to improve the quality of life in first nations communities. We are working to make a real and practical difference in the lives of aboriginal people. We continue to make major investments to support a wide range of infrastructure projects; water and wastewater projects; education and economic development.

Our government is making a difference in the lives of people living on reserves in our country.

● (1945)

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Madam Speaker, we can see what the real problem is here. I attend many meetings of various aboriginal groups in the country and have been to many committee meetings. The real problem is that the Conservatives believe that all problems can be solved with massive injections of money. In the Innu language we say, *mishta shuniau*, which means that money cannot solve all the problems of these groups and cannot meet all the needs that the nations have identified.

Adjournment Proceedings

I know that the Conservatives want to ensure that the monies invested will be used for the intended purposes. However, the transparency act, or rather, the measures for transparency of communities and band councils, will focus primarily on the chief's salary.

What we need is concerted action on the ground, culturally integrated action that will truly help the nation and focus on where the monies are invested because *mishta shuniau* is not the only answer to the problems of aboriginal communities in Canada. I submit this to my colleague.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Madam Speaker, as I said, our government is continuing to work with first nations to meet their communities' needs and to ensure that long-lasting infrastructure is in place to meet their current needs and support their development.

I want to make it clear that our government's infrastructure investments in first nations communities are helping to stimulate economic growth and improve the quality of life on reserves.

Every year, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada works with the first nations to develop the national first nations infrastructure investment plan, which includes strategic planning for investments that will support greater economic stability for Canada's first nations.

All told, we funded over 1,034 infrastructure projects during the 2010-11 fiscal year.

Investments in these areas will have a significant, positive impact on improving the quality of life for first nations.

● (1950)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Windsor West not being present to raise the matter for which adjournment notice has been given, the notice is deemed withdrawn.

The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:51 p.m.)

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