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(HANSARD)

Wednesday, April 4, 2012

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, April 4, 2012

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1405)

[*English*]

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

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

THE BUDGET

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it comes as no surprise that the government did not take the opposition's legitimate objections into account and that it will pass its budget without amendment. This cold and heartless budget will have tragic effects on the lives of thousands of Quebeckers in the coming weeks.

Starting today, devoted workers will find out that they no longer have jobs. People in the regions will feel the effects of cuts to Canada Economic Development. Unemployed workers will lose five weeks of employment insurance benefits. People in the forestry industry will see cuts to foreign market development. CBC and Telefilm will have to make tough choices.

Meanwhile, the Conservatives will be patting each other on the back and celebrating this fiasco. What a sorry spectacle.

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[*English*]

NORTH YORK GENERAL HOSPITAL

Mr. Joe Daniel (Don Valley East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I send congratulations to a notable institution in my riding of Don Valley East, the North York General Hospital. It has recently been evaluated by Accreditation Canada and has been given an exemplary standing, a 100% rating, the highest rating it can possibly receive from Accreditation Canada. It must be noted that this kind of designation is very rare for hospitals or any other service provider.

This achievement is emblematic of how the highly qualified staff of North York General Hospital acts with professionalism and is committed to its patients. Those who need the services of the North York General Hospital can come in with confidence. Their needs will be looked after by some of the most professional staff in the world with the most modern and sophisticated medical technology.

Once again, I congratulate the North York General Hospital for its outstanding achievement.

* * *

[*Translation*]

REFUGEE RIGHTS DAY IN CANADA

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the daughter of refugees, I am delighted to celebrate Refugee Rights Day in Canada. On this day in 1985, the Supreme Court recognized that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms also protects the fundamental rights of refugee claimants.

Unfortunately, 27 years later, the federal government is trying to take away these rights by politicizing the refugee selection process, which must be fair, independent and equitable. Bill C-31 will discriminate against some refugees by revoking their right to appeal.

Not only will this government be engaging in discriminatory practices, but it may even deport refugees who have become permanent residents. In 2012, this is cruel and makes no sense. I believe that I am a good example of how refugees can integrate well into life in Canada.

I invite my Conservative colleagues to abandon their divisive politics. They should instead recognize and celebrate the socio-cultural and economic contributions of thousands of refugees living in this country, like my parents, who have helped build the Canada that we know today.

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[*English*]

YUKON NATIVE HOCKEY TOURNAMENT

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Yukon Native Hockey Tournament, the largest hockey tournament in the Yukon, celebrated its 35th anniversary this past weekend in Whitehorse. Forty-two teams and more than six hundred players from across the Yukon, Northwest Territories and British Columbia, as well as their family and friends, caught up, had some fun and watched some great hockey.

Statements by Members

This tournament is an opportunity to promote aboriginal hockey for all ages and provides the opportunity for Yukon first nations athletes to compete with other Canadian provinces and territories in the sport. It is a commitment to hockey for all ages in the spirit of friendship and goodwill on a local, regional and national level. This tournament is the biggest and best native hockey tournament north of 60.

Thanks go to the sponsors, volunteers and organizers. Congratulations go to all the teams and to 35 fantastic years.

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MONTAGUE INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on March 28, Megan Morrison's grade eight class at Montague Intermediate School in my riding won the Canada's Coolest School Trip Contest.

This contest had classes submit videos that recreated a significant Canadian moment. It was sponsored by Parks Canada. Ms. Morrison's class finished first out of 69 entries from across the country, and won a class trip to Banff, Alberta. The winning video was called The Charlottetown Conference of 1864. It featured the class playing the Fathers of Confederation as they met at Province House in Charlottetown to discuss the birth of our nation. It is inspiring to see our youth become so passionate about the history of our great country. It reflects on the wonderful community of teachers and students at Montague Intermediate.

I want to send Ms. Morrison and all of her grade 8 class who worked so hard on this video heartfelt congratulations from me and every member of this House of Commons.

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PALLISER

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce two leadership changes in Palliser.

First, I would like to congratulate the new commanding officer of the Saskatchewan Dragoons, Major Chris Hunter, and to thank the outgoing officer, Major Brad Hrycyna.

Second, I would like to congratulate the new honorary colonel Jim Hunter at 15 Wing Moose Jaw and thank the outgoing honorary colonel, Yvette Moore. Jim Hunter began his aviation career by training as a pilot at 15 Wing Moose Jaw, later served as wing commander and currently is the president and CEO of the Regina Airport Authority. Yvette Moore is a Saskatchewan entrepreneur, well known for her naturalistic portraits of prairie landscapes.

Thanks again to Major Hrycyna and Yvette Moore for their service. Best wishes to Major Chris Hunter and Honorary Colonel Jim Hunter.

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● (1410)

KOMAGATA MARU

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, April 4, 1914 was the ill-fated date the *Komagata Maru* departed from Hong Kong and reached Vancouver's Burrard Inlet on May 23. For two

months the *Komagata Maru* remained in Burrard Inlet and passengers were denied basic necessities like food and water. The discriminatory continuous journey regulation prevented the passengers from disembarking.

The tragedy of *Komagata Maru* marks a dark chapter in Canadian history. The federal government must provide closure for the trauma this has caused the South Asian community so that the process of healing and reconciliation can begin. That is why I have put forward a motion demanding that the Prime Minister formally apologize in the House of Commons.

I urge the Prime Minister to finally steer the *Komagata Maru* to shore after 98 years and offer a dignified, respectful official apology for the *Komagata Maru* tragedy.

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GREAT NORTHERN RIDE

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 13 years ago 13 businessmen from Brantford set out on their snowmobiles to raise \$35,000 for children with special needs. Thirteen years later, that adventure has evolved into the annual cross-country snowmobile trek known as the Great Northern Ride, having raised over \$1.3 million.

The driving force behind the ride is a good friend, Bob Caissie, a larger than life personality. Riders have covered almost 15,000 kilometres of terrain from Cold Lake, Alberta to Newfoundland's Northern Peninsula. They are an exceptional group of individuals who like to work hard, play harder and share a commitment to improving children's lives.

Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote, "Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail". Great northern riders have done just that, charting their own path, leaving behind not just a trail of snow but a trail of very special kids whose lives will never be the same.

Thanks to Bob and thanks to Great Northern Riders.

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BURMA

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the nation of Burma has just held a set of byelections and early results are in. Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the National League for Democracy party, has won a seat in parliament. We are pleased that reports indicate voting was conducted without violence or overt intimidation. Burma appears to be making progress toward democracy once more. We hope this progress continues.

Despite these gains, we are concerned, however, about the protection of individual rights of Burmese citizens. We call on the Government of Burma to respect the fundamental rights and freedoms all people should enjoy. Those freedoms include freedom of the press, of expression and of religion. We also call on the Burmese government to seek peace in Kachin State and to put a stop to the abuses, such as the recent burning of Christian churches and destruction of villages which have been reported there. We continue to call on the government to respect the lives and property of the Kachin, Karen, Mon, Karenni, Chin, Shan and other ethnic and religious minorities.

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[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday, on behalf of my NDP colleagues, I moved a motion in the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development to hear from witness Dan Wicklum, the chief executive of Canada's Oil Sands Innovation Alliance.

"Loaning" this senior Environment Canada official to an oil industry lobby raises serious ethical questions. How can someone be on the payroll of a regulatory agency one day and on the payroll of Shell, BP, Imperial Oil and Suncor the next, only to resume his position at Environment Canada as though it were no big deal?

Instead of adopting my original motion, the committee instead decided to study "the positive environmental impacts" of the oil sands lobby.

It is clear that the Conservatives are more interested in spreading big oil propaganda than in shedding light on this blatant conflict of interest. It is shameful.

* * *

• (1415)

FRENCH LANGUAGE WORLD FORUM

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, French is much more than just a language. In addition to being one of our official languages—spoken by over 9.5 million Canadians—French is an essential element of our history and our heritage.

Yesterday, my colleague, the hon. Minister of State for La Francophonie, announced \$950,000 in funding for the French Language World Forum, which will be held from July 4 to 6, 2012.

Canada is proud to contribute to this first French Language World Forum, which will take place in Quebec City, the very birthplace of our francophone heritage in North America. Our government is firmly committed to promoting the French language and linguistic duality. That is why we are committed to promoting French at home and abroad by participating in activities like this one. And I am very pleased that this first forum is being held in Quebec City.

Statements by Members

THE BUDGET

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative budget does not meet the needs of the women in Gatineau, in Quebec or in Canada.

[English]

It is obvious that no gender-based analysis was done during its preparation.

[Translation]

No gender-based analysis was done during the preparation of this budget. Raising the minimum age for old age security benefits will have a disproportionate effect on women because 53% of them depend on the program to ensure a decent income.

The proposed tax cuts will not help low-income women who cannot take advantage of them. In Gatineau, the public service cuts will have a greater impact on women, who account for 55.2% of public servants. This budget does very little for women. In fact, many women from across the country contact me every day to express their disappointment.

I strongly encourage the Minister for Status of Women, whose organization was ignored in the budget, to do her job and make sure that the measures in the budget are adjusted to reflect the gender equality that this government so often claims to champion.

* * *

[English]

CANADIAN GRAIN COMMISSION

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since 1912, a hundred years ago, the Canadian Grain Commission has been helping to establish Canada's reputation as a consistent supplier of high quality grain.

Our Conservative government has always supported the Grain Commission. Last week's budget provided \$44 million in new funding to help the commission modernize and make sure that the next hundred years are as successful as the past century.

Our government will continue to introduce legislation that will modernize the commission and ensure its continued success. Indeed, the CGC will continue to play an important role in an open market when farmers get marketing freedom on August 1.

Mr. Speaker, I invite you and all parliamentarians to a reception tonight at the government conference centre to congratulate the grain commission on its historic past, serving farmers, grain companies and our international customers.

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INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Centre-North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, economic action plan 2012 is providing support to families and communities. Federal transfers to provinces and territories continue to be at a record levels, and Alberta will continue to receive significant support through major federal transfers.

Oral Questions

For Alberta, major transfers will total close to \$3.6 billion in 2012-13. This long-term growing support will help to ensure that Alberta has the resources required to provide essential public services, and contributes to shared national objectives, including health care, post-secondary education, and key components of Canada's social programs, as well as infrastructure.

This support includes almost \$2.3 billion through the Canada health transfer, an increase of \$646 million since 2005, and over \$1.3 billion through the Canada social transfer, an increase of \$717 million since 2005, as well as continued support through the gas tax transfer fund.

While the opposition is making false accusations about our support for transfers to the provinces and territories, our government is continuing to provide growing support to these partners.

* * *

HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to commemorate National Holocaust Remembrance Day, a remembrance of horrors too terrible to be believed but not too terrible to have happened, of the Holocaust as a war against the Jews in which not all victims were Jews but all Jews were targeted victims, being defamed, demonized and dehumanized as prologue and justification for their destruction.

This day is reminder of the dangers of state-sanctioned incitement to hatred and genocide; of the danger of the oldest and most enduring of hatreds, anti-Semitism; of indifference and inaction in the face of incitement and mass atrocity; of the targeting of the vulnerable, whom the Nazis spoke of as having "lives not worth living"; of the culture of impunity; of the dangers of forgetting, ignoring, trivializing or denying the Holocaust; and a reminder, on this centenary of Raoul Wallenberg, this hero of the Holocaust, that one person can resist, that one person can confront evil, that one person can prevail, that one person can transform history.

Let us pledge never again to be silent or indifferent in the face of evil. Plus jamais.

* * *

• (1420)

[Translation]

HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, every year, we take a moment to remember and reflect on an inhuman genocide carried out by human beings.

[English]

The systematic planning and carrying out of the destruction of six million human lives is an unequalled tragedy in a century that saw far too many.

[Translation]

On Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, we are all called to contemplate the truth of the genocide: the brutal murder of six million Jews simply because they were Jewish, of six million

women, men and children, in addition to the millions who were displaced and hunted just because they were Jewish.

[English]

Today, we remember, but we also must remember to act against intolerance, racism and hatred of any kind.

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HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the evening of April 18, Jewish communities around the world will come together and mark Yom Hashoah, a special day of remembrance for the suffering and murder of millions of innocent men, women and children during the Holocaust.

As parliamentarians, it is our duty to ensure that "never again" is more than just about words but about action.

While there are numerous examples of our government's work in the fight against anti-Semitism, I am most proud that in the 2010 Speech from the Throne our government committed to supporting a national Holocaust memorial, which will be located in the national capital region.

On April 18, this Yom Hashoah, I ask everyone to join me in rejecting anti-Semitism in all its virulent forms and in remembering the victims of the Holocaust.

The Speaker: I now invite the House to rise and observe a moment of silence in commemoration of the Holocaust.

[A moment of silence observed]

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General's report on the F-35s is damaging to the government. One fundamental question remains unanswered. Can the Prime Minister tell us who in his cabinet, in his government, was responsible for the F-35s?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General's report was very clear about responsibilities. The government has accepted the Auditor General's recommendations and, clearly, we will act on them to ensure better oversight.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, our parliamentary system is based on the principle of ministerial accountability. The minister is accountable for what happens in his department. Ultimately, the Prime Minister is accountable for the ministers he has chosen. The F-35 file is the Department of National Defence's responsibility.

It was therefore the Minister of National Defence's responsibility to know what was happening and to ensure that parliamentarians had all the information and that the information was accurate.

Oral Questions

Does the Prime Minister believe that his Minister of National Defence did his job properly?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Yes, Mr. Speaker, the government and the ministers accept their responsibilities and the Auditor General's recommendations. We will act on these recommendations. The government has not yet purchased any such planes. Clearly, we will re-examine the process and make changes.

[*English*]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, even if we were to believe that the Chief of Defence Staff and the generals were plotting behind the minister's back to lie to Parliament, to lie to Canadians, which is highly unlikely, it would only prove that the Minister of National Defence was not in control of his own department.

However, the Minister of National Defence knew the F-35 was a fiasco. The NDP, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, and media report after media report all highlighted the numerous problems with the plane and its budgeting.

When will the Minister of National Defence finally stand up and take responsibility for the F-35 debacle? Where is the accountability?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course the leader of the NDP is putting words into the Auditor General's mouth that he certainly never said.

The reality is that the government has not yet purchased any such planes. The Auditor General has given a recommendation on re-examining the cost estimates. The government will do that.

The government will also improve the process for cost estimates before moving forward. We have been clear on that.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence looked very much in charge when he climbed aboard the F-35 for photo ops. He looked very much in charge when for months he was denying any problems with the F-35.

Here is the bottom line: The Minister of National Defence had the responsibility to know, he had the duty to find out and he had the obligation to tell the truth in Parliament.

Now that his Minister of National Defence has failed so miserably, why is the Prime Minister refusing to act?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): On the contrary, Mr. Speaker, the government is acting on the recommendations of the Auditor General. The government has not acquired the aircraft. The government has not signed a contract. The government has frozen the funds for acquisition. The government will examine the process.

The government has said it will set up a separate and distinct secretariat, and we will make sure there are independent verification processes. That is how the government will proceed.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if the generals will not follow the chain of command, who

is the problem exactly: the Chief of Defence Staff or the Minister of National Defence? Under our system, it is the minister.

We have seen no action, no accountability. Worse, instead of opening up the process with a public tender, as he has just admitted, they are to create an F-35 secretariat. The Conservatives are still fully on board with the F-35, believe it or not. They are not even considering other options.

Why will the minister not stand up and take responsibility? Why will the Prime Minister not put an end to this nonsense?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is accepting the recommendations of the Auditor General. The course of action suggested by the leader of the NDP is not the course of action suggested by the Auditor General.

The Government of Canada, along with its allied partners, has been involved in the development of this aircraft for some 15 years. There are close to half a billion dollars in contracts that have been given to Canadian firms, which are continuing their work.

This government remains committed to making sure, when the CF-18 reaches the eventual end of its life, beginning at the end of this decade, that our men and women in uniform have the best equipment.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is accepting the recommendations but it is not accepting responsibility. The Prime Minister is directly avoiding his responsibilities.

A \$10 billion piece of misinformation does not happen by immaculate conception. Somebody misinformed somebody else. It happened.

When will the Prime Minister of Canada take clear responsibility for what took place? When will that happen?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General has been very clear on responsibility for this in the report and the government is taking the responsibility to act on his recommendations.

We will re-examine, as the Auditor General has suggested, the cost estimates before proceeding. We will ensure there is a more independent process to verify the accuracy of those estimates.

• (1430)

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is the same government that vilified the Parliamentary Budget Officer for his report and for his numbers, which have been completely vindicated by what the Auditor General had to say. It is the same government that denied the veracity of what was going on with the Congressional Budget Office in the United States.

When we asked the Prime Minister questions about what the Dutch prime minister was doing, he told everyone not to worry because we had a contract in Canada that would protect us from the rising costs, which would prove to be simply untrue.

When did the Prime Minister finally become aware of the fact that the information he had been giving the House of Commons was completely and utterly—

The Speaker: The right hon. Prime Minister.

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is the Government of the United States that has agreed to cover escalation in the development costs. The Government of Canada remains, which it has been for the past 15 years, part of the development process of the aircraft. We do have half a billion dollars of contracts in this country.

As I have said repeatedly, we will ensure that when we replace the aircraft at the end of this decade, and we have not yet signed a contract in that regard, we will ensure that our men and women in the air force have the best equipment.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is not taking any responsibility. No one is responsible for the situation. What has happened is practically a miracle.

Any company that made this type of mistake, that misled its shareholders, misled the public, published a false prospectus and published false figures and documents involving billions of dollars—any company that did these things—would fire its CEO and replace its board of directors.

Why not do the same for the Government of Canada? Why not?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the government has not spent any money to purchase these planes and has not yet signed a contract.

The Auditor General's report was very clear about responsibilities. The government is taking responsibility and re-examining the cost estimates, improving the process and ensuring that, in the future, when we replace the aircraft, our air force has the best equipment.

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, before committing to the procurement of military equipment, the Minister of National Defence must ensure that the equipment in question meets our operational needs.

The Auditor General's report confirms that the F-35 jets do not meet all our operational needs. It is the responsibility of Public Works to purchase equipment within budget and in accordance with the procurement process. The Auditor General's report also shows that the Conservatives failed in that regard.

At least two ministers did not do their job. Whose fault is it?

[*English*]

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we accept the conclusions of the Auditor General and will implement his recommendations.

The Government of Canada is taking action to ensure that due diligence, oversight and transparency are permanently embedded in the process to replace Canada's aging fighter aircraft, which is why we have frozen funds for the acquisition and are establishing a separate F-35 secretariat outside of National Defence to lead this project moving forward.

To date, no funds have been expended in acquiring replacement aircraft.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if the Conservatives truly want what is best for our troops,

they will purchase a plane that works, and they will do so in time to replace the CF-18.

The best way to purchase the right jet for our troops, to get the best price for taxpayers and to obtain industrial spinoffs that are formally guaranteed is through an open and transparent call for tenders.

Instead of covering up the F-35 failure by passing the buck from one department to another, why not hold an open and transparent call for tenders right now?

[*English*]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would remind the member opposite that the Auditor General said that the officials from the Department of National Defence did not provide cost estimates for the F-35 to parliamentarians. In his recommendations he said that the Department of National Defence should update those cost estimates and table them in Parliament. We agree.

However, we will also go further than that to ensure that taxpayer dollars are respected. We are establishing a new secretariat outside of the Department of National Defence which will run the process to replace the CF-18s. We have also frozen the funding allocated for that, and no purchase will be made until these conditions are met.

● (1435)

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Defence can stop looking around. This is not a fishing lodge and there is no helicopter coming for him today.

This is the House of Commons and this is where ministers are supposed to stand up and take responsibility when things go off the rails. We knew the numbers were wrong. The PBO knew the numbers were wrong. The U.S. and other countries raised lots of red flags. However, the Minister of Defence carried on rigging this process. Will he stand up and take responsibility for this today?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course the member is wrong. The Auditor General has provided conclusions and has made recommendations and we have accepted those.

As was outlined already by the Prime Minister and the Minister for Public Works, we have put in place a process that is comprehensive and responds to those concerns. We will continue now, with the guidance of Public Works, to move forward with a proper acquisition process to replace the aging CF-18s.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that process is all about deck chairs on the *Titanic*. It was that Minister of National Defence who originally lost control of this file. The PBO, industry experts, anybody who told the truth about the F-35, all of us were demonized by the minister. All the while, he was misleading Canadians and rigging this procurement process.

Ministerial accountability means that the minister is accountable. Will he finally take responsibility? Will he get up?

Oral Questions

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as was mentioned, with no contract in place, no money misspent and now funds frozen, we are injecting more accountability into this process.

We will move forward. Our intention is to see the CF-18 aircraft replaced with a proper aircraft. We will continue to make investments that support the men and women in uniform. I would advise the member opposite to do the same.

Mr. Mathieu Ravnagat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to see that the Minister of National Defence is out of the penalty box.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, the minister responsible for conflicts of interest, the member for Mégantic—L'Érable, was in charge of Public Works at the time. The Auditor General's report clearly establishes that he did not exercise due diligence in the procurement of military equipment.

How can the current Minister of Public Works monitor the integrity of the procurement process when her department has been blamed by the Auditor General?

[*English*]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General made one recommendation and that was for us to respond to the fact that officials at the Department of National Defence did not provide what he sees as accurate cost estimates for the F-35s. He wants the Department of National Defence to table those new estimates in Parliament.

We agree with him but we will go one step further to ensure taxpayers' interests are protected and to ensure these estimates are validated independently. We will create a secretariat outside of the Department of National Defence. We have frozen funding, and there will be no purchase of any new aircraft until these conditions are met.

Mr. Mathieu Ravnagat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when the minister of conflicts of interests, also known as le député de Mégantic—L'Érable, was at Public Works, he was supposed to provide oversight for the largest military procurement in our history but he dropped the ball, the latest item on a long list of his failures to exercise due diligence.

Multiple ethics investigations, violating conflict of interest laws and now failing to rein in the F-35 fiasco when he had the chance, will he now take responsibility for his role in allowing the F-35 fiasco to spin out of control?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. member that the largest procurement in the history of Canada was the shipbuilding procurement strategy and it was delivered very successfully by the government. In fact, it is seen as one of the best procurements internationally.

We have taken the Auditor General's recommendation to heart. He said that the Department of National Defence needed to refine its cost estimates and table them in Parliament, and we agree with him. We will not move forward with this purchase until that is done.

• (1440)

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the fact is that the F-35 fiasco spun out of control on the Conservatives' watch. The Auditor General now confirms that the Parliamentary Budget Officer got his numbers right when he released his cost estimates on the F-35s a year ago. The government knew the PBO was correct but the Conservative ministers attacked him anyway.

Why did the government viciously attack the PBO when it knew his numbers were correct? Why did it do that?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General spoke and we have accepted his recommendations. We have listened to him and we are moving forward. We have frozen the acquisition funding in anticipation of refined cost estimates before the decision is made for any acquisition.

We have not signed a contract to purchase a replacement aircraft and, to date, we have not spent any public funds to purchase a replacement aircraft.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let me try again.

The Minister of Finance recently called PBO numbers “unbelievable”, “unreliable” and “incredible”.

What is unbelievable is the government attacking the PBO when it knew he was right. What is unreliable is any financial estimates the Conservatives give Parliament. What is really incredible is that the government still refuses to make the PBO independent.

Will the government now withdraw its smears against the Parliamentary Budget Officer and apologize to him?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are committed to ensuring that taxpayers receive the best value. Funding in this regard will remain frozen. Canada will not purchase new aircraft until further due diligence, oversight and transparency are applied to the process of replacing Canada's aging CF-18 fleet.

Canada remains committed to ensuring that the Royal Canadian Air Force has the aircraft it needs to do the job we ask of it.

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government's handling of the F-35 file is a disgrace and no minister is willing to stand up and take responsibility. The Auditor General made it clear that for too long Conservative ministers have kept parliamentarians and, indeed, the public in the dark.

Getting to the bottom of this fiasco is in the best interest, not only of our armed forces but of all Canadians. Will the government agree to immediately hold open, full and public hearings on the F-35 fiasco at the public accounts committee, yes or no?

Oral Questions

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, committee business is up to the committee, but I would encourage as much transparency as possible on this file.

I believe that what the Auditor General is recommending is the right thing to do. We have already put in motion steps to do exactly that. We will not move forward with the purchase. The allocated funding for the F-35 has been frozen until the Department of National Defence tables updated cost estimates publicly to Parliament and we validate those independently.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, two words, transparency and accountability. We should remember those words—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Westmount—Ville-Marie has the floor.

Mr. Marc Garneau: Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Auditor General told us that the F-35 program was anything but transparent. In fact, it was a cover-up. The government also told us yesterday that there was no intention to be accountable in any way whatsoever, and again today, at least not for the ministers who were involved.

The Minister of National Defence is responsible to Parliament and to Canadians for this fiasco. Will he do the honourable thing and stand up and resign?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that is not what the Auditor General has said. The member should be very careful about mischaracterizing the words of the Auditor General.

We have said that we accept his conclusions. We have acted on the recommendation, as outlined by the Minister of Public Works and Government Services. We will continue to move forward on this file with her on the point with respect to these steps, this process that would improve accountability, transparency and greater clarity on the need for this project.

• (1445)

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the government created an F-35 secretariat, composed entirely of the same old incompetent gang, which was missing in action in the first place, plus the minister for gazebos.

Meanwhile, the Parliamentary Budget Officer was the only competent public official awake during the entire debacle. He was right and the Conservatives knew they were wrong. We trust the PBO, not the Conservatives.

If the Prime Minister will not fire himself, will he at least fire the three blind mice and appoint Kevin Page in their place?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, it is important, as we move forward, that we independently validate the new cost estimates that the Department of National Defence will table in Parliament.

We have also asked, through the secretariat, that annual updates to Parliament on the performance schedules and the cost estimates are

also made public. We think that is very important. We have put in place as much accountability in this framework as we can.

To the point the members made about the secretariat, this will be managed by a committee of deputy ministers, but, again, we will look for independent validation.

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last fall, when the government knew full well its F-35 plan was in a tailspin, the Associate Minister of National Defence repeatedly told Parliament everything was just fine and dandy. He said, "Our plan is on track. Things are working. The aircraft are coming off the production line".

My question for the Associate Minister of National Defence, now the minister without portfolio, is this. Will he resign for misleading Canadians?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in actual fact, no such thing has happened. Let me go back to what is relevant and important.

We accept the conclusions of the Auditor General. His recommendations are the very things we are acting upon. We are moving forward to ensure that diligence, oversight and transparency are fully embedded in the process to replace Canada's aging fighter aircraft. That is why we have frozen funding. We have, in fact, moved to ensure that the very things the Auditor General has recommended are actually done.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General estimates that millions of Canadians systematically avoid paying taxes without worrying in the slightest about Revenue Canada. The agency does not have the necessary resources to go after these tax cheaters. Instead of helping Revenue Canada, the Conservatives are once again cutting its budget. The government is letting billions of dollars slip through its fingers.

Instead of cutting services, why are the Conservatives not getting tough on tax evasion?

[English]

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General found that CRA has identified suitable methods to address filing and registration non-compliance and identified some areas for improvement. We agree with the recommendations contained in the report and we are taking steps to address the issues that have been identified.

I would also like to make the House aware that the Auditor General also stated, "The agency gets a good return on investment from this program".

[Translation]

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, why cut funding from the agency that catches tax cheaters?

Oral Questions

[English]

Tax cheaters cost Canadians billions. However, Conservatives are attacking the people trying to get the money back. Over the past two years, \$2.8 billion was recovered from tax cheats, but more can and should be done to reverse the tax on OAS, to invest in health care and create jobs.

Instead of cuts, why will the government not invest more in CRA and help it find more tax cheats?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since 2006, the CRA has audited thousands of cases of tax evasion, identified more than \$4 billion in unpaid taxes through our efforts on aggressive tax planning. This is compared with just \$174 million in the final years that the Liberals were in office.

Because of the measures taken by our government, the number of Canadians coming forward with previously undisclosed assets have soared every year since we have been in office. The number of voluntary disclosures in 2011 increased by an astounding 238%.

* * *

● (1450)

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, so much for a jobs-based budget. The Conservatives think they are going to stimulate the economy by cutting 19,000 jobs out of the public service. The first public servants affected by these cuts will be notified today. What the government is not saying is that the cuts will also lead to the loss of 40,000 jobs in the private sector. These cuts will not only affect the national capital region, but will have a domino effect across the country.

Do the Conservatives realize that they are hurting the economy?

[English]

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, economic action plan 2012 is our plan for jobs, growth and long-term prosperity, keeping taxes and debt low, while returning to a balanced budget. We have found fair, balanced and moderate savings measures to reduce the deficit, which would reduce the size of the federal public service by about 4% over the next three years. Departments will be informing unions and employees about specific changes and will communicate accordingly.

A leaner, more affordable government is good for Canadian taxpayers.

* * *

THE BUDGET

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Conservatives can say whatever they want, but Canadians are going to lose the services they need. We already know that the Conservatives' cuts would affect aviation safety and now food safety. These cuts would put the health and safety of Canadians at risk.

We know the consequences of the Conservative cuts at Service Canada. What other services will Canadians find are gone tomorrow? Canadians have a right to know and they need to know. What is it?

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, budget 2012 is our government's plan for jobs, growth and long-term prosperity. Savings measures contained within the budget are modest. We will continue to improve necessary services to Canadians moving forward.

* * *

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians gave our government a strong mandate to end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry once and for all. This is a measure that has burdened law-abiding hunters, farmers and sport shooters for 17 years. According to the CBC, it has cost Canadian taxpayers over \$2 billion and has not stopped a single crime or saved a single life.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety please update the House on the progress of ending the long gun registry? Does she have some good news for us?

Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to report that today the Senate will vote for the last time on ending the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry.

We are all counting the hours until the moment comes when law-abiding Canadians will no longer have to register their long guns. We committed to Canadians that we would end the long gun registry, and they gave us the mandate to do so. We are grateful that we will be able to follow through on our commitment and end the long gun registry once and for all.

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, how a four time convicted fraudster gets an all-access pass into the Prime Minister's office remains a mystery. However, we know that wherever Bruce Carson goes, he leaves a lot of ethical violations and unanswered questions.

Speaking of unanswered questions, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development has been ducking some fundamental questions about his relationship with Bruce Carson. He would know that his office was at the centre of the Bruce Carson scandal.

Would the minister stop hiding behind his staffers and stand and tell the House what he is hiding about his relationship with Bruce Carson?

Oral Questions

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Timmins—James Bay knows full well that this is under investigation. Therefore, it would be inappropriate for me to comment.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, talk about investigation, we have the lobbying commissioner, the ethics commissioner, the RCMP and the OPP. When we think about the Conservative Party and Bruce Carson, this man is like a one-man stimulus package for the police and at the centre of it is his office and the fact that Bruce Carson and his girlfriend were going to head up a whole bunch of impoverished first nation communities.

Why is he trying to hide from Mr. Bruce Carson? What does he know and what is his involvement with the Bruce Carson gang?

• (1455)

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know the member for Timmins—James Bay likes to throw dirt around this place. All I can say is this is under investigation and therefore it is inappropriate to comment and the member knows that. I do not know why he is pursuing this line of questioning in the House.

* * *

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives never miss an opportunity to reward their friends. The Minister of Industry has made yet another patronage appointment, this time to the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada. The appointee's qualifications amount to contributing to the Conservative Party's coffers. We were already very familiar with the elastic ethics of the Minister of Industry. He is fully prepared to sell jobs in his department to the highest bidder.

How many ethical blunders will it take for the Minister of Industry to realize that Canadians no longer trust him?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, NSERC is an important granting council. People must be appointed based on merit, and that is what we always do.

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, these are not the kinds of appointments that will help the minister of conflict of interest regain his credibility. The individual appointed to the council has contributed thousands of dollars to the election campaigns of the President of the Treasury Board. We would not be surprised to learn that the Minister of Industry went on another hunting trip, this time near the gazebo in Huntsville to discuss the appointment.

Will the minister continue to become embroiled in never-ending scandals or will he do the right thing and resign from cabinet?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, all appointments are made based on merit. In this case, I repeat, NSERC is an important granting council. I can assure this House that all appointments, including this one, are made based on merit. I therefore encourage the hon. member to look at the qualifications of the individual in question.

[English]

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonaville—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after bragging about maintaining or even increasing the level of funding for the CBC, it seems the axe is now out. Even the backbench Conservatives are drooling all over the place just at the concept. The wolves are at the door.

The Conservative cuts will kill plans for new programming, force the CBC off the air in rural and remote communities and 650 jobs will gone. Did he realize that these cuts would be so deep? Why did he not do anything about it?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, the member opposite has it exactly wrong. I would encourage my hon. colleague to look at the speech that was given by Hubert Lacroix, president of the CBC, which outlines it in greater detail.

Our budget provides the funds necessary for the CBC to fulfill its obligations under the Broadcasting Act and to go further to implement its 2015 plan for the next few years of the CBC, which includes staying in the regions, protecting its official language footprint, more digitization and also to have a leaner public broadcaster that serves the interest of not only of the cultural communities but also of taxpayers.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we listened to Hubert Lacroix's speech and, contrary to what the minister says, this is a sad day, not only for Canada's Francophonie, but also for culture and for the regions. Financial pressure is forcing the CBC to cut over \$200 million. Not only will this affect analog airwaves, but the CBC is also saying it will have to scale back its plans to expand local service, digital specialty channels, signature events and cross-cultural programming.

What does the minister have against the CBC? Why will he not stand up for the interests of Canadians and the Francophonie?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in our budget, the CBC has sufficient funds to fulfill its mandate under the Broadcasting Act. It also has the funds needed for its 2015 plan.

[English]

If my hon. colleague opposite believes the government should adopt a Liberal approach to the CBC, here is what was said about the Liberal approach to the CBC by the *Toronto Star*. It said, "CBC has been treated shabbily by the Liberal government, downsized, underfunded, abandoned". The Liberals cut the CBC by \$414 million. If they want this government to adopt the Liberal position—

Oral Questions

The Speaker: The hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

* * *

• (1500)

[Translation]

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this morning, Quebec families woke up to a huge price jump at the pump. Prices in Montreal are higher than those in any other Canadian city. This morning, the price was \$1.47 per litre. Families are being—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, families are being swindled on what just happens to be the eve of the Easter holiday, and the Conservatives are refusing to do anything about it.

When will they listen to the New Democrats and appoint a gasoline prices ombudsman who will have the power to act on behalf of consumers? When will they give Quebec families a little breathing room?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is really interesting is that the member is a carbon tax advocate. Imagine the devastating effect of such a tax.

On this side of the House, we have a responsible government that reduced the GST by two percentage points and tabled a budget in that same vein, a budget that keeps taxes low. We also implemented the Fairness at the Pumps Act. These measures are having a tangible impact and are the complete opposite of a carbon tax, which would have a devastating impact on jobs in Canada.

[English]

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Conservatives have no problem dishing out lavish tax subsidies to their friends in big oil, but when it comes to protecting families from gas pump ripoffs, they are asleep at the wheel.

Canadians again woke up this morning to soaring gas prices, and Canadians struggling to get by are sick of being gouged by oil companies every time there is a long weekend upon us. For years, New Democrats have called for an independent gas price ombudsman to finally put an end to these ripoffs.

When will the Conservatives stop putting big oil ahead of Canadians?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the member were serious about this matter, he would stop advocating for a carbon tax, which would be devastating for the economy of Canada. Moreover, instead of pushing for higher taxes on Canadians, like the NDP would do, we reduced the GST by two points and we put measures of fairness at the pumps. These things work. Not later than last month, three companies were guilty of fixing prices.

This is real action and totally the opposite of advocating a carbon tax that would be devastating for the economy.

* * *

THE BUDGET

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government understands that Canada's long-term prosperity means expanding beyond our borders. It means promoting Canada on the world stage to succeed with more trade and encouraging more investment. Unfortunately, the NDP does not understand this concept. The only time the NDP reaches beyond our borders is to collude with radical left-wing groups that want to halt our economic growth and cost hard-working Canadians their jobs.

Can the parliamentary secretary please tell the House how economic action plan 2012 is helping create jobs and contribute to Canada's long-term prosperity?

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Chatham-Kent—Essex for his hard work in the finance committee and on the budget.

Since 2006, our Conservative government has worked hard to make Canada the best place in the world to do business, to create jobs and, of course, to open new markets. Of course, the budget is going to continue that, and the world is taking notice. Listen to what an editorial in *The Wall Street Journal* said just today:

Not too many years ago, Americans could get away with cracking jokes about spendthrift Canada.... These days, the joke is on Americans.... The governing Conservative Party took another step forward last week with a pledge to balance the budget by 2015 without raising taxes.... As America's recent performance proves, the wealth of a nation isn't guaranteed. Canada shows how mistakes can be reversed with sound policies.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the environment minister could not name a single organization that could replace the national round table. Here are a few: the Canadian Foundation for Climate and Atmospheric Science and the National Science Advisor, eliminated by Conservatives; Environment Canada and Fisheries and Oceans, cut to the bone; environmental advocates, targeted.

With legislation gutted and critics silenced, what is to stand in the way of environmental disaster?

Oral Questions

●(1505)

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said the other day, I was surprised my colleague had to ask. There is a plethora, in fact, of groups and organizations across academia and across business, even many NGOs, domestic as well as international, that do have today the scientific and research capacity that did not exist broadly when the national round table was created.

Our government has thanked the round table for its decades of work, and we are committed to an orderly, considerate wind-down of the organization.

* * *

[Translation]

RIGHTS & DEMOCRACY

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Conservatives announced that they were going to shut down Rights & Democracy, citing the organizations' many problems as the reason.

The problem is that the Conservatives inherited an organization that is respected around the world and when they started appointing their little friends to the organization and gave it a partisan direction, the ship started sinking.

Canada is losing its position and reputation when it comes to promoting democracy. This is another black eye for Canada.

Why do the Conservatives insist on undermining our credibility on the international stage?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it will not come as any surprise to members of this place that I do not share the views of the member opposite.

We do believe in promoting freedom. We do believe in promoting democracy and human rights. Promoting Canadian values is one of the two priorities of this government and our foreign policy. Our men and women who work in the foreign service, our ambassadors, high commissioners, consul generals and consuls will continue to do that each and every day right around the world.

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PENSIONS

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government understands the importance of a secure and dignified retirement for people who have spent their lives building Canada through hard work. That is why in 2006, we have taken action to ensure that retirement income is sustainable and is there when Canadians need it.

Will the Minister of State for Seniors please update the House on the measures we are taking to ensure that Canadians' retirement income is sustainable today and tomorrow?

Hon. Alice Wong (Minister of State (Seniors), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Burlington for the question. That is exactly what we are doing.

That is why, since 2006, we have introduced such measures as pension income splitting, billions in annual tax relief for seniors and the largest GIS increase in 25 years.

But we also need to ensure that future generations can count on sustainable retirement benefits when they need them. Changes made to OAS will be phased in between 2023 and 2029, giving Canadians up to 17 years to plan and adjust accordingly. No current recipients will be affected. That is the good message for all Canadians.

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Éleine Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, military bases are going to suffer the consequences of the Conservatives' cuts. Troop support staff positions are going to be cut on bases across the country. In all, more than 1,000 jobs will be lost. In my riding, CFB Valcartier will lose 150 jobs. That is huge.

A few months ago, I asked the minister whether he had any intention of making cuts at Valcartier. He accused me of not supporting the troops.

Is cutting jobs his strategy for supporting the troops?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not true. It is false, as usual.

With the return to a more normal operational tempo, and with the end of the Canadian Forces combat mission in Afghanistan, we are now focused on redirecting our staff and other resources toward long-term sustainability.

[English]

It is true that the member and her party have opposed every investment we have made in equipment, in bases, in support for the men and women in uniform and their families.

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TRANSPORT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister for many years expressed concern as an Albertan about the heavy-handed intrusion of federal policy on the will of Albertans.

Right now, British Columbians oppose supertankers on the coastline, the Union of British Columbia Municipalities opposes the supertankers and today's polls show, by a margin of three to one, that British Columbians do not want oil tankers on their coastline.

Will the Prime Minister run roughshod over the will of British Columbians for his pet project?

• (1510)

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, our government is confident that sound regulations are in place to ensure petroleum products are transported safely along the B.C. coast.

In the last five years, close to 500 supertankers have been close to the shores with no accidents. All tankers arriving in Canadian ports are inspected by Transport Canada to ensure that they comply with all Canadian and international regulations.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the report of the Auditor General, he states on page 3—

An hon. member: That is debate.

Hon. Bob Rae: No, it is not debate. It has to do with misleading the House, if members would please just give me the opportunity to say why:

Both National Defence and Public Works and Government Services Canada disagree with the conclusions set out in paragraphs 2.80 and 2.81.

The Prime Minister, the Minister of National Defence, the Associate Minister of National Defence and the Minister of Public Works and Government Services all stated that the government accepted the conclusions and recommendations of the report, but in fact when we look at what it is that National Defence and Public Works disagreed with, it is the entire substance of the report with respect to its factual findings on the lack of notice given to the public and to government with respect to critical information.

We were misled today, clearly and emphatically, by the Prime Minister.

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I say to the member that our government believes very strongly that the Auditor General's recommendations and conclusions were accurate, and we agree with them.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I have not heard anything at this point that leads me to believe that this is a question of privilege.

If the member for Toronto Centre feels that statements need to be re-addressed, he can bring it up at a future question period, but question period is now over, and I have not heard anything that leads me to believe that it is a question of privilege.

I see the member for Toronto Centre rising. I will give him one more chance to tell the chair what he feels is a question of privilege, but dispute over the facts has never been counted as a question of privilege.

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to what the minister just said. She said the Government of Canada accepts the

Points of Order

recommendations and conclusions, and conclusions, of the Auditor General.

This runs in the face of what is stated on page 3 of the report.

The Speaker: It is not up to the Chair to determine the accuracy of statements.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. government House leader is also rising.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, officials may have the views they have and he may have the views he has. This government has clearly expressed, through the ministers here, the views we have that we accept the findings of the Auditor General and the recommendations.

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POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, during question period, the hon. member for Crowfoot, a gentleman for whom I have great respect, said, “The gun registry did not save one life”.

Unlike the Minister of National Defence and the—

An hon. member: That is debate.

The Speaker: Order, please. I have said it before several times. If members take exception to something that was said during question period and they have a difference of opinion, they can bring that up in a future question period or perhaps during statements or any other different type of debate that goes on, but they are not to be raised through points of order well after question period.

The hon. member for Wascana.

• (1515)

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my point relates to the intervention just moments ago by the government House leader where the government House leader said categorically that the government accepts both the conclusions and the recommendations of the Auditor General.

Do I take it then the government is saying it is withdrawing the point that appears on page—

The Speaker: Order, please. Again, I have not heard anything that is a point of order or a question of privilege. It sounds as if it would be great material for a future question period, if members take an opposite view of what the government has said in its responses, but they are not points of order or questions of privilege, so we will move on.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: You are sheltering the government on—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

*Routine Proceedings***ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS***[English]***FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32 (2) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the treaties entitled: Amendments to Annex 1 of the International Convention Against Doping in Sport adopted at Paris on November 15, 2011; Amendment to the Agreement between the Government of Canada and the Government of Romania on Cinematographic Relations done at Bucharest on February 22, 2012; the Second Protocol Amending the Convention Between Canada and the Republic of Austria for the Avoidance of Double Taxation and the Prevention of Fiscal Evasion With Respect to Taxes on Income and on Capital done at Vienna on December 9, 1976 as Amended by the Protocol done at Vienna on June 15, 1999, which was also done at Vienna on March 9, 2012.

An explanatory memorandum is included with each treaty.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Every member of this place knows the basic rules of decorum in the House and that a member cannot challenge a Speaker's ruling. Beyond the fact that both the member for Toronto Centre and the member for Wascana challenged your ruling, just a few moments ago—

The Speaker: Order. We are going to continue on with routine proceedings.

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INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegations of the Canadian branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association respecting the participation in three events: the 57th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference; the International Parliamentary Conference on Millennium Development Goals; and the Annual International Seminar in Delhi.

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the following reports of the Canadian delegation of the Canada-United States Interparliamentary Group respecting its participation in three meetings: the National Conference of State Legislatures held in Louisville, Kentucky from July 25 to 28, 2010; the 35th Annual Conference of New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers held in Halifax, Nova Scotia from July 10 to 12, 2011; and the Pacific Northwest Economic Region 21st Annual Summit held in Portland, Oregon from July 19 to 22, 2011.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts in relation to its study of chapter 3, Reserve Force Pension Plan,

National Defence 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.

● (1520)

JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the ninth report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights in relation to Bill C-217, an act to amend the Criminal Code (mischief relating to war memorials).

The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House with an amendment.

[Translation]

FINANCE

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Finance in relation to Bill C-311, An Act to amend the Importation of Intoxicating Liquors Act (interprovincial importation of wine for personal use).

The committee has considered the bill and has agreed to report the bill back to the House without amendment.

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*[English]***IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE PROTECTION ACT**

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-415, An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (appeals).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce a bill that addresses an important issue that exists in our immigration law, with thanks to the seconder, the member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert.

This bill would establish an appeal process for people who have been denied permanent residency on health grounds or simply because they have a disability. While our country needs reasonable policies to protect our health care and social services, our immigration law is being used to exclude people with all forms of disabilities and differences. One recent example from my own riding of Vancouver Kingsway is the case of the Patel family.

Routine Proceedings

Kevin Patel is a young, bright, successful accountant who immigrated to Canada almost a decade ago. He is exactly the kind of person the government says it wants to attract. Mr. Patel sponsored his family to join him in his new home in Canada. The request was denied solely because his parents have a dependent daughter who has Down's syndrome. Down's syndrome is not an illness, it is not a disease. It is a chromosome difference that exists in nature and across all cultures. People with Down's syndrome go to school, work and marry. They are cherished and contributing members of our families and communities. Families with children with autism are being similarly excluded, and this is wrong. These people are not burdens on anyone. It is time our immigration laws were amended to reflect this fact.

I hope I can get the support of all my colleagues for this important bill.

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

* * *

EDISON ARANTES DO NASCIMENTO HONORARY CITIZENSHIP ACT

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-416, An Act to proclaim Edison Arantes do Nascimento an honorary citizen of Canada.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise to tell everyone in the House and those Canadians watching across the country that this fantastic piece of legislation would make Edison Arantes do Nascimento, or Pelé, an honorary citizen of Canada.

Who is he, members may ask?

Pelé is the world's greatest soccer player of all time. More importantly, his work for the poor and impoverished, UNESCO and the United Nations has been recognized. He was appointed a Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire by her Majesty the Queen in 1997. Pelé is, by and large, one of the world's finest citizens to have ever graced this planet, like Gandhi, Mandela, Martin Luther King and many others. In 2014, the World Cup will be in Brazil.

I want to thank my hon. colleague for Chambly—Borduas for seconding this bill to have Pelé become an honorary Canadian citizen. I think this would be a wonderful tribute to the man, to the country of Brazil, as well as to the relations and cultural contacts Brazil has with Canada.

We have made other wonderful citizens of the world honorary citizens. I believe that Pelé deserves this title as well. Making Pelé, the world's greatest soccer player of all time, an honorary citizen would be fantastic, not only for the sport of soccer, which, by the way, is my favourite sport, but because he is an absolutely tremendous human being.

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

● (1525)

PETITIONS

ABORTION

Mr. Jim Hillyer (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to encourage Parliament to reassess and examine the question of what defines a human being to update Canada's 400-year-old definition.

NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present this petition on behalf of my constituents who call on the Government of Canada to issue an invitation for all states to gather in Canada and begin the discussions needed for a global legal ban on nuclear weapons.

The petition states, from the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, that there is no medical response to nuclear war. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has proposed a summit on nuclear disarmament. In 2010, the House unanimously passed a motion that encourages the Government of Canada to deploy a major worldwide Canadian diplomatic initiative in support of preventing nuclear proliferation and increasing the rate of nuclear disarmament. This request by my constituents would be a way of translating that into meaningful action.

PENSIONS

Mr. Randy Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present today. The first is signed by British Columbians who have some serious concerns about the present member of Parliament pension plan, believing it is extravagant compared to the majority of pensions in the public or private sectors. They are concerned about the proposed review of the MP pension plan and believe that a political review of the current plan should be replaced by an apolitical review and that the findings should be released in their entirety to the public.

ABORTION

Mr. Randy Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission, CPC): The second petition is also signed by British Columbians. They are concerned about the 400-year-old definition of a human being in Canada that says a child does not become a human being until the moment of complete birth.

Therefore, they call upon Parliament to confirm that every human being is recognized by Canadian law as human by amending section 223 of our criminal code in such a way as to reflect 21st century medical evidence.

HEALTH

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege and the honour of attending the RADHOC Conference in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. A collection of youth from grades 10 to 12, up to 17 years of age, spent three days talking about issues of the day and how public policy affects them. They presented a petition to me on site and asked me to present it to the House of Commons.

Routine Proceedings

They are calling on the federal government to make health transfers to provinces adequate to all ten provinces and three territories. I would like to thank you, Mr. Speaker, and the House, for allowing me to do this. I also thank all those young people from communities such as St. John's, Bishop's Falls and Conception Bay South.

[*Translation*]

SENIORS

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to submit a petition signed by more than 500 people in the riding of Acadie—Bathurst, who are calling on the House of Commons to maintain funding for old age security and to make the necessary investments to enhance guaranteed income supplement benefits and end poverty for all seniors.

[*English*]

AIR CANADA

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I rise today to table a petition from individuals in the province of Manitoba, who are concerned about the aerospace industry and the fact that the Government of Canada is not taking Air Canada to court to preserve the overhaul maintenance base.

The law states in paragraph 6(1)(d), "...provisions requiring the Corporation to maintain operational and overhaul centres in the City of Winnipeg, the Montreal Urban Community and the City of Mississauga".

The petitioners are calling on the Prime Minister and government to hold Air Canada accountable to the law of Canada.

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am presenting, on behalf of Canadians, another petition about the well-deserved fears that they have about cuts to the CBC. They want to be able to keep the CBC intact and are putting their pens to paper to support such action.

• (1530)

[*Translation*]

AIR TRANSPORTATION

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today, I would like to present a petition, signed by about a hundred people, concerning the Aéroports de Montréal or ADM. In my riding, there is a major problem with aircraft noise, and people are also very concerned about their health and the environment.

This is what the petition says:

WHEREAS:

1. In recent years, the number of aircraft headed toward runway **24D** at the Montreal-Trudeau Airport has **increased**;
2. Aircraft are flying over the area at low altitudes at **all hours of the day**;
3. There is noise pollution due to **repeated** exposure to aircraft noise;

We, the undersigned, who live and work in the Saint-Sulpice sector of the Ahuntsic-Cartierville borough of Montreal,

are asking the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities

for a return to the situation that existed **prior** to the renovation of the Montreal-Trudeau Airport in 2007, when aircraft flew at an **acceptable** altitude and rate and produced a **normal** level of noise.

That is what people want. I am very pleased to table this petition today.

[*English*]

NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present four petitions from members of my community.

The first is calling on Canada to host a conference on nuclear disarmament. The petitioners remind us that there are 22,000 nuclear weapons in the world, several thousand of which are on alert and capable of being used in under 30 minutes, and also that the UN Secretary General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, has proposed a summit on nuclear disarmament. Therefore, the petitioners call on the House of Commons to issue an invitation to all states to gather in Canada to begin discussions needed for a global legal ban on nuclear weapons.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from the Canadian Interfaith Call for Leadership and Action on Climate Change. The petitioners are from my riding of Parkdale—High Park and call on Parliament to adopt the following policy goals: that we take collective action by signing and implementing an international binding agreement replacing the Kyoto protocol; that we demonstrate national responsibility by committing to national carbon emission targets; and that we implement climate justice by playing a constructive role in the design of the green climate fund under United Nations governance.

The third petition is again from my riding of Parkdale—High Park and also on the issue of climate change. It calls on the Government of Canada to take immediate steps to develop, in co-operation with the provinces, a national policy on renewable energy with the goal of presenting to Parliament this national policy by 2014 for adoption into law; and subsequent implementation, by government action, policies to develop renewable energy technologies that will mitigate the concentration of greenhouse gas emissions.

Finally, I have two petitions from members of my community, again on the issue of climate change, recognizing that more than 95% of climate scientists conclude that greenhouse gas emissions from human activity are responsible for the increase in global average temperature over the last 200 years. The petitioners call on Parliament to give this problem its immediate and fullest attention and to create policies that support innovative solutions; commit to the most current science-based greenhouse gas emission reduction targets; facilitate transition to a clean energy economy, based on renewable energy; and to act as a world leader on climate change solutions, as it did in tackling acid rain and the ozone hole.

I respectfully submit these.

The Budget

[Translation]

POVERTY

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to rise today to present two petitions.

The first pertains to the fight against poverty in Canada. The petitioners, who are mainly from Ontario, are asking Parliament to vote in favour of Bill C-233, the purpose of which is to establish a strategy to eliminate poverty in Canada.

• (1535)

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition comes from residents of Ontario and British Columbia. They are urging the Government of Canada to stop presuming the results of the National Energy Board joint review panel on the so-called northern gateway project, the great pipeline of China, the risky supertanker scheme. They call on the government to allow that process to function. It is more urgent than ever that these petitioners be heard because it appears from the budget that there is an attempt to fast-track an existing review.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the following question will be answered today: No. 433.

[Text]

Question No. 433—**Mr. François Pilon:**

With regard to the construction of a new arena in Laval: (a) can the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities confirm that, if the project submitted is the same apart from the number of seats in the arena (10,000 instead of 7,000), the government will contribute the same level of funding announced in 2009; and (b) what are the rules and criteria for obtaining federal funding for the construction of public sports facilities?

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, in response to (a), under both the community and large urban centre components of the building Canada fund program, each Quebec municipality was eligible to submit project proposals that met the program terms and conditions for consideration by the Government of Quebec. The Government of Quebec then determined which projects could receive funding based on its priorities. Projects selected by the government of Quebec were then sent to the Economic Development Agency of Canada for Quebec Regions, which undertakes a review and recommends projects to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities for federal approval. Each project funding proposal was reviewed based on the program funding criteria and remaining program funds. For each project approved for funding, Quebec is required to establish a memorandum of understanding with the applicant confirming funding by the parties.

Construction of the Laval multipurpose sports and cultural complex was expected to begin in early 2010 and end on December 1, 2011. However, the construction work has yet to begin and the

project is now well behind schedule. Confirmation of the Government of Quebec's involvement in the project has been delayed, as a memorandum of understanding has not been signed with the applicant. Lastly, certain factors suggest that the scope and scale of the project are much more extensive than what was initially approved. In light of this new information, the project is no longer the same as the one approved in 2009. A new project proposal that meets the program's eligibility criteria must be submitted to replace the Laval multipurpose sports and cultural complex project.

In response to (b), Infrastructure Canada's investments in sport and recreational infrastructure are intended to encourage Canadians of all ages to become active, and can also help high-performance amateur athletes train for national and international competitions and support major amateur sports events. However, facilities used to house professional sports teams, including major junior hockey teams, are not eligible for federal infrastructure funding. This policy is Canada-wide.

[English]

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

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): 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 Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

THE BUDGET

FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF MINISTER OF FINANCE

The House resumed from April 3 consideration of the motion that this House approve in general the budgetary policy of the government.

Mrs. Nycol Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to share my time in this budget debate with the hon. member for Parkdale—High Park.

The budget that the Conservatives recently tabled is an austerity budget. It will result in major job losses and scaled-back services to the public, and it will make seniors, women and children more vulnerable. This budget even attacks our health care system.

The Budget

Let us stop beating around the bush. The Conservatives' budget is an austerity budget. We will be dealing with fallout from this budget for years. To justify their choice, because it is certainly a choice, the Conservatives are trying to convince us that the sky is falling, that there is an urgent need to scale back services to the public, to limit environmental studies, and to make seniors in need work two years longer before collecting old age security.

The Conservatives are basing their arguments on fear, not facts. As many economists have said over and over again, our system is viable; it is not in trouble.

After tabling their budget, the Conservatives were all over the place explaining that their budget cuts were based on their commitment to manage public moneys responsibly, to save money and cut costs. That may be, but I must say that, coming from the Conservatives, such arguments do not hold much water.

This government has proven over and over again that it has a special talent for misusing public funds. When the Minister of National Defence uses a military helicopter to go to a fishing camp, is that responsible? Is that trying to save money?

When the government authorizes over a billion dollars—yes, a billion—in spending on the G8 and G20 summit festivities—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. The hon. Minister of National Defence on a point of order.

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member has just said is patently false.

I on no occasion took a military asset to a fishing lodge. I left that lodge early to go back to work. I would like the hon. member to correct the record on that point.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The Minister of National Defence will know that on these points of debate, the Chair is not in a position to question the statements of hon. members. There are other opportunities, of course, for members to raise these issues when there are disagreements as to the facts. We would encourage the minister and others, if they wish, to use those opportunities as they may.

• (1540)

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Hull—Aylmer.

Mrs. Nycole Turmel: Mr. Speaker, I will continue.

Would it be responsible to spend \$25 billion to buy F-35s? Does the Prime Minister project the image of a responsible fiscal manager when his own office's budget has increased by 32%? The answer is no.

On the one hand, the Prime Minister has asked the departments that provide services to the public to cut up to 10% from their budgets. On the other hand, he is inflating his own budget by 32%. The Prime Minister is talking out of both sides of his mouth. He is asking families to tighten their belts and asking older people, who are already struggling, to work two years more before qualifying for old age security. But when it comes to expenditures in his own office, there is a free lunch.

It takes some nerve to stand up in front of Canadians and ask them to make sacrifices that he is not willing to make himself. It also takes some nerve to ask Canadians to tighten their belts when the Conservatives' rich friends have it easy, thanks to the tax breaks they get from this government.

Canadians are hungry for social justice. They are prepared to do their part, as long as those who earn millions do the same. But with this Conservative budget, nothing has changed: families have to pay, while the very rich get richer.

Budget 2012 will have painful consequences for the economy in the Outaouais region and my riding of Hull—Aylmer. Tens of thousands of public servants, who are also fathers and mothers, have already lost or will lose their jobs and therefore their families' main source of income.

When a company lays off 1,000 people, the economy of the region where operates is harshly affected. Imagine what happens when that number is multiplied by 10 or 20. The people who are going to lose or have already lost their jobs are going to spend a lot less money at local businesses. What happens when less money is spent at those businesses? They lay off all their staff or completely close their books.

In my region and elsewhere in Canada, a number of small and medium-sized businesses depend on the federal public sector for their contracts. Some 40% of federal contracts go to small and medium-sized businesses. When \$5.2 billion in cuts are made to various government departments, that threatens the existence of many small and medium-sized businesses. It is a vicious circle.

I hope no one tries to tell me that the Conservatives' cuts are modest. The impact on my region's economy will be anything but modest. The Prime Minister promised Canadians to create jobs, not to create more unemployment. All Canadians, not just those in my region, are going to pay for this budget.

Take, for example, the cuts to Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, which will primarily affect such services as food inspection. This service is provided to all Canadians. The Conservatives' decision to cut Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's budget will definitely have repercussions on the quality of this service, and that will create fear throughout Canada.

Raising the retirement age from 65 to 67 is another measure that will affect all Canadians. The main victims of this measure are those who depend on old age security to live with a minimum of dignity. Women in particular will be affected because 50% of Canadian women depend on government transfers to supplement their income. The same is true of health transfers.

The Conservatives' pigheadedness and their refusal to talk to the provinces mean that health transfers to the provinces will be reduced by \$31 billion by 2024. By making changes to health transfers, the Conservatives are directly attacking Canada's primary health care system.

The Budget

What impact will this decision have? Fewer doctors and nurses for Canadians and longer wait times in emergency rooms. The Prime Minister had promised that he would not touch health transfers. Why are the Conservatives attacking our health system?

• (1545)

There is still a very long list of unacceptable measures in this budget. One of them is particularly odd, and that is the \$7.5 million in cuts to Elections Canada. What a coincidence. Elections Canada is currently investigating one of the biggest scandals in Canada's political history, and now part of its budget is being cut. Really.

I would also like to draw Canadians' attention to the fact that the Auditor General, who just released a report that is not very sympathetic to the Conservatives, will have his budget cut by \$6.7 million.

In my opinion, the Conservatives' priorities leave much to be desired, to say the least.

They forgot to include things in the budget. One would have to look long and hard to find measures to combat poverty or to improve access to affordable housing. That is because there are no such measures. The Conservatives have also done away with the national pharmaceutical strategy.

Developing a budget is first and foremost about making choices. The Conservatives have chosen to turn their backs on Canadian families, single people, seniors and the entire middle class.

The middle class is tired of footing the bill. Canadians deserve better.

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will begin by saying how deplorable a number of the comments the member just made were. The comments she made about the Minister of National Defence are beneath the House and she should have withdrawn them when she was given the opportunity to do so. However, she decided not to, which speaks to character.

However, I want to correct the record on a number of things the member just said. For instance, she indicated that spending in the PMO was up and that spending in ministers' offices was up. I would like to give her the opportunity to respond, especially where numbers are concerned. The NDP often gets very lost in numbers because it does not understand numbers, but Canadians feel it is important that we do.

The budget in the PMO was down 13.7% over 2010. That is more than the overall spending decreases that we are asking from the rest of government. The budget for ministers' offices is down 16% compared to the last year the Liberals were in office. That is seven years ago and we are 16% beneath that. We are running an efficient, effective government. We make no apologies for seeking to run the government as efficiently and effectively as possible. She would drive taxes up and investment would fall in this country. She should withdraw the inaccuracies and the deplorable things that she said about the Minister of National Defence because they were beneath the House.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Nycole Turmel: Mr. Speaker, it is very clear that money was spent on the G8 and the G20. It is very clear that we still have no answers to questions about the F-35s and that we still do not know how much the planes will cost. We know that the government cut spending in areas where the provinces will have to make up the shortfall. That is what we know, and that is the truth.

We can tell the Conservatives that there are expenditures that are not targeted appropriately and priorities that are not in line with Canadians' priorities.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has been an interesting process going into the whole budget debate. There are a number of concerns that all members of Parliament have with regard to the budget. It is fairly well established that not only will the Liberals be voting against the budget but I understand that the New Democrats will also be voting against it.

Some of the concerns we have are related to the lack of commitment to jobs and increasing the retirement age from 65 to 67. I wonder if the member might be able to provide some input as to why she believes it is important that all members be afforded the opportunity to address the budget debate, given the fact that we will be spending over \$250 billion in this fiscal year.

Mrs. Nycole Turmel: Mr. Speaker, I would agree that we should have a real debate on the budget to talk about job creation, to talk about the need in the field for social housing and to ensure the people in Canada have a decent retirement. Those are the things we should be debating and not about creating more work and expenses for the provinces in different avenues.

• (1550)

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my colleague mentioned cuts at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. This government has been in power since 2006, and there has hardly ever been anything for agriculture in its budgets. Now things are worse than ever because the department is going to be hit harder than most by the cuts.

The member for Hull—Aylmer also mentioned cuts at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. I would like to remind the House that around the time of the listeriosis outbreak, which killed 22 people, the government wanted the industry to self-regulate and conduct its own food safety inspections. The Conservatives still seem partial to that ideology even though people died during the outbreak.

Rather than cut funding for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, what does my colleague think the government should do to ensure the safety of all Canadians?

Mrs. Nycole Turmel: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's question.

The Budget

Indeed, the budget gives companies complete freedom and tells people that they have to deal directly with the company. It is a shame. The government should be increasing food inspection services to ensure that we are ahead of the game when it comes to protecting the health of Canadians, instead of taking a step backwards as we are doing now.

[English]

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, budgets are all about choices and, with this budget, the Conservatives have chosen winners and losers.

[Translation]

The winners are those who promote Canada as a fossil fuel centre; those who rid environmental assessment of its substance; those who do not stand up for communities that want to protect the wilderness in western Canada and the fragile coastal waters; and those who work to increase oil exports as quickly as possibly.

[English]

The losers are the ones the government is willing to leave behind.

Our environment and those working to protecting it are losers in this budget. The Conservatives have tried to dismiss their critics as radicals. However, it is their dogged promotion of disastrous environmental policy that is truly outrageous. The Conservatives want to gut Environment Canada and National Resource Canada, along with the environmental assessment process. They want to send hundreds of supertankers through some of the world's most dangerous waters off some of the world's most fragile coastline. The oil sands pipeline is a real threat to our environment, fisheries and first nations. The risk for supertanker oil spills is enormous.

The government must listen to everyone who is affected, not just the oil industry.

Environmental assessment processes are not just red tape. They are an essential tool in the protection of our environment and in the promotion of sustainable development practices.

The government claims to be focused on economic growth but it has no plan to take advantage of the enormous economic opportunity of the green economy. Instead, it is shutting down the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy.

While it continues to provide generous subsidies to its friends in the oil industry, it has no direct funding to support renewable energy, and it has abandoned the ecoenergy home retrofit program.

Central Canada and Ontario are also big losers in this budget, along with any company that relies on manufacturing.

At a time when governments in Germany and the U.S. are recognizing the importance of manufacturing, the Conservative government has turned its back on the manufacturing sector. Manufacturing has a powerful spillover effect on the rest of the economy, including on innovation. In other words, the outsourcing of our manufacturing jobs leads to the outsourcing of our innovative edge as well.

[Translation]

Some other losers in this Conservative budget are Canadian artists. This sector is especially important in my riding of Parkdale—High Park, where a great many artists live and work. The arts play an important role, not only in the vitality of our communities, but also in economic recovery.

We appreciate the fact that the Canada Council for the Arts is not affected by the cuts, but I am deeply concerned about the cuts to Telefilm Canada and the NFB and the major cuts to the CBC.

The CBC is not only one of the country's vital cultural institutions. A study in 2010 shows that the Canadian public broadcaster generated economic spinoffs to the tune of \$3.7 billion on expenditures of \$1.7 billion.

My voters are strong supporters of the CBC and they are not alone. In fact, 74% of Canadians want the government to provide more support to the CBC. The major cuts in the budget will have tangible repercussions on the CBC's capacity to develop or even maintain its regional and cultural programming.

• (1555)

[English]

Of course, those are not the only losers in the budget. Canadian cities, like my home of Toronto, have been completely left out of this budget. There is nothing for affordable housing, nothing for transit, nothing for immigrant settlement services and there is no new money for infrastructure.

A big issue in my riding of Parkdale—High Park has been the building of the Union-Pearson air-rail link. People want clean, electric trains to be built prior to the opening of the service, not years down the road. The budget contains nothing to support the electrification of this important infrastructure project. In fact, there is no mention of it at all.

The budget contains nothing for young people. Not only are there no new jobs but the Katimavik project is being cancelled. A young person just contacted me yesterday to say that she had been accepted to the program for this summer, and now it has been cancelled. That is outrageous for young people in this country.

Canadian retailers will also continue to feel the squeeze from lower prices across the border, forcing them to lower their own prices and decrease their profitability.

[Translation]

The growing income gap is one of the biggest challenges that our country must tackle. In fact, we are now reaching levels of inequality not seen since the 1929 crash. However, the Conservative budget does not address this problem.

*The Budget**[English]*

In fact, this budget makes the problem worse by forcing our seniors to work two years longer to make ends meet. This budget should have been used to strengthen retirement security for Canadians, not to undermine it. Despite what the Conservatives have said, the OAS is entirely sustainable, a fact confirmed by many pension experts and the PBO. They should try listening to him once in a while. This program keeps tens of thousands of seniors out of poverty and the changes proposed by Conservatives will hit the most vulnerable seniors the hardest.

[Translation]

This government has made things worse by trying to balance the budget at the expense of the provinces. The budget unilaterally alters the formula for calculating health transfers, which will deprive provinces of \$31 billion and create a two-tier system.

The Conservatives have made provincial finances less stable and imposed significant costs, for instance, millions of dollars for their prison plans.

[English]

The government has made the problem worse by making deep cuts to the public services Canadians rely on. It does not take a rocket scientist to know that cutting 19,000 jobs will have a major impact on services. The \$5.2 billion in cuts in this budget will result in significant job losses in the private sector as well.

This budget has nine times more in cuts than in job creation measures and no mention of any strategy to deal with the stalled labour market, no strategy to deal with the 1.4 million Canadians out of work and no strategy to deal with the lowest labour force participation in a decade. In fact, the Conservative budget plans for unemployment to rise.

Yes, budgets are all about choices and priorities but it is clear that the priorities of the government are out of line with the priorities of Canadians. With this budget, we all lose. Of course, it our job here on this side of the House to also propose solutions.

[Translation]

What would an NDP government do differently? We would have a balanced approach and a long-term vision for the sustainable development of the energy sector. Instead of shipping more crude oil overseas, we would focus on value added jobs in the processing sector and tomorrow's clean, renewable energies. We would strengthen our manufacturing sector, maintain its quality and support jobs here at home. We would provide our arts community with stable funding, and we would support our public broadcaster in promoting Canadian culture, linguistic identity and regional diversity both at home and abroad.

● (1600)

[English]

An NDP government would work with our provincial, territorial and municipal partners to strengthen our communities with strategic investments in public transit, in affordable housing and in critical infrastructure. We would renew this country's commitment to family reunification and strengthen immigrant settlement services. We

would retain the age of eligibility for OAS at age 65 and strengthen the CPP-QPP to ensure that our seniors' retirement is secure.

We would work with the provinces and territories to ensure that families have access to the services they need. Unlike the Conservative government, picking winners and losers, an NDP government would work with Canadians from coast to coast to coast to build a Canada where no one is left behind.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's comments. I am sure Canadians would acknowledge that the budget does fall short. The government has proven that it will not fight for the people. We recognize that. Examples of that would be Aveos and Air Canada. Air Canada is in violation of the law. Thousands of jobs are being lost across the country. The government has done nothing to hold Air Canada accountable to the law.

There will be 19,000 civil servants laid off. There is a lack of any sort of job creation that will generate the types of jobs that are important to all Canadians.

The only area the government has actually made a commitment to move forward on is to increase the number of politicians in the House of Commons.

When the member makes reference to the government being "out of tune with Canadians", would she not agree with the Liberal Party that now is not the time to increase the size of the House of Commons? We do not need more politicians. We need a government that will care more about our civil service, protecting aerospace jobs and creating jobs. Would she not agree with that?

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, in my remarks I spoke about the lack of attention to job creation in Canada. We have lost hundreds of thousands of good paying manufacturing and resource processing jobs. Canadians are fed up with seeing trucks go down the highway in British Columbia, shipping raw logs out of the country. Albertans do not want to see raw bitumen shipped out of the country. They want to have upgraders and process it there. People across the country want to have good quality jobs, not low wage service sector jobs.

If we want to save money in Ottawa, we should think about eliminating the Senate. That might be a good place to start.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I note with some interest my colleague's discussion about the lack of any support for renewable energy within the budget and within the whole ideology of the Conservative Party.

The Budget

Interestingly enough, in the United States over the past two years, ending December 31, 2011, renewable energy sources grew by 27%. At the same time, domestic energy production only increased by 6.7%. We see a great movement to renewable energy in the United States. We see nothing in the budget to improve production and distribution of renewable energy in our country.

What is wrong with the government? Why can it not see the writing on the wall for energy in our country?

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is absolutely right. Canada is being left behind. The rest of the world is rushing to focus on energy efficiency. It is rushing to focus on investment and renewable energy. We are focusing on the non-renewable energy sector. That will be part of our energy mix for some time to come. However, surely we want to join the rest of the world in investing in renewable energy sources and all of the economic advantages and job creation opportunities that go with that.

The fact the government is so blind when the rest of the world is leaving us in its dust is shocking for Canadians.

• (1605)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Parkdale—High Park for her concerns for what the budget does not do for working families, particularly in situations such as Aveos.

What does the member find in the budget that relates to the shipping of bitumen crude to other countries? Why is there a presumption running throughout the budget that this is in the national interest when it is clearly shipping jobs offshore?

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, the member's question raises two issues. The first relates to the shipping of raw bitumen out of the country when Albertans are saying that there should be upgraders in Alberta so the bitumen can be processed there.

However, when we talk about exportation of raw bitumen and a pipeline going through some of our most sensitive wilderness areas to tankers and through dangerous and very sensitive coastal waters, against the wishes of the people who live and work in that area and care passionately about the environment, it is unbelievable the government would want to ride roughshod over the wishes of that community.

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, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore.

It is stormy waters in the world today. In Rome and Athens, cradles of civilization are replaced with cradle-to-grave socialism. Across Europe and the United States, millions go without work. Those who do work face a lifetime of crippling taxation to pay for the entitlements of their countrymen and the debts of their governments.

Canada by contrast is strong. To stay that way, we must never repeat the mistakes of Europe and the United States and we must instead focus on what Canada has already done right.

What went wrong in the United States? Many believe that the 2008 financial collapse and recession were the result of irresponsible behaviour by business and banks. In fact, this behaviour was merely the symptom. The illness was massive government intervention to turn the mortgage business into a social program.

The roots of this go back three decades. Presidents from Carter to Bush Jr. wanted to expand home ownership, a worthy mission no doubt. To do this, they mandated government-sponsored enterprises like Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae to cover the risks of loans to people who would otherwise not qualify for them. We call these subprime mortgages.

According to a 2010 World Bank report, Freddie and Fannie, both government sponsored enterprises, bought an estimated 47% of these toxic mortgages. Harvard financial historian Niall Ferguson estimated that between 1980 and 2007 the amount of government backed mortgages increased from \$200 million to \$4 trillion. Furthermore, the American government not only encouraged but forced banks to provide these loans.

To quote the World Bank report, "In the mid-1990s, the government changed the way the Community Reinvestment Act was enforced and effectively compelled banks to initiate risky mortgages".

Once Americans are in debt, the U.S. government encourages them to stay there by allowing them to write off their mortgage interest. The bigger the mortgage debt, the lower the taxes.

In sum, the government encouraged millions of Americans to spend money they did not have on homes they could not afford, using loans they could never repay and then gave them a tax incentive never to repay it. The state had pumped so much air into the mortgage bubble that it burst. Financial institutions collapsed, taxpayers were on the hook, millions were jobless and one in five American households went under water, and that is to say their mortgages were bigger than the value of their homes.

To make matters worse, those same American households have trillions of dollars in debt of which they are likely not even aware, government debt. The U.S. government debt is now bigger than the entire American economy. This is household debt, as families will need to repay it on their tax bills with interest, now or later.

According to the U.S. Treasury Department website, mainland China holds \$1.1 trillion of it. To quote Mark Steyn:

If the People's Republic carries on buying American debt at the rate it has in recent times, then within a few years U.S. interest payments on that debt will be covering the entire cost of the Chinese armed forces.

The Budget

Imagine, through debt interest, soon American taxpayers will be funding 100% of the Chinese military. Steyn points out, according to the Congressional Budget Office, that by 2020 the United States government will be spending more annually on debt interest than the total combined military budgets of China, Britain, France, Russia, Japan, Germany, Saudi Arabia, India, Italy, South Korea, Brazil, Canada, Australia, Spain, Turkey and Israel. Yet if America is jogging off the debt cliff, Europe is sprinting.

• (1610)

The European welfare state borrows on taxes to give people stuff they have not earned. Recently, for example, Greek public sector workers took to the streets to demand the government continue to pay them 14 monthly paycheques per year. We call this socialism. Margaret Thatcher pointed out that the problem with socialism was that eventually we would run out of other people's money. We call that a "sovereign debt crisis".

Standard and Poors has now downgraded French and Austrian government debt and further has reduced the ratings of seven other countries in the Euro currency block.

Portuguese and Greek debts have now been downgraded to junk status by all rating agencies.

To avoid bankruptcy, the Greek government needs to borrow more. Because no one will lend its own money to that country, the European Central Bank must step up and lend 150 billion euros of other people's money. Thank goodness, the EU has a bailout fund to prevent government defaults. Too bad Standard and Poors has downgraded that bailout fund. Soon the bailout fund will need a bailout.

I describe this humiliating American and European experiment with the welfare state because it is precisely the same experiment the opposition and its union bosses wish to impose on Canada. We know where it leads.

Through government spending, the indulgence of one is the burden of another. Through government borrowing, the excess of one generation becomes the yoke of the next. Through international bailout, one nation's extravagance becomes another's debt. Everyone takes and nobody makes. Work does not pay and indulgence does not cost. Money is free and money is worthless. The system punishes work, rewards sloth, taxes the makers to pay off the takers, and quoting Thomas Jefferson, steals "from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned".

To paraphrase Rudyard Kipling:

In the era of generous government we were promised abundance for all,
By robbing selected Peter to pay for collective Paul;
But, though we had plenty of money, there was nothing our money could buy,
And reality stood up and told us:
if you don't work you will die.

Amazingly, opposition members ignore this timeless truth. They see the Europeans and Americans running off the debt cliff and say, "Let's hurry and catch up". No thank you, Mr. Speaker. I choose the Canadian way.

Canada is one of the greatest success story of human history precisely because our leaders were practical and smart. From the beginning, they understood the basic rules of success: people should work hard, pay their bills, spend only what they have and let free people do the rest.

When Prime Minister Laurier declared that the 20th century would belong to our country, he said, "Canada shall be the star towards which all men who love progress and freedom shall come".

More freedom meant less government. From 1900 to 1920, federal, provincial and municipal government spending was a combined 9% of Canada's GDP. Today, it is 39%. Low-cost government meant a low-tax nation.

To quote the authors of *The Canadian Century*, Crowley, Clemens and Veldhuis:

Laurier believed that the cost of government, and especially the tax burden, needed always to be kept below the level in the United States, so as to create a powerful competitive advantage for Canada

Then, as now, Canada's low-tax worked. In the first 20 years of the 20th century our population grew by an unprecedented two-thirds, the wheat yields in the Prairies by 500% and exports more than doubled.

Today we have an economic action plan based on our history. It tears down the walls of paperwork and protectionism so businesses and workers can reach the cornucopia of natural resources, so we can reach foreign markets to create jobs and so our entrepreneurs can build a mountain of success rather than drowning in a sea of paper. It welcomes skilled immigrants in and punts fraudulent ones out.

We are in rough seas in the world today, yet we have a solid captain and the bright star of our ancestors to guide him through stormy waters.

• (1615)

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the hon. member's comments on the government's budget and note that most of the sources he cited were from the 19th century and his very ideological approach to economic problems. Even though I do not share that ideology, it makes me wonder if he does not have a problem with his government's record? He sat in a caucus when the Conservatives boosted spending to all time highs, while cutting taxes on corporations and thus borrowing more money.

Therefore, given the things he has just said, it makes me wonder how he could support his government's program and economic record, which has resulted in much higher debt and higher unemployment at the same time.

The Budget

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, by the end of the next four years, federal government spending will be 12% of GDP. That is a low over the last four decades. This government has the smallest deficit in the G8 and the smallest debt as a percentage of our economy. Twelve per cent of our economy is federal government spending. In the United States, federal spending accounts for 24%. That means we have a government that is, on a relative basis, half the size of the American government and because of that free enterprise policy, we have catapulted to the front. *Forbes* magazine says that we are the best place in the world in which to do business.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, whether it is megaprisons or the F-35, the one thing we know is that we cannot trust the Conservative government in terms of its numbers. We do not believe it really understands the concept of numbers. We know for a fact that when the Conservatives took office they inherited billions of dollars of surplus. Today we are billions of dollars in annual debt.

The government created this crisis situation relating to seniors and pensions, which just does not exist, and has made the determination to put a lot more seniors into poverty in the years ahead by increasing the age from 65 to 67. Why has the government decided to penalize future seniors in Canada because of its irresponsible behaviour today?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, the member ignores the reality of our economic action plan, a plan that tears down the walls of paperwork and protectionism so that our businesses and their workers can reach Canada's cornucopia of natural resources and our job-creating exporters can reach hungry foreign markets in India and Europe. It is a plan that allows our entrepreneurs to be unshackled by paperwork so they can create jobs. It is a plan that keeps skilled immigrants in and punts fraudulent ones out. It is a plan that makes government \$5 billion less expensive to the people who work and pay the bills.

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we heard a lot today about renewable energy. If we look at an example in the province of Ontario where there was a government intervention-based plan to support this, we saw energy prices increase, as the Auditor General said, by almost 41%. In turn, this input cost change increase affects the manufacturing sector. We have actually seen job losses because of government intervention in this area.

Our opposition colleagues today have been talking about the need for government to support renewable energy resources. We have been supporting in our budget innovation and R and D. Perhaps my colleague could tell the House about how best government can support natural resource development through a market based approach.

• (1620)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is quite right. The McGuinty government's green energy program has been an unqualified, unmitigated disaster, and so says the Ontario auditor general. It has caused energy prices to skyrocket in the province. It has wasted tens of billions of dollars paying 2,000% markups on the price per kilowatt hour, which has killed jobs for manufacturers and, according to the auditor general of Ontario, all of this money has been spent in order to ensure that wind and solar account for only

1.5% of the electrical energy mix in the province. In other words, it has had no impact on the environment whatsoever.

The best way to proceed is by allowing the marketplace, our entrepreneurs, investors and brilliant workers across this country to compete to provide the most reliable cleanest sources of electricity at the lowest price to consumers.

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport for his sage remarks and establishing some global context for what we are trying to do in Canada with our economic action plan 2012.

Economic action plan 2012 positions Canada for economic growth, job creation and long-term fiscal health. It is based on creating a climate for private sector investment, innovation and opportunity.

[Translation]

With this economic strength, Canada can give families and communities all the support they need. This means developing sustainable social programs and secure retirements.

[English]

Underpinning all of this is getting the federal government's house in order by returning to balanced budgets. This enables Canada to keep taxes low and leaves more money in the pockets of Canadians. It also means Canada will not kick the fiscal can down the road and will not leave large debts for future generations.

Canada's economy has expanded for nine of the last ten quarters. It has created over 610,000 net new jobs since July 2009, which is the strongest job growth in the entire G7.

Fitch ratings, Moody's and Standard & Poors have all renewed Canada's triple A credit rating, keeping Canada's borrowing costs manageable.

For the fourth straight year, the World Economic Forum has ranked Canada's banking system the soundest in the world. Canada has the lowest overall tax rate on new business invested in the G7, which gives us a distinct competitive advantage.

The reason that venerable Canadian institution, Tim Horton's, moved its headquarters from Delaware to Ontario recently was to take advantage of our low corporate taxes.

Canada's net debt to GDP ratio remains the lowest in the G7 by far. The influential *Forbes* magazine ranked Canada number one in the world for business to grow and create jobs.

The Budget

However, our Conservative government cannot take anything for granted. Advanced economies around the world are struggling to create jobs and to balance their books. Last week, Spain, whose economy is about the size of Canada's, announced that it would cut government spending by 23 billion euros. In addition, it would increase taxes by about four billion euros. The result has been general strikes and a chill on private sector investment.

The United States, our largest trading partner, struggles with trillion dollar deficits and legislative gridlock to fix its situation.

[*Translation*]

The global economy remains fragile, which is why our government is taking reasonable, careful measures to respond to the challenges we face. Investment and innovation are the keys to long-term prosperity.

The Government of Canada is making significant investments in scientific research, but we can and must do more to encourage private sector investments in innovation and commercialization. These activities create high value-added jobs that generate productivity and prosperity.

[*English*]

That is why economic action plan 2012 proposes, among other things, \$400 million to help increase private sector investments and early stage risk capital; \$100 million to the Business Development Bank of Canada to support its venture capital activities; \$110 million per year to the National Research Council to double support to manufacturers and other entrepreneurs through the industrial research assistance program; and \$95 million over three years starting in 2013 and \$40 million per year thereafter to make the Canadian innovation commercialization program permanent and to add a military procurement component.

While I am here I would like to note the contribution of some members of the NDP and the Liberal Party who studied the question of the commercialization program, notably the member of Parliament for Louis-Hébert and the member of Parliament for Markham—Unionville. We all agree that this has been a very good program, which is why we have recommended that it be continued.

Another requirement for investment is to streamline the process for regulatory reviews. As we know, over 75% of the world's mining companies are based in Canada, with the greatest number of those based in my city of Toronto. The Canadian government is proposing legislation to realize the objective of one project one review within a clearly defined time period. That is good for jobs and good for the economy.

Via the major projects management office initiative, we have shortened the average review time for major natural resource projects from 4 years to just 22 months, while improving accountability by monitoring the performance of federal regulatory departments. These measures would create economic activity and job opportunities.

In economic action plan 2012, we propose extending the hiring credit for small business to reduce employers' EI costs by \$205 million. The opposition always says that it likes small business, until they become successful and become big business, then it is against them.

Economic action plan 2012 proposes enhancing a youth employment strategy to help connect young Canadians with jobs in areas that are in high demand.

Finally, economic action plan 2012 includes enhancements to the opportunities fund to enable more Canadians with disabilities to obtain work experience with small and medium size businesses.

I would like to talk about how economic action plan 2012 helps support families and communities.

The budget contains many measures to strengthen Canadian and Ontario families. Highlights for Ontario include: ongoing support through major federal transfers, which will total more than \$19 billion in 2012-13, and almost \$11.4 billion of that is through the Canada health transfer, which is an increase, I should mention, of \$3.7 billion since 2005-06, and \$97 million of that is for the wait times reduction funds as part of the 10-year plan to strengthen health care; over \$4.6 billion will be transferred to Ontario through the Canada social transfer; and \$197 million will be transferred to Ontario for labour market training. I should also mention that \$3.3 billion will be transferred to Ontario through equalization, which is a situation that we Ontarians hope to rectify. Hopefully, we will be transferring money to other provinces in the future.

Of particular note is the plan to provide fair compensation for employers of Canada's reservists. Economic action plan 2012 commits to providing financial support to employers of reservists to offset costs, such as the hiring and training of replacement workers or increased overtime when reservists serve their country in deployments. This is good news for reserve regiments like the Toronto Scottish Regiment, which is based in my riding of Etobicoke—Lakeshore. It has had soldiers deployed in Afghanistan and other parts of the world.

I will now talk about some of the sustainable social programs and how economic action plan 2012 provides a long-term stable retirement future for Canadians.

The budget takes action to ensure the retirement security of all Canadians now and into the future. As we all know, the age of eligibility for OAS and GIS will be gradually increased from 65 to 67 starting in the year 2023, with full implementation by 2029. This gives plenty of assurances to seniors who are about to retire that their OAS will remain intact and it gives plenty of time for those who are looking at retirement in the future to plan their retirement accordingly.

The Budget

This builds on the measures our government has taken to improve the economic security of seniors. We have removed 380,000 seniors from the tax rolls. We introduced pension income splitting. We increased the age credit amount and doubled the pension income credit. We increased the age limit for RRSPs to RRIF conversion from 69 to 71. We also established the tax free savings account.

In economic action plan 2012, we are announcing measures to improve employment insurance to make it sustainable for the long term.

• (1625)

Notably, our government proposes to ensure stability in the EI premium rate by limiting rate increases to five cents each year until the EI operating account is balanced.

Economic action plan 2012 will invest funds to improve efforts to connect EI claimants with the necessary skills and with available jobs in their communities. The budget proposes to invest in a new national EI pilot project that will ensure claimants are not discouraged from accepting work while receiving EI benefits, by cutting the current earnings clawback rate in half.

Let me talk about balanced budgets.

• (1630)

[*Translation*]

Our government has reduced the tax burden on Canadians to the lowest level in nearly 50 years, that is, since the 1960s.

[*English*]

To get our fiscal situation on track after the global economic downturn, our government proposes to reduce spending after careful analysis and study. We have the lowest net to GDP ratio in the entire G7, and we intend to enhance our competitive situation even further.

While the NDP and Liberals want to engage in a reckless spending spree, our Conservative government is committed to getting back to balanced budgets. We are refocusing government, making it easier to deal with and streamlining back-office administration to achieve \$5.2 billion in ongoing savings to taxpayers. About 70% of the savings will come from eliminating inefficiencies in the internal operations of government, making it leaner and more effective.

Unlike the NDP and Liberals, our Conservative government will not take the easy route by raising taxes, and unlike the previous Liberal government we will not slash transfers to the provinces for health care, education or support for seniors. Our Conservative government will provide the stable, responsible government that Canadians elected to protect our country's future now and for the long term.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my hon. colleague's comments with great interest. I have the utmost respect for him, and I am sure he certainly believes everything he was saying.

It is interesting that the member talks about reckless spending sprees. I would just like to get his thoughts on one particular spending spree his government is on right now. A lot of Canadians voted for the government on the basis of what it was calling a \$2 billion boondoggle with the long gun registry.

It seems that there is now a \$25 billion boondoggle. Those are not my words but words from the media, a \$25 billion F-35 boondoggle. The Conservatives pretend they are good managers of the economy. In fact, they are ideologically moving forward on a boondoggle that will certainly outdistance any other boondoggle they have ever talked about.

I wonder if my hon. friend would like to make a comment on that particular \$25 billion boondoggle.

Mr. Bernard Trottier: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to hear the member mention the \$2 billion boondoggle that was the long gun registry, because of course he is a bit conflicted amongst his own party members about whether he should support that or attack that particular boondoggle. Thankfully the government is taking some action in that regard.

With respect to the defence of Canada and to our international obligations of working with our allies in overseas missions, the challenge of replacing fighter jets is something the NDP does not want to face. The NDP wants to deny there is a problem, and wants to postpone any acquisition of aircraft altogether. That is what the NDP's game really is.

We are looking at the strategy of how we can participate meaningfully with our allies, not just for the defence of Canada and North America but also in overseas expeditions. That is why we are looking at what is the best possible aircraft for our armed forces.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore referenced a regiment within his riding. Within my riding, a key employer is the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Back when the strategic operating review was taking place, all departments were asked to submit a 5% plan and a 10% plan. The Department of Veterans Affairs has a \$3.6 billion budget, 90% of which is paid to veterans. We have heard over and over again that veterans' benefits will not be affected.

That leaves \$360 million to run the department. The cut in this budget in year one is \$36 million, in year two it is \$49 million, and in year three it is \$67 million.

My question is whether this member is comfortable with the books of this country being balanced on the backs of those who serve our veterans?

Mr. Bernard Trottier: Mr. Speaker, it is one thing for the hon. member to make up his facts, but not a single veteran has suffered any reduction in his or her benefits. The streamlining that has been happening at Veterans Affairs has to do with the back-office administration, but in terms of benefits received by veterans, they are there. That is why veterans are 100% for our budget. They recognize that, in terms of providing a stable framework for Canada to move into the future, we need to do a lot of things, including reducing some of the bureaucracy in the back office in Ottawa and around the country.

The Budget

●(1635)

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore for his very insightful analysis of the budget.

We heard the hon. Minister of Finance in his presentation speak about Canada having one of the lowest debt to GDP ratios in the world, and the projections of that look very good moving forward. I wonder if the hon. member can elaborate a bit on what the projection is for balancing our budget.

Mr. Bernard Trottier: Mr. Speaker, the projections are to get to balanced books. Our plans are to get there by the year 2015. Part of that is difficult to predict in terms of the shape of the overall economy. That overall economy shapes our exports and our economic activity. However, right now we are well positioned to do that. Our controllables are the things we spend money on and that is why we are taking action there.

On the revenue side, we are cautiously optimistic that the world's economy will strengthen, our exports will increase and economic activity and opportunity will increase in this country. We look forward to balancing those books and paying down our debt for future generations.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform the House that I will be sharing my time with my hon. colleague from Edmonton—Strathcona.

I am pleased to rise in the House today to denounce this budget. I do not even know where to begin because, in my opinion, this budget clearly demonstrates that, once again, the Conservatives are completely out of touch with the reality facing Quebeckers and all Canadians.

The budget contains spending and cuts that make no sense in areas that are extremely important to Canadians and Quebeckers. I know my colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster spoke for hours and hours and, I must say, I wish I could also speak for hours and hours, because there are so many things in this budget that deserve the attention of all Canadians and Quebeckers.

I would like to begin with the decision to raise the age of eligibility for old age security from 65 to 67. I would like to say to the Conservatives that, as a member of the generation that they claim to want to protect with these cuts, personally, I do not agree with this increase. I think all young people of my generation would agree. We want this program to be there for us.

I seriously question the government's decision to attack the most vulnerable, those who did not have the chance to work full time because they might not have been able to find full-time work or because they took time off to take care of their children, something they wanted to do as mothers and fathers. I honestly question the government's budget cuts that affect those who need help the most.

Second, I want to talk about the cuts to the public service. We are talking about 19,200 jobs that will be lost. It is not just jobs, but also services such as employment insurance. A number of my constituents are already saying that they have to wait far too long to get the benefits they need to live. That is a problem. The

government wants to cut where there is already a problem, and that just does not add up.

What is more, the government is cutting \$115 million from Radio-Canada/CBC. These are cultural institutions, especially in Quebec. If you ask Quebeckers what television they watch in the evening, they will say Radio-Canada. If you ask them what radio station they listen to, they will say Radio-Canada. It is a cultural symbol to us. I thoroughly object to the government's choice to cut this program, this cultural institution.

The government has also not made any commitment to support infrastructure projects, which was something that cities in Quebec specifically requested from this government. Once again, the government ignored them. The government is making massive cuts at Environment Canada. At a time when we should be investing in the green economy, the Conservatives are making cuts to research. On every side, this government is making choices that do not reflect the values of Quebeckers and Canadians. I can certainly tell this government that its choices do not reflect the choices and values of the people in my riding, because they have told me so.

I would like to speak about one cut in particular because it has a major impact on my generation, my friends and my peers throughout Canada. That is the Minister of Canadian Heritage's decision to abolish the Katimavik program. Katimavik costs only \$14 million. This government is prepared to spend \$28 million to celebrate the War of 1812, which is not a war that is important to the people in my riding; yet, it cannot find \$14 million to help young people and communities across Canada. This is a problem, and it shows that the government is not listening to Canadians and that it does not understand what is important to them and to young people.

I brought with me today testimonials I received from people who have participated in the Katimavik program, people who acted as host families for the participants and people who work for an organization that received help from Katimavik program participants. This program has provided communities with essential services. These communities will not be able to grow and prosper as well as they could have with the help of the program. I completely oppose the government's choice to abolish this program. It is also important to note that 600 young people were supposed to begin their journey in July. Now, they no longer have a plan.

●(1640)

It is too late to apply to post-secondary institutions. These 600 young people will lose a year. I have a letter from one of my constituents, the father of a young man who was supposed to join Katimavik in July. He says:

With the cancellation of the Katimavik program, he will lose a year of training as he was planning on improving his English. One year lost because of an unexpected budget cut.

The Budget

This father lives in my riding and he is concerned about the budget cuts. I would like to point out that he said his son planned to improve his English. We should also realize that this program made it possible for young anglophones to learn French and young francophones to learn English, resulting in an cultural exchange between French Canada and English Canada. However, this is apparently not important enough for this government.

I will read another testimonial, this one from Kimberley Mackie who currently lives in Barrie, Ontario.

[English]

Being in Katimavik opened my eyes to the value of volunteering, taking care of my health and the natural environment, and helped me understand my country on a much deeper cultural level.... Katimavik means 'meeting place', and the current budget is stripping away an important meeting place for young people.

[Translation]

I will quote Tse Kameko, from Montreal:

By eliminating funding for Katimavik, other young people will not have the opportunity to participate in a rewarding experience, and communities across Canada will be affected—specifically, the more than 500 non-profit organizations affiliated with Katimavik.

I will also quote Jaymie Adams.

[English]

He says: “I was booked to depart with Katimavik in July 2012. I cannot express my extreme disappointment that this program has been cut. Because of this I have not made plans for the summer or school for this coming year. This budget cut has turned my life upside down and hundreds of others as well”.

[Translation]

Once again, she is one of the 600 people who will have nothing to do for a year and whom this government has abandoned.

I also received a message from Wayne Greenway.

[English]

He says: “A Katimavik project provides about 5,000 hours of volunteer support for local charities. The youth go home recognizing their personal responsibility in building sustainable communities and valuing active participation in the community. Many participants carry on their community leadership skills through their lifetime”.

[Translation]

These are people who will do volunteer work for the rest of their lives, people who will continue to invest in their communities. These are the leaders of tomorrow.

I would like to ask this question: what is this government's plan for youth development? The government is cutting programs that build strong young people and teach them community and civic values. We want to encourage this generation to vote, but opportunities to show them what civic engagement really means are being taken away.

I would like to read another testimonial, this one from Yoan Manny, who says:

This program gave me the opportunity to feel like a Canadian for the first time in my life and to be proud of it. I am sad to think that no other young people will have the same opportunity that I did. I am also sad to see the partner organizations lose the thousands of hours of volunteer work they obtained through this program.

Here is another testimonial from Julie Mannering from Montreal, Quebec.

An opportunity to learn to speak another language, work alongside representatives of different provinces and cultures, become aware of a community's challenges, take initiatives, promote eco-citizenship and much more...

She learned to take care of the environment. However, given the cuts at Environment Canada, we see that this government does not even want to take care of the environment. So, it is not surprising that things like this are not important to the Conservatives.

Here is another testimonial, this one from Krista Boniface.

● (1645)

[English]

She says: “I have never felt so needed and respected in volunteerism like in Katimavik. Your involvement keeps non-profits afloat and enriches communities, supporting so many people that a household of youth.... This program has meant so much to me and I am furious that an experience such as mine may not be a possibility for future generations”.

[Translation]

I will stop there. I think I have provided a good idea of who these extremely disappointed people are. This is not even about the entire budget. I only read testimonials from people who are disappointed with one decision this government chose to make. In my opinion, the government has turned its back on youth, seniors and Quebec's cities. It did not listen to them in this budget.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before moving on to questions and comments, it is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for St. John's East, Firearms Registry; and the hon. member for Beaches—East York, National Defence.

[English]

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague's remarks and I have one comment to make and one very short question to ask.

She said that commemorating the War of 1812 was not important to her constituents. However, it was fairly important to the Quebecers of the day in 1812 who fought alongside the rest of Canada to save their country. I would say it is a shame that she does not seem to appreciate the history of her country, Canada.

I would like to ask her one simple question. She was not elected at the time, but we were criticized roundly for making government bigger. Now that we are becoming more efficient and cutting out red tape, we are being criticized for making government smaller. What would she like, that we make it bigger or smaller?

[Translation]

Ms. Charmaine Borg: Mr. Speaker, it is not a matter of making the government bigger or smaller. It is a matter of giving Canadians the services they deserve and that they should have. It is a matter of serving Canadians well and ensuring that Service Canada delivers employment insurance benefits on time, benefits to which the claimants are entitled.

The Budget

I fully respect our country's history, but I think that spending \$28 million to commemorate this war is not the best way to spend our money. I would like to point out that Katimavik teaches young people about Canada's culture and heritage.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member brought up a wonderful program, one that Pierre Elliott Trudeau actually brought in during the 1970s. It has stood the test of time. Literally tens of thousands of youth from across Canada have had the opportunity to get engaged in many different non-profit organizations through the years. It is a program that is worth fighting for. It is important to note that it survived Progressive Conservative governments but it cannot survive the Conservatives or this Reform-Conservative Party.

My question for the member is this. Does she believe, as the Liberals do, that because of the benefits of this particular program for tens of thousands of youth across this land that this is indeed a program worth fighting for and that the government should reconsider its decision on this valuable program, which has stood the test of time and survived Progressive Conservative and Liberal governments in the past? It is a good Trudeau initiative, I must say.

• (1650)

[Translation]

Ms. Charmaine Borg: Mr. Speaker, I would like to reply to the Liberal member that yes, we must fight for this program, but we also need to consider the people affected—the 30,000 young people who have participated in the program and all of the communities and non-profit organizations that depend on this program to provide essential services to Canadians. We must consider the full impact of this program. Yes, this program is definitely worth fighting for.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my friend from Terrebonne—Blainville. I agree with her completely regarding the War of 1812.

[English]

I agree with her completely that spending \$28 million on celebrating the War of 1812 is excessive at a time when we are supposed to be practising austerity. I would also say that spending over \$1 billion on fossil fuel subsidies and a further \$165 million in this budget for pipelines, tankers and offshore drilling is a threat. I want to ask her as a Quebec MP how she feels about the government's new priority for drilling in the sensitive Gulf of St. Lawrence.

[Translation]

Ms. Charmaine Borg: Mr. Speaker, this government has its priorities backwards. It should be investing in the green economy. It should be doing what other countries do and committing to and investing in this economy that could be profitable and create green jobs in Canada. But that is not what the government is doing.

I think that my colleague also understands that this government is not going in the right direction and that its priorities do not reflect those of Canadians.

[English]

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague mentioned the impacts of Katimavik. Anyone

growing up in the 1970s and 1980s would realize that sometimes there have been tensions in this country between groups, between French and English. I had the privilege of being with a family in a park in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce at one time. The father had participated in Katimavik and we had a friendly conversation.

Does my colleague think that the elimination of this program will create tensions and reduce understanding between groups in this country?

[Translation]

Ms. Charmaine Borg: Mr. Speaker, in the testimonials I received, many people indicated that they were really happy to have had the opportunity to learn Canada's other official language, whether it be English or French, and to immerse themselves in the other culture by staying with host families who spoke another language.

So yes. It is extremely important for building our country.

[English]

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the budget aims to remove the deficit created by the Conservative government through cuts totalling \$5.2 billion over three years; cuts to services critical to Canadians, to the detriment of our environment and to future generations.

The budget purportedly is a western advantage budget. I am afraid that is not the view I am hearing expressed by my constituents and many other Albertans.

Alberta is bearing the brunt of the impacts and the costs associated with the reckless, fast-tracked, so-called streamlined approvals for oil sands and pipelines. The government brags about how the oil sands are fuelling the national economy, so where are the associated benefits to Albertans?

While crime rates are generally reported down across the country, which is a good thing, violent crimes, unfortunately, seem to be on the rise in Edmonton. Many, including the police, have associated this is in a large way to a boom town having increased drug trade which attracts crime. Meanwhile, Alberta taxpayers are being downloaded with the bulk of the cost to build the government's desired new prisons.

Where are the benefits to Alberta of the impacts of the oil sands?

According to the Edmonton Social Planning Council and elder and disability advocates, John and Carol Wodack, particularly hard hit by the budget will be those living on low to moderate incomes in Alberta. The new OAS rules will hurt the poorest of seniors. On a phased-in basis to 2023, access to the OAS will be delayed until age 67. This will hurt those seniors struggling to meet their basic expenses, including rising electricity prices, thanks to deregulation.

The Budget

We heard today a government member faulting the Government of Ontario for investing in clean renewable power as being the cause for rising electricity prices. I welcome any one of those members, including the Alberta members, to stand in the House and reveal what has been going on in Alberta with deregulated, major league, coal-fired power electricity and with expanded power lines to export coal-fired power to the United States.

There will be no new dollars for infrastructure. While Edmonton services the oil fields, bringing wealth to Canadians, the government has not seen fit to offer gratitude by providing dollars to repair crumbling infrastructure and expand the long awaited LRT in Edmonton to serve our growing population, which is being attracted to our province because of the booming oil and gas sector. What about money to build the passenger train between Edmonton and Calgary, which would be welcomed by all the residents of Edmonton and Calgary?

All federal housing programs, including CMHC, will be cut by \$131 million, on top of deeper cuts in the last budget, despite the fact there has been a call in our city for increased investment in affordable housing, particularly for the growing aboriginal population moving to our capital city.

A once burgeoning energy efficient sector has been cut short by the abject refusal of the government, despite the demands and the calls by Canadians, to provide long-term support to homeowners and small businesses seeking assistance to employ local contractors to do energy retrofits. The nonsensical return of the money for one year was not enough of an incentive to re-establish the businesses that have shut down in my riding.

The narrow job strategy of the government remains, pulling youth out of high school and sending them to Fort McMurray. Many youth in my own community who had expressed a desire to get into the energy efficiency business gave up and left the province.

The cuts to the environment are absolutely reprehensible. I am proud to say that I come from one of the cities in Alberta where people support protecting the environment. They are absolutely astounded at the government's decision to further streamline reviews and to remove the most important trigger of assessment of major projects, which is the habitat provisions of the Fisheries Act.

• (1655)

What is most reprehensible is the Conservatives' decision, as they did in the last two budgets, to put these kinds of measures through a budget, and we are anticipating measures in the budget implementation bill. It is completely undemocratic and counter to the solid foundation of environmental law in which I feel privileged to have participated over the last four years. However, in one fell swoop, in order to save a few dimes and short-circuit by a few weeks or maybe a few months some of these major projects, the Conservatives are throwing away one of the most important pieces of environmental legislation in this country.

In addition, one of the most important and previously growing employment sectors in this country was the environment sector. If the Conservatives had sought the advice of their own round table on environment, they would have determined that the market analyses

showed that it was the single largest growing sector for employment, potentially, in this country.

What is in the budget for aboriginal Canadians? In her last report, the former auditor general, Sheila Fraser, called for a radical fix to address the deep-seated structural impediments leading to inequities for first nations and for action to bring greater government accountability, not accountability by the first nation peoples and their government, but greater accountability by the federal government.

She stated that there was a lack of clarity about service levels to ensure comparability of services, a lack of legislative base and a lack of timely delivery. She stated, "What is truly shocking is the lack of improvement over the last decade". She also stated, "In a wealthy country like Canada, this gap is simply unacceptable".

She called for a legislative base for delivery of key services, not just education, but also for housing, for health and for child and family services for aboriginal communities. She called for greater accountability and delivery of federal responsibilities. It was not only the former auditor general but it was also a series of panels struck by the government that called for major investments right now in all of these needs.

To its credit, the government did listen to one of those needs and has come forward with some dollars to improve access to education. What is not clear is whether the dollars being delivered will actually accord to aboriginal children equal access to education as all other Canadian children receive.

The government has committed to begin drafting legislation to provide a legislative framework for education with willing partners. It is not sure what that kind of language is supposed to mean.

The first nations have been very clear. They totally oppose a one size fits all. Therefore, it will be absolutely incumbent on the government to directly consult with all of the first nations in this country to ensure they are on side with the legislation that is being developed and that it actually meets their needs, including their cultural needs.

The commitment of \$275 million spread over the next three years to support education and build schools has been welcomed. It is not clear if this is additional to the moneys committed in the main or if this is the replacement. Given the Assembly of First Nations' estimate that \$500 million are needed just to provide equal education, this may fall short of what its own panel recommended. As 40 new schools are needed at a cost of \$12 million each, this dollar figure falls far short.

The Budget

Sadly, there is no new money for housing for first nations despite the need for 85,000 more housing units. The First Nations Statistical Institute was killed. Why would the Conservatives kill this institute? It was actually formed to provide data and to help inform economic development on first nations communities, which is what the government is saying that it supports.

The most important thing the government can do is, first, to finally commit to the expeditious finalization of the negotiations of specific claims and comprehensive claims, and second, to deliver on the honour of the Crown and deliver its duties and responsibilities and the dollars necessary for the first nations to begin to have self-government and participate in the economy.

• (1700)

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I also represent an Alberta riding and I and many of my constituents are not ashamed of the responsible development of our energy sector because it provides the resources to support many of our social programs that all Canadians benefit from, not just our constituents but constituents across the country. It employs over 500,000 people and, over the next 25 years, it is expected to contribute over \$2.1 trillion to the Canadian economy, which is a huge amount.

In 2010 alone, the energy sector contributed \$1.3 billion to aboriginal companies and it employs more than 1,700 aboriginal people right now.

Will my colleague opposite finally come out and support the energy sector, because I have never once heard that from her?

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I do not think it is necessary to have more of a cheering squad on this side because there is such a resounding cheering squad on that side of the House for one sector of our entire Canadian economy. What I would like to hear from that side is just a tiny semblance of an appreciation that the rest of the world, including our major trading partner, the United States, is moving in the direction of a cleaner energy economy. Jobs can also be created in other sectors.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the cuts to the environment are negligent and reprehensible as they destroy 50 years of safeguards. The budget eliminates the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy. It was originally established to advise the Prime Minister but it regularly produced reports that challenged the environmental policies of the government, particularly around climate change. The budget also commits \$8 million over the next two years to help the Canada Revenue Agency target registered charities that the government believes are overly political.

I wonder if the hon. member thinks that the national round table is being silenced to eliminate dissent, and that charities, which are environmental critics, are being targeted.

• (1705)

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's support for trying to bring attention to the desecration by the government of 40 years of development of environmental law and policy in this country. Absolutely, it is reprehensible.

However, we cannot just look at the round table. We need to look at it through successive budgets. First the Conservatives killed the Canadian environmental network which provided support to all the small local organizations, including hunters and fishermen, so they could have a voice in Ottawa. Obviously, they want to get rid of the round table because it does credible, scientific, well-founded analysis, which they are not interested in.

What can we say? One by one, the Conservatives are destroying the very foundations upon which a credible regulatory process in this country was established and which I was proud to take overseas and market. Now we will not have that credible system.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when we discuss the energy industry in Alberta and we discuss what is happening there right now, we should go back to 2007 when the industry itself was proposing to increase the upgrading in Alberta to three million barrels a day. That was the projection. What did the Prime Minister say in the 2008 election? He said that he would stop the export of raw bitumen out of this country.

We have a Conservative government in Alberta and a Conservative government in Ottawa. They had the right path to take three years ago. What happened to those guys? Why did they abandon good jobs for Canadians and the opportunity to upgrade the industry? What kind of managers of the system are those people turning out to be?

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is truly a strong advocate for moving in the direction of renewable energy, particularly for the far north. I appreciate his contributions. I only wish the government would listen to his sage advice.

Indeed we did hear the Prime Minister say during the election in 2008 that he would under no circumstances allow the export of raw bitumen to a nation that has lesser standards than Canada. We heard the Prime Minister many times stand and remonstrate against China and say, "Why would we take action on climate change when we have China, the bad actor?" However, here the Conservatives are spending our public resources, taxpayer dollars, to fast-track a system that will send our raw bitumen and our jobs down a pipeline to China.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to be the last person to stand on this particular budget 2012, which is our plan for jobs, growth and long-term prosperity.

Before I start into some technical parts of the budget, I have to make an observation about what has happened over the last few days. I have to note that the NDP official opposition only had one member who could even speak to this budget for three days. I have to appreciate his stamina, but reading tweets and emails for hour after hour leads me to believe that the NDP really did not have all that much to say against the budget.

We often hear concerns about time allocation because the opposition has so many people who need to speak to the issues. But again, I did find it very strange to watch that approach to this budget.

The Budget

I have to look at the response by the Liberals. They had many opportunities to suggest an amendment that would be important to Canadians. What did they do? They chose to focus on the Prime Minister's retiring allowance. Soon after they actually made that amendment, they had to apologize when they realized their own party was responsible for the implementation of the policy.

In actual fact I think it is very telling that the debate over the last few days has really just been about tweets and minor amendments. It must mean we have this budget right.

What we need to do is understand how we plan to return to a balanced budget without raising taxes. It is important to start, first all, with reflecting on some of the extraordinary challenges we have faced in the last few years.

Between 2006 and 2008, we paid down \$38 billion in national debt and reduced the tax burden to the lowest level in 50 years.

I did have to look at budget 2009, because I think it is an absolute critical piece to understanding where we are. This was when we were entering an extraordinary recession, called the great recession. Across the world, people were very concerned.

Our Minister of Finance, in budget 2009, said the following: "We are in the midst of an extraordinary global economic slowdown.... We will spend what is necessary to stimulate our economy to protect our future prosperity through Canada's economic action plan.... We will be spending for the purpose of stimulating the economy and to make many long-term investments that we would have had to make at any rate".

He said we would not fall into permanent deficit, but lay out a plan to move out of deficit and back to surplus within five years.

Again, this was as we were heading into the recession. He had extraordinary insight in terms of what we needed to do to deal with it and move forward. He said that our stimulus spending was temporary and confined

I am so proud of the government. If we look at our current plan and look at the stimulus and how it really was confined to those two years, we did what we needed to do and we moved forward. The next thing he said was that we anticipated the budget balance would improve sharply, starting in 2011-12.

What have we seen? Dramatic improvements.

He said, "Once the economy recovers, we will ensure deficits incurred over the next five years are repaid and the debt burden is firmly on the downward track.... To accomplish this, we will set rigid spending targets, keeping program spending on average below the rate of nominal GDP growth.... We will do what is right and necessary for the good of our country, without placing the burden on our children and grandchildren".

That was 2009. Again, I think we can see there was a plan, and that plan is working.

People look at this document we have in front of us, and some people wonder how it came about. It is important to recognize that this is not something that is crafted in offices. This is crafted through consultation across the country.

As members of the finance committee, we travelled from coast to coast to coast. We listened to Canadians. We put forward suggestions. Most members of Parliament met with their constituents. They had round tables, crafted and put in proposals. There are a couple in here that I would reflect upon that come from riding in Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

When I was first elected, Manny Jules, who was from the first nations land management, met with me and talked about economic prosperity. He talked about the ability for first nations property rights.

● (1710)

We announced that the government intends to move forward with legislation that would allow interested first nations to consider private property ownership within the current reserve boundaries.

It was interesting. The finance committee met with Mr. Jules and it met with four chiefs in Kamloops. We talked about how we could help them create economic prosperity.

Mr. Jules said very clearly that this is not something that is for everyone. It needs to be voluntary. However, again this was something that came from constituents. It came from chiefs in my riding. We believe we can create a future for our communities with something like this, so we saw that into the budget. It could be part of some transformation for the Indian bands, the first nations communities that choose this as an option.

Another simple story I like to look at involves the red tape reduction commission. In Kamloops, again, we heard from a business owner who said, "It was Christmas. I hired a temporary worker for a couple of weeks. I missed doing a report to Revenue Canada. The penalty that I was hit with was extraordinary. It was inappropriate". They were really concerned about what they deemed a very unfair penalty assessed by CRA.

I note that in this budget we have a new policy to ensure these penalties are charged in a manner that is both fair and reasonable. When a business is unable to comply in a timely manner with a reporting obligation related to certain information returns, such as T4s, reduced penalties will be applied when the number of late returns is small.

So, that is one example of something significantly altering for a lot of people and a small example of an irritant, but these are examples of Canadians' input being reflected in the budget.

In summary, I am very proud to be part of a government that actually set out a path to see us through the global recession in 2009. We came out of the recession in better shape than most countries. We now have a path forward, in terms of doing exactly what we said we would do; that is to get back to a balanced budget and to create growth, jobs and long-term prosperity.

● (1715)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): It being 5:15, it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the ways and means Motion No. 7.

[Translation]

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.

• (1800)

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

(Division No. 180)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adler
Aglukkaq	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambler	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Ashfield	Aspin
Baird	Bateman
Benoit	Bernier
Block	Boughen
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Carrie
Chisu	Chong
Clarke	Daniel
Davidson	Dechert
Del Mastro	Devolin
Dreeshen	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Dykstra	Fantino
Fast	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Fletcher	Galipeau
Gallant	Gill
Glover	Goguen
Goldring	Gosal
Gourde	Grewal
Harper	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hawn	Hayes
Hiebert	Hillyer
Hoback	Hoepfner
James	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kent	Kerr
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lauzon
Lebel	Leaf
Lemieux	Leung
Lizon	Lobb
Lukowski	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie

Mayes	McColeman
McLeod	Menegakis
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
Oda	Opitz
Paradis	Payne
Penashue	Poileuvre
Preston	Raitt
Rajotte	Rathgeber
Reid	Rempel
Richards	Richardson
Rickford	Ritz
Saxton	Schellenberger
Seeback	Shea
Shipley	Shory
Smith	Sopuck
Sorenson	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Tilson
Toet	Trost
Trottier	Truppe
Tweed	Uppal
Valcourt	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 — 150

The Budget

NAYS

Members

Angus
Atamanenko
Bélanger
Bennett
Bevington
Blanchette-Lamothe
Borg
Boutin-Sweet
Brosseau
Caron
Cash
Choquette
Christopherson
Coderre
Côté
Cullen
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Day
Dionne Labelle
Doré Lefebvre
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Dusseau
Eyking
Fortin
Fry
Garrison
Giguère
Goodale
Groguhé
Harris (St. John's East)
Hsu
Hyer
Julian
Lamoureux
Larose
Laverdière
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Énard)
Liu
Mai
Martin
Mathysen
McCallum
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)

Allen (Welland)
Ashton
Ayala
Bellavance
Benskin
Blanchette
Boivin
Boulerice
Brahmi
Byrne
Casey
Chicoine
Chow
Cleary
Comartin
Cotler
Cuzner
Davies (Vancouver East)
Dewar
Donnelly
Dubé
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Easter
Foote
Freeman
Gameau
Genest-Jourdain
Godin
Gravelle
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Hassainia
Hughes
Jacob
Kellway
Lapointe
Latendresse
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
Leslie
MacAulay
Marston
Masse
May
McGuinty
Michaud
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)

Private Members' Business

Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Mourani	Mulcair
Murray	Nash
Nicholls	Nunez-Melo
Pacetti	Papillon
Patry	Péclet
Perreault	Pilon
Plamondon	Quach
Rae	Rafferty
Ravignat	Raynault
Regan	Rousseau
Saganash	Sandhu
Savoie	Scarpaleggia
Scott	Sellah
Sgro	Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind- sor)
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	Sitsabaiesan
St-Denis	Stewart
Stoffer	Sullivan
Thibeault	Toone
Tremblay	Trudeau
Turnel	Valeriote— 132

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed from March 30 consideration of Bill C-310, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (trafficking in persons), as amended, be concurred in at report stage.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion to concur in Bill C-310 at report stage under private members' business.

• (1805)

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

*(Division No. 181)***YEAS**

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Alexander	Allen (Welland)
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambler	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Angus	Ashfield
Ashton	Aspin
Atamanenko	Ayala
Baird	Bateman
Bélanger	Bellavance
Bennett	Benoit
Benskin	Bernier
Bevington	Blanchette
Blanchette-Lamothe	Block
Boivin	Borg
Boughen	Boulerice
Boutin-Sweet	Brahmi
Braid	Breitreuz
Brosseau	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Brunooge	Butt
Byrne	Calandra

Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Caron
Carrie	Casey
Cash	Chicoine
Chisu	Chong
Choquette	Chow
Christopherson	Clarke
Cleary	Coderre
Comartin	Côté
Cotler	Cullen
Cuzner	Daniel
Davidson	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Davies (Vancouver East)	Day
Dechert	Del Mastro
Devolin	Dewar
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Dreeschen
Dubé	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseau	Dykstra
Easter	Eyking
Fantino	Fast
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Fletcher
Foote	Fortin
Freeman	Fry
Galipeau	Gallant
Garneau	Garrison
Genest-Jourdain	Giguère
Gill	Glover
Godin	Goguen
Goldring	Goodale
Gosal	Gourde
Gravelle	Grewal
Groguhé	Harper
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Harris (St. John's East)
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hassainia
Hawn	Hayes
Hiebert	Hillyer
Hoback	Hoepfner
Hsu	Hughes
Hyer	Jacob
James	Jean
Julian	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kellway
Kent	Kerr
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lamoureux
Lapointe	Larose
Latendresse	Lauzon
Laverdière	Lebel
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Leaf	Lemieux
Leslie	Leung
Liu	Lizon
Lobb	Lukiwski
Lunney	MacAulay
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Mai	Marston
Martin	Masse
Mathysen	May
Mayes	McCallum
McColeman	McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	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
Murray	Nash
Nicholls	Nicholson
Norlock	Nunez-Melo
O'Connor	Oda
Opitz	Pacetti
Papillon	Paradis
Patry	Payne
Péclet	Penashue
Perreault	Pilon
Plamondon	Poilevire
Preston	Quach
Rae	Rafferty
Raitt	Rajotte

Private Members' Business

Rathgeber	Ravignat
Raynault	Regan
Reid	Rempel
Richards	Richardson
Rickford	Ritz
Rousseau	Saganash
Sandhu	Savoie
Saxton	Scarpaleggia
Schellenberger	Scott
Seeback	Sellah
Sgro	Shea
Shipley	Shory
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	
Sitsabaiesan	Smith
Sopuck	Sorenson
St-Denis	Stanton
Stewart	Stoffer
Storseth	Strahl
Sullivan	Sweet
Thibeault	Tilson
Toet	Toone
Tremblay	Trost
Trottier	Trudeau
Truppe	Turmel
Tweed	Uppal
Valcourt	Valeriotte
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— 283	

NAYS

Nil

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

It being 6:08 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

* * *

FOOD AND DRUGS ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-313, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act (non-corrective contact lenses), as reported (with amendment) from the committee.

The Speaker: There being no motions at report stage on this bill, the House will now proceed without debate to the putting of the question on the motion to concur in the bill at report stage.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC) moved that the bill, as amended, be concurred in.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

The Speaker: When shall the bill be read the third time? By leave, now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

She said: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to stand among my fellow parliamentarians today as I speak in support of my private member's legislation advancing to third reading.

● (1810)

Bill C-313, an act to amend the Food and Drugs Act (non-corrective contact lenses), has received unanimous all-party support at every level of debate since its introduction in the House. Even at the committee review stage, all parliamentarians from the various parties have expressed their full support.

In the few months since my legislation was first introduced, there have been millions of non-corrective contact lenses recalled across the North American marketplace for quality control issues. Such stories have become more common, and Canadians are just beginning to open their eyes to the importance of their eye health. As we shed more light on this issue, we will continue to hear about such product recalls in the news. That is why Bill C-313 is supported across party lines and by virtually all Canadian eye health professionals. Canadian policy-makers are keenly aware of the impact my legislation would have across Canada, just as many of my colleagues have followed my legislation's progress.

Organizations like the Canadian Association of Optometrists have been key players in helping to spread the word on this important consumer health issue. The Canadian Association of Optometrists, the Opticians Association of Canada and the Canadian Ophthalmological Society have all come out in support of this legislation, and many more provincial bodies and their representatives have voiced their support as well. I will share some of their opinions with the House in due course.

I would like to thank the individual optometrists and ophthalmologists who have taken time from their busy practices right across Canada to write to me to voice their support. I realize that many of these same professionals took the time to write to their own MPs, asking them to support this private member's business, and for this I am grateful.

As we discuss the bill now at third reading, I intend to share medical evidence with the House that will provide clear reasons why we need my legislation. However, before we discuss Bill C-313 further, I want to take members back to the autumn of 2007 in the 39th Parliament of Canada.

One of my first responsibilities as a new member of Parliament was to be a member of the Standing Committee on Health. Looking back at my time on that specific committee, I was particularly seized by the concerns that were brought to me by professional eye care organizations from across Canada about the lack of regulatory oversight of what were called cosmetic contact lenses.

It is easy to break down the main concern brought forward to me all those years ago. A cosmetic contact lens is identical to a corrective lens in its impact on the human eyeball, with the only difference being that it does not correct a sight imbalance. However, despite the fact they are identical to a corrective lens, these cosmetic lenses have been free of regulatory oversight similar to the provisions in place for corrective lenses. It was with this in mind that I began to work in 2007 to further understand the risks of cosmetic contact lenses.

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After extensive study, liaising with health researchers and eye care professions and meeting with our own experts from Health Canada and engaging with the opposition health critics, I developed a strategy that would go further toward protecting the eye health of Canadians everywhere. The result was private member's Motion No. 409, which proposed that cosmetic lenses should be classified as medical devices and be regulated accordingly under the Food and Drugs Act. The actual text of Motion No. 409 read as follows:

That, in the opinion of the House, the Minister of Health should regulate non-corrective, cosmetic contact lenses as medical devices under the Hazardous Product Act or the Food and Drugs Act.

This motion passed unanimously on March 7, 2008, in a fractured minority Parliament no less, which I believe is testament to the fact we are discussing an important health matter that could impact many Canadians, especially our youth. When faced with the facts on non-corrective contact lenses in 2008, we as a Parliament did the right thing by supporting Motion No. 409 and we stand to do so again with Bill C-313.

I was pleased that the government acted upon the unanimously passed motion. It was 2008 when the Government of Canada, upon advice from Health Canada, introduced my motion as an amendment to former Bill C-51, an act to amend the Food and Drugs Act and to make consequential amendments to other acts. That act was introduced in April 2008 but also died on the order paper upon the election in the fall of 2008.

• (1815)

That was unfortunate. Having already used my private member's spot in the 39th Parliament, I found myself near the bottom of a long private members' business list. It can be a long wait before MPs have the opportunity to again bring forward legislative items once they have used their spot on that list.

Moving ahead to late 2010, in the 40th Parliament it became evident that I would be able to bring forward private members' business. Knowing that Canadians still had concerns about the existing policies in Canada surrounding non-corrective cosmetic lenses, I directed my research staff to determine what types of legislative remedies could be brought forward. In short order, they developed opinions to deal with my previously unfinished private members' business as a stand-alone piece of legislation.

More time passed. Subsequently, we had another election and I was re-elected by the good people of Sarnia—Lambton. With the return of the 41st Parliament, my name was near the top of the list for private members' business, meaning that months of research and efforts by my office were about to be realized and we would finally be able to bridge the regulatory gaps that exist for decorative non-corrective lenses.

This legislative process has taken place across three different sessions of Parliament and now stands at third reading before the House of Commons.

With this background on my bill before the House, I would like to speak directly to Bill C-313, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act (non-corrective contact lenses).

Eye health professionals have been saying for a long time what we now know to be fact: National distribution of these products without

professional oversight, fitting and training significantly increases the risk of public harm. This is the main finding captured by independent research reports. It is what Canadian eye health organizations have found. Now we see peer-reviewed science from reputable academics and institutions across the globe now fully supporting these findings.

To speak to the potential medical issues that can arise from the use of non-corrective contact lenses, stating that a decorative lens is potentially a harmful product may seem to some to be an overstatement, yet medical researchers have shown otherwise.

A list of the complications that could occur due to unsafe handling and the wearing of an improperly fitted lens in one's eye includes the following: conjunctivitis; corneal abrasions; giant papillary conjunctivitis; microbial keratitis; and other forms of bacterial, allergic, and microbial infection, as specified by the eye care industry.

Already, we know that these complications all occur with prescribed corrective lenses, which is exactly why Health Canada regulates the use of these products through opticians and regulatory bodies. Furthermore, it has been proven through peer-reviewed studies that non-corrective lenses are much more likely to cause complications to users because of a combination of factors, including lack of oversight of the product for the consumer, in particular how to use the product and issues with the potential quality of the product.

The Internet market for these products has grown immensely, even since 2006. We are talking about a market share in the millions and tens of millions of dollars. Much of this revenue is taken offshore. We need to ensure that Canadian consumers are protected when it comes to such operations.

To date, we have now seen several studies on the issue of decorative lenses and the harm they can cause to consumers. Perhaps the most well-known study in Canada is the human health risk assessment of cosmetic contact lenses conducted by Dillon Consulting Limited. Also known as the Dillon report, the final assessment was submitted to Health Canada in September of 2003 and outlined the scientific evidence, which at that point was still being debated by public health officials, namely that the level of risk associated with the use of cosmetic contact lenses is comparable to that associated with corrective lenses, and may potentially be higher. The main issue here is that corrective lenses are subject to professional monitoring and proper regulatory oversight. Cosmetic lenses are not.

The Dillon report also called for the following risk management strategies: individual screening should take place before a cosmetic lens is sold to a customer; proper fitting should be ensured; adequate instruction on cleaning and sterilization should occur; and consumers should be made familiar with potential symptoms related to the condition of the eye; and regular aftercare is needed.

To date, not one of the suggested risk management strategies called for in this report has been adopted, while corrective lenses are strictly defined by Health Canada. My legislation would address this problem.

• (1820)

Whereas the long list of issues associated with non-corrective contact lens use was once viewed somewhat contentiously by policy-makers, such health concerns are now considered an accepted fact of non-corrective contact lens use, due to a recent study that appeared in *Acta Ophthalmologica*, the official medical journal for optometrists and ophthalmologists in Europe. In this study, research conducted by the department of ophthalmology at Strasbourg University Hospital in France clearly indicated the following:

Patients who acquire CosCL [cosmetic contact lenses] are less likely to be instructed on appropriate lenses use and basic hygiene rules. Consequently, CosCL wearers are experiencing acute vision-threatening infections.

The study in question focused on a bacterial infection known as microbial keratitis, a common yet preventable infection that can occur in wearers of contact lenses, both the corrective and non-corrective, cosmetic varieties. This study showed that wearers of cosmetic lenses were indeed at higher risk, with 79% of the control group of cosmetic contact lens wearers suffering from corneal scraping. However, the study showed that only 51% of the corrective contact lens wearers suffered similar effects. Meanwhile, more than half of the cosmetic lens wearers who were shown to have suffered corneal scraping were also shown to have serious microbial infection in the eye.

The study concluded that the increasingly documented risks of easily accessible cosmetic contact lenses were a serious concern in the country of France, where the study took place. In this regard, there is no reason to believe that the situation is any different in Canada, and in fact the Dillon report of 2003, which in many ways served as a ground-breaker on this issue, also came to the same conclusions as the French study in 2011.

Considering the medical evidence that clearly shows the need for the provisions contained in Bill C-313, it is important to note that Canada is at least a decade behind other jurisdictions, such as the United States and Europe, in achieving proper regulations for non-corrective cosmetic lenses.

In 2008, M-409 was able to obtain the full support of all opposition parties and their health critics, in addition to the support of the government and the Minister of Health.

Today, with Bill C-313, I ask hon. members to stand with me once again as we deal with this important issue. Listen to what some of our leading eye care experts from across Canada have had to say about this piece of legislation.

An optometrist from Newfoundland has stated, "In my province there are novelty shops and drugstores that are selling these lenses

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without regard for the possible health implications to eyesight. All our opticians want to stop this activity of unregulated dispensing". Moreover, Clearlycontacts.ca, a Canadian ebusiness provider of vision-care products, has also stated on the record that, "At Clearlycontacts, we support regulatory oversight in the sale of non-corrective contact lenses and fully support Bill C-313".

Dana Cooper of the Canadian Association of Optometrists has said that:

Bill C-313 is a commonsense initiative that aligns all contact lenses in the same federal regulatory environment. Bill C-313 makes sense from a vision health perspective, a consumer protection perspective, and is justified based on the concerns and actions already taken and being pursued by governments around the world.

In addition, I have also received strong endorsements from the Opticians of Manitoba, the Saskatchewan College of Opticians and also the School of Optometry and Vision Science in Waterloo, Ontario.

Internationally, Bill C-313 has the support of esteemed groups, such as the Contact Lens Institute of Florida and the American Optometric Association of Virginia.

The need for this legislation has never been greater than it is today. The Internet marketplace has opened doors for international buyers and sellers of these products like never before, and as policy-makers we have a duty to ensure that the eye health of Canadian consumers is protected as much as possible.

I believe that Bill C-313 is the first step in this direction, and today I call on all esteemed members of this House to stand in support of my private member's legislation.

• (1825)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to begin by congratulating the member opposite on her bill. As she knows, I supported this bill when it was referred to the Standing Committee on Health.

For years, the Conservative government failed to show leadership on a number of important health issues, including eyesight protection.

Why is this regulatory amendment being put forward as a private member's bill rather than a government bill? When will the government take health protection issues seriously?

[*English*]

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Madam Speaker, I very much appreciated support the member opposite afforded me when I appeared before the health committee. There were some very good questions that arose at committee. The member, who is well aware of the issues, asked some very pertinent questions.

As I said in my speech, I have been bringing this issue forward since 2007. Right from the very onset, I have had the full support of Health Canada, plus the ministers of health, and there has been more than one minister during that time.

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This issue is being supported. I have been encouraged by Health Canada and the ministers of health to continue forward with this. It was an issue that would have been included in government legislation when I put forward my private member's motion. Unfortunately, because of elections, Bill C-51 died on the order paper. Other than that, this would have appeared in government legislation.

It was brought forward, on my initiative, as a stand-alone private member's bill following that because I had done so much work and research on it and I wanted to see the issue moved forward quickly.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise here today to speak to this bill.

I would like to give a little introduction so that people really understand the impact this bill—which is in its final stages—will have.

At this time, there are several kinds of contact lenses. There are the corrective contact lenses one gets after consulting a vision specialist, and there are non-corrective lenses that are used for aesthetic purposes to change the colour of the eyes or to add designs.

Corrective lenses are regulated by Health Canada, and non-corrective lenses are not. The purpose of this bill is to standardize the regulation of all kinds of contact lenses in order to protect the health and safety of Canadians.

Under this bill, cosmetic contact lenses that do not correct vision would be regarded as medical devices. Accordingly, this type of contact lens would be subject to the requirements of the Food and Drugs Act and the Medical Devices Regulations.

We in the NDP support this bill, because it establishes safety requirements regarding the use of these lenses, as health specialists have been calling for several years now.

Health Canada has also been asking since 2003 for cosmetic contact lenses to be regulated. What is more, the first Health Canada warning about this was issued in 2000. I believe it is quite appropriate to act on the matter rather quickly, even immediately.

In 2003, Health Canada published the report, "Human Health Risk Assessment of Cosmetic Contact Lens", which found that there was no difference in the way cosmetic contact lenses and corrective contact lenses were inserted in the eye and interacted with the eye, and that all lenses should be subject to the same regulation. The risks and use of these products are quite similar.

Cosmetic contact lens sales have exploded in recent years.

Cosmetic contact lenses and corrective lenses are essentially similar products, except one corrects vision and the other does not. They interact with the eye and, accordingly, present similar risks.

Currently, the regulations and standards are not the same, but the risks are.

The non-corrective lenses are not even regulated by Health Canada. The legislation will have to change because cosmetic lenses are a growing industry and more and more problems are arising from this lack of regulation.

Furthermore, this type of contact lens is often used by young people, who are often less aware of the health risks associated with the use of these products.

Health Canada's website lists the many risks associated with wearing contact lenses. The risks for corrective lenses are listed, but they also apply to non-corrective lenses. The risks include tearing, itching, burning, sensitivity to light, dryness and also the risk of developing an eye infection. These conditions may be worsened by improper cleaning of contact lenses.

The extended use of contact lenses, particularly overnight, seriously increases the risk of developing corneal ulcers. An ulcer can perforate or scar the cornea in a day or two, leading to permanent scarring and, in the most serious cases, blindness.

It is estimated that complications and lesions caused by non-corrective lenses are more frequent than complications caused by corrective lenses.

A study conducted in France recently reported that such complications are 12 times more prevalent.

This is because of the lack of regulations. It may be because of the poor quality of the product, the poor fit, not meeting the buyer's needs, or the fact that the buyer is not told about the risks and precautions that must be taken.

We should realize that these lenses can be purchased in many unusual locations, if I may call them that.

● (1830)

You can find them at the Rideau Centre here in Ottawa. They can be purchased from several merchants that are not optometric clinics but clothing stores. They can be obtained very easily. These stores do not provide instructions on their use as an optometrist or ophthalmologist who prescribes corrective lenses would do. An optometrist or ophthalmologist would teach the person how to use the lenses safely. Such instruction is not available in a store.

Health Canada recommends that non-corrective contact lenses be used under the supervision of a vision specialist given the risks associated with their use.

Every year, health professionals treat patients with eye problems caused by the use of cosmetic contact lenses, problems that could have been avoided with proper regulation, which has been sought for almost 10 years.

Clearly, there is an urgent need to legislate and regulate this product to minimize risk. It is important that all contact lenses be regulated the same way to minimize health risks for Canadians.

One of the most serious risks is blindness or vision loss. According to Health Canada, 75% of vision loss is preventable. Clearly, all cases of vision loss do not result from the use of contact lenses; however, if the use of these lenses were regulated, it could truly help to lower this percentage.

Under this bill, non-corrective contact lenses would be licensed through Health Canada, and distributors would be required to have a licence to sell medical devices. Given the complications that can result from the use of contact lenses, this measure is entirely appropriate. It would decrease the incidence of complications and infections and even serious consequences, such as blindness, that could have been avoided. Eventually this bill will also relieve some of the burden on our health care system.

The prescription and distribution of cosmetic contact lenses fall under provincial jurisdiction. We therefore encourage the government to work with the provinces to ensure that regulations and measures are put in place to protect the health of Canadians. The government must demonstrate leadership in this area and encourage the provinces to do the same.

In closing, I would like to make one final point. Even though the bill itself is fine, I am disappointed that it has taken 10 years to come before us and that it did not come directly from the Minister of Health. It is a real shame that the minister did not consider it important enough to introduce as a government bill and that a member had to do all of the work herself.

I will certainly support this bill, but I think that the Minister of Health herself should have taken action on this front long before now.

• (1835)

[*English*]

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak, literally, as the voice of the member for Vancouver Centre, who seems to be suffering from body betrayal today.

[*Translation*]

I would also like to thank the member for Sarnia—Lambton for introducing Bill C-313.

[*English*]

The fact that this bill has received support from all parties in the House this evening is a rare occurrence in this place. Miraculously, the bill was also allowed to be improved upon in committee, which is also a little bit rare in this place these days.

Initially, the bill aimed to classify non-corrective contact lenses according to subrule 2(1) of part I of schedule I of the Medical Devices Regulations, which states:

Subject to subrules (2) to (4), all invasive devices that penetrate the body through a body orifice or that come into contact with the surface of the eye are classified as Class II.

A class II medical device is a low risk device, including contact lenses, pregnancy tests, ultrasound scanners, endoscopes, et cetera. Manufacturers require a Health Canada licence before selling or advertising Class II devices. Annual licence renewals are required.

Health Canada noted in committee that because these non-corrective contact lenses have no therapeutic benefits nor aim to correct vision, it would be best to classify this as a device under the Food and Drugs Act as opposed to a medical device. It is important to note that manufacturers of non-corrective contact lenses will not have evidence of nor will they be required to attest to the effectiveness of these products as they have no role in correcting

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vision. By making this change to a device, regulations under the FDA would apply and the committee, therefore, passed this amendment. By adding non-corrective contact lenses as a device under the Food and Drugs Act, we can ensure greater safety in the manufacturing and sales of these decorative contact lenses.

In November 2005, the United States declared all contact lenses, corrective and non-corrective, as medical devices requiring a prescription.

The United States food and drug administration states:

Without a valid prescription, fitting, supervision, or regular check-ups by a qualified eye care professional, decorative contact lenses, like all contact lenses, can cause a variety of serious injuries or conditions. For example, lens wear has been associated with corneal ulcer, which can lead rapidly to internal ocular infection if left untreated. Uncontrolled infection can cause corneal scarring, which can lead to vision impairment, and in extreme cases, blindness or the loss of an eye. Other risks include conjunctivitis; corneal edema (swelling); allergic reaction; abrasion from poor lens fit; reduction in visual acuity, contrast sensitivity, and other visual complications that can interfere with driving and other activities.

A motion calling for non-corrective contact lenses to be classified as a medical device was unanimously passed in the House of Commons, as the member has stated, in March 2008.

Non-corrective contact lenses designed to change the appearance or colour of one's eyes should be listed as a device in order to protect consumers. Placing a contact lens on the surface of the eye that does not fit properly or is poorly manufactured can lead to many health concerns as was identified by the U.S. FDA.

The Liberals support evidence-based policy and recognize that this measure has been advocated for in the U.S. by groups such as the American Academy of Ophthalmology, the American Optometric Association, the Contact Lens Association of Ophthalmologists, Prevent Blindness America and the Contact Lens Institute. It is also supported by the Canadian Association of Optometrists, which has called on parliamentarians to “enact it with haste”.

Bill C-313 was amended in committee to remove the word “cosmetic” as this is defined elsewhere in the Food and Drugs Act and should not be applied to a medical device. It was amended to remove “Class II medical device” because all class II devices have to show proof of effectiveness and non-corrective contact lenses are not meant to be effective.

It was further amended to provide for the coming into force on a date specified by the Governor in Council.

Bill C-313 was supported by all witnesses at the health committee and all members passed this bill.

We congratulate the member for Sarnia—Lambton for this important initiative. We, too, think it has taken a very long time and look forward to its passage in this place.

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● (1840)

[Translation]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Madam Speaker, this is not the first time I have had an opportunity to speak to this bill. I spoke at second reading and when it was referred to the Standing Committee on Health. As far as I know, every party in the House supports this bill.

Non-corrective contact lenses, as they are now known following amendments to the bill in committee, are used to change the eyes' colour or appearance. Over the past few years, the market for these contact lenses has grown considerably. There is no real difference between corrective lenses and cosmetic lenses in terms of how they interact with the eye.

Even though they present the same health risks, non-corrective contact lenses are not yet classified as devices under the Food and Drugs Act, nor are they regulated by Health Canada. There is plenty of evidence about the risks associated with using non-corrective contact lenses without professional supervision.

Problems occur when the contacts are not adapted to the specific needs of the buyer, when they are the wrong size and do not fit the eye properly, when the contacts are of questionable quality, or when they come from a truly unknown supplier. Problems often occur when consumers are not given the appropriate information and instructions on how to use the contacts properly and safely, for example, how to put them in, how to take them out and how to clean them.

Health Canada has warned the public and the government of the potential risks associated with non-corrective contact lenses. According to a 2003 Health Canada report, the rate of serious injury among people using corrective contact lenses every day is approximately 1% and the overall rate of complication is about 10%.

It is estimated that the rate of injury and complication—for example, infection, inflammation or ulceration—is much higher among non-corrective contact lens users than among those who use corrective lenses. In 2007, vision loss accounted for the Canadian health care system's highest direct cost, as compared to any other illness.

What is more, 75% of the cases of vision loss can be prevented. Bill C-313 seeks to amend the Food and Drugs Act to deem a non-corrective contact lens to be a device. This amendment would require all non-corrective contact lenses sold in Canada to be licensed by Health Canada and would require the product distributors to have a medical instrument sales licence.

As I said at the previous reading, I am surprised and disappointed that we are still talking about such a bill in 2012. In 2000, Health Canada issued a warning about non-corrective contact lenses and recommended that they be used only under the supervision of an eye care professional.

In 2003, Health Canada recommended that the federal government regulate the use of non-corrective contact lenses, but, 12 years later, the matter is still not resolved. Nevertheless, I want to express my appreciation to the hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton for her bill and her perseverance.

● (1845)

I know that she has been working on this particular file since at least 2008, when she moved a motion that was adopted by the House of Commons. However, we are currently discussing the budget, and I hope it will be discussed for some time, even though it may not be in this House.

Budget cuts will affect Canadian families. They are talking about the cuts and will continue to do so. When I see measures such as these, which are essential, I wonder if they will have any real impact given the 2012 budget.

Regulatory measures such as this bill cannot be effective without some oversight. When I see the budget cuts made by this government, including those to Health Canada, I doubt that the department will be able to do the necessary follow-up with the manufacturers.

How can we protect public health and safety with minimal and limited monitoring?

I know that the government will say that Canadians' safety will not be compromised. However, I am not absolutely convinced of that. I do not have to look too far to realize why. I only have to read the Auditor General's report on the F-35 jets and compare his comments with the statements made by this government's members in this House.

Speaking of the Auditor General, I would like to point out that, yesterday, he blamed this government for the Canada Border Services Agency's performance. He said, and I quote:

In the small percentage of cases where goods that did not meet import requirements were allowed to enter the country, most were products for which there was no agreement in place between Health Canada and the CBSA. While the CBSA has formal arrangements with the three other organizations in our audit, as yet it has no formal agreement with Health Canada that documents respective roles, responsibilities, policies, and procedures for implementing controls on several products under Health Canada's responsibility, such as medical devices [including the one we are talking about today] and pest control products. Until there is a formal agreement, border services officers do not have consistent instructions on procedures to follow for those products.

Non-corrective contact lenses are often ordered via the Internet. I hope that this government takes the Auditor General's recommendations in this regard seriously and gives the Canada Border Services Agency and Health Canada the means to protect the health and safety of Canadians. If not, this bill will serve no useful purpose.

● (1850)

[English]

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am very happy to stand here today in support of this private member's bill in the name of the member for Sarnia—Lambton. Bill C-313 would amend the Food and Drugs Act in regard to cosmetic non-corrective contact lenses.

Cosmetic contact lenses do not have any effect in improving the eyesight of a wearer. Instead they alter the colour and appearance of the eyes. However, while the contact lenses do not alter the wearer's eyesight, they do interact with the eye in the same way that a corrective contact lens would. This means that cosmetic lenses have the same health risks as corrective contact lenses, but despite the risk of complications and injury, cosmetic lenses are not listed as class II medical devices under the Food and Drugs Act and are therefore not subject to regulation by Health Canada.

As the New Democrat consumer protection critic, this obvious gap in the consumer protection regime is worrying. There is a large amount of research detailing the problems that can occur from the improper use of cosmetic contact lenses, such as using lenses that are not suited for a particular individual, using lenses that are not the proper size for the wearer or not fitted correctly, or wearing contact lenses which are of a questionable quality from an unknown supplier.

It is also often the case with these cosmetic contact lenses that critical information and proper instructions. For example, on how to put the lenses in, remove them and clean them are not included with the contact lenses.

By amending the Food and Drugs Act to classify cosmetic contact lenses as class II medical devices, it would mean they would be regulated in the same way as regular corrective lenses. This would mean that all cosmetic lenses sold in Canada would need to be licensed through Health Canada and the distributors of cosmetic lenses would require a licence in order to supply them.

To understand the dangers that occur because of a lack of regulation, we only need look at the statistics related to contact lenses. A 2003 Health Canada report stated that the rate of severe injuries among users of daily corrective lenses was around 1%, while the overall rate of complication was approximately 10%. Report after report has estimated that rate of injury and complications due to infection, inflammation or ulceration is much greater for users of cosmetic contact lenses.

This is not just a public health problem, but an economic one. In 2007 vision loss carried the highest direct cost to Canada's health care system, more than any other disease. Given that 75% of vision loss is preventable, regulations to protect the users of cosmetic contact lenses would go a long way to saving people's eyesight and money, as well as public money.

That brings me to the great work that is done in my riding by the CNIB. I think of Paul Belair, executive director, who would over and over again tell people of the importance of what was talked about earlier: preventive regulations to protect users of cosmetic lenses and the eyesight of Canadians because eyesight is so crucial.

I applaud the member for Sarnia—Lambton for bringing forward this legislation, but it begs the question as to where the government was on this issue in the past. This is not an issue that the government was blindsided by. In 2000 Health Canada issued a health warning about cosmetic contact lenses and recommended they only be used under the supervision of an eye care professional. Then, in 2003, Health Canada recommended the federal government should regulate cosmetic contact lenses.

Private Members' Business

What does that mean? It means both the current government and the previous Liberal government simply failed to act on this issue against the recommendations of their own departments. When we think of all the opportunities that have occurred in the last 12 years for a government to introduce this simple change, it speaks volumes about how little interest those governments had in protecting consumers.

Once again, while I applaud the MP for Sarnia—Lambton for bringing forward the bill, but I am deeply troubled that we have to address this issue in private members' business in 2012. Put simply, it never should have come to this point.

• (1855)

It is important to realize that the bill is really only a first step, an important step, but still just a first step all the same. The prescribing and dispensing of cosmetic contact lenses is controlled by the provinces and territories. As such, if this change becomes law, the prescribing and dispensing of cosmetic contact lenses would fall to those provincial health departments. This means that any long-term plan to improve upon the quality and safety of cosmetic contact lenses must be designed in coordination between the different levels of government, as the only way to establish an effective regulatory regime is through the federal government working actively with the provinces.

However, this requirement also raises a more worrying question in the long run. As the government has failed to act appropriately in bringing forward the legislative changes needed to regulate cosmetic contact lenses, how can we expect it to work with the provinces and build a long-term regulatory plan for them? It makes me wonder.

Now, I am sure Health Canada will be on top of the issue, just as it was in its 2000 and 2003 reports, but will there be political leadership from the government to act, to work with the provinces to come up with comprehensive legislation that will protect Canadian consumers? Given its track record on this issue and many other consumer protection files, that scenario seems doubtful.

The list of consumer failures that the government has made is shocking. It has turned a blind eye to gouging at the gas pumps. It has let banks walk away from an independent and impartial ombudsman system, avoiding regulating credit cards by announcing a voluntary code of conduct which was designed behind closed doors with the credit card issuers. It wasted years before implementing all-in-one pricing for airlines. Then in last week's budget, it slashed \$56.1 million in funding to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

Trusting the government to act in a proactive manner to protect consumers using cosmetic contact lenses, as much as I would like to, just seems foolish given its past action, or more properly, its lack of action.

Private Members' Business

I am very happy to support the initiative of the member for Sarnia—Lambton in bringing forward this legislation. It is a low cost, high reward change in the current legislation. However, it is indicative of the government's lack of adequate consumer protection policies that we are dealing with this issue in this private members' business. We need to continue to push the government to be more proactive when it comes to protecting Canadians and protecting consumers.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to speak to the bill today, especially on the heels of my colleague, the member for Sudbury, who has done amazing work on consumer protection issues for Canadians. In fact, I would call him a true consumer advocate. Therefore, it is great to speak after his speech on the consumer protection issues involved in the bill.

I have learned a lot from the bill. I did not know that cosmetic contact lenses were not a class II medical device. In fact, I did not know what a class II medical device meant, despite the fact that I have worn coloured contacts. I am wearing contacts right now, although this is my natural eye colour. I did not know any of this because I was able to purchase my coloured contacts many years ago from my optometrist. That is not the situation that we have with this bill.

Because I needed corrective lenses, I had to see an optometrist. I have to meet with him regularly and get regular checkups. I was instructed on how to properly handle my contact lenses, how to insert them and how to clean them properly. In fact, he always advises me when there is a new type of contact lens that comes out, which allows more oxygen into my eye. It is not something I know anything about. I trust his expert advice, when he says there is a new contact that is better for my eyes because it does allow more oxygen in. I learned all of this because they are corrective lenses. When I was in high school, I had a slight green tint to my contacts, but they were still corrective lenses, so I still received the proper training and proper monitoring.

Last year I had a regular checkup with my optometrist. When he took a picture of my eye, there was a dark spot on it. He said that it could have been a freckle or it could have been something quite serious, but that he would not know until time had passed to see if the size of it had changed. Immediately, I was so terrified that I did not want to go back to see him. I know that is not logical, but sometimes we are not logical. Sometimes we just react with our gut emotions. I did not want to know if this was something dangerous. It made no sense, but it was how I felt.

However, because I had to see him to get my prescription renewed to order new contacts, I was forced into the position where he had to do another checkup. That is a really positive thing.

Some people complain that we might be regulated to death. In the situation like this, we are trying to protect Canadians to ensure they are healthy and safe.

If someone like me, an informed and educated consumer, a consumer who is familiar with the product, is too scared to go back to get a photo taken of the back of my eye to see if there was something wrong, too scared that I wanted to avoid knowing the truth about the health of my eye, imagine, for example, young people, large consumers of non-corrective or cosmetic contact lenses, not knowing how to handle them properly or not knowing the

risks involved, and there are incredible risks. They think it is just for Halloween so they will get fun lenses so they can look like a cat, or a vampire or whatever. It seems pretty harmless. People wear contacts all the time. However, they can have pretty serious eye injuries. They can have an allergic reaction. There could be a bacterial infection. They could have inflammation or swelling of the cornea, scratches on the cornea, even loss of sight. However, the one thing with the Halloween contacts is some of these reactions can happen in as little as 24 hours.

We think it is just this silly little costume thing, but this is very serious. It is eye health. We only have one shot at this. Imagine having some of those kinds of impacts happen in as little as 24 hours. Some of these things are very difficult to treat and sometimes they are permanent.

I watched a CBC piece about a woman who went to Panama to get permanent contact lenses. There is an operation where a hard disc is inserted in the eye to permanently change the colour.

● (1900)

This woman is now legally blind. She can only see shapes and colours. She has had to have numerous surgeries, one surgery to take these disks out and then numerous cornea surgeries. It was heartbreaking to see. This was a young beautiful woman. This is how desperate people are sometimes to alter themselves cosmetically, that they go to such lengths. This surgery cannot be done in Canada, thank goodness. However, people actually spend their savings to go down to Panama so they can have blue eyes. It is hard to imagine, but that is the reality.

If that is the reality, we need to be doing everything we can to make sure Canadians are safe. When it comes to corrective contact lenses, absolutely they should be a class II medical device. It only makes sense.

My colleague from Sudbury used the term “low cost, high reward change”. This is not going to cost us anything. It is something that has been demanded. It has been asked for. Health professionals have been warning Canadians for the last 10 years about these risks. They have been urging the government to actually come forward and make these changes.

One of the first responsibilities of government should be to protect the health and safety of Canadians from potentially dangerous products. That is a no-brainer. It does not matter if people believe in big government or small government. This is fundamentally about what government should be there for. It is there to help us, to protect us, to make sure we are safe.

One thing about the bill that I think we have heard some folks chat about is that this bill is only the first step because, by and large, contact lenses are regulated provincially. It is a good first step. It is a necessary first step. However, what we are going to have to see is the federal government taking on more of a leadership role and working with the provinces to make sure there is an effective regulatory regime established for cosmetic contact lenses.

Adjournment Proceedings

On that point, I would note the leadership shown by the member for Sarnia—Lambton in bringing forward this bill. I commend her for what she has done. Effectively what she has done is stepped up to the plate where her minister has failed to. We have been hearing about this for years. In 2000, Health Canada issued a warning. Health Canada issued a warning about cosmetic lenses and recommends that people only use them under the supervision of an eye care professional. Where is the Minister of Health on this? She is utterly absent in all the mandates where she has been serving, utterly absent on stepping in to play a leadership role in protecting the health of Canadians.

I just wanted to add those who have actually been championing this in civil society, to say that this is the kind of leadership we need from our government: the Canadian Association of Optometrists, a huge champion of this; the Canadian Ophthalmological Society; and the Opticians Association of Canada. They have all been publicizing the risks that are associated with cosmetic contact lenses, and they have all been asking Health Canada to regulate them under the Food and Drugs Act.

They recognize the jurisdictional issues here, too. By and large, it is the provinces that would be regulating contact lenses. They are saying both federal and provincial regulations are needed to treat cosmetic contact lenses the same as corrective lenses.

Going back to the evidence, I talked about some of the groups that are actually bringing forward this idea and being champions. There really is an abundance of evidence and research—

● (1905)

The Deputy Speaker: 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]

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise to further query the Minister of Public Safety on the question raised on January 31 of this year concerning the firearms registry. The question was about the government's misleading Canadians about what the gun registry did and what the government was going to do. It was also about the suppression of reports, government reports from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, one going back to February 2010, which was hidden from the public, and the other being the Commissioner of Firearms 2010 report, which was also withheld.

These reports were suppressed during the time when the House was considering the notion of a vote on Bill C-19, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act, which I understand was passed today. I expect the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety will crow about that when she gets up to respond.

This is about the kind of misinformation we heard in the House today. A government member talked about a \$2 billion cost for the registry, frightening Canadians about the expense, when a report of February 2010, the RCMP Canadian firearms program evaluation, said the cost of the long gun registry was between \$1.1 million and \$4 million in 2009, that it was a cost-effective program. The RCMP, which runs the firearms program, said in its report that it was going to cost between \$1.1 million and \$4 million a year, yet the government even today talked about \$2 billion. That is obviously misleading.

The report, by the way, was suppressed. It was available in February 2010. It was not until it was reported in August and September that the government was refusing to release the report that it ever came out.

What does the report tell us? It tells us a lot about the firearms program that Canadians were not allowed to find out about, because the government did not want them to know because it was pursuing its own approach, which was to try to kill the long gun registry without the facts getting in the way.

The RCMP said the firearms registry was a critical component of the entire firearms program. It recommended that the existing full registry be maintained as part of that program in order to increase non-restricted firearms compliance.

The RCMP also said that one of the effects of the proposed changes would be a significant impact on firearm-related mortality and injury. What did that mean? It meant that if these changes were brought about there would be deaths in Canada.

The RCMP also said something that we raised in debate. It said without the registration there is a failure of accountability, and anyone could buy and sell firearms privately and there would be "no record". That is a fact that was included, and the bill that was before the House made loose provisions for that.

The other report that was suppressed was in November 2011 while we were having the same debate in Parliament. The report disclosed that the firearms registry was used 14,357 times per day in 2010. The government did not want Canadians to know about that. It misled Canadians by saying that it would continue to monitor long guns after the registry was gone. It is not doing that. No records will be kept of sales by gun shops and there will be unenforceable laws with respect to transfers.

● (1910)

Ms. Candice Hooppner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Madam Speaker, I disagree with my hon. colleague on a number of fronts. First, I would disagree that I am about to get up and crow. I think there is only one crow who is crowing, and it was not me at all, nor will it be me.

Adjournment Proceedings

Second, I disagree with the hon. member in regard to reports being suppressed. We welcome the reports by the RCMP on the entire Canadian firearms program. If one actually reads the entire report, one can see that the RCMP is talking about the program as a whole. What we did hear from front-line officers when they testified on Bill C-19 was that they did not use the long gun registry when they went on calls because they could not count on the information.

In fact, we heard from not only the RCMP but police officers as well that the 14,000 so-called checks were actually automatic checks. They were not individual police officers going to check the registry. Therefore, there were obviously some differences in how we read the report and also the testimony we heard from police officers.

The bottom line is that today Bill C-19 passed in the Senate. It passed by a vote of 50 to 27. It passed with three Liberal senators supporting the bill. We are very pleased that the House passed the bill with Conservatives and two NDP members of Parliament supporting it, and in the other place we actually received support on the bill from three Liberals. It shows that across the country, even across political lines, we agree it is time to end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry.

It is time to give police the tools they need to do their job. It is time to put in place laws so that there is not a revolving door. That is exactly what we have done with Bill C-10. We have stopped the revolving doors with criminals who are in jail, then out of jail.

Let us not harass and criminalize rural Canadians, aboriginals, hunters, sport shooters and farmers who are using firearms for legitimate purposes. Sadly, the NDP has been misleading and misrepresenting on many parts of this file. NDP members show pictures of firearms that are clearly restricted and try to say they will no longer be registered.

My hon. colleague is incorrect, in that it still remains a requirement to get a licence to own a firearm. If a person sells or transfers a firearm to someone without a licence, it is a criminal offence. That stays in place. Nothing changes.

We can all very thankfully know that the bill has passed in the other place. It will soon reach royal assent. The long gun registry will be done in a very few short hours. Farmers, hunters and sport shooters, law abiding Canadians, will not have to register their long guns anymore.

• (1915)

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Speaker, we may have heard from one or two police officers that they did not like the system and did not rely on it. However, the RCMP did a study of front-line police officers, and 81% supported the statement, "In my experience, CFRO [the Canadian firearms registry online] query results have proven beneficial during major operations", 98% of CFRO-trained police forces use the system, 81% use it responding to calls for service. We are dealing with a report that clearly and undeniably supports the firearms registration system. In fact, they say it is estimated that approximately 3,940 lives have been saved by the licensing and registration system.

I will acknowledge that includes licensing, but it is a system that the RCMP has said is a holistic system and the registration of long

guns was a critical part of that system. The registry being lost is at the increased danger to public safety in the country. As well, the government has, systematically in fact, kept these two reports away from the public for periods of time.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Madam Speaker, clearly my colleague was not part of the studies we did on Bill C-391. Maybe he was not at all of the studies, nor did he tour around the country, as I did, and speak to front-line officers and actually travel with them and look at the systems.

I can say that front-line officers are not using the long gun registry. In fact, there was a study done in Edmonton. More than 2,000 front-line officers responded and said they are not depending on the long gun registry.

It is time for us all to move forward. What we need to do is look at ways in which we can truly combat gun crime. I am very pleased that one of the things that is included in the bill is destroying all of the data. We promised to end the long gun registry and that means destroying the data.

As we go forward seeing the bill reach royal assent and seeing firearms owners finally not being criminalized by this Liberal boondoggle, which by the way the CBC said cost \$2 billion, we should support legislation that truly combats gun crime, truly supports people who are in need of help, whether from domestic violence or other things, rather than targeting law-abiding Canadians.

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am following up on questions today with respect to the F-35 because the government has not at all been responsive to the questions we have asked or their responses did not seem credible or had the ring of truth. In fact, all of us on this side of the House have struggled to reconcile the facts, figures and news emanating from independent and objective sources with the government's facts and figures on the F-35.

The Auditor General's report has provided us with an explanation at last and I will quote at some length from it. In chapter 2 of his spring report, he states:

National Defence did not provide complete information in a timely manner.

Nor did National Defence provide complete cost information to parliamentarians.

National Defence likely underestimated the full life-cycle costs of the F-35. The budgets for the F-35 acquisition...and sustainment...were initially established in 2008 without the aid of complete cost and other information.

It is absolutely clear that this \$30 billion and counting file has been mismanaged at every turn by those responsible for the procurement process. Of equal if not greater concern is the government's response to the Auditor General's report. Not one minister has taken responsibility for this mess in spite of the fact that our system of government has as one of its foundations the principle of ministerial accountability.

Adjournment Proceedings

Further, the government has left future management of this process in the hands of the very people who have so grossly mismanaged the file to this point. The sum total of the self-described comprehensive response to the Auditor General's report is the creation of a secretariat within Public Works and Government Services Canada to coordinate the future procurement of the F-35. There are many problems here but I will list just three.

First, how are Canadians to believe that Public Works and Government Services Canada will exercise better stewardship of this process going forward when it was in no small measure that department's dereliction of duty that contributed to the current situation? The Auditor General clearly stated that by endorsing the sole source procurement strategy, Public Works and Government Services Canada did not demonstrate due diligence in its role.

Second, Public Works and Government Services Canada disagrees with the Auditor General's findings that is failed in its responsibility. If that department cannot acknowledge the errors that it made in light of the stark evidence and categorical findings of the Auditor General, how can it be expected to take appropriate action going forward?

Finally, and perhaps most fundamentally, by naming this new bureaucracy the F-35 secretariat, the government continues, not just a presumption in favour of the F-35 but an explicit commitment to purchase this plane. In so doing, it continues along with the process for the F-35 but the procurement policies can never comply with the Government of Canada's legislation, policies and departmental guidelines for procurement.

Not only has no one taken responsibility for this fiasco as laid out by the Auditor General, but it seems clear that the Conservatives have learned nothing, understood nothing and are prepared to implement nothing that would correct the gross mismanagement of this file that we see to date.

• (1920)

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am disappointed to hear the hon. member opposite for Beaches—East York, more or less foreclosing on the possibility of the Government of Canada, under its laws, achieving procurement of a next generation fighter to replace the CF-18s that would meet with his expectations. This government and the Government of Canada over generations have shown their ability to do this. The government is showing the ability again with regard to the replacement aircraft for the CF-18s.

There are two great challenges that we have had before us for over a decade. One is to replace the CF-18s to make sure that we have the ability to perform the missions that I think the member and his party agree are important to defend Canada, to defend the aerospace of North America and to operate with our allies abroad, when necessary, on difficult missions such as those in Kosovo and Libya that have seen the CF-18 in action. The second is to develop a joint strike fighter capability, a decision taken by another government in another decade, in 1997, to develop technology that would be cutting edge and meet the demands of the 21st century.

He is absolutely right that as those two programs have gone forward, the Auditor General has seen fit to comment and find some shortcomings in our work as a government. There were weaknesses in the decision-making process. There was a failure to fully carry out

the Department of Public Works' role in the procurement process. I am paraphrasing from the report. The Department of National Defence did not provide full information and perhaps underestimated the full life cycle of costs. That is from the report. However, there is also praise. The Department of National Defence took the appropriate steps in managing Canada's participation in the joint strike fighter program to develop the F-35. That is something the opposition generally does not mention because it is favourable, positive and reflects the good work of this government.

There was a recommendation that the Department of National Defence should refine its estimates for complete costs and that we should regularly provide actual complete costs incurred through the full life cycle of the F-35. We have agreed with that recommendation and we are acting. We have frozen funds for the acquisition of a new aircraft pending the establishment of a new process. A secretariat, led by four deputy ministers, will bring forward more complete information from the Department of National Defence, and if necessary elsewhere, to the House to ensure that we know before any procurement takes place how much this aircraft will cost. An independent review is to be undertaken by the Treasury Board using sources of expertise outside government to validate the costs put forward by the secretariat. There is responsibility for Treasury Board to ensure full compliance with the laws of Canada with regard to procurement.

The aircraft has not been acquired and no final decision has yet been taken on acquiring this aircraft. The numbers and prices, all of that, will be in the future. We have heard many hon. members in the opposition talking as if it were in the past, as if money had been misspent. That is clearly not the case, nor has the Auditor General said so. The industrial benefits to Canada and to our aerospace industry across this country have been significant, even before we take a final decision about aircraft, because of our participation in the joint strike fighter development program. They belong to communities like Winnipeg and Vancouver, six provinces across the country, dozens of companies. They include Montreal, one of the centres of our aerospace industry.

I would encourage the hon. member opposite to make his leader, the member for Outremont, aware of the existence of jobs related to the F-35 in the city he represents, probably involving workers who live in his riding. Earlier today in public he seemed to deny that these jobs existed or that these benefits existed. They clearly do and they will continue to do so as we move forward with this procurement.

• (1925)

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Madam Speaker, I confess that it is very satisfying to see the history laid out and the conclusions reached by the Auditor General over his signature, but in fact there was very little that was surprising or new to those of us who have been following this issue closely.

One of the surprising things, and it goes to what the parliamentary secretary was talking about, the industrial benefits issue, was the finding that the government, in terms of its projections of industrial benefits arising out of this program, had been relying entirely on the prime contractors for the F-35, those contractors who had work provided to them under the program that had existed to date.

Adjournment Proceedings

Those projections were regurgitated, reiterated by the government wholly in an unqualified and unchecked way. The Auditor General found that those projections were too often overly optimistic. So when the government members talk about how well managed that program was, they omit these very critical details about mismanagement of that part of the program. It seems, frankly, that the government's response to the Auditor General's report is simply another overly optimistic and frankly misleading approach to the F-35.

Mr. Chris Alexander: Madam Speaker, we are optimistic. We are confident that the Government of Canada, under the laws of Canada, has the capacity to undertake a responsible procurement for this very large and complicated, complex project that will achieve value for taxpayers' money, defend Canada and help us work with our allies around the world when necessary to meet needs internationally.

We have put in place a new structure as a result of the Auditor General's findings. We are moving to ensure that there is

independent validation of the cost, not just the cost of acquisition, but also the cost of the full life cycle of the aircraft, and that these estimates are broadly based and sound.

No purchase of an aircraft will take place, as has been said in this House previously this week, unless and until verified cost estimates are tabled before this House under the supervision of the new secretariat established this week.

• (1930)

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: 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 7:30 p.m.)

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