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Monday, April 30, 2012

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, April 30, 2012

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1105)

[*English*]

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP) moved:

That the House acknowledge that Canada lags behind international search and rescue norms and urge the government to recognize the responsibility of the Canadian Forces for the protection of Canadians, and to take such measures as may be required for Canada to achieve the common international readiness standard of 30 minutes at all times, from tasking to becoming airborne, in response to search and rescue incidents.

He said: Mr. Speaker, this resolution is one which is extremely dear to my heart based upon, in part, the place in Canada from which I come and the concern that all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have about the importance of the availability of search and rescue for those who are lost at sea or in need of assistance from the Canadian Forces to protect them in circumstances of danger.

Search and rescue is a matter of great importance from coast to coast to coast. The third coast that we talk about is up in the Arctic where search and rescue is particularly difficult and important.

The motion says that the House acknowledge that Canada lags behind international search and rescue norms. That is something that I firmly believe is so, and I will deal with that in my remarks. The motion urges the government to recognize the responsibility of the Canadian Forces for the protection of Canadians and to take such measures as may be required for Canada to achieve what is a common international readiness standard of 30 minutes at all times, from tasking to becoming airborne, in response to search and rescue incidents. The motion is worded in that way to recognize that we do not have the kind of international standards that exist in the U.K., the United States, Australia, Norway or other countries that are our allies and that we would look to for benchmarking of standards.

I will never forget the testimony given by Mr. Philip McDonald. He testified before the defence committee meeting in St. John's on February 1, 2011. He was a fisheries observer on board the *Melina & Keith II* which, at about 5:30 p.m. on September 12, 2005, slipped beneath the waves. The eight crew members on board, including Mr.

McDonald, ended up in the water. Two men drowned right away. The others clung to debris during the search and rescue efforts. Mr. McDonald was rescued by a boat. He said, "As they were hauling me aboard, I heard the loud noise of the Cormorant helicopter flying over. I jumped up on the deck and told the crew of the *Lady Charlotte Star* there were eight of us." Two others were rescued shortly later. Unfortunately, the other four, Ivan Dyke, Anthony Malloy, Joshua Williams and Justin Ralph, were gone. He then said, "I saw a young man clinging to a piece of styrofoam just 20 minutes before I was rescued. He could not hold on any longer."

So Mr. McDonald saw this young man drop below the waves 20 minutes before he was rescued. The Cormorant that left Gander to come to the rescue scene was tasked at 4:50 p.m. It became airborne at 6:10 p.m., one hour and 20 minutes later. When it arrived on the scene, it was 20 minutes past this young man slipping beneath the waves.

We have a standby time in Canada for the period 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. five days a week. They call that "working hours". For the rest of the time during the week, on the weekends and after 4 p.m., what the Department of National Defence repeatedly and inexplicably in its reports called the "quiet hours", the response standard is two hours. Most times, search and rescue teams do better than that. However, this is the only country I am aware of that has a two-hour response standard after 4 p.m.—in fact, a two-hour response standard at all. If this helicopter had left within 30 minutes from being tasked at 4:50 p.m., it would have been there considerably earlier. In fact, it would have been there long before this young man slipped beneath the waves.

• (1110)

A study done in 1999 by the National Search and Rescue Secretariat of National Defence stated that it had great difficulty with the approach to search and rescue. The team studying the readiness standby posture, two-hour standby during quiet hours and 30-minute readiness capability during working hours, said that resource availability is the primary driver that determines the standby postures for all national search and rescue program departments.

Private Members' Business

That was in 1999. In 2007, when the Transportation Safety Board did its report on the *Melina & Keith II*, it talked about a review of the standby search and rescue posture and quoted the report. It said that the standby postures of primary SAR resources should be determined primarily through an analysis of demand for services. It went on to say that DND policy limits the 30-minute standby position to 40 hours per week, indicating that resource availability continues to be the primary factor in determining SAR responses.

What is the demand for services? I can refer to another report by the Department of National Defence, an unclassified copy dated 2005. A table shows coverage for incidents occurring during a three-year period when different times were considered. It looked at various periods of standby time, to see how many incidents were covered.

When we look at the 30-minute standby for eight hours a day, Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., only 17% of the incidents requiring search and rescue services occurred during that period. Over 80%, 83% by this calculation, of the taskings for search and rescue aircraft occurred outside the so-called working hours and during the so-called quiet hours, after 4 p.m., before 8 a.m. and on weekends. This was a fleet analysis determining what was required for fixed-wing search and rescue, determining demand for services of search and rescue.

It looked at various configurations. It looked at seven days a week, 16 hours a day, from 8 a.m. to 12 midnight, which would be 82% coverage. Changing the configuration and looking at how many hours of service there would be for this 30 minute standby posture, could actually increase the coverage to 82%.

If we did what this motion called for and had a 30-minute standby posture, 24/7, we would have 100% coverage available in 30 minutes.

What does that mean? It means that we are not doing the job when it comes to making search and rescue aircraft available. I want to talk about the crews, pilots and search and rescue technicians. They are some of the bravest and most skilled people we have in our society, let alone in the military. These people risk their lives daily to save others. Unfortunately, some of them lose their lives in that task.

●(1115)

Just before Christmas of last year, an incident happened in the north where the search and rescue technicians parachuted in the dark through 40-kilometre per hour winds into 10-foot Arctic waves to rescue two Inuit men whose boat had become trapped in the ice while they were walrus hunting. The hunters and two technicians survived the ordeal, but Sergeant Janick Gilbert did not. The tether connecting him to his life raft broke, and by the time a rescue helicopter arrived five hours later, he was dead.

Over the years, some of the bravest actions have been undertaken by search and rescue technicians in incidents such as this. They not only risk their life but sometimes lose it.

Other countries have greater abilities to conduct search and rescues. It is not the fault of the search and rescue technicians or the pilots that the helicopter was not there to save those who were lost on the *Melina and Keith II*. They were there ready to brave whatever elements existed to save the lives of those individuals. However, the

resources, the system and the availability of aircraft are what determine how they are able to act.

Some international comparisons have been done, unfortunately not by the government because that does not seem to be the benchmark, but by an individual by the name of Paul Clay of Seacom International Inc. who presented a report to the defence committee in St. John's. He provided information on the comparisons between Canada and other countries. In the case of Canada, it was 30 minutes by day, and 120 minutes being the standard after 4:00 p.m., before 8:00 a.m. and on weekends. The Government of the United Kingdom shows the ARF at 15 minutes by day and 45 minutes by night. The Republic of Ireland is 15 minutes by day, meaning 7:30 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., and 45 minutes after 9:00 p.m. Australia is 30 minutes by day, 30 minutes by night and 24/7 service provided by the Royal Australian Air Force operated by CHC. The United States Coast Guard is 30 minutes day or night, 24/7. Mexico is 40 minutes day or night. The royal Norwegian air force in Norway provides 15-minute coverage day or night 24/7.

When we compare Canada to the U.K. and the Republic of Ireland with 15 minutes by day until 9:00 p.m. and 45 minutes at night, the common standard is that of Australia and the United States, showing 30 minutes for the U.S. Coast Guard, 30 minutes for Australia and then 40 minutes for Mexico. We should have that standard for our people who are lost at sea.

Whether it is off the east coast of Newfoundland and Labrador, in the Gulf of the St. Lawrence, on the Great Lakes of Ontario, off the coast of British Columbia or in the Arctic, the fastest way to rescue somebody is to get in the air quickly. We are not doing that, and that should be changed.

I call on the support of all members to ask the government to meet that international standard so that Canadians can be protected, as they should be.

●(1120)

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have some points of disagreement with the hon. member on the actual comparative timings that he has put forward, but I will save my remarks in that regard for a speech I will be making shortly.

My question to the member is about the availability of aircraft. He has correctly and repeatedly identified aircraft as being one of the main factors determining the ability of the Canadian Forces and other responders to get to people in distress. We need many aircraft and we need them in the right places. The member opposite knows that full well.

Could the member explain to all Canadians why, if availability of aircraft is so important, his party has consistently voted against the procurement of new aircraft, whether it is helicopters, replacements for the Hercules or any number of aircraft whose role is instrumental in search and rescue across this country?

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, I hope all Canadians are listening to that kind of nonsense. We are getting a little sick and tired of hearing those kinds of remarks. We voted against our own salaries. We voted against your salary, Mr. Speaker. When we vote against the budget on a matter of confidence, which is what we do, it because we do not agree with the Conservatives' approach to the whole running of government. We vote against every item in that budget. It has nothing to do with picking out a particular thing and voting against it. The government and the member, I am sorry to say, have fallen into that same trap of illogic and disrepute, frankly, by trying to accuse the opposition of not supporting things that are good for Canadians, when people know full well that we want to see search and rescue given sufficient and better priority than it has been given. Nobody puts that on the floor for a vote, except we are doing it right now and we will see how that member votes when the time comes.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the things that the parliamentary secretary points out is the voting records. As a matter of fact, the member for Random—Burin—St. George's presented a motion in this House asking for more resources for search and rescue in the Department of National Defence. Members will never guess what the Conservatives did. They voted against it. We can play that game all day.

However, my question for this particular member is, vis-à-vis the ground search and rescue effort across this country, which is primarily a voluntary one, would it not be ideal for the Department of National Defence, along with the Coast Guard, to up its standards so that ground search and rescue across this country, a teamwork of volunteers, could also be increased in its effectiveness?

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor who has shown great interest in this issue over the years he has been here and, of course, Gander is the centre where the 103 Squadron Cormorants are stationed.

Ground search and rescue is part of the overall system. The Department of National Defence is the lead ministry and its minister is the lead minister for the whole system of search and rescue in Canada. Yes, I believe there ought to be a more coordinated effort. We saw the recent tragic loss of Burton Winters in Makkovik, Labrador, where there seemed to have been some elements of misunderstanding about what the roles of various parties were, as well as communication difficulties and very serious bureaucratic hurdles in the way of Burton Winters being rescued more quickly.

Yes, there needs to be more effort and integrating some of these services in a better way should also be a priority. However, we need to start by getting a helicopter or a Hercules in the air within 30 minutes to get to the place where the help is needed.

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in the House on behalf of the government to respond to the motion in question and to the speech just made by the member opposite.

Private Members' Business

Unfortunately, the government will not be able to support the motion for reasons that I will outline at some length. However, it is principally because we do not agree with its premises and we do not agree with its conclusions.

On the premises, we do not agree that Canada lags behind international search and rescue norms. I must take this opportunity to defend not only the Canadian Forces and other Government of Canada agencies and departments involved in search and rescue, but also the provinces, territories, volunteers and municipal governments, all of whom play an outstanding role in meeting the very highest standards of response to search and rescue across the country. Just by the very phrasing of the motion, the member opposite has implied that somehow not just the Government of Canada, but all of those private, volunteer, civilian responders to search and rescue incidents across the country in every province and every territory are somehow lagging behind. We simply reject that premise.

We also do not think it is the place of the House, this member, or other members to determine what the actual response times of the Canadian Forces, or any other body, ought to be on these matters. The House has never set those standards in the past.

I see some members opposite expressing disbelief. They clearly have not read into this file. They clearly have not understood the proud history of search and rescue in this country and they clearly have not understood how other countries determine these things. It is not a matter for Parliament. In the case of the Canadian Forces, the standards are set by the Canadian Forces in accordance with their operational determinations on the basis of their resource base, and that is the way it should be. That is a best practice not just in Canada but around the world. It is one for which our friends and allies looked to Canada, and continue to look to Canada, for leadership and not for political interference in these matters.

Therefore, we will not be supporting the motion because it is both misleading and inaccurate. It is inaccurate because it suggests that a 30-minute response posture is prescribed by international search and rescue standards; it is not. It is misleading because it seems to imply that instituting a readiness standard of 30 minutes for the Canadian Forces would significantly improve the service provided to Canadians on the basis of the resource base the Canadian Forces have and on the budget they have, which it would not.

● (1125)

[*Translation*]

I believe it is important that I set the record straight on these two points today so that we can have a properly informed debate about Canada's search and rescue services and how government investments can make the most meaningful contribution to their continued strength and improvement.

Private Members' Business

[English]

I would take this moment to add that we are engaged with the Canadian Forces in a constant campaign to improve service. A new helicopter was added in Goose Bay recently. The member opposite did not mention that. In the wake of the very unfortunate incident recently in Makkovik, there was a review, led by the Chief of the Defence Staff, which has resulted in an improvement to procedures in response to those very critical search and rescue incidents in the Arctic.

With respect to international search and rescue standards, Canada is a signatory to several search and rescue treaties: the International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue, the Convention on International Civil Aviation, the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, and the Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue. Together these treaties set a framework for search and rescue. None of them has a mandate of a 30-minute response posture. That is because the international community recognizes that geography, varying characteristics of different countries, and the varying institutional structures of different countries dictate that each one must design a search and rescue system tailored to its own needs.

[Translation]

For example, it would be of little use to mandate exactly the same kind of search and rescue system for both a small, evenly populated European country with little or no coastline and for a country as huge as ours—surrounded by three oceans and with a population dispersed over vast distances.

[English]

Canada has built up its own traditions, its own institutional framework, its own best practices in the area of search and rescue, and they suit Canada. That is why it is a mistake to suggest that Canada lags behind some kind of international standard. In fact, it is even a mistake to suggest that other countries like Canada or remotely similar to Canada maintain a 30-minute response posture.

Of course, no country has exactly the same ties or features as we do. No country but ours has the longest coastline. No country has 18 million square kilometres of search and rescue responsibility.

In the case of Australia, for example, I must differ with the member opposite. Australia, another large country with long coastlines and a thinly dispersed population, has a military fixed-wing response posture of between three and 12 hours for search and rescue. That was not the kind of fact that the member opposite put before us. He put a different fact forward, but I think if he looked to military fixed-wing search and rescue response times from Australia, he would find the standard is much lower, and much longer than it is for Canada.

● (1130)

[Translation]

Contrary to what this motion suggests, it is generally accepted that each nation must design a search and rescue system that is uniquely tailored to its own needs and utilizes available resources in the way that best benefits its population. Canada has just such a system—one that serves Canadians extremely well.

And I would be happy to discuss the Canadian Forces' role in this system, as well as why a move to a continuous 30-minute response posture is not in our country's best interest.

[English]

When we talk about a response posture, we are referring to the maximum timeframe in which Canadian Forces can become airborne after being tasked. When it comes to search and rescue, Canadian Forces have two different postures: from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday, the posture is 30 minutes; after hours, at night or on the weekend, the response posture is two hours.

However, I want to make absolutely clear that regardless of their response posture, regardless of whether they are on base or at home, crews always respond immediately when a call comes. They do everything they can to get out the door and off the ground as quickly and effectively as they can.

During regular business hours, takeoff is routinely accomplished within 30 minutes, and response time is even better if the crew already happens to be in the air when the call comes in. After hours, Canadian Forces crews become airborne, on average, just over 60 minutes after the call comes in.

[Translation]

That is an impressive feat when you consider that they must first get to the base, evaluate mission requirements against prevailing conditions, start their aircraft and manoeuvre for departure.

And response time is even quicker during peak periods—such as periods of high-intensity seasonal fishing—when crews may be kept on base even in the evenings and on weekends.

[English]

When it comes to mobilizing a search and rescue response, the actual difference between the 30-minute response posture and the two-hour response posture is usually measured in minutes, not hours.

When we consider the vastness of Canada's area of responsibility as well as the complexity of our terrain and the unpredictability of our weather, studies have shown that the significance of these minutes usually pales in comparison to the significance of other factors that can influence mission outcome, such as the time between an emergency situation arising and the appropriate authorities being notified, the time it takes to cover the significant distance—which is often a factor—between the nearest base and the site of the emergency and the time it takes to find and recover the people in distress, which is often no easy task.

We can all mention any number of incidents in which an earlier response time might have changed the outcome or a tragedy could have been avoided if there had been a helicopter in another part of the country closer to the zone of the incident, but the disposition of the resources we have is on the basis of a statistical base that extends over years, decades, and indeed even centuries.

Private Members' Business

[Translation]

Some of these factors—such as the speed of notification and the mobility of our assets—can be influenced to one extent or another. Others—such as the weather or the characteristics of our Canadian landscape—cannot.

[English]

Members of our SAR crews, our SAR techs, want to save each and every individual who needs their help, and in the vast majority of cases they do just that.

Military assets are deployed for about 1,100 of the approximately 9,000 search and rescue incidents reported annually in Canada—meaning a minority, the more serious ones—but they help to save an average of 1,200 lives every year.

I also know that our SAR techs deeply regret those rare instances when weather, distance or a delay in notification prevents them from getting there in time.

[Translation]

But rather than focusing on the relatively narrow issue of response posture, as recommended by the motion before this House, we want to invest public resources where they will have the greatest possible impact on the safety and survival of Canadians.

[English]

Our latest plan is to acquire a new fleet of fixed-wing search and rescue aircraft, as promised in the Canada first strategy. We are supporting the Canadian Forces in deepening their partnerships with other departments at all levels, including federal, provincial and territorial. We are also strengthening our international search and rescue partnerships, particularly in the north, through joint initiatives like the Arctic search and rescue agreement that was signed under this government in 2011.

A huge amount of work happens every day to improve the effectiveness of search and rescue resources in this country. Unfortunately, this motion is not a contribution to that effort.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to address some of the concerns that were just brought up. Actually, I am somewhat bemused by the comment that we should not debate the response time issue here because the member thinks perhaps we are not qualified or that this is not the place to do it.

I first came to this House in 2004 and I remember the debate about the Coast Guard. I am sure my hon. colleague for St. John's East will remember it. The Conservatives complained in the House for days on end about the fact that there was no fuel available for some of the Coast Guard ships in St. John's. The bureaucrats later said that it was not true, yet it was made a point of debate in this House. At some point the Conservatives will start practising what they used to preach.

Here we find ourselves in this debate. Why can we not debate response times? Why can this country not have a discussion about the resources that we have in the Department of National Defence and be informed about how we go about doing this?

I find it ironic on several levels. Another level is the huge announcement about the F-35 and how we are going to deal with this situation with the stealth fighters. While the Conservatives say that they have a Canada first defence policy, the F-35s get the attention but the fixed-wing search and rescue is floundering. Where is it going? What will it be? Who is going to get this contract? Will the Conservative put out a tender for this aircraft? They are flying 50-year-old airplanes on the west coast.

I think this is a good debate. The Conservatives talk about the F-35s and say that they have a Canada first defence policy; I cannot think of a greater Canada first defence policy than what we are talking about here today, which is search and rescue.

The Conservatives have signed international protocols. Just the other day there was an announcement that there was a new initiatives fund for ground search and rescue, which is a fund that was established many years ago. Why can we not debate this?

Perhaps this is a bold statement on my part, but Newfoundlanders and Labradorians now probably know more about the minutiae of search and rescue in this country than any other province and perhaps any other jurisdiction around the world. Why? It is because it is an issue. The Conservatives say in this House that we are not going to debate it. They complain that the NDP vote against defence policies, yet they do not even want to talk about it. It is absolutely ridiculous. Why can this House not be a place of discourse, a place to be informed about how it works?

The member had a point when talked about response times. He said it is just over 60 minutes on the weekend; it is actually less than that, at just over 50 minutes, and on weekdays the response time is just over 20 minutes. That is the result of good people on the ground and in the air. However, we are talking about the policy of 30 minutes, 24/7. That is our debate. To say that we are not allowed to or should not be talking about it is disgraceful to anybody involved in this issue.

We have some of the best search and rescue people in the world. There are just over 100 Cormorant helicopters around the world, and nobody uses these helicopters the way Canadians do. We are flying these things more than any other jurisdiction around the world, and it is because of our people who do this.

When I first got elected in 2004, there was an accident involving the *Ryan's Commander*. There was one individual, and I will not say his name, but he is currently a search and rescue technician, and this was one of his first missions out. He was lowered down from the wire to get to the ship when all of a sudden the wind came up; he was smacked against the boat and found himself floundering in the water. Can we imagine being lowered in the dark with just one spotlight from a helicopter, waves two or three storeys high, just dangling there, and all of a sudden becoming untethered and landing in the North Atlantic?

Private Members' Business

●(1135)

I bring that up because, my goodness, this is the perfect place to discuss what these people do. This is a question of resources. If the Conservatives want a Canada first defence policy, then they should make it about this country. They should make it about Canada first.

When we talk about a Canada first defence policy, there is no better example than our own search and rescue. We have the largest coastline in the world, and the biggest areas; there is no doubt about it. We have bases across the country, and now we require assets in the north as well. We require fixed-wing search and rescue. All of this comes down to one thing: to be ready and to be available.

That discussion has to take place right here, at the highest level, in order for us to understand its importance and how it works. We want Canadians to believe in a Canada first defence policy and to believe in better search and rescue for all citizens across this country, whether they live in the mountains, whether they live inland or on the lakes, or whether they live beside the North Atlantic or the North Pacific. If we are going to make this a better system for them, then let us discuss what kind of resources they need. We need to ask Canadians what they believe to be the number one priority in defence.

For the last six years I have argued that I do not think that search and rescue has been the priority, and that is a shame. This fixed-wing search and rescue issue has gone back and forth between departments and cabinet discussion here and there. Unfortunately, it seems to be a political football getting thrown back and forth, a hot potato that nobody wants to deal with.

We are talking about search and rescue. It is the very essence of the motion that my hon. colleague has brought to the House today. He and I and many people in the House have talked about this for years, and it is not just we who have been talking about it. I remember former NDP member Catherine Bell, from the Comox area; she was very passionate about search and rescue. The thing about search and rescue was that we all had a learning experience from it, and because we discussed it so much, we are having an informed debate.

Let us look at another element of search and rescue readiness: crew hours. Crews can be out on the job for a maximum of 15 hours, and then it has to come down. They have to be off the job. That element has not been addressed here, but we have to look at it in order to create a 30-minute readiness standard, 24/7.

We should be looking at best practices in other countries. Both of my colleagues brought up several illustrations. Why can we not stand in the House and talk about what those countries do best and how we can become better as a result?

We have talked about the search and rescue system in the Department of National Defence, but what about the Coast Guard as well? The government wants to trim the deficit; it wants to be more cost-efficient, as Conservative members would say. We have proven to them time and time again that closing down the maritime rescue sub-centre in St. John's is not the way to do it. A whole host of experts have told the government that if it wants to create efficiencies, that is not the way to go about it.

I ask my hon. colleague here in the House: was he aware that this was being considered? I certainly was not. I went with Conservative colleagues, NDP colleagues and the Bloc to St. John's to have a look at the sub-centre, and it was wonderful. Everybody loved the sub-centre. It was a great asset and it was doing wonderful work. Then, bang; down came the hammer, and it was gone.

●(1140)

Like many people, I was shocked. Where was the discussion then? Is that what this is about? The government is going to put resources here and will not have a discussion about it. All of a sudden the government is making this decision, even though the experts are telling it that it is probably not such a good idea, given the history of search and rescue on the east coast and given the history of the Coast Guard, DND and ground search and rescue with a team of volunteers.

I am disappointed, but I support the motion. If it furthers the debate, then so be it. If that is all it does, rescue is still going to be needed in this country.

I would tell my Conservative colleagues that if they are serious about a Canada first defence policy, then they should get on board and vote for the motion. Let us go forward and have a decent debate in the House, as we have been doing.

●(1145)

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I stand with my colleague, the hon. member for St. John's East, in support of Motion No. 314.

Canada does indeed lag behind international search and rescue norms. That is an indisputable fact. I urge the federal government to do what it takes to achieve the international readiness standard of 30 minutes at all times, from tasking one of the military's Cormorant helicopters to becoming airborne. In other words, 30 minutes, wheels up, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, a search and rescue response time of 30 minutes around the clock.

As it stands, the wheels-up response time for the military's search and rescue helicopters, the Cormorants that operate across the country, including out of Gander in my home province of Newfoundland and Labrador, are twofold, as we have already heard. Between Monday and Friday, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., the wheels up response time is 30 minutes, but after 4 p.m. and on weekends and during holidays, the wheels-up response time is 2 hours.

That is right, there is a search and rescue response time of two hours during evenings and on weekends and during holidays. Just imagine fire departments around the country operating with one response time during the day and another during evenings and on weekends. Canadians would not have it, because it would make no sense. Lives would be put at risk and people would most certainly die.

A two-tier response time would not cut it in terms of fire on land, and a two-tier response time does not cut it in the North Atlantic where the survival time in the absence of a survival suit is measured in minutes.

Private Members' Business

Let us make no mistake and let there be no doubt, the Canadian military's two-tier search and rescue response time, inadequate search and rescue response time, has cost lives. It has cost the lives of Newfoundland and Labrador mariners and will cost even more lives if the search and rescue response time is not changed.

I might add that the Canadian Coast Guard has a 24-hour response time for its vessels of 30 minutes around the clock.

Before I became a member of Parliament, about one year ago today, I was a journalist. I was a reporter, a columnist and a newspaper editor. I know my way around a news story.

In September 2005, I was the editor in chief of a weekly provincial newspaper called *The Independent*, when a fishing boat went down, which happens, I am sorry to report, quite often where I come from. The *Melina & Keith II*, as the hon. member for St. John's East mentioned earlier, sank off Cape Bonavista on September 12, 2005, while fishing for turbot and shrimp. What struck me about the story from the get-go, what set off my spider sense as a newspaper editor, was the search and rescue response time. Therefore, I assigned a team of reporters to the story of the *Melina & Keith II*.

What we learned, after weeks of investigation, was shocking. Cutting to the chase, it took the National Defence Cormorant helicopters operating out of Gander's 103 Search and Rescue squadron approximately three hours and eight minutes, after the capsized vessel was located, to arrive on scene. In that three hours and eight minutes, four of the eight fishermen who were reportedly alive when the fishing boat went down had died. Four men, half the crew, died because search and rescue did not get there quickly enough.

I am not sure if Canadians watching CPAC know this, but we are not allowed to use props when we give speeches in the House of Commons, which is too bad. I would like to show Canadians the front page picture, published in *The Independent* newspaper, of one of the survivors of the *Melina & Keith II*. The picture was of survivor Bernard Dyke, who was 17 years old at the time when the ship went down. It was only his third trip to sea at that point. He was the youngest crewman on board. He is as fresh-faced in that picture, as can be imagined. He was just a teenager to look at, but with a vacant look in his eyes, a vacant look that the photographer for *The Independent* captured in that front page picture.

● (1150)

Bernard Dyke of Eastport, Bonavista Bay survived after spending more than four hours in the North Atlantic waiting to be rescued. As the hon. member for St. John's East mentioned, four others were lost: Ivan Dyke, Justin Ralph, Anthony Malloy and Joshua Williams. Dressed only in a T-shirt and underwear, Dyke survived by clinging to an overturned boat. He held tightly to a piece of rope, ready to lash himself to the boat if need be, so his mother would at least have his body. This is what went through his mind.

Bernard Dyke told his story to *The Independent*. The boat went down in under a minute, just enough time to get out a mayday, but the search and rescue did not come nearly quickly enough. All eight crewmen were reportedly alive when the boat went down, although only the captain had on a survival suit. The men survived the first couple of hours sitting on the bottom of the overturned vessel. When

the boat finally went down, the men survived in the water for another two hours or so by holding onto the overturned aluminum boat, but they did not all survive. Bernard Dyke watched as his friends and crewmen slowly floated away, as he described it, because the search and rescue did not come quickly enough.

A policy of a 30 minute wheels up during the day and a 2 hour wheel up on evenings, weekends and holidays is not good enough, no matter what the Conservatives say. It is not good enough for Bernard Dyke, not good enough for the four crewmen of the *Melina & Keith II* who were lost and not good enough for provinces like mine, Newfoundland and Labrador, where people live and die by the sea. The sinking of the *Melina & Keith II* is but one example of the inadequacies of the military search and rescue response.

The CBC's *The Fifth Estate* carried out a recent investigation into the death of 14-year-old Burton Winters of Makkovik, Labrador. The search and rescue did not come quickly enough for young Burton either, but that is another heart-wrenching story about another needless death, the death of a teenager who walked 19 kilometres before he lay down on the ice and died because help did not come soon enough.

According to *The Fifth Estate's* investigation, Newfoundland and Labrador is ground zero for search and rescue in Atlantic Canada. Most times, there are happy endings, but not all times. Each year, there are new examples of search and rescue gone wrong. Each year there are new example of people who perished, while waiting for search and rescue that never came. According to *The Fifth Estate*, there have been nine cases in the last eight years alone where people died waiting for search and rescue. How many lost lives will it take for the Conservative government to accept the fact that search and rescue response as it stands is not good enough? We will probably get to that number soon enough, the number of people who die because of inadequate search and rescue response.

This is another interesting fact. The survival odds in the North Atlantic are better for an offshore oil worker than for a fisherman. It is true. Cougar Helicopters, which service the oil industry off Newfoundland and Labrador, recently implemented a wheels up search and rescue response time of 20 minutes around the clock. As I have mentioned before in the House of Commons, when it comes to survival time in the North Atlantic, there is no difference between a fisherman and an offshore oil worker. The survival time is the same. Why then the two-tier response? It is not good enough.

How does the Canadian military's search and rescue response compare to other countries? The member for St. John's East mentioned this earlier as well. It is far behind. According to a report prepared for a House of Commons Standing Committee on Defence, Canada's SAR response posture places last in comparison to Australia, Ireland, Mexico, the United Kingdom and the United States. That is not good enough and it has to change, no matter what we hear from the Conservatives.

Private Members' Business

• (1155)

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for St. John's East for providing me with this opportunity to express my esteem for search and rescue services. I also congratulate him on his re-elevation to defence critic. As a member of the national defence committee, I look forward to working with him again.

Coming from British Columbia, I have a unique appreciation of the reliability and efficiency of this service and of the extraordinary work of all those who contribute to it, whether professional or volunteer, in uniform or not.

I will take a moment to thank the RCMP, Kent Harrison Search and Rescue and Chilliwack Search and Rescue, which just yesterday participated in a very difficult, very dangerous recovery effort after a tragic hang-gliding accident in my riding of Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon.

We western Canadians are blessed with a natural environment of exceptional beauty. Enjoying the great outdoors has become a key part of our lifestyle and identity. Western Canada has also become a prime destination for visitors from all over the country and from abroad who want to take advantage of the unparalleled recreational opportunities that we have to offer, activities like skiing, rock climbing, kayaking, hiking or camping, to name just a few. However, while our lakes, rivers, forests, mountains, coastlines and island chains are among the most spectacular in the world, they are not without dangers. This is something that we can easily forget.

We sometimes also forget that our environment can make search and rescue operations particularly challenging. Fortunately, we can rely upon the dedication and expertise of search and rescue professionals, such as the two Canadian Forces SAR techs from 442 Squadron in Comox who parachuted out of a CC-115 to a plane crash site 130 kilometres southwest of Williams Lake, B.C. on January 22. Because of their actions and the response of the 442 Transport and Rescue Squadron, all four occupants of the aircraft were found alive.

Not all incidents are that extreme, but I think all of us from the west can think of many incidents where search and rescue services were called upon. Because of that, we appreciate the importance of ensuring the quality of these services. Therefore, I fully understand and share the desire of the hon. member for St. John's East to provide Canadians with the best system of search and rescue services possible.

However, I cannot support the motion that we are debating today. Focusing uniquely on the issue of Canadian Forces' response posture does not accurately reflect the nature of Canada's search and rescue system, nor the specific needs of Canadians.

We have already heard that there is no mandated international norm for response posture. Focusing solely on the Canadian Forces would also be a mistake, because they are only one part of a larger system. What really matters to this government, and what I believe matters to Canadians, is having a search and rescue service that is well suited to the specific challenges of our Canadian environment.

Therefore, in taking part in this debate today, I will speak to some of those particular challenges as well as help Canada's current search and rescue system do a good job of addressing them.

Canada is a uniquely challenging environment for search and rescue. As we all know, we live in an extremely vast country, with a land mass of almost 10 million square kilometres and the world's longest coastline. However, Canada's area of responsibility for search and rescue extends even further than that, totalling approximately 18 million square kilometres when the ocean regions for which we are responsible are included. Within this space, a relatively small population is dispersed over great distances. Needless to say, a country as vast as ours contains enormous geographical diversity.

What is more, the Canadian climate can be very hostile, with temperatures ranging from 35°C to -50.

Taken together, all of these characteristics make Canada unique in the world when it comes to search and rescue and to inherent challenges of trying to reach people in distress, of trying to cover vast distances quickly and then to locating and assisting people in hard to reach places and often under difficult conditions.

Such a unique environment calls for an equally unique search and rescue system. Fortunately, Canada has just such a system, one that is specifically tailored to meet the needs of Canadians and one that is very successful at quickly responding to emergencies and saving lives, at no cost to the user, I should add.

I will now take a few moments to explain that system so as to ensure the motion before the House is taken in the proper context.

• (1200)

Given the particular conditions and challenges of our country that I have just described, no single organization, not even one as versatile and responsive as the Canadian Forces, could possibly cover every inch of our territory all of the time.

Canada's search and rescue system is based on extensive collaboration and co-operation between numerous different departments, agencies, levels of government and other actors. This includes other federal departments and agencies, provincial and territorial governments, municipal and local organizations, commercial companies and volunteer organizations.

Co-operation among these various stakeholders helps ensure that, in every part of the country, local knowledge and expertise can be harnessed in support of search and rescue efforts. It also ensures that people and resources already in the area can provide as fast and effective a response as possible.

Of course, none of these organizations can operate in isolation. Instead, they work together and support one another within the framework of our comprehensive and collaborative approach. Within this context, the Canadian Forces play a crucial role in responding to many different emergencies but are by no means the only provider of search and rescue services. Together with the Canadian Coast Guard, they coordinate the country's response to air and sea incidents by operating the Joint Rescue Coordination Centres in Victoria, Trenton and Halifax. With respect to the provision of air search and rescue services, the Canadian Forces have primary responsibility in cases of downed aircraft and are responsible for providing air support to the Canadian Coast Guard in emergencies at sea.

However, the response to search and rescue incidents on land is different. In cases of ground emergencies, provincial or territorial governments lead the response, including the provision of air services, while the Canadian Forces' role is solely to provide assistance if and when it is requested by the local authorities. It makes perfect sense to rely primarily on local organizations, police forces, volunteer associations, commercial companies et cetera in cases of ground SAR because they have the knowledge, the resources, the expertise and the experience required to respond in the fastest, most appropriate way.

Of the approximately 9,000 search and rescue incidents reported annually in Canada, military assets are deployed for approximately 1,100 and help to save an average of 1,200 lives each year. However, operational statistics only tell part of the story when it comes to this government's commitment to search and rescue. Beyond the responses themselves, the Department of National Defence and, indeed, the government more broadly are actively engaged on a number of fronts to help improve the preparation and coordination of stakeholders as well as the availability of information and public education about the dangers of the Canadian environment.

Each year, the government invests millions through the SAR new initiatives fund to enhance the effectiveness, efficiency, economy and innovation of search and rescue response and prevention activities across Canada. On the international stage, Canada also continues to work with like-minded nations to discuss and review search and rescue efforts. For example, last year we organized and hosted the first ever gathering of specialists from eight Arctic Council nations, in Whitehorse. This year, we welcomed the defence chiefs of those same countries, in Goose Bay, to encourage closer co-operation in dealing with emergencies in the Arctic.

Through all of these programs and initiatives, the government is consistently taking steps to improve the search and rescue service in Canada not just by improving response times but also by improving the coordination and co-operation of stakeholders, by helping develop new technologies and practices so that authorities can be notified of emergencies faster and, perhaps most importantly of all, by providing funding to improve the availability of information and public education on the hazards of our Canadian environment so that fewer of these emergencies occur in the first place. We do all of this because we are committed to the quality of our search and rescue system.

Although I am happy to see that the opposition shares in this commitment, I cannot support the motion before us today.

Business of Supply

For the reasons I have just described, I ask the opposition to expand its perspective beyond the narrow issue of military response postures to the broader realities of search and rescue in Canada and to support this government in continuing to find ways to invest our resources where they can make a real difference in the safety and survival of Canadians.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the motion is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1205)

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—HEALTH AND SAFETY OF CANADIANS

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government, and specifically the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the President of the Treasury Board, has failed to learn the painful lessons from Walkerton which proved that cuts to essential government services protecting the health and safety of Canadians are reckless and can cause Canadians to lose their lives; and further, that the House condemn the government for introducing a budget that will repeat the mistakes of the past and put Canadians in danger by reducing food inspection, search and rescue operations, and slashing environmental protections, and call on the government to reverse these positions.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Wascana.

It is well known that the Conservative movement around the world bases its policy prescriptions on several key ideas, one of which is deregulation and the other of which is less government spending. I think it is fair to say that this government has been captured by this idea, as was the Harris government in Ontario.

It is important for the House to take the opportunity to understand, in the aftermath of the budget, the risks involved in following this ideology in a very stubborn way, such as we are seeing from the government.

It is ironic and nevertheless appropriate for this debate for us to point out that three of the senior ministers in the government were also senior ministers in the Harris government. It was during the time of that government in the year 2000 that there was an E. coli outbreak in the water supply of the community of Walkerton in the province, which led to the death of seven people, to 2,300 people falling ill and to the fact that even to this day some people are feeling the continuing effects of the E. coli outbreak.

As a result of that terrible series of events, the government of Ontario established a royal commission that was led by Mr. Justice Dennis O'Connor. Mr. Justice O'Connor found that, although one could point to individuals who had clearly failed to do their job, and subsequent charges were laid against those people, nevertheless there were broader responsibilities that needed to be established and spoken about.

Business of Supply

In particular, Mr. Justice O'Connor found, and I am quoting from page 27 of his report where he said:

I am satisfied that a properly structured and administered inspections program would have discovered, before the May 2000 outbreak, both the vulnerability of Well 5...

which was the well in question that was contaminated

...and the PUC's unacceptable chlorination and monitoring practices. Had these problems been uncovered, steps could have been taken to address them, and thus to either prevent the outbreak or substantially reduce its scope.

He also concluded on page 30 of the report:

I am satisfied that if the MOE had adequately fulfilled its regulatory and oversight role, the tragedy in Walkerton would have been prevented (by the installation of continuous monitors) or at least significantly reduced in scope.

In the course of his inquiry, Mr. Justice O'Connor pointed out the extent to which dramatic cuts were made in the Ministry of the Environment in the years after 1995, cuts that followed a period of restraint, admittedly, between 1990 and 1995, but were nevertheless a shift in philosophy.

There was a decision in 1996 to privatize the laboratory system, which would assess the quality of water, and continuing refusal of the government to implement a regulation that was suggested over and over again by several, including the Environment Commissioner of Ontario in 1996, that at the very least the private laboratories had the obligation to inform and to provide notice to the public health officer whenever there was a problem.

As it stood at that time, the only requirement was that the laboratories had to tell the very officials who were sending them the information.

• (1210)

What is interesting as well is that at the hearing, during the inquiry, the premier of the day, Mr. Harris, testified. He said:

I'm in a position to say, that at no time was any action taken by our government that I believe either jeopardized the health or safety of the people of this province or of Walkerton. I am in a position to say that.

He went on to say:

At...no time would we have approved or would I have approved, and I...don't believe our government would have approved, I don't know anybody that would, any reductions that would have jeopardized either the environment or public safety.

That is precisely what one would expect the premier to have said. If I may say so, it is precisely what we hear from ministers opposite when we challenge them with respect to the regulation of the food system and when we challenge them with respect to the changes in the search and rescue operations that are being shifted away from those areas that are closest to and best able to provide immediate response, to more centralized operations in Halifax and Trenton. Similarly, we hear from the Department of the Environment that the changes it is making are in fact going to improve the quality of the environment.

Perhaps we can be forgiven for taking with more than a grain of salt, but perhaps with several canisters, the comments we hear from members opposite when they say they can make these changes and they will have no deleterious effects, no negative impact on the health and safety of Canadians.

We do not have to go to other countries to find out what happens when deregulation goes too far. We do not have to go to other countries to find out what happens when the cuts in public expenditure, or when the reduction in the number of inspectors, or when the cuts in the numbers of people who are involved in an oversight and regulatory role, in fact, lead to loss of life. We do not have to go to the terrible examples around the world where regulatory failure has resulted in loss of life. We only have to go to Canada. We only have to go to the province of Ontario.

[*Translation*]

We do not have to look elsewhere to see negative outcomes and even loss of life. People have gotten sick not for a certain period of time, but for their whole lives because the regulatory system failed and cuts had a direct impact on their health. Of course, every time governments make those kinds of cuts, they will tell us that there will be no impact. They will keep saying that there will be no impact on the health and safety of Canadians.

[*English*]

We on this side are not simply skeptical. We are saying to at least let us learn the lessons of our own history. Let us at least understand that the kind of ideology that is rooted in this government is the same ideology that was rooted in the government of Ontario in the years 1995 to 2003 and that the consequence of that ideology had a significant impact on what really happened. People lost their lives. People died. People got very sick.

It is no exaggeration for us to say this: Let no one in Canada say that this Parliament did not warn the Government of Canada that the path it is taking us down on food inspection, on environmental protection and on search and rescue is a path that will have a direct impact on the real safety and security of Canadians, which is after all the fundamental purpose and objective of every government, regardless of its ideology.

• (1215)

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the leader of the Liberal Party for his commentary, reminding us of some very important history in the province of Ontario and the potential impact of the budget that the government has brought in recently.

I would also like to ask him if he thinks, as part of that history lesson, that we can also draw a line back to the 1995 Liberal budget that drastically cut transfers to the provinces and then led many provinces to try to balance their books by cutting programs, such as the ones around water safety that he described? Does he also draw a link to past federal Liberal budgets?

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, I have very clear memories of that budget as I was premier of Ontario at the time that it was introduced.

However, it is important to recognize that different provinces managed those cuts in different ways. Not every province decided to cut its welfare benefits by 22%. Not every government, on the immediate impact of the federal transfer cuts, decided to cut its own revenues by cutting taxes saying that the approach that was being taken was being put in place.

Business of Supply

I am sure the hon. member will recognize that every government in the country, in the years between 1990 and 1995, had to make some very tough decisions about how to deal with the deficit. We had to make them in Ontario and other provinces had to make them. The federal government did as well. I can say that at the time I did not relish the changes that were brought about in the 1995 Liberal budget but I think everyone recognizes that how each province responded to those was a matter of choice for those provinces.

The argument that one might hear from the Conservatives in Ontario, that the devil made me do it, is a completely nonsensical argument. It did not have a similar impact in other provinces. We did not have a similar collapse of the regulatory regime in other provinces that we had in Ontario.

What we have in Canada today, however, is a direct imitation of that approach and that philosophy, which is why we are pointing out the risks and dangers of it.

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the third party talks about the devil making us do it. Actually, it was not the devil who made us do it. It was a terrible NDP government from 1990 to 1995, which the leader of the Liberal Party led, that forced a lot of changes in the province of Ontario. That, combined with an awful federal Liberal government that unilaterally cut \$25 billion in transfers for health and social programs, was a big problem.

That member seems to forget that when he left office in the province of Ontario, it was spending \$1 million more an hour than it was taking in, more than a million people were on welfare and hope and opportunity had been lost in the province. We can combine that with a federal Liberal government that had just come through a decade of darkness or was in the midst of a decade of darkness to our military. Is the Liberal Party not just doing the same thing it did on H1N1, which is making people frightened for no reason whatsoever?

Why will the Liberals not simply support this government and all of the good measures that we have brought in in this budget, whether it be the record investments in health care, the investments in the armed forces, the investments we making across the economy to bring the budget back into balance, which will continue to protect the Canadian taxpayers, and all the measures that we are doing? Why will they not support us instead of spreading—

● (1220)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. The hon. leader of the Liberal Party.

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, I knew the parliamentary secretary was going to raise that issue, which is why I would ask him to have a look at Justice O'Connor's report that points out that the reckless Rae administration reduced public expenditure in the ministry of the environment from \$363 million to \$271 million.

The difference between the government that I led and the Harris government was that nobody died on our watch. People need to ask themselves what the consequences will be of their actions? This is something the government is not prepared to accept.

I will not carry on a debate with respect to what happened between 1990 and 1995. The deficits that were run up in recent years by the current government are far larger than anything ever seen in

the province of Ontario. The government has increased spending by over 40% of those five years. The Rae government increased it by 18%. The kinds of comparisons the member is making are nonsensical.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to have the opportunity to continue this debate on an important subject matter in terms of what governments can and should properly do to protect the public health and safety of Canadians. As the member for Toronto Centre has just said, that is the fundamental obligation of every government, regardless of ideology.

The problem we see with the particular government at the federal level in Canada today is that it simply presumes too much about its mandate. It exaggerates and overreaches. Yes, the government happens to have a majority of seats in the House of Commons, but it does not have a majority of support among Canadians. The Conservative government received 40% of the vote from 60% of those who voted. That means its mandate amounts to 24% of the eligible voters who cast votes in the last election. That is a very modest mandate.

In fact, that kind of a mandate, a minority of overall support, is not uncommon in Canada. However, what it says to the government that wins is that it must be a little modest in interpreting the mandate it has been given. It must not exaggerate, overreach, engage in false bravado or engage in triumphalism because that leads to bad governance. It leads to an attitude of impunity and that leads to the kinds of problems that we see with the cuts to public health and safety that the government is imposing in this latest budget.

The government's attitude of impunity, of overreaching and exaggerating its mandate leads to excessive and obsessive behaviour. We have seen that with the Minister of International Cooperation, the Minister of Industry and the Minister of National Defence. We see that in the way the Conservatives are treating the whole issue around the robocalls and the election scandal that the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada is now investigating. The government simply dismisses this as irrelevant and trivial.

We see the consequences of this attitude of impunity in the abuses of parliamentary procedure and process where the Conservatives never answer questions in question period. They take the important business of parliamentary committees and move it behind closed doors in secret sessions. They have used closure to ram through their legislation more times in four or five months than most majority governments used in four or five years.

We see it in the omnibus legislation and the very budget bill that is before Parliament right now. It is legislation that lumps so many matters together that Parliament cannot possibly debate, discuss and consider those matters in any serious way that Canadians would expect.

Business of Supply

We see that attitude of impunity in the way the Conservatives deal with an issue like the F-35s and the keeping of two sets of books, as has been revealed by the Auditor General. We see it in their failure to be candid with Canadians and tell the truth about the real cost of that particular transaction.

Most problematic, we see this attitude of impunity reflected in the government's unbridled application of its ideology. Rather than taking into account the varied and diverse views of Canadians and allowing everyone to have their say to ensure those views are properly respected and reflected, we have this rigid application of ideology that simply drives the government's minority position down the throats of Canadians. Nowhere is that more obvious than in the cuts that the Conservatives have chosen to make in this budget.

We can talk about the cuts to health care, old age security and in so many other areas, but most particularly I want to focus on the cuts to search and rescue, environmental science and protection, and food inspection. The government seems to think that those things are less important than its pet projects where it lavishes spending on, for example, the acquisition of the F-35, without any kind of competitive tendering process, and the downloading of expenses for jails onto the provincial levels of government. Jets and jails are the government's pet projects. The Conservatives seem to think that things like the environment, food inspection and search and rescue are expendable.

• (1225)

The Conservatives are cutting \$56.1 million from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's budget. They say that all of it will come from the back office and that we will not notice any front line difference. In fact, these so-called savings will be coming from the firing of at least 344 personnel from the already understaffed CFIA food inspection branches across the country, the very jobs that exist to protect Canadians from unsafe food products.

The government is also planning to implement a new policy with respect to food labelling. We might call it eat at our own risk. This policy will rely on the self-policing of food safety by industry and by individual Canadians rather than trained public servants. It is like saying that if people think they have an E. coli problem they should look it up on the Internet and maybe they can find help there. Those cuts will put the health and well-being of certain Canadians at particular risk, including those who can suffer potentially fatal allergies and serious health conditions like Crohn's disease, celiac disorder or diabetes, individuals who rely on the CFIA to ensure the accuracy of food labels to protect their health.

Those are not the only cuts that the government is making with respect to the CFIA. Last year, it took \$33.5 million from its budget, including \$17.5 million from increased inspections and inspectors. This is a dangerous policy. The purpose of our motion today is to point out that danger so that the government can reflect on these issues and change its mind before it is too late.

We have mentioned the environment. The government is chopping \$88.2 million from the environment portfolio while making the empty promise, which the member for Toronto Centre mentioned, that it will maintain "the highest possible standards for protecting the environment". In fact, these cuts are being made by the firing of government scientists who oversee environmental

assessments and monitoring, as well as cutting some 30 staff from the environmental emergencies program.

The government is also gutting environmental legislation and weakening several environmental laws. It is silencing dissent from environmental non-governmental organizations and continues to muzzle government scientists working in the field of the environment, at least those who still have their jobs. It has also cancelled the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy.

Food inspection is one area, environmental science and environmental protection is another where the government is being penny wise and pound poor as it cuts away at those things that protect the quality of life and the safety of Canadians in this country.

The government has also decided to close the St. John's and Quebec City maritime search and rescue coordination centres. These cuts are a direct attack on the safety and security of everyone who makes their living at sea. Despite the government's blandishments to the contrary, it is highly unlikely that the centres in Halifax and Trenton will be able to make up the difference and handle the increased workload caused by the St. John's and Quebec City closures.

If the Conservatives can spend over \$30 million on a commemorative program for the War of 1812, then surely they can keep vital centres like the search and rescue coordination centres open to serve Canadians and to protect Canadians' lives in and around places like St. John's and Quebec City.

The cuts that we are facing with the government today, as the member for Toronto Centre so graphically illustrated, mimic directly the kind of behaviour that we saw in the Ontario provincial government leading up to 2000 when that government decided to make a collection of decisions cutting back on environmental protection and on water safety in the province of Ontario. That decision by the Harris government led directly to the tragedy in Walkerton in 2000. That is not simply a political statement. That is the explicit legal finding by Mr. Justice Dennis O'Connor when he investigated that matter in a public environment. We need to ensure that kind of thing does not happen again.

• (1230)

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question relates back to the issue of search and rescue, which we were discussing in this House earlier today, before this current debate began. However, there is an important point to be made here because there has been a collapse in the logic of the member for Wascana. We are not surprised to hear that from someone like the member for Toronto Centre. When an old socialist sells out to big capital, logic collapses in all kinds of ways. However, we do need to know whether the member for Wascana agrees with the following facts.

Business of Supply

Search and rescue on the sea and in the air is a lead responsibility of the Canadian Forces and the Canadian Coast Guard. Does the member agree that the base funding for resources and equipment of these proud Canadian services is 30% to 40% higher today than it was in 2006 under his government, and therefore that search and rescue services on Canada's three coasts for anyone in peril at sea or as a result of an air accident have been enhanced considerably under this government? Does he agree with those facts?

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, the government has taken a decision to close centres in Quebec City and in St. John's. The services provided by those centres cannot easily be transferred to other locations as far away as Halifax or Trenton. As well, the Quebec City location offers the absolutely vital service in the French language, which is also critical in that region of the country in particular. The member simply cannot escape the reality that his government has made the decision to cut back on search and rescue and that is not in the best interests of Canadians.

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this debate is a very interesting one and I would like to thank my hon. colleague from Toronto Centre for bringing this motion into the House and enabling us to remind Canadians about the close association, not just in ideology but in action, between the government here and the government of Mike Harris in Ontario. A government in an era which can only be described as disastrous for the province of Ontario and the tragic circumstances which culminated in the deaths of seven innocent people is the clearest and starkest example of what happens when hard right-wing ideology trumps science, good public administration and common sense.

So I would like to thank the hon. member for giving us this opportunity. I wonder if he could comment further on what we are seeing today. We are seeing the government defending the Mike Harris years. One would think that any sound politician would run for the hills rather than defend that egregious government.

• (1235)

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government really cannot help itself from falling into the very trap to which the hon. gentleman has just referred. It is a government that embraces the same ideology and embraces a number of ministers who were at the table when the fateful decisions were made in Ontario. At least three members on the front benches of the current government were in that government. The decisions taken at that time, in the 1990s, led to the shortchanging of the environmental system in Ontario and the water protection system in Ontario. We were all assured that these decisions would have no negative consequences whatsoever. However, the reality is that there were negative consequences. Again, that is not just the expression of a political or a partisan point of view.

This whole matter was thoroughly and completely investigated by Mr. Justice Dennis O'Connor. His report is very revealing. In paragraph after paragraph, he links the consequences at Walkerton to decisions taken by the Harris government in Ontario. He says very clearly that if those decisions had been otherwise, then there would have been every likelihood that the tragedy in Walkerton could have been avoided.

The purpose of this motion today is to say let us learn that lesson from history and ensure that, in this country, that kind of thing cannot happen again.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very disappointed with the motion that the opposition has decided to debate in the House today. Suggesting that the minister responsible for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, CFIA, would do something that would endanger the health and safety of Canadians lacks credibility and reflects poorly on the opposition itself. Spreading fear among Canadians by suggesting that budget 2012 will make their food unsafe is irresponsible. I find it most regrettable that the opposition is attempting to achieve political gain by undermining the confidence of Canadians in the safety of their food. I believe it shows very poor judgment on the part of its members.

Protecting the health and safety of Canadians has been and remains one of our government's most important priorities. Canadians know this. They know that their food is safe and they have confidence in our food safety system. Therefore, it is with great pleasure that I take this opportunity to set the record straight, focusing specifically on the impact of the budget on the work of the CFIA and food safety within Canada.

The recent budget will not reduce Canada's investment in food safety or diminish the role of the CFIA. Our government believes that it is possible to find savings, find efficiencies and cut red tape within the CFIA without putting the health and safety of Canadians at risk. Both before and after our most recent budget, all food products produced or sold in Canada must meet our high safety standards. Before elaborating further, allow me to provide some context for food safety in Canada.

Our food safety regime is a partnership among governments, industry and consumers. At the federal level, Health Canada works with stakeholders to establish policies, regulations and standards relating to the safety and nutritional quality of all food sold in Canada. Once Health Canada sets these policies and standards, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency enforces them.

In addition, the CFIA is responsible for protection of the animal and plant resources base in Canada on which the production of safe food depends. As members may recall, the previous four federal budgets invested significantly in our food safety system, enabling the agency to hire additional inspection staff. In fact, not only did our previous budgets sustain funding for our food safety programs, they increased funding.

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For example, budget 2011 provided an additional \$100 million in funding for the agency to build science capacity and enhance training and inspection tools for inspectors. Unfortunately, the opposition members voted against these changes. They profess to be concerned about food safety in Canada, but every time we put forward a positive initiative and increase funding for food safety they vote against it. These are significant investments in our food safety capacity. It just does not make sense that after having made such significant investments the government would then set about to undermine the progress that has been made.

In fact, the exact opposite is true. Budget 2012 provides an additional \$51 million over two years to the CFIA, the Public Health Agency of Canada and Health Canada for continuing key food safety activities. In other words, the recent budget is strengthening, not weakening, this government's commitment to the health and safety of Canadians.

The opposition members call for more money and food safety. We have put more money into Canada's food safety system and, against all logic, they have voted against the very initiatives that they asked for. They do this every time. The opposition members voted against the \$100 million increase in budget 2011. They voted against the \$51 million increase in budget 2012. I believe that when it comes to food safety Canadians do not understand what the opposition is doing or trying to accomplish. The very actions of the opposition members betray them.

Like all federal departments and agencies, the CFIA is contributing to the government's deficit reduction action plan. However, the CFIA has not and will not reduce staff or cut programs that would put the health and safety of Canadians at risk. Indeed, budget 2012 is supporting the CFIA's drive toward modernization and will allow the agency to focus its key resources where they are most needed.

For some reason, the opposition does not want to acknowledge that Canada's food safety system was recognized as superior in a food safety report on OECD countries. I will happily quote again from that report for my colleagues.

It states:

● (1240)

The nation's food safety is ranked as superior based on factors such as the rate of food-borne illness, inspections, education programs, use of agricultural chemicals and strategies on bioterrorism, risk management and food recalls.

For some reason this independent, third-party report is not credible in the eyes of the opposition, which is why I am here to speak to this motion today.

The changes to the CFIA following the budget reflect four key principles. First, the CFIA will focus on programs that are important to Canadians. Second, it will modify programs to reflect current scientific knowledge. Third, it will improve service capacity and cut red tape for industry. Fourth, it will increase efficiency.

[*Translation*]

Let me explain how the agency will apply those principles.

Canada has one of the world's best food safety systems. We must not only maintain and improve that system, but also preserve the confidence of Canadians and our trading partners in our ability to

protect consumers. How will we do that? We will focus on what is really important.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency will focus on its core mandate: safeguarding Canada's food supply, plant and animal resources and consumers. As such, the agency must take a close look at all activities that do not fall within that mandate and that should be turned over to other qualified individuals or organizations.

For example, Canada has always worked with the provinces on meat inspection. That partnership will not change. All meats produced in Canada, in both federal and provincial institutions, must comply with the health requirements set out in the Food and Drugs Act.

In accordance with its mandate under the Act, the CFIA inspects federally regulated facilities. In principle, the provinces are responsible for inspecting facilities that they regulate. On the ground, however, the division of labour is not quite that clear.

[*English*]

While most provinces fulfill their own meat inspection responsibilities, the CFIA has been handling these activities in British Columbia, Manitoba and Saskatchewan on a contract basis. This has been going on for a number of years now on a limited cost recovery basis. This inspection activity has been focused on verifying compliance with provincial standards in these provinces. However, as announced last August, the CFIA is returning meat inspection responsibilities to these three provinces.

I want to emphasize that CFIA is not abandoning its responsibilities, but rather returning certain tasks to their rightful owner. When Canadians buy meat at the local grocery store, they may look at the brand, the price, the best-before date and the nutrition label. I do not believe for a moment they wonder whether the meat plant was inspected by a provincial or federal authority. What is important is only that the product was inspected by a qualified inspector and that it was deemed safe.

The CFIA has no legislated obligation to inspect provincially regulated meat plants, and the agency has judged the time right to focus on its primary role of federal inspection activities. During the transition, of course, the CFIA will continue to work closely with its provincial counterparts as they put in place their own inspection services, and the food safety system will continue to protect Canadians.

The integrity of the food safety system will certainly not be compromised by returning provincial meat inspection duties to where they belong. Indeed, budget 2012 positions the CFIA to focus on its core responsibilities, and that is what is most important to Canadians.

The second principle guiding implementation of the budget is a focus on the latest science. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency is Canada's foremost science-based regulator. It uses science when making program decisions. Due to its very nature, however, science is constantly evolving, and the agency must keep pace.

To that end, the CFIA is adjusting some programs so that its activities, equipment and facilities reflect the most current scientific knowledge. It is also consolidating its scientific expertise in better equipped facilities. This will support collaboration and make more effective use of laboratory resources.

• (1245)

Let me provide some concrete examples of what this means in practice. On the west coast, the CFIA will move some of its activities at the Centre for Plant Health in Sidney to the research station in Summerland, run by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. Combining expertise at one facility in British Columbia will enhance capacity to serve the grapevine and tree fruit industries. Moreover, it will ensure the agency's vital work takes place in a better equipped facility with a larger pool of scientists. Together, the team will take the greatest care to conduct its work effectively. That includes working in an appropriately secure environment that reflects the associated pest risks.

In Atlantic Canada, the CFIA is consolidating some services within its own network of laboratories. Specifically, the agency will transfer testing and diagnostic activities in St. John's to laboratories in Charlottetown and Dartmouth, and for good reason. The facilities in Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia are more modern and better equipped to handle the complex food and plant testing required by the industry.

As someone who has studied science, I know many people still entertain romantic notions of innovation. These often revolve around a professor working alone in a lab who has a eureka moment that changes history. This is not reality. Science usually moves forward in increments and more often than not demands close collaboration for success. That is why the consolidation of the agency's laboratories in Atlantic Canada hold so much potential. The move will create enhanced pools of expertise in two geographic areas instead of three. This will allow scientists and diagnosticians to work together more closely and promote greater effectiveness.

As its third principle guiding implementation of budget 2012, the CFIA is determined to improve service and to cut unnecessary administrative costs for industry. To do that, the agency is harnessing

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new technologies that will provide another tool to help industry create compliant labels. These changes will have no impact on food safety, but they will reduce costs for both government and industry alike.

Unlike the opposition, our government knows that money can be saved without affecting food safety and, in addition, that Canadians expect us to use their tax dollars prudently.

This tool, called the self-assessment labelling tool, will give producers, manufacturers and retailers the information they need to apply federal regulations correctly. In the process, it will reduce the amount of time needed for agency staff to answer routine questions. As an added benefit, if they so wish, consumers can also use the tool to learn more about labelling and rules that companies are required to follow.

Let me be as clear as possible. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency will continue to verify and enforce all food safety and consumer protection labelling requirements, including those related to ingredients, allergens, nutrition, compositional standards and mandatory labelling. It will simply do so more efficiently and effectively.

It is possible to save taxpayer dollars and improve service. I know this is difficult for the opposition to grasp, but this is exactly what we are doing.

In addition, a mandatory pre-market registration of labels is currently required for processed food. This practice, however, duplicates routine oversight activities that the agency already carries out in the marketplace. I want to stress that these changes do not effect food safety. Indeed, all this requirement has ever done is slow down the entry of new products into the marketplace.

These savings are definitely good for taxpayers and our food safety system and they do not effect food safety.

• (1250)

[*Translation*]

I repeat: CFIA inspectors will continue to verify labels, take samples and conduct analyses to ensure that no allergens are present and that the list of ingredients indicated on the label is complete. They will also continue to investigate public complaints.

The agency will also repeal the regulations that limit the size of food containers. Thus, the industry will be able to profit from new formats and new packaging technologies and will be able to import new products from abroad. When all is said and done, these measures will provide consumers and the industry with greater choice.

Increased efficiency is the final principle that will guide the implementation of budget 2012. Thus, I am pleased to announce that the agency will work more intelligently without sacrificing its commitment to food safety.

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The CFIA carefully examined all activities that were not directly associated with food safety or animal or plant health and made some smart adjustments. For instance, the agency will now spend less time on grading and quality assurance activities that have no impact on food safety, such as for seeds and fertilizer. Accordingly, the CFIA will work with the private sector, industry and other stakeholders to develop other delivery mechanisms when it makes sense to do so.

It is important to remember that, since 2006, our government has invested significantly in order to improve our food safety system. In particular, budget 2011 allocated \$100 million. Building on those commitments, budget 2012 allocates \$51 million to primary food safety activities, including the activities managed by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

Yes, like all federal departments and agencies, the CFIA will contribute to the government's deficit reduction efforts. I can assure the House, however, that these budget reductions will not affect food safety. On the contrary, the changes brought about by the budget will only strengthen the agency's work.

Budget 2012 will allow the CFIA to realign its efforts and resources in accordance with its basic mandate and the programs that are truly important to Canadians. It will also allow the agency to make better use of its scientific expertise, to launch new initiatives that will improve services and reduce red tape for the industry, and to streamline its integrated operations so that it can work more intelligently. In short, we should be congratulating the CFIA on having transformed challenges into new opportunities.

[*English*]

This government is proud that Canada has one of the best food safety systems in the world. Be assured that we will not tarnish our reputation globally or undermine the trust and confidence of Canadians in the food they eat. Let me repeat. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency has not, and will not, reduce staff or cut programs that would, in any way, put the health and safety of Canadians at risk.

For all these reasons, the government does not agree with the spirit or the letter of the opposition motion. Indeed, the motion recklessly attempts to undermine the confidence of Canadians in our world-class food safety regime and it does so for the attempted gain of the opposition.

I urge all members in the House to join me in opposing this opposition motion.

•(1255)

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the parliamentary secretary has asked us to do is to trust that whatever the government says is, in some way, fact.

The government told us that the F-35s would cost \$75 million a plane. Now the costs are at \$120 million a plane, a budget that has bloomed \$10 billion. It cannot be trusted.

The government tells us that we have strong environmental policies. We have not only become laggards in the international community, we have become environmental outlaws in the international community.

The member comes into the House to have us believe that everything is fine, that there will be no cuts to the front line. Yet that is not what the front line is talking about. That is not what the senior management of CFIA is talking about right now. It is telling its staff, "I don't know how you can take 10% out of your budget and not deal with the front line".

Why this denial, why this camouflage, why all of this subterfuge? Why do you not tell us what you are doing and be honest with Canadians?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before I go to the parliamentary secretary, I would like to remind all hon. members to direct their comments to the Chair, rather than to their colleagues.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, I sit on the agriculture committee. We had the union bosses come in front of committee. They talked about cuts to food inspectors, in particular meat inspectors. I put forward this case of the three provinces of Manitoba, British Columbia and Saskatchewan, where right now federal inspectors do the work of provincial meat inspections. What if the federal government decides to transfer the responsibility for those inspections right back to the province, which is where they belong? That would mean 50-some inspectors would leave the federal payroll and be transferred to the province. It is not a cut. It is a transfer. It is a natural transfer of responsibility. It actually makes good sense.

Yet the union leader and my colleague on the other side would call this a cut. This is the kind of deception at play here. Some people are calling things cuts that are not necessary cuts.

I thank the member for his confidence that the government is operating at 100% efficiency. I take that as a compliment, but there are efficiencies that can be made within government. Canadians know that. They have asked that of the government. We are making those kinds of savings without compromising food safety.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, based on what I am hearing in the House, history seems to be repeating itself because the assurances the government member just gave us in writing are not unlike those given by the Conservative Government of Ontario when it made budget cuts that contributed to the tragic events in Walkerton.

Honestly, I put very little stock in what I see here in writing or in what is being said. It is truly the result and the process that matter the most. The hon. member in question, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, has a lot to say about the money that has been invested, to the tune of millions of dollars, but if those millions of dollars have been poorly invested, then we are really no further ahead.

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I would like to raise two points in particular and ask the hon. member to share his comments on each. In August 2008, before the listeriosis outbreak, an employee at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency read the government's directives that 5% of the agency's funding had to be cut and some of its essential, independent functions had to be transferred to the private sector. This amounted to self-regulation. How can that really be considered an improvement?

The second point is the scathing report by Ms. Weatherill. In her report—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has asked us for facts and I would like to give him some. Our recent budget includes an additional \$51 million over two years for improving food safety, on top of the \$100 million in last year's budget. Those are the facts.

The opposition members have asked for more resources in order to allow the CFIA to do its job. The government has allocated a lot more funding, but that member and the other opposition members voted against our positive initiatives. We are taking measures to strengthen our food safety system. I would like to have the support of the other members of this House.

• (1300)

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always rich to hear Liberals talk about ethics in government. When they were in government, they promised that they would kill the GST and they did not do it. They promised to implement Kyoto and they did not do it. They promised not to cut health care and they cut \$25 billion from it.

When the NDP had a chance to be in government in Ontario, it spent so much money it almost bankrupted the province.

This government has reinvested in the economy. The Conservatives said that we would focus on jobs and the economy. We said that we would balance the budget and reinvest in families and we have done that. We said that we would improve food inspection for the country and we have done that. We have reinvested in the armed forces. Both of those parties voted against that.

Could the parliamentary secretary continue to tell us about some of the very important investments we have made, not only in food safety but also in agriculture so we can take more Canadian products around the world, so we can increase productivity, do better for our farmers and our economy and create more jobs?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, as the House knows, we are very active on the agriculture file. We put farmers first. We have had tremendous success and farmers most of all know this as do consumers.

In terms of some of the successes, for example, we have been opening international markets to our farmers. Our farmers compete extremely well internationally once the borders are open. Our

Minister of Agriculture has done tremendous work in opening borders for our farmers. Our farmers have profited.

One of the things that helps sell Canadian produce abroad is our food safety system. Other countries know that our food is safe and not only that, it is top quality food, food that their residents want.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to have a chance to take this up with the parliamentary secretary. I have voluminous comments on Bill C-38 because it touches on so many aspects of environmental protection.

In relation to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency facility in my own riding of Saanich—Gulf Islands, the Centre for Plant Health, I really hope to gain the co-operation of government members to keep this facility open. This facility has been in place since 1912.

The following is from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency material. "...in 1965 a plant quarantine function was added on the advice of the Advisory Board of the Destructive Insect and Pest Act to protect the Agricultural Industry from disease risks of international importations of propagation material which could spread to other crops in Canada."

I heard my hon. friend say that the facility in Summerland to which this quarantine function is being moved has "a better equipped facility". At this point, several greenhouses would need to be built to have anywhere near the capacity that the Centre for Plant Health has on the Saanich Peninsula. Moreover, it would be a risk to all the economic crops of the Okanagan to move a quarantine facility into the heart of that region. I urge the government to reconsider.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, none of the places where we are finding savings affect food safety. Efficiencies can be realized, particularly with the relocation of personnel or functions. For example, the activities at the Centre for Plant Health in Sidney, B.C., as I mentioned in my speech, will be moving to the research station in Summerland, B.C. Labs and expertise will be combined to make sure that the important work is carried out in a better equipped facility and with a critical mass of expertise. There will be a larger pool of scientists on which to draw. Some modification might be required but the overall efficiency would make this a worthwhile endeavour.

Canadians have looked at the expenses of government. They see that we are in challenging economic times and they expect savings to be found. We have proposed some savings. These savings would not affect food safety, and Canadians know that. The only people who do not know that are members of the opposition.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

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I am pleased to speak to this motion today which draws a line between the cuts to regulations and funding developed for the public good and cuts to public oversight that affect the well-being of Canadians. There have been comments today, and referred to in this motion, about the terrible situation in Walkerton, Ontario where people lost their lives because of lack of public oversight, due to cuts to public infrastructure funding that should have ensured that the public was protected with respect to water safety.

I trace this back to the federal budget of 1995 where the Liberal government of the day made massive cuts to funds that it would transfer to the provinces, and at the time bragged that with these massive cuts relative to the size of the economy, public spending in 1996 and 1997 would be lower than at any time in our country's history since 1951. Of course, that was prior to medicare and prior to many other programs which we subsequently brought into place. So it gives us a sense of the massive extent of the cuts that were made by the federal government, and the off-loading of debt that went, in essence, to the provinces and then was off-loaded to cities and the people of Canada. We saw the impact directly in Ontario. We certainly saw it in my community in Toronto where there was greater homelessness and greater poverty, and people were placed more at risk.

Now in its budget, the government is going down a similar path. It is cutting on the pretense of streamlining. We heard the member opposite a few minutes ago talking about getting greater efficiencies, streamlining, trying to reassure Canadians that all that is happening is basically good economic housekeeping and that there is nothing here that will jeopardize any protection or safety for Canadians. I remind Canadians that it is the government that was not particularly frugal or efficient in its spending of \$1 billion when the G20 came to Toronto or when the G8 was in Muskoka and the minister was able to find great ways to squander money in his own riding. We have noticed a lack of efficiency and accountability for the dollars that Canadians send to Ottawa when we see the various budget estimates around the F-35s and multi-millions of dollars' difference when the Conservatives are talking about their pet projects. We can see how cavalier they are in public spending when they pass a crime bill that will off-load billions of dollars to the provinces when crime is declining across the country. So the Conservatives seem to want to be frugal when it comes to protecting the public but, as we have seen with \$16 glasses of orange juice for cabinet ministers, not necessarily frugal when it comes to their friends or their own personal spending.

Getting to the matter at hand, Canadians ought to be very concerned about the content of these changes, but also the way they are being brought in. It is a government that seems ideologically bound to off-load what it does not take an interest in, to privatize what it can turn over to its friends and to abandon the notion of accountability when its preference is to centralize power and leave decision making to ministers or to groups behind closed doors.

● (1305)

I think there is a real concern with the lack of accountability and the way so many changes are bound into the budget implementation act of more than 400 pages, a third of which deals with changes to environmental protection. There is a real concern about undermining democracy. I say that because there are changes the bill seeks to

make that ought to be in a separate bill to be properly examined and debated by the environment critics and the environment committee. That is the proper way to make those kinds of changes as well as other changes that the budget implementation act proposes.

For example, the previous speaker reassured us on the issue of food safety. On the contrary, what the government is putting forward is an erosion of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. To be specific, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency is facing overall cuts of \$56 million. As we already have outbreaks of listeriosis, it seems to me that food inspection is an area where we would want to invest more money, not cut \$56 million. We need food safety oversight today more than ever.

In fact, the government is taking away the oversight of the Auditor General from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. The Conservatives are making the CFIA exempt from a mandatory review by the Auditor General. This is what I mean by a lack of accountability. It is very troubling for Canadians that we do not have the rigour of oversight of the Auditor General for our food inspection agency.

This paves the way for private contractors to do the work of food inspection. Therefore, the fox is in the chicken coop. I think that Canadians ought to be very troubled by the privatization of our food inspection. I prefer to have someone acting in the public interest rather than private profit to be responsible for food inspection. That seems obvious to me. The fact that the Conservatives want to make this change to privatize food inspection should set alarm bells ringing throughout the country.

The *Canadian Medical Association Journal* has long pointed out key failings in our food safety system. It warned Canadians in an editorial on April 12 of last year to eat at their own risk. It said, even prior to this budget, that it was very concerned about the lack of oversight.

The Food and Drugs Act would see a streamlining where the Minister of Health would be able to exempt products from the regulatory process. That seems a bit troubling. The minister would have the power to issue marketing authorization to exempt a food, or advertisement with respect to a food, from certain provisions of the act. Again, this is about concentrating more power in the hands of the minister without proper regulatory oversight.

As well, the bill would provide for Health Canada to adopt any industry regulations as law without proper parliamentary oversight. I believe this would be very problematic if there were no policy to go with this change to prevent conflict of interest. There is tremendous potential for us to get into trouble with this.

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•(1310)

There are many areas, such as: the cuts to search and rescue; the slashing of environmental protections; and the gutting of environmental assessments to speed up major projects, namely pipelines. There are sweeping changes. Canada is already an international pariah when it comes to the environment, but the Conservatives are making massive changes, of which I know my colleagues will put forward more detail. The Conservative government is missing opportunities not only to protect Canadians but to green our economy and invest in new opportunities with renewable energy and energy efficiency. We are lagging behind many other countries in doing this.

I believe that this budget implementation act should be of great concern to Canadians and I think that the motion raises important points in terms of protecting public safety.

•(1315)

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when I hear about the government's plans to cut scientists who are monitoring our natural environment and the human impact on the natural environment, and when I hear about its plans to cut the monitoring of our food supply, something we need every day, I am reminded of the statement: what gets measured gets done. If we do not look carefully at our food supply and look at how we are impacting the natural environment we depend on, we will not be good managers of these resources.

It was said in the House that the government believes that what gets measured gets done. Who said that? It was the Minister of the Environment. I have always wanted to say that and I thank the members for their indulgence in that regard.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, I did not hear a question there but I will take this opportunity to speak a bit further to some concerns I have about the environment.

After the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, BP has had to spend \$14 billion so far in cleanup efforts. As well, \$179 million have been spent on tourism promotions across the four gulf states, \$82 million have been spent on seafood testing, and a \$20 billion trust was established in 2010 for the claims and oil spill related costs.

The U.S. government recognized the need to strengthen the environmental approval process it uses for major projects and to put a halt to some projects where the risks were unknown as a result of the BP oil spill. Why would the Government of Canada go in the opposite direction and weaken our environmental oversight for major projects like pipelines that could damage sensitive wilderness areas and coastal waters when we see the cautionary tale in the Gulf of Mexico? Why would the government not protect Canadian interests?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her excellent speech, which I listened to carefully. She talked about something important: the manner in which this government should have presented the changes regarding the environment and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency in particular.

I would like my colleague to speak more about the difference it would have made to introduce a completely separate bill instead of bundling everything into the budget, as the government decided to do. Could we have better evaluated the changes made to environmental impact assessments and how?

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent question. One-third of this bill deals with changes to environmental protection. In order to protect the environment and Canadians, it would be better to separate out everything to do with climate change and the environment and place it in a separate bill for debate in the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development. That is the usual process.

These changes cannot be debated by the Standing Committee on Finance. I do not have the expertise to debate detailed changes to the regulations. That is why it would be better to divide this huge and complicated bill and debate each issue—such as the environment and health—in specialized committees. I am advising the government to do so.

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to the subject of this motion, because I think it goes straight to the heart of the government's way of operating.

When we talk about government services or government structures, members on both sides of the House agree that procedures, services and structures should be constantly reviewed so that they can be made to respond more efficiently and more effectively to the situations they were created to deal with. A regular review of these procedures, services and structures is essential. I believe members on both sides of the House agree completely on that.

Nevertheless, the government's vision, as it has demonstrated since 2006, is just the opposite of what it should be. One way to study the efficiency and effectiveness of services, and even find savings, is to perform a regular review of these services.

The government, however, is doing things backwards. It wants to make budget cuts—\$5.2 billion this time. Then, every government service will feel the impact of these cuts. Thus, the government's intention to make cuts is detrimental to all services, whether they are inefficient—as sometimes happens—or very efficient, and even essential. In this way, the government's actions and reaction are causing great damage.

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I would like to talk about two particular situations addressed in the opposition motion. First, I will discuss the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Second, I will talk about search and rescue, in particular the issue of the Quebec City centre, which serves my riding.

The government's flippant attitude toward important and fundamental questions relating to the health of Canadians has never been clearer than during the listeriosis crisis of August 2008. The response by the Minister of Agriculture at the time was quite telling. I remind the House that the agriculture minister, speaking during a conference call, made the following comment about the crisis:

• (1320)

[*English*]

“This is like a death by a thousand cuts. Or should I say cold cuts”.

[*Translation*]

Later on during that same call, someone mentioned that a Prince Edward Islander had died of listeriosis. Once again, his response to the situation was flippant:

[*English*]

“Please tell me it's the member for Malpeque”.

[*Translation*]

In fact, that member was from Prince Edward Island. The minister apologized for his comments when they were made public, but he suffered no consequences for his behaviour.

That shows the extent to which the Minister of Agriculture and this government in general fail to take the health of Canadians seriously. Obviously, nobody wants to jeopardize the safety of Canadians deliberately, particularly when it comes to food inspection, but measures such as those the government is planning to implement will endanger Canadians whether or not that is the intent.

A government that seeks to govern well should take history into account, should keep the listeriosis outbreak and Walkerton in mind when making decisions in this area.

I mentioned the 2008 listeriosis outbreak. Clearly, that was not benign. Fifty-seven people across Canada got sick and 22 of them died. The outbreak highlighted the inadequacy of inspection measures. The Weatherill report by the commission that inquired into the listeriosis outbreak mentioned a number of disturbing facts about the situation.

I would like to quote four of the report's findings.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency failed to do mandatory safety audits of the Maple Leaf Foods plant which produced the tainted cold cuts for years prior to the outbreak.

A new inspection system—the compliance verification system or CVS—implemented just before the outbreak was flawed and in need of “critical improvements related to its design, planning and implementation”.

The CVS was “implemented without a detailed assessment of the resources available to take on these new CVS tasks”.

Finally, there is a fourth point.

There was already a shortage of inspectors prior to the outbreak. Let us talk about the period before the outbreak—the number, capabilities and training of the inspectors assigned to the Maple Leaf processing plant on Bartor Road, the plant that produced the contaminated cold cuts. Apparently, the inspectors were feeling

stressed about their responsibilities at other plants, the complexity of the Bartor Road plant—particularly concerning its size and hours of operation—and the adjustments needed because of the new compliance verification system.

The Weatherill report was scathing. It pointed out that the system put in place by the government right before the listeria outbreak was deficient. It wanted to go even further regarding this deficient system. This relates to the question I asked the parliamentary secretary about the Canadian Food Inspection Agency employee who discovered a government directive concerning the agency that reduced its funding by 5%—and this was in 2008. So, it was a matter of a 5% cut and directives whereby essential food inspection procedures, which should have been conducted independently, would be transferred to the industry in the name of self-regulation and voluntary regulation.

“Voluntary regulation” is a lovely expression, but very little regulation is actually involved. The responsibility for this regulation is being given to those who stand to gain in the process. That is the very definition of conflict of interest. As far as food inspection is concerned, Canadians and Quebeckers want to have independent procedures to ensure that there will be a clear and accurate evaluation that is outside any other interest and that simply seeks to protect the safety of our citizens.

Do you want to know what happened to that employee, by the way? Easy: he made the document public and the Conservative government responded by dismissing him. He blew the whistle on an initiative that could have been hazardous to the health of Canadians. The Minister of Agriculture even denied the employee's status as a whistleblower saying that he was not the one who blew the whistle on the government's initiative that was going to hinder food inspection, but rather he was the one who blew the whistle on the whistleblower.

Again, this shows the government's flippant attitude and indifference toward the real problems raised by the commissioner responsible for the commission that followed the listeriosis outbreak.

My colleague here talked about the findings in the journal of the Canadian Medical Association, namely that the process itself is inadequate. The commission did a good job with the guidelines it was given by the government. However, the guidelines did not focus on casting doubt on the process, the way in which the agency operates, but instead focused, within the framework of the process, on seeing how we can assure the most accountability and best identify the people who are responsible. There are fundamental problems with the processes that were uncovered in this article by the Canadian Medical Association, and that is worth mentioning.

Business of Supply

I heard my colleague, the Minister of Agriculture, talk about all the money that has been invested by the government in the past few years when it comes to the Food Inspection Agency. The problem is that if the money goes to the wrong place or if the processes are not improved, then the money is no good. What the listeriosis case and the crisis in Walkerton, Ontario, uncovered is the issue of the process, the way to proceed, and that is not being reviewed by the government.

I would like to have more time—as I know I am running out of time—to speak about the Quebec City search and rescue centre, and the Quebec City office in particular, which will affect my riding. I hope to have the opportunity to say a few words about this when answering questions.

The crux of the problem is really the Conservative government's approach to the budget cuts imposed on all departments and on agencies in critical situations, such as the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Instead of verifying whether services are effective and meet their objectives, general cuts are made and all services suffer, including essential services. That is our concern with the budget implementation bill. That is why we will support the motion.

• (1330)

[English]

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, air pollution is a major environmental risk to human health. By reducing air pollution levels, we can help reduce the burden of disease from respiratory infections, heart disease and lung cancer. The lower the levels of air pollution in a city, the better the respiratory and cardiovascular health the population will be in.

Exposure to air pollutants is largely beyond the control of individuals and requires public authorities at the national, regional and even international levels. Does the hon. member think that the government should be making cuts to air pollution?

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, yes, I believe that the Conservatives should reduce pollution and therefore should not cut the budgets of programs aimed at reducing air pollution.

With regard to the environment, the member for Parkdale—High Park mentioned that one-third of the budget implementation bill deals with environmental measures. I believe that this is the wrong approach for two reasons.

First, the government claims that it is doing more for the environment than any other previous government. On the contrary, it is doing less for the environment and doing the most harm to the environment of all the governments that I have seen to date.

Second, as my colleague stated, these provisions should be studied by the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development to determine their environmental impact and not just their impact on the budget, as would be the case with the omnibus bill. I agree with my colleague that this matter should be given special consideration.

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague's speech, which was unfortunately limited in time.

As a Quebecker, I appreciate discussion of the search and rescue centres. There is talk of reducing the service available in French. This is not just a symbolic service, but one that enables people to communicate properly. It is literally a question of life and death.

I would like to ask the hon. member to elaborate further on this subject, since he ran out of time.

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, that is a very important question. The search and rescue centre was the topic of the second part of my speech. I know that the office in St. John's, Newfoundland, is affected, but the one in Quebec City is to be abolished.

This has major consequences for my riding. Rimouski and my riding are on the banks of the St. Lawrence River, and are currently served by the Quebec City centre. The loss of this centre will result in 500 more calls per year in Halifax and 1,000 more in Trenton. The problem is that Halifax and Trenton are not familiar with the circumstances in the gulf and estuary of the St. Lawrence. That will clearly mean problems in obtaining a rapid response.

Second, *Le Soleil*, the Quebec City newspaper, has pointed out the problems related to French. Last June, an article in this paper reported on a test of the Halifax office, in which it took 20 minutes to get a satisfactory reply in French.

The 1976 creation of the Quebec City office filled an existing gap with respect to response capabilities in French. The report by the Commissioner of Official Languages, following a request from the NDP, makes exactly this point. In particular, the St. Lawrence area, which extends as far as the Magdalen Islands, will be poorly served by the planned measures. Unfortunately, the Fisheries and Oceans Canada budget, which ought to have covered this, will be reduced further.

Finally, in this respect, the Fisheries and Oceans Canada budget will also bring reductions in the Canadian Coast Guard and the small craft harbours program, under which Rimouski is supposed to serve as a port of refuge. At the moment, it cannot easily play this role, because it needs a breakwater.

These questions must be dealt with by the government, but that is not happening and the lives of people using the St. Lawrence are at risk.

[English]

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has been famously said that those who fail to learn from the past are doomed to repeat it.

The motion before the House today is concerned with exactly that. Not only is the government repeating history by making reckless cuts to essential government services that protect the health and safety of Canadians, but it is doing it knowing full well what tragic consequences can arise.

I will be sharing my time with the member for Etobicoke North.

Business of Supply

Sitting on the front benches of the government are ministers who, while senior members of the Mike Harris government in Ontario, were at the wheel when essential government services were cut, leading to the deaths of seven people and the serious illness of thousands of residents of Walkerton. In this day and age, it is unthinkable that Canadians should have to question the quality or safety of their food or water, yet it was a Conservative government in Ontario that created a health and safety vacuum when it cut water monitoring, among other essential government services, to create efficiencies in the late 1990s. Justice O'Connor, in his subsequent investigation into the Walkerton tragedy, cited the pursuit of these efficiencies as key among the reasons the whole water quality monitoring system broke down.

As if that were not enough, we are barely four years removed from the outbreak of listeria at Maple Leaf Foods, which tragically killed 22 and left many other Canadians seriously ill. In the wake of the listeria contamination outbreak, the Weatherill report recommended not only increased funding for more inspectors but also a significant government investment in the necessary infrastructure to ensure that the Canadian public is never again at risk from food we would never expect to be dangerous.

These illnesses target the most vulnerable in our society: children and seniors, those who need and deserve our protection the most. It is entirely reckless to go ahead and tell Canadians, children, seniors, and men and women with dietary restrictions and allergies that in the wake of such tragedies, they are now responsible to eat at their own risk.

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada experienced the most severe cuts of all the departments in the most recent Conservative budget. Among those cuts is a cut of \$56.1 million to the budget of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Now, my colleagues opposite will have us know, as soon as I am done speaking, that they have invested a considerable sum of money in the CFIA this year as well; of course, it is still significantly less than they are cutting, leaving a funding deficit of approximately \$5 million.

Conservatives would also have us believe that these cuts will be found from internal efficiencies and that there will be no front-line changes that would place the health and safety of Canadians at risk. Unfortunately, they neglected to inform senior management, who told CFIA staff quite the opposite, saying:

I don't know how you take 10% of your budget and not deal with the front line.

Front-line staff are not "efficiencies". They are not a reduction in the paper budget or a readjustment of administration or management, and they are certainly not a reduction in an excessive advertising budget.

There were approximately 1,200 food inspectors in Canada before the listeriosis outbreak in 2008. In the last two years, the CFIA has added 70 meat inspectors to respond to the outbreak and another 100 in order to comply with the higher inspection standards of the United States. Members opposite will argue that there were some 700 net new inspectors since 2006; however, a majority of these additional staff members have nothing to do with food inspection. They are not front-line staff; it is just that everyone was given the title "inspector".

This is particularly important when we consider that only about 2% of imported food is inspected as it enters Canada. Right now when meat is imported into Canada, it is cleared separately, because it is a higher-risk product; however, in the same town hall where senior managers at CFIA informed staff that there was no way they could avoid affecting front-line services, they also announced that as part of cuts to food inspection, they will be eliminating the program to pre-clear and track imported meat shipments.

Considering that meat inspectors clear and track 50,000 shipments a year, axing this program means less scrutiny and less information about high-risk imports.

● (1335)

Cuts to food inspection will also affect interprovincial imports and exports, with cuts to jobs at the ferry terminal in Port aux Basques where inspectors spray down soil-contaminated vehicles to prevent the spread of potato cyst nematode. If the nematodes are allowed to get into P.E.I. or other maritime soil, the result would be near destruction of the potato industry as the disease spreads across the area.

Unfortunately this new, less thorough, approach to inspecting imports is coupled with what CFIA senior management calls a radical re-engineering of the inspection process. CFIA executives informed staff that they would be transitioned largely from food inspectors to systems inspectors only. The difference is fundamental: they will no longer be food safety inspectors, but instead paper-pushers who will oversee industry self-policing. In large part, this environment existed before the listeriosis crisis, yet the Conservative government has ignored all of the valuable lessons most Canadians learned in the wake of that tragedy.

Industry cannot solely be relied upon for food safety regulation and verification, which is why we do not rely on any industry or body to police itself, especially when the results could be as dire as they were in Walkerton or at Maple Leaf Foods; however, the government, which is ideologically opposed to regulation, is letting ideology and politics interfere with safety.

Consumer protection inspectors verify the accuracy of product nutrition claims, which is critical safety information for diabetes sufferers or Canadians living with heart disease, high blood pressure or other life-threatening allergies. On top of cutting the verification of product labels, CFIA has also cut its verification of restaurant menu claims as well as product net weight claims.

Business of Supply

Now more than ever, Canadians are more conscious about the food they are eating in terms of salt intake, fat content, and wheat or peanut content, and rightly so. *Postmedia* showed in an article on April 20 that some of the country's biggest food brands, in some cases, drastically understated the quantities of harmful nutrients while inversely overstating the presence of healthy nutrients.

According to these CFIA tests, of the 600 products tested, more than half were inconsistent with the information on the packaging, with information in some cases off by nearly 90%. That significant a variation is a terrifying proposition for a mother with a child suffering from celiac disease, for a middle-aged man who needs to regulate his sodium intake in order to regulate his blood pressure or for a diabetic whose day-to-day health is contingent on a very rigorous diet. Canadians with serious dietary restrictions will have to look at every food product as though it is labelled "use at your own risk".

More astonishingly, the only remedy left by the government in the wake of the vacuum it has now created is an online portal where consumers can contact companies directly with their complaint. Perhaps Conservative members can answer me this: what good is a web inquiry to a mom whose child is in the hospital?

In the Conservative war on experts and information, the health and food safety professionals are no longer the first line of defence, but it certainly appears now that everyday Canadians are the last. My deepest fear is that it could be too late by the time anyone needs to report an inaccurate label.

This is no less than the second wave of cuts. Not even six months ago, the Conservatives slashed the CFIA budget by \$33.5 million, including \$17.4 million dedicated specifically toward increased inspectors and inspections. The Conservative government argued these funds already had an expiration date, yet instead of implementing a permanent infrastructure to protect Canadians against food-borne illness, it followed these early cuts with more and deeper cuts in this budget.

In the 2008 election, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food made an inappropriate joke at the expense of the victims of the listeriosis outbreak. He was rightly criticized for it at the time. I would like to think that he had learned his lesson and no longer saw food safety as a joke.

I am certain there is no member in the House who wishes to see another food tragedy. I am certain that should another befall Canadians, the Conservative government will wring its hands and be quite contrite. We can, however, avoid that to the extent possible by continuing to support the regulations now in place, the regulations that came about and were informed by Walkerton and by the listeriosis outbreak.

We have come too far to make the same fatal, costly mistakes. It is not too late for all members of the House to support reversing these cuts and restore peace of mind to the Canadian public that its food is not only the best but also the safest.

• (1340)

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, earlier today a member opposite suggested that Canadians do not really understand the point of this motion today. However, Canadians do

understand that the government cannot be trusted when it comes to Canadians' health and safety, the integrity of our food security and the protection of our environment.

This is a government that is becoming a pariah internationally because it is holding up an international body that wants to put a warning on asbestos. The government is the only government on this committee that is holding up that process. How can the government be trusted to protect the integrity of our food system and the safety of it when it is showing its colours internationally in a most egregious way?

I wonder if my hon. colleague on the Liberal side wants to comment on the general direction the government takes in terms of protecting us against hazardous materials and protecting our food.

• (1345)

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Mr. Speaker, there is no question that the government has not only lost the confidence of Canadians, with I think a 20% approval rating as to its trustworthiness, following the robocall scandal, following the F-35 misinformation that it had given us for which it was found in contempt last year, as members will recall. It has also lost international esteem because of its position on asbestos, because of its position on the environment.

Imagine firing 700 environmental scientists, muzzling environmental scientists and shutting down the round table on the environment and the economy. When the government says, "We've got everyone's interests at heart about the environment", we know it has gone from becoming environmental laggards to environmental outlaws.

Canadians are not fooled by this. They know that the same ideology has now been applied to food safety. I am warning Canadians now that if they do not stand up to the government and become warriors about food safety, their health is at risk.

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have heard this all before from the members opposite. We have heard it time and time again.

However, the reality of the matter is that the largest cuts to health and social programs in this country's history came from that government. The largest cuts to the military in this country came from that government. Cuts to health and safety and food inspection came from that government. The worst provincial government in the history of the province of Ontario, which made cuts to all manner of programs, all manner of departments, after having spent so much money that it was spending \$1 million more an hour than it was taking in, was that NDP government. A number of those people are still on the front benches of this party. The only unfortunate thing for the Liberals is that the worst premier in the province's history is now the Liberal leader.

Business of Supply

Will the Liberals finally confess to all of the damage they have done to this country? Will they look at this budget and see the investments we are making across the board in health and safety and in agriculture, and will they do the right thing, not like what they did with H1N1, which was to make Canadians afraid? Then what we saw was the best response in the world to H1N1, probably, after months and months of listening to hysterical Liberals tell us that the world was coming to an end.

This government gets the job done constantly—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please.

The hon. member for Guelph.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Well, Mr. Speaker, my good friend is certainly full of bravado today. I hear him speak about all these cuts, but I recall that no one died on the watch of any Liberal government in Ontario or in Canada. He has failed to tell Canadians that.

What we are doing right now is this. We are repeating all of the same mistakes that were made by Mr. Harris. We are repeating—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please.

Is the hon. parliamentary secretary rising on a point of order?

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, the federal Liberal government that was in power in 1999 in Canada—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please.

That is not a point of order. It is a point of debate.

The hon. member for Guelph.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Mr. Speaker, Walkerton was the jurisdiction, of course, of the provincial Conservative government at the time. That is the point I made. He well knows that.

What he is afraid to do is stand and admit that his ideology is now compelling them to make the very same mistakes now that they made then, which they continue to make, refusing to learn from history, refusing to learn from the listeriosis outbreak—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Etobicoke North.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in May 2000, 2,300 people fell ill after E. coli bacteria contaminated the water supply of Walkerton, Ontario. Sweeping Conservative cutbacks to the Ontario Ministry of Environment contributed to the tragedy, the most serious case of water contamination in Canadian history.

For a first example of the impact of the cutbacks, the Conservative government discontinued laboratory testing services for municipalities in 1996 and failed to put in place a regulation making the reporting of contamination mandatory. Had the government done this, hundreds of illnesses would have been prevented.

For a second example, Conservative cuts to the Ministry of the Environment made the ministry less capable of identifying and dealing with problems at Walkerton's water utility. The ministry's inspections program should have detected the improper treatment and monitoring practices and ensured that those practices were corrected.

In January 2002, Premier Mike Harris accepted responsibility for the shortcomings of the Conservative government. He said:

I am truly sorry for the pain and suffering you have experienced.

I, as premier, must ultimately accept responsibility for any shortcomings of the Government of Ontario.

I deeply regret any factors leading to the events of May 2000 that were the responsibility of the Government of Ontario....

History teaches hard lessons, reminding us that prevention is the best line of defence and that worst-case scenarios do happen.

In examining past disasters such as when the Exxon Valdez struck Bligh Reef in Prince William Sound in 1989 and when the Deepwater Horizon exploded in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, causing the worst environmental disaster in U.S. history, we see that key decisions were frequently made without assessing the risks, and sufficient prevention measures were not always taken. When extreme cases did occur, responses were often delayed and opportunities to reduce damage were lost. Most recently, the lesson to prepare for worst-case scenarios was repeated with the double disaster of the east Japan earthquake and tsunami in 2011.

It has been said that those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

Unfortunately, economic action plan 2012, or the inaction plan for the environment, and Bill C-38, the budget implementation bill, show a complete failure to learn from the past, namely that past cuts to the environment have resulted in dire consequences and that worst-case scenarios do occur.

Instead, the budget implementation bill continues the Conservative government's war on the environment. An astonishing 150 pages of the 400-plus-page budget are focused on streamlining or gutting environmental oversight. The government is absolutely trying to avoid public scrutiny by jamming such major changes into Bill C-38, thereby avoiding specific study of the changes at individual parliamentary committees. Critics have called it an affront to democracy. As a result, on Friday I called upon the government to hive off changes to environmental protection and then send them to the relevant committee for a thorough clause-by-clause study.

Bill C-38 is an attack on our best means of defence, namely environmental protection monitoring and emergency response. The budget severely cuts Environment Canada, reduces our number of scientists, eliminates the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy, the independent think tank with a direct mandate from Parliament, silences the government's critics and guts environmental legislation.

Statements by Members

Environment Canada will lose 200 positions. Last summer, the government announced cuts of 700 positions and a 43% cut to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency. Key research and monitoring initiatives, which sample air pollution, industrial emissions, water quality, waste water et cetera, and partnerships for a greener economy will be cut \$7.5 million.

It is important that parliamentarians have the opportunity to do due diligence and to identify all areas of scientific research and partnerships to be cut and to see how each identified cut is projected to impact decision-making and the development of public policy.

• (1350)

Critics of the government are being silenced through changes to the Canada Revenue Agency and attempts to seize control of the university research agenda. Critics are also being silenced through exclusion of concerned groups and citizens from the environmental review process for pipelines.

Bill C-38 effectively dismantles Canada's environmental laws as we know them, by the repeal of the Kyoto Implementation Act and the wholesale repeal of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act and its replacement with a new law that allows the federal government to avoid environmental reviews of many potentially harmful projects and to do less-comprehensive reviews where they still occur. What are the impacts of the repeal of CEAA on regulatory decision-making and the risk of project-specific and cumulative environmental impacts? What is the adequacy of the environmental assessment process in each province and territory and the impacts of industrial projects that cross provincial borders? The weakening of several environmental laws including species at risk in water and near elimination of fish habitat protection in the Fisheries Act puts species from coast to coast to coast at increased risk of habitat loss and population decline. The authority of the federal cabinet to approve new pipeline projects is now above the National Energy Board.

Astoundingly, as the government guts environmental legislation to fast-track development of major projects such as the Northern Gateway Pipeline and to allow oil tankers in northern British Columbia waters, it is cutting \$3.8 million from emergency disaster response and consolidating the unit that responds to oil spill emergencies in central Canada, namely Gatineau and Montreal. Key questions regarding the government's preparation for and ability to respond to environmental emergencies should include how many positions in the unit will be slashed; how consolidating the unit in Quebec will impact operations and the predicted response time to travel from the new location to the oil spill; whether the unit will have the financial and technical resources necessary to respond to oil spill emergencies, including those emergencies involving diluted bitumen on the Pacific and Atlantic coasts and along the proposed route of the Northern Gateway Pipeline project; and what action the government has undertaken regarding risk assessment and worst-case scenarios related to the navigation of oil tankers and potential diluted bitumen oil spills.

With independent science squashed, environmental legislation gutted and critics silenced, what stands in the way of environmental disaster? The government must stop its war on the environment, science and indeed anyone who threatens to stand in its way of fast-

tracking development. Canada needs robust environmental legislation to protect ecosystems, the health and safety of Canadians, the communities in which we live, the economy and our livelihoods.

I will finish by saying that I spent years of my career undertaking disaster prevention, response and recovery, helping organizations across North America prepare for extreme events resulting from climate change and preparing for pandemics, as well as designing the full disaster preparedness program for the university. The United Nations development program has recently asked me to be on the steering committee for international parliamentarians regarding disaster reduction.

Finally, in the wake of disasters, people often wonder whether there was a way to protect both people and property from such devastating losses. The answer is a resounding "yes, by taking action to prevent future damage before a problem occurs". In order to prevent another tragedy, the government must ensure that Environment Canada's programs and scientists are fully funded to support scientific excellence in prevention, monitoring and emergency response and hive off the environmental protection sections from Bill C-38 and allow public scrutiny of the bill through clause-by-clause study at the appropriate committee.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1355)

[English]

TED ROGERS SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

Mr. Joe Daniel (Don Valley East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to inform the House that the Ted Rogers School of Management of Ryerson University in Toronto was recently presented with its Certificate of Accreditation by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business. The awarding of this accreditation is a tremendous accomplishment for the Ted Rogers School of Management, for Ryerson University and for Canada.

The attainment of this accreditation by the Ted Rogers School of Management is a very prestigious honour that attests to Canada's success in developing outstanding business schools and to the importance of the role that our business schools play in helping to create an economically vibrant and prosperous society from which all Canadians can benefit.

It must be noted that this will help Canada stay competitive in the global market, and that many students from Don Valley East attend Ryerson University.

Statements by Members

I invite all members of the House to join me in warmly congratulating the Ted Rogers School of Management, in particular, its dean, Dr. Ken Jones, and the president, Sheldon Levy, on this outstanding accomplishment.

* * *

● (1400)

[Translation]

RAIL SERVICE

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since 1876, people from northern New Brunswick have been taking the train to go on vacation, get to medical appointments and travel to university.

VIA Rail currently uses tracks operated by Canadian National. Now CN is planning to stop operating the section of track between Campbellton and Moncton because it is not profitable. If that happens, people from northern New Brunswick will become more isolated and our region's economic recovery will be hindered.

As an independent crown corporation established in 1977, VIA Rail Canada provides passenger rail services on behalf of the Government of Canada. I sincerely hope that the Government of Canada will not abandon the people of northern New Brunswick and that it will do whatever it takes to maintain rail service, which is essential to our communities.

* * *

[English]

KHALSA DAY PARADE

Mr. Parm Gill (Brampton—Springdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am thrilled to share with the House the incredible celebrations that took place in Toronto this past weekend. The Khalsa Day parade showcased our country's rich diversity, cultural traditions and unity.

What is so special about this annual event is that it brings us all together, regardless of faith, to share in the Sikh religion's values of service to others, harmony and equality. These are principles that our nation holds dear. These are the same principles that Canadians build their families on and that our government defends at home and abroad.

The strength of the Sikh community emanates across Canada. The Khalsa Day parade is a time to celebrate and also a time that reminds us all about enriching Canada through participation, peace and togetherness.

I would like to thank all of the organizers and volunteers who made this celebration a wonderful experience for everyone.

* * *

VOLUNTEERISM

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize a young woman from St. George's in the riding of Random—Burin—St. George's.

In 2009, while a student at Memorial University of Newfoundland, Laura Chubb was part of a group that travelled to Tanzania in

Africa to teach men and women in the HIV and AIDS ravaged Pemba Island.

She was so affected by the suffering she witnessed, she later returned to Africa on her own, this time to Kenya, intent on documenting the suffering she witnessed, but also to show the world the beauty of East Africa and to share a message of hope. While in Kenya, Laura volunteered with Kwacha Africa, helping in some of the worst famine-affected areas of the country.

Although Laura is busy working on a Master's Degree in Kinesiology, she is also preparing for her next trip. In May she will leave for Peru and spend 50 days assisting residents with the new farming techniques and helping build a new community centre.

Laura Chubb sees the world as a place in which we are responsible for the well-being of each other. I ask all members of the House to join me in recognizing this compassionate young woman who is doing her part to make a difference.

* * *

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, spring has firmly entrenched itself once again in Peterborough county and this spring, as has been the case for generations, local farm families are gearing up to once again sow the seeds that will lead to the fall harvest.

As a person fortunate to have been born and raised on the farm, I understand the hard work that goes into producing the food we eat and export to the world.

Just this past weekend, one could pretty much watch as the wheat planted last fall stretched from the ground, while farm equipment hastily went to work tilling the fertile soil of Peterborough county, making way for the planting of corn and bean crops that will support everything from livestock to five star restaurants.

As the federal representative, I could not be more proud of our agricultural producers and farm families, regardless of whether they are operating in the supply managed sectors such as poultry and dairy or producers of beef, pork, lamb or grain and oilseeds. All of them are doing their part and they are all contributing to the strength of our country and to our county.

I am proud that our government stands with our farmers. We are opening markets and we are growing forward together. I cannot predict the weather, but I can predict that our agricultural sector will continue to grow in Canada. One more thing I know, nothing runs like a Deere.

* * *

● (1405)

[Translation]

21ST QUÉBEC ENTREPRENEURSHIP CONTEST—SOUTH WEST DIVISION

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on April 11, I attended the awards ceremony for the 21st edition of the south west division of the Québec Entrepreneurship Contest, which was held in my riding.

Statements by Members

This year, nearly 70 applications were submitted to the contest. That is a record number of new entrepreneurs. The jury conferred 11 awards in seven categories, and I am very proud to announce that nine of the winners are from my riding.

I wish to congratulate Bluespace, Eau Matelo, Atrium 64, Centre la Tienda-d'ici à Compostelle, Logiciels Héritage, Opera VMan, Panoplie, So Food and Zandel Media on their projects.

I am also proud to celebrate the creation of new small and medium-sized businesses in my riding. They help to create stable, innovative, high quality jobs and contribute to the prosperity of our nation.

* * *

[English]

RED ROAD LODGE

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I recognize a constituent who makes a difference, not only where he lives but also in the inner city of Winnipeg.

Richard Walls is an individual who saw possibility when others only saw an old hotel building. He created Red Road Lodge, a 40-room transitional housing facility providing support services for at-risk individuals. Through the medium of art, the lodge is able to assist those who have no other way to express themselves and the artwork of these individuals is impressive.

I was honoured to announce for the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development two important projects in Winnipeg: the North End Women's Centre and Red Road Lodge, which are receiving \$128,000 in funding. By working together, we are helping these community projects and partnerships to improve and create services and facilities for homeless and at-risk individuals.

Once again, I commend the great work being done by my constituent, Richard Walls, and Red Road Lodge.

* * *

QUEEN'S DAY

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Winnipeg South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to rise in the House today in celebration of the official birthday of Her Majesty Queen Beatrix, Queen of the Netherlands. Queen's Day is celebrated throughout the Netherlands and in many parts around the world.

In Ottawa a reception will be hosted by the Dutch Ambassador, Mr. Wim Geerts, at his residence for Canadian guests and members of the Dutch community. The Hon. Mr. Abdul Nasser El Hakim, Minister of Economic Development of Curacao, and members of his delegation will attend tonight and are in Ottawa with us today.

Today, one million people in Canada are of Dutch descent and they are celebrating this important birthday. On behalf of the Canada-Netherlands Parliamentary Friendship Group, I would like to extend best wishes to Her Majesty as she celebrates her birthday and welcome Minister El Hakim and his delegation to Ottawa.

[Translation]

MARIE-SOL SAINT-ONGE

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on March 8, Marie-Sol Saint-Onge, a 34-year-old mother of two boys, aged 5 and 8, and an artist who lives in my riding, was hospitalized with the deadly flesh-eating disease.

Despite all the wonderful care she received, the disease spread. Last month, Marie-Sol's arms and legs were amputated. She will never again be able to care for her children in the same nurturing way. It is her children and her husband Alain who will have to wrap her in all their love.

Marie-Sol's family life and professional life will never be the same. To help the family, a number of fundraising activities are being organized. My team and I will be participating in a bowl-a-thon on Saturday, May 5.

Today, I am asking for everyone's support for Marie-Sol.

Marie-Sol, our thoughts are with you. We wish you well.

* * *

[English]

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was saddened to learn about the attack on a church yesterday in Nairobi, Kenya. One person died and fifteen people were wounded when a grenade was thrown among parishioners attending Sunday service at God's House of Miracles International Church

• (1410)

[Translation]

Canada stands with the people of Kenya, who wish to live in peace and have the freedom to choose and celebrate their religion according to their beliefs.

Although we do not yet know who is behind these attacks, we condemn all those who use violence in this place of worship. We hope that the perpetrators will be brought to justice quickly.

[English]

On behalf of all Canadians, we extend our deepest sympathies to the family and friends of the parishioner killed in this attack and wish a speedy recovery to the injured.

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WESTON COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my riding of York South—Weston has an amazing gem of a school in Weston Collegiate Institute. When principal Deborah Blair arrived three years ago, the school was plagued with non-stop bullying, especially among girls. She led students and staff through training in a remarkable program called "Restorative Practices". It is a whole school approach based on the belief "not to penalize, but to restore. Victims are empowered to play a key role in addressing the harm that has been done".

Statements by Members

Victims and the accused are brought together in restorative conferences led by peers and attended by parents and staff.

The program has been so successful that these conferences are now rare. In three years, office referrals of students have gone from 80 each day to just 5. Suspensions are down from 151 to just 46. As a result of the declining suspensions, student achievement has gone up and the numbers of credits earned has increased.

Sometimes the most effective way to change behaviour is not to punish but to restore. There is a great lesson at Weston Collegiate Institute for all of us.

* * *

RAIL SAFETY WEEK

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the few legitimate roles of government is the protection of the individual and the preservation of safety and security. That is why it is important for us to celebrate Rail Safety Week.

Since 2007, our government has increased rail safety inspectors, has increased investments in new security technology, provided a partnership with our industry partners and made 2,000 presentations to raise awareness about safety and security around the tracks. The results are clear: a 23% reduction in accidents and a 26% reduction in derailments since 2007.

Furthermore, the House, in the spirit of unanimity, has come together to pass Bill S-4, which would amend and improve the Railway Safety Act.

I congratulate all members, and in particular the Minister of Transportation, for moving forward with these strong improvements to continue to preserve the safety and security of our people around the tracks.

* * *

NOT MYSELF TODAY CAMPAIGN

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one in five Canadians are affected by mental health problems. Many of them will not be able to access the care they need because of the long-standing stigma and negative stereotyping that make them afraid to seek the help they need.

The “Not Myself Today” campaign by Partners for Mental Health aims to transform and improve mental health in Canada by raising awareness, encouraging better treatment and providing funding for research, for support and for better workplace policies.

[Translation]

Each one of us in this House has a friend or family member with a mental illness. Some of us will also have a mental illness in our lifetime. It is time to speak up and let those with mental illness know that they are not alone.

[English]

Let us agree today to stand up for Canadians with mental illness as they face these insurmountable barriers.

I encourage all members of the House to visit notmyselftoday.ca and sign the pledge to improve mental health in Canada

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the official opposition announced his shadow cabinet last week. These appointments show quite clearly what the NDP's plan is for the economy.

The appointment of the member for Parkdale—High Park as finance critic is particularly telling. The long-time union boss has voted against every tax cut for Canadians, including lowering the GST, income splitting and the creation of the tax-free savings account. She has even stated that the tax on employers is too low today and should be increased. A reversal of these tax cuts is estimated to cost Canadians over \$45 billion in capital investment and a loss of 233,000 jobs.

Choosing the member for Parkdale—High Park as finance critic reveals where the NDP stand on taxes and the economy: higher taxes, higher debt, less growth.

Canadians cannot afford the NDP's dangerous economic experiments. Our government remains committed to our low-tax plan for jobs, growth and long-term prosperity.

* * *

[Translation]

DECORUM IN THE HOUSE

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I am announcing our team's intention to discuss and work with you, as the Speaker of the House, and with the other parties on giving people the decorum they expect from their elected officials.

● (1415)

[English]

I will quote my friend Jack Layton, who about a year said:

We will disagree passionately at times but passionate debate is essential in this place. We may disagree but we must show each other respect at all times because Canadians elected each and every one of us here. When we do not show respect for each other as individuals, then we are not showing respect for the Canadians who sent us here.

To honour Jack's belief in this place and to honour the role we have been given by Canadians, let us all work together to reform this place, to bring it to a higher level of discussion, to a more respectful discussion on behalf of all Canadians.

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PUBLIC SECTOR UNIONS

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, union bosses continue to ramp up their fiery rhetoric and have engaged in an unprecedented campaign of fear and smear as they dig in their heels to fight our government's responsible and moderate deficit-fighting measures.

This week, the union of PSAC is proposing hiking dues on its members with a new levy. What would this new levy be used for? It would be used for partisan purposes, such as political action campaigns, a strike fund that already has over \$29 million and a new million-dollar fund to impose public sector union resolutions.

First, public servants are not given a choice on whether or not to join the union, and now their self-interested bosses want to unanimously impose a partisan levy on the employees they are supposed to be protecting.

Our government will stand strong against public sector union bosses trying to pick the pockets of their own members to pay for their outlandish media campaigns and vote themselves hefty pension bonuses.

We are here for all Canadians, to ensure that —

The Speaker: Order, please. Oral questions.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada's Parliamentary Budget Officer says that he agrees with the Auditor General that there were two sets of books for the F-35, one presented publicly, the other, with much higher figures, for Conservative eyes only. Kevin Page said, "you do get the sense there were different books.... It looked like [the government was] lowballing".

Canadians are still waiting to know the real price tag for these jets.

When will the Conservatives stop lowballing, cancel this program and start from scratch with a transparent and open tender process? When will they start respecting taxpayer money?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has clearly communicated in the budget that we have set out to replace Canada's fleet of aging CF-18s, and we will stay within that budget. Our numbers cover the acquisition costs for the F-35. However, other numbers cited include operating costs.

Canada has not signed a contract and has not spent any money acquiring the F-35. That is why we are proceeding with our seven-point plan, led by the very capable and able Minister of Public Works.

[Translation]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have two sets of books for the F-35s: the private one with the real numbers and the public one they have used to mislead Parliament and the public.

They have already spent millions of dollars and are about to squander billions more on a plane that does not even work. At the same time, a two-billion-dollar plan to buy new combat vehicles that is two years behind schedule has to go back to the drawing board because it was poorly managed as well.

Oral Questions

When will they get their military procurement house in order?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the recent announcement with respect to the second acquisition shows just how clearly and how appropriately this government deals with the acquisition of equipment for our men and women in uniform.

We had a fairness advisor who played an active role working with the Department of National Defence and the Department of Public Works to ensure that taxpayers had a credible process and that the process was followed.

The reality is that those of us on this side of the House want to end the decade of darkness and actually do something that those on the opposition side do not want to do, which is actually give equipment to our men and women in uniform who do a heck of a good job standing up for Canadian values right around the world.

[Translation]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when will they stop trying to hoodwink us with answers like that? From the F-35s to combat vehicles, not to mention search and rescue aircraft, the Conservatives' sorry management is hurting our Canadian Forces and costing taxpayers dearly.

The Conservatives are trying to conceal information, camouflage costs and confuse the issue by misleading Canadians. According to the rules of good public administration, there must be a public tender and the contract should be awarded to the lowest qualified bidder.

Why are they refusing to follow the rules of good public administration?

• (1420)

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all the rules have been respected with respect to the procurement of the F-35. There was a long process to establish the only fifth-generation fighter to ensure that when the CF-18s, which were designed in the 1970s and acquired in the early 1980s, reached the end of their lifespan at around 2020, we would have a fleet of airplanes for our air force to ensure that we can protect Canadian sovereignty, to ensure that we can follow through on the duty to protect as the men and women of the Royal Canadian Air Force did in Libya where they performed admirably for Canada and admirably for NATO.

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, speaking of non-answers, the Canadian Association of Journalists has just voted the Conservative government the most secretive in Canadian history.

Oral Questions

We can look at the minister the government put in charge of spinning the openness. The Muskoka minister ran a \$50 million slush fund through his constituency office and then buried the documents and is refusing to tell Canadians what services are on the chopping block.

The Prime Minister promised Canadians that he would establish open and accountable government. Why did he break that promise?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was seven minutes ago that the House leader for the NDP stood and talked about a new decorum. He talked about putting an end to name-calling, treating people with respect and calling them by their proper titles and proper names. It lasted seven minutes. The repeat offender is at it again.

I encourage the House leader for the NDP to get his own side to fall in line—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is the Conservatives' sense of entitlement. They expect us to be subservient. Our job and their job is to be respectful of the taxpayer, which returns me to the fact that they made promises to the Canadian taxpayer and they have turned their ministerial departments into black holes of accountability, which is why the Minister of International Cooperation was able to hide dubious amounts of lavish spending.

The Prime Minister's obsession with secrecy is allowing his ministers to break the rules time and time again.

Why is the government committed to misrepresenting spending, hiding the books and misrepresenting Parliament?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, they have done no such thing. In fact, it was this government, at the very start of our mandate in 2006, that created the Federal Accountability Act, the most sweeping anti-corruption legislation in the world today. We have made great strides, of course, in delivering more information to Canadians, not only to the opposition members and to the media, but to Canadians directly. There are 272,000 data sets online right now at data.gc.ca. That is our commitment to opening the government and it will continue.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General has been very clear. The government kept two sets of books on the F-35 issue and that duplicity was known and condoned at the highest levels.

While the government was claiming the full life cycle costs would be only \$14.7 billion, it knew full well that was not true. The truth was something over \$25 billion.

Who in the government made the strategic decision to not tell the truth?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is simply not the case. The member opposite will not be surprised that I do not accept the premise of his question.

This government is seeking to ensure that when the useful lifespan of the CF-18 fleet comes to an end in 2020 we have an aircraft for the men and women of the Royal Canadian Air Force that will do the job that the Government of Canada and Canadians are asking them to do. This is something that is foreign to the Liberal Party. The man that it appointed as Chief of the Defence Staff of the Canadian Forces defined the Liberals' term in office as a decade of darkness.

We are working hard to ensure that does not happen again.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government's military procurement record is a joke and has already cost us billions of dollars too much.

Now the government is announcing that its new F-35 secretariat will be called the new Canadian fighter aircraft secretariat.

My question is very simple. Can we count on this government to launch an open and transparent competitive bidding process to replace the CF-18 as soon as possible? Time is running out.

● (1425)

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was the previous government, a Liberal government, that began the process to select a new aircraft for our Canadian Forces. It was the Liberal government that spent over \$300 million on arranging and designing this aircraft. It is our government that wants to be sure that the Canadian Forces have the equipment they need to do the job that our government and Canadians ask of them.

* * *

[*English*]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in his report on the Walkerton tragedy in Ontario, Mr. Justice Dennis O'Connor said:

...Walkerton's drinking water system became contaminated with deadly bacteria... Seven people died, and more than 2,300 became ill. The community was devastated.

Judge O'Connor drew a direct link to provincial budget cuts imposed by the Harris regime in Ontario.

Why would the federal government now follow that same path by gutting environmental protection and downgrading food inspection? Why is it risking another Walkerton?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the NDP warned Canadians and warned all of us this in this House that the Liberals would become more and more desperate and more and more panicky to decide on how they can get attention in this House.

I find the motion brought forward by the Liberal Party says a lot more about the Liberals.

Clearly, the leader of the Liberal Party wants to change the topic. His own caucus and his own party will not defend his time in government, and his own former cabinet sitting on the NDP benches will not defend his leadership.

Canadians will not be fooled by this partisan smear.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we already knew that the RCMP was looking into the alleged corruption at the Canada Revenue Agency offices in Montreal. Now we know that the problem far exceeds the scope of this investigation.

The NDP has obtained documents showing that more than 450 problematic cases over a period of eight years caused great risk within the agency.

How can the minister cut hundreds of millions of dollars from Revenue Canada when it already has so many problems?

[English]

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the integrity of our tax system is important to all Canadians. I can assure the House that our government will take all steps necessary to ensure that it is protected.

Our government has increased CRA's budget for internal investigations by 127% and we have nearly doubled the number of its investigators because any misconduct is unacceptable. CRA employees are in positions of public trust and we demand professional and ethical conduct for all Canadian taxpayers.

[Translation]

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today is the last day for filing income tax returns. Canadians are providing sensitive information to an organization rocked by serious allegations of corruption. There is talk of hundreds of cases of falsified documents, fraud and abuse of authority. With all the ethics problems the government is having these days, it really cannot set itself up as an example.

People want to put their trust in a revenue agency that has the means to fight tax evasion. Why is the agency's budget being cut?

[English]

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said before, employee wrongdoing will not be tolerated at CRA. We have increased our budget by 127%, and that has doubled the number of investigators. Employees are required to respect the obligations and laws of the system in which they are employed, and we will not take any less from them.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, tonight is the deadline for most Canadians to file their taxes, and taxpayers who play by the rules are concerned to see corruption scandals at the Canada Revenue Agency. To make matters worse, the Conservatives have quietly removed oversight from the Canada Revenue Agency. The government's solution to internal problems is less oversight and less accountability.

Oral Questions

Canadians deserve better. Will the minister respect taxpayers by strengthening oversight at the CRA?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a matter of fact, we have strengthened oversight at CRA. As a matter of fact, as I just said, we have increased the budget by 127% and doubled the number of investigators. We have taken steps to ensure the integrity of the Canadian tax system and the professionalism of our workforce.

* * *

• (1430)

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the opposite is true.

[Translation]

Canadians must be able to trust their revenue agency. They would also like it if the Conservatives were accountable. Unfortunately, all the Conservatives do is to cut services to Canadians by eliminating jobs.

The regional offices of Canada Economic Development are being closed and internal auditor positions are being eliminated. This work might be given to the Auditor General's Office, but reductions are being felt there already.

Why do the Conservatives want Canada Economic Development to be less accountable?

[English]

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have found ways in the back-office operations of government to find efficiencies and better ways to deliver excellent services to Canadians. At the same time, we have given these responsibilities to the Comptroller General of Canada, who already has that oversight over 47 different departments and agencies. He has the expertise and the ability to do the right thing in terms of making sure that we can follow the dollars, and we do so in an efficient way so that we can concentrate on delivering better services to Canadians.

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AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have seen how well the Conservatives have been following the dollars.

Canada's civil service delivers vital programs that Canadian families rely on. These are services that keep Canadians safe, such as protecting the food we put on our tables, yet Conservatives are cutting front-line service jobs such as food inspectors and border guards. The Parliamentary Budget Officer confirmed last week what we have been warning about. Significant additional details are missing on who is getting cut and why.

When will the government come clean and tell Canadians which of the services they rely on are being chopped?

Oral Questions

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would simply like to say that this member is wrong. I will give a few examples from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Our food supply system remains safe. Our government is maintaining federal meat inspections and meat inspectors. Since 2006, we have hired an additional 733 food inspection staff, including 170 meat inspection staff. Clearly this member is in error.

* * *

[Translation]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today we learned that oil lobbyists changed this government's environmental policies. That explains the cuts. That explains why the government abandoned environmental protection. Future generations will pay for these bad decisions. They will pay for the fire sale of our natural resources and for the policies of a government that listens only to its lobbyist buddies.

Why is the minister still ignoring Canadians who are calling for the sustainable, responsible development of our natural resources? Why are the Conservatives so irresponsible?

[English]

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government consults broadly with Canadian citizens, business interests and with environmental groups. For that reason, in that context we are opposed to the non-scientific and discriminatory fuel quality directive. We are opposed to the attempt to block the pipelines that will provide hundreds of thousands of jobs and billions of dollars of revenue to governments to support social programs. We will continue to work on behalf of Canadians.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if the government is acting on behalf of Canadians, it should know that Canadians want and deserve a government that conducts responsible environmental reviews.

The government's approach is irresponsible natural resources policy, irresponsible environmental policy and bad energy economics. To be sustainable over the long term and maintain access to markets, we have to responsibly manage the impacts of our natural resources sector, so why is the government changing the rules to exclude Canadians and exclude scientific experts from reviews around crucial issues such as pipelines?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there will be every opportunity for a full, comprehensive, independent scientific review.

Furthermore, there will be an opportunity for those who have expertise to appear and to be heard at the hearings. Furthermore, those with a direct interest in the construction of the pipeline will have an opportunity to be heard.

There is a scope for these hearings, and those who have something to say about the scope of the hearings will have an opportunity to be heard. This is an overt and transparent policy.

• (1435)

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the poorest countries are getting cut while wealthy countries are maintaining their aid levels.

This favouritism makes it clear the government is playing games with foreign aid, but what can Canadians expect from a minister who takes \$1,000 limo rides to a conference called "Saving Children's Lives"?

Will the Conservatives end this malicious transformation of Canada's previously respected aid system and commit to reversing these inappropriate cuts once and for all?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government wants to ensure that those living in poverty are going to have a great future over the long term.

That is why we want to make sure that our aid is effective and is going to make a difference. This means creating employment, making sure that unemployed youth have a great future. It means saving lives of mothers and children. By being focused, targeted and looking for results, we will succeed and we will help those living in poverty.

[Translation]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of International Cooperation is getting a lot of attention, but for all the wrong reasons.

While she is spending thousands of dollars on limousines and lavish suites, her department is slashing aid to the poorest countries.

Zambia, Rwanda, Niger and Zimbabwe are among the poorest countries in the world, yet they are losing nearly all the assistance they were receiving from the Canadian government.

Can the minister justify the cuts in international aid, especially relative to her luxury lifestyle?

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we want to get results, as I have said.

For example, today there are 8,000 producers, 150 micro and small agricultural enterprises that saw their revenue increase from 20% to 65% in Senegal. In Burkina Faso 173 organizations have used quality technical financial services to help their people come out of poverty.

This is getting more teachers, more kids in school, more vaccines for children. This is getting results.

*Oral Questions***SENIORS**

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I recently met with advocates against seniors poverty and was told that OAS is the tip of the spear when it comes fighting poverty among Canadian seniors, especially the disabled.

During a recent meeting, the president of the Council of Canadians with Disabilities said that many disabled Canadians count the days until they are 65 so that they can live poverty-free for the first time. Shame on those kinds of statements.

The disabled want to know this: why is the Prime Minister hurting those who can least afford these meanspirited cuts to the OAS?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we are doing is making sure that OAS is there not just for today's retirees but for future generations as well.

What we are trying to do is make sure that we have a sustainable system that will help all seniors. The member should remember that it was our government that introduced the registered disability savings plan and that signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Our government is standing up for the disabled. It is too bad the opposition will not do the same.

* * *

[Translation]

HOMELESSNESS

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in Quebec, people can count on the Réseau d'aide aux personnes seules et itinérantes de Montréal, or RAPSIM, an organization that works with 90 agencies that help homeless people. RAPSIM embodies Quebec's consciousness of the reality of homelessness. Indeed, times are tough, but they are even tougher for the homeless.

Why is the minister setting a precedent by refusing to grant RAPSIM its modest subsidy under the federal homelessness partnering strategy, when a federal-provincial committee strongly recommended doing so?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was our government that signed an agreement with the provinces and the territories in order to provide funding for five years to fight homelessness. We did that.

Across Canada, there are projects with merit, but they will have to apply for funding next year because other applications have greater merit.

* * *

●(1440)

[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has been almost four years since the Prime Minister stood in this House and promised healing and reconciliation for the aboriginal people of Canada as part of the apology. Since that time, the government has

acted in exactly the opposite direction. First, astonishingly, the Conservatives killed the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. Now they have slashed the funding for first nations, Inuit and Métis organizations delivering health and healing from coast to coast to coast in this country.

Will the Prime Minister reverse these cuts or will he admit that the apology was just hollow and a sham?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my priority is to protect the front-line essential services of health care throughout Canada. The answer relating to NAHO is very simple. There was an AFN resolution and a letter from three of the five National Aboriginal Health Organization members. We were asked by NAHO to wind down the organization because it was dysfunctional, and we listened. Why does the member opposite not accept that recommendation coming from the aboriginal leaders?

* * *

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, families from coast to coast to coast rely on the fisheries for their livelihoods. This industry is an important part of our economy, so people are asking themselves why the government is rolling back decades of important progress in the protection of fish habitat and the sustainability of this important industry.

Why has the Minister of Finance allowed himself to be shoved aside by his colleagues, who are shilling for big oil, and allowed his act to be gutted?

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the question from the member opposite and congratulate him on his new position.

We are focusing our fish habitat protection rules on Canada's fisheries, not on farmers' fields. For too long, we have heard countless stories about DFO protecting ditches and man-made reservoirs and flood plains when they should have been protecting the rivers, lakes and oceans that are home to our fish.

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are not talking about ditches; we are talking about rivers and lakes and the fact that they are not isolated bodies. Their health depends on the entire watershed, just as the health of our fisheries depends on a deeply interconnected ecosystem. Why does the minister not get the fact that firing fish scientists and gutting fish habitat protection will harm our fishing communities and the people who depend on it?

Oral Questions

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to announce new measures to focus on managing threats to Canada's fisheries to ensure their ongoing productivity and sustainability. These changes will provide greater certainty and consistency for stakeholders such as landowners and will enhance partnership opportunities with provinces, territories, conservation organizations, aboriginals and others.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this weekend Swiss officials laid charges against a former vice-president of SNC-Lavalin over very serious concerns about corruption, fraud and money laundering in North Africa. It is clear that something is amiss at SNC-Lavalin. Just months ago, the Conservatives sold off Canada's nuclear company, AECL, to the same business. Were they aware of the problems at SNC-Lavalin when they decided to hand over AECL at a rock-bottom price?

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadian consulate officials stand ready to provide consular assistance to Mr. Ben Aissa and are liaising with local authorities to determine his situation.

[Translation]

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, corruption, fraud, tax evasion: concerns about SNC-Lavalin are not new. We should not forget that it was going to build a \$275 million prison for the Gadhafi regime.

Canada must set high standards for companies working abroad. The office responsible for this oversight costs taxpayers money, but produces no results.

Is the government co-operating with Switzerland? Does the tax evasion concern Canada? Will corporate social responsibility finally be taken seriously?

● (1445)

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are very serious allegations being made against this company. There are very serious investigations going on. The government will do everything it can to support these investigations and to be as helpful as we possibly can.

Anyone who breaks the law should bear the full force of the law. That is something this government strongly supports, in Canada or abroad. High ethical standards for Canadian enterprise are not up for negotiation.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, being a former RCMP member and a member of the aboriginal caucus, I can tell members that Canadians are concerned about crime, which is why they gave our government a strong mandate to keep our streets and communities safe. Unlike the opposition, we believe in a balanced approach, which includes

stronger sentencing, rehabilitation for those who are truly committed and support for community crime prevention programs.

Can the Minister of Justice please update this House as to the status of the aboriginal justice strategy?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to the safety and security of Canada's streets and communities. Today, I am pleased to confirm that the government will continue to support the aboriginal justice strategy. This funding helps make the justice system more fair, effective and accessible for first nations. These programs ensure that offenders are held to account. They also have been shown to reduce recidivism rates.

The aboriginal justice strategy helps to address the overrepresentation of aboriginal people in the Canadian justice system both as victims and as offenders. This is further proof that we are the party with a balanced approach to fighting crime in this country.

* * *

[Translation]

HEALTH

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, families of gravely ill children need help right now, not a photo op with the Prime Minister.

The Conservatives made a commitment to help families with gravely ill children during the last election campaign, as well as families of missing and murdered children, but in the recent budget they have not kept their promise.

Why are the Conservatives going back on their promise and washing their hands of sick children and their families?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is well aware of the difficulties facing families with seriously ill members. That is why our government has expanded eligibility for compassionate care benefits. And during the last election campaign, we promised Canadians to review these provisions and to help people with gravely ill children. We will keep that promise.

[English]

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives keep making cuts they were never honest about before, like the decision to cut the OAS. Now they are backing away from the commitment that they made to the parents of gravely ill children.

Oral Questions

The Conservatives brag about having acted to help parents of crime victims, so why are they failing the parents of children who have fallen victim to illness? The Conservatives promised to help. When will they fulfill that promise and why was it not in the budget?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government does want to help families when one of their members is facing a serious illness. That is why we expanded eligibility for compassionate care benefits under EI.

As well, we did make a promise in last year's election campaign that we would be bringing forward assistance for families who have gravely ill children. We intend to keep that promise and we will be doing it soon.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have not seen anything on this so-called promise the Conservatives have made. In fact, at her own press conference today the minister refused to answer questions about it because apparently it does not fit with her message of the day. No wonder the Conservative government has a well-earned award for secrecy from The Canadian Association of Journalists.

I ask again. Why will the Conservatives not level with Canadians who want straightforward information, or is their PM-approved message of the day as much information as they think Canadians deserve?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we promised in our campaign in April and May last year to help financially the parents of children who are gravely ill. That was reinforced along the way and we will keep that promise to Canadians

• (1450)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this government has given Canadians cuts to Service Canada, longer and longer wait times for employment insurance, and now, a minister who does not want to answer questions because answers are not on the day's agenda.

The Conservatives seem to be incapable of telling the truth. From the F-35s to changes to old age security to health care cuts, we are still waiting for answers.

It is time to put a stop to this culture of secrecy. When will Canadians get some answers? When will we start seeing some ministerial accountability?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I spoke to the press today to explain the new programs we are introducing. That is sharing information. That is exactly what she asked for. We want our services and programs to help Canadians, and we want to explain those programs to them. That is why we talk to the press. That is what we are doing.

[*English*]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, cuts to CFIA at inspection sites in Newfoundland could put Prince Edward Island's potato industry at risk. Golden nematodes and potato wart are found in Newfoundland's soil. For generations, federal governments have accepted the responsibility and prevented the spread of these pests by inspections at ferry terminals.

Now the government is cancelling the vehicle washing program. Does the government not understand the risk? Will the minister just cancel his hare-brained scheme to get rid of this successful program and protect Prince Edward Island's potato industry?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we commented on this last week. CFIA resources should not be involved in vehicle washing. The agency will continue to be responsible for the inspection of vehicles, but CFIA should not be washing people's vehicles. It is working with industry to find the resources necessary to wash vehicles that are considered to be contaminated with soil.

* * *

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' decision to cut the community access program will leave hundreds of thousands of Canadians without Internet access. In Newfoundland and Labrador alone there are 147 CAP sites. The majority are in remote and rural communities.

According to an Internet survey by Statistics Canada, 46% of Canadians who earn \$30,000 or less do not have access to the Internet or own a computer, the very people for whom the community access program was designed. Will the government stop ignoring the needs of low-income Canadians and continue to fund this essential program?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, this program was launched in 1995 and has met its objectives. When I meet constituents, the vast majority of them are now connected to the Internet at home, while many more have access through their mobile devices.

When we renewed it in the past, members opposite always voted against it. Our government will continue to support the youth internships at community Internet sites. We will focus our efforts on strengthening the infrastructure needed to connect Canadians to the Internet, such as through the spectrum options I announced last March.

*Oral Questions***IMMIGRATION**

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, broken promises and bad management abound. It turns out that the Conservative plan to simply delete almost 300,000 applications in the federal skilled worker backlog is not quite as simple as it sounds. Along with the betrayal of applicants' trust, millions in administrative costs have been left unaccounted for.

Canadians deserve to know: What is the true cost of this misguided plan, and why is this minister making it up as he goes along?

Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, the minister makes nothing up as he goes along. In fact, everything he has done on the immigration file over the past number of months and years has led to a much better system than we were left with, a broken, disgusting system that did not work in this country.

The economic action plan of 2012 includes measures that will transform Canada's suite of economic immigration programs to create a just in time system that works for the people who come to this country, works for the people who live in this country and works for the strength of the Canadian economy.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if the minister is short of solutions, he should come and talk to the NDP. We are very open and could advise him.

People are starting to lose confidence in the system, because the Conservatives keep on inventing new rules. A class action lawsuit is being organized against the Conservatives for how they have mismanaged the immigration backlog.

It has been proven that the government's current plan is costing taxpayers more than it would to come up with a sustainable solution to the problem. How much will the minister's plan cost?

• (1455)

[*English*]

Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the NDP members would take a bit of time to read the budget, they would see exactly what the cost of the strategy would be moving forward with respect to this immigration policy.

More importantly, the immigration committee is spending six hours a day for the next number of days reviewing and determining the extent to which Bill C-31 would have a positive impact on this country.

I simply ask the NDP if it is willing to put its money where its mouth is, because it has not yet. If it wants to come forward with constructive amendments, if it wants to support the legislation that would work for this country and for the refugee system that we have, in fact, it should—

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. member for Prince George—Peace River.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as part of our jobs, growth and long-term prosperity act, our government announced changes to the best weeks EI pilot project to better align this program with local labour market conditions.

Would the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development inform the House about how this new national, legislated approach will make the EI program more fair and responsive to labour market conditions throughout the country, while removing disincentives to work in low-unemployment areas like my riding of Prince George—Peace River?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, starting in April 2013, a new national best weeks program will be introduced to the EI system that would base the number of best weeks on the local unemployment rate. The average of the best weeks would be used to calculate the weekly amount of benefits that EI recipients would get. The current best 14 pilot will be extended through to April next year while this transition goes on.

These changes will remove barriers to employment in low-unemployment areas, but will also ensure that people in regions with similar labour market conditions actually get similar benefits.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism stand on the back of a ship at great expense to our refugees.

Today, we find out in committee that in fact the current system, in terms of detentions, has been working. There is no need to fix the system, in terms of the detentions.

My question for the minister is, and he asked for positive amendments, why is the government pursuing the need to have a one-year minimum detention for refugees when it was made very clear today in committee that it is just not necessary?

Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have to smile when hearing a member of the Liberal Party say there were no problems with the immigration system that the Liberals created a number of years ago and then stand today and say that no changes are necessary. That is why the Liberals are sitting in the third place and we are sitting here.

We are prepared to take the stands necessary. We are prepared to move forward on this legislation. If they actually do, because they have not—not once have they moved any amendments or spoken in a way that was going to be constructive and build upon this system. They have not done it yet. I am going to hold my breath and see.

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week, my Atlantic caucus colleagues and I had the pleasure of visiting Prince Edward Island. We met with people concerned about the Conservatives' total lack of transparency and their habit of making decisions with no local consultation, like the cuts to Veterans Affairs, like the possible elimination of fleet separation and owner-operator policies, or like the closure of Service Canada's claims centre in Montague, which has a severe impact on the local economy and was announced with no notice and no justification.

The people of P.E.I. deserve better. My question is, why is the government refusing to be accountable?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government has done extensive consultations. Pre-budget, ministers of the crown, our entire caucus, went throughout this country to every nook and cranny and consulted with Canadians about the future of our country, about jobs and opportunities and about economic growth. That is what is in the budget, and we are proud of that.

* * *

• (1500)

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nearly one year ago today, Canadian farmers, along with millions of others, helped elect a strong, stable, national Conservative majority government with a focus on creating jobs and economic growth for the agriculture industry. They sent a clear message that they wanted a government that was committed to bolstering trade and opening new markets for their top-quality products.

Last week, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food was joined by industry representatives in Morocco to expand opportunities for our farmers. Could the minister please update the House on the successes of this mission?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Crowfoot for his dedication to farmers and agriculture.

The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food was in Morocco where he formally invited Moroccan officials to Canada in June for the next round of free trade agreement negotiations. He also met with his counterpart to sign a memorandum of understanding to strengthen agricultural co-operation between our two countries.

Out of interest, in 2011, Morocco's agriculture imports from Canada totalled more than \$188 million mainly in durum wheat and pulses. Canadian farmers are eager to build on that number.

* * *

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Association de la presse francophone and the Société franco-manitobaine are worried. Funding rules, which are based on magazine circulation, penalize official language minority communities. Ignoring the linguistic reality means that the quality of

Privilege

information for francophones in Sudbury, Manitoba and Alberta will suffer. Even worse, some magazines may not survive.

Will the Minister of Canadian Heritage exempt these magazines so they can continue to serve francophone communities, yes or no?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the accusations made by my colleague opposite are completely false.

* * *

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, back in March 2005, when the previous Liberal government attempted to place the redefinition of a subsection to the definition of the Canadian Environmental Protection Act within a budget bill, the then opposition leader and current Prime Minister was outraged. He said that this was a backdoor way, a dangerous way of proceeding. He went on to say that it would not allow any parliamentary approval or discussion whatsoever. He said that it was completely unacceptable.

If changing one subsection to environmental law through a budget bill is completely unacceptable, why is changing hundreds of sections of a dozen environmental laws acceptable to the Prime Minister?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been a long-standing practice, of course, for budget implementation bills to actually implement budgets. Our budget is focused on the economic growth and long-term prosperity of the country, and that includes moving forward with responsible resource development so that we can ensure prosperity for generations to come.

Canada has in great quantities the resources the world needs, the emerging developing world, countries like China and India. The development of those resources are the key to the prosperity, wealth and social well-being of Canadians for generations to come. That is why we are moving on it and that is why it is in the budget implementation bill.

The Speaker: The Chair has notice of a question of privilege from the hon. member for Westmount—Ville-Marie.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

ALLEGED INVASION OF PRIVACY

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on a question of privilege to raise a matter that represents a serious offence against the dignity and authority of Parliament and, as such, constitutes a clear contempt of Parliament.

Privilege

● (1505)

[Translation]

On February 24, a package addressed to me was received by the House of Commons delivery service. However, although the package was clearly addressed to me, the shipper used the address of my former office, which is now occupied by the hon. member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord.

The messenger went to the office of the hon. member in question, which signed for the package even though it had my name on it. As we had not received the package, we looked into the matter with the House of Commons delivery service and we contacted the office of the hon. member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, which sent a very clear and short email in response: “Yes, we received the package that was addressed to the hon. member. The thing is that the hon. member regularly receives these sorts of promotional items so we handed them out. Sorry.”

This is a serious offence. What is more, that package contained items that were meant for a charity.

[English]

While a contemptible offence has taken place, regardless of what was contained in the package, it is worth noting that the package contained toys intended as fundraising prizes to raise money for sick children from the north who need to come south for medical treatment. Although an offence against the dignity of the House regardless of the contents, the theft of these contents, in my view, is also an offence against common decency.

I wish to quote from section 356 of the Criminal Code under the heading Theft of Mail, which states:

Everyone commits an offence who

(a) steals

(i) anything sent by post, after it is deposited at a post office and before it is delivered, or after it is delivered but before it is in the possession of the addressee or of a person who may reasonably be considered to be authorized by the addressee to receive mail.

While the member's office has admitted to receiving the package addressed to me, opening this package, removing the contents and giving them away, it remains unclear who specifically took part in the offence. In other words, was it the member himself, members of his staff or both? On this point I will simply note that I have notified the sergeant-at-arms of this situation and, pending his investigation, a further complaint to police may be made. Regardless of who committed the offence, this took place within the parliamentary precinct and as such would constitute a contempt of Parliament.

Maingot's *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, Second Edition, states on page 163:

Each House of Parliament has jurisdiction over its precincts. While outside of “proceedings in Parliament” and parliamentary debate the criminal law applies to Members of the House of Commons, the act of doing something within the “precincts” could constitute a contempt of Parliament...

Furthermore, the opening and/or theft of the member's private correspondence or mail are tantamount to past findings of contempt where an invasion of privacy of members has occurred.

Maingot states on page 256:

The invasion of the privacy of a Member of the Senate or of the House of Commons within the precincts of Parliament by any person also constitutes a prima facie question of privilege. This includes the interception of a private communication on the precincts.

On October 17, 1973, a meeting of the NDP caucus on the precincts was the subject of electronic eavesdropping by a journalist. A question of privilege was raised by the leader of the NDP at the time, David Lewis, who stated on page 6942 of *Debates*:

Whether or not it is illegal under the present Criminal Code, or any other statute of which I may not know, is irrelevant. Certainly it is totally illegal as far as the rules of parliament are concerned. I hope that those responsible will not find it more offensive that I intend it to be when I say that it is morally and socially wrong in every respect for them to have done this.

Those words are as accurate in describing the present event as they were in dealing with that prima facie breach of privilege in 1973.

[Translation]

House of Commons Procedure and Practice, Second Edition, in defining contempt of Parliament, states on page 82:

[...] the House also claims the right to punish, as a contempt, any action which, though not a breach of a specific privilege, tends to obstruct or impede the House in the performance of its functions; obstructs or impedes any member or officer of the House in the discharge of their duties; or is an offence against the authority or dignity of the House, such as disobedience of its legitimate commands or libels upon itself, its members, or its officers.

[English]

It is, I believe, self-evident that the theft of a member's mail within the precincts of Parliament undoubtedly represents an offence against the authority and the dignity of the House, as does the cavalier response of the member's office once confronted and admitting the offence.

I would understand if, in error, the hon. member or his office staff had opened the package. However, what occurred was not simply an error. They received the package, opened it and, once viewing the contents, toys intended for a fundraiser in regard to a cause supporting children, miniature shuttles in this particular case, they did not call and return the contents with an apology for opening the package clearly addressed to me. Instead, they removed the contents and gave them away. That was not only an invasion of my privacy but it was theft. When contacted by my office, they showed no remorse whatsoever for the offence.

I understand that the member is new, having only been elected a year ago, and that his staff may also lack the experience to understand the more complicated nature of privilege, but this is not a complicated matter. Surely the office of the NDP leader has someone responsible for organization who can inform that member and his staff that they do not open packages that are not addressed to them.

While the member and his office are new, there is no excuse for this.

Routine Proceedings

● (1510)

[Translation]

Sadder still is the fact that the beneficiaries of the charity will suffer as a result of this deplorable and unimaginable situation. Sick children, who are supposed to benefit from this care, saw these items that were meant to help them handed out to the hon. member's friends. It was a very offensive act and I cannot accept it.

[English]

Should you rule in my favour, Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to move the appropriate motion.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with intent to my colleague because he raises a point that is important in terms of the correspondence that we receive.

I have talked about this with the member concerned to find out the facts of the matter. I think there may be some discrepancy as to whether there was actually a name on the box. However, we will get to the bottom of this.

At the point of being respectful to the member, who I respect a great deal, it feels like the rhetoric and the use of moral cases in this regard for what appears to be an accident with regard to some toy space shuttles seems to me a mislaying of priorities right now.

I think there are conversations we could have honourably between members to resolve this case. However, if we are talking about small toy shuttles that were erroneously and mistakenly distributed to my colleague's constituents in error, then we can seek to find more toy space shuttles to replace those that were mistakenly given away and find a way to rectify my friend's sense of dignity in this place.

I am not sure if there is any *prima facie* case of anything here. It feels like taking up the House's time for this long for something that we could try to work out between hon. colleagues would be something we could attempt to do. I am a bit confused about the amount of time we have already taken away and the heated rhetoric over this notion of misplaced toys. We will make it right in any way we can.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I did not intend to speak longer about this issue, because the House leader of the Liberal Party was very eloquent and clear. However, the response by the House leader of the official opposition was disappointing.

Everyone, every man and woman, knows that opening another person's mail is a crime. The right thing to do would have been to return the package to the Liberal House leader, but that was not done, unfortunately.

Your response can be very simple and the hon. member could even think it up without your intervention. He could simply buy—with his own money, not out of his budget—more of the objects that were in this box addressed to the Liberal member, give him these objects, and of course, apologize for opening the other member's mail. If that is done, the case is settled.

[English]

Mr. Marc Garneau: Mr. Speaker, in reply to the comment made by the NDP House leader, I want to assure the House that the package was sent from Hope Air and it had my name on it.

● (1515)

The Speaker: I will look into the matter and get back to the House in due course.

Is this in response to the previous question of privilege?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): No, Mr. Speaker, this is not, although I listened with interest to the question of privilege raised by the Liberal House leader with regard to the theft of his spaceships. I am tempted to say, Mr. Speaker, that you are being invited to boldly go where no Speaker before has gone.

The Speaker: Is this a further submission on the question of privilege raised by the member for Toronto Centre?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Yes.

The Speaker: If it is all right with the House, I would not mind getting through the proceedings first. Then I will hear the submissions.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

* * *

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have four reports to table today.

First, I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association respecting its participation in the joint visit of the Sub-Committees on Energy and Environmental Security and Transatlantic Economic Relations held in Edmonton and Fort McMurray, Alberta, and Dawson Creek, British Columbia, from July 11 to 14, 2011.

Second, I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association respecting its participation in the 57th annual meeting of the NATO PA held in Bucharest, Romania, from October 7 to 11, 2011.

Third, I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association respecting its participation at the bureau meeting of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly held in Moscow, Russia, from November 1 to 2, 2011.

Routine Proceedings

Finally, I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association respecting its participation in the spring session 2011 held in Varna, Bulgaria, from May 27 to 30, 2011.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PUBLIC SAFETY AND NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security in relation to its study of Bill C-293, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release act (vexatious complainants), with an amendment.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Hon. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on International Trade in relation to Bill C-23, an act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report it back to the House, without amendment.

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, I am sure members are aware that next week is National Mental Health Week, from May 7 to 13. In advance of that, today is the national day of action for the Not Myself Today campaign that draws attention to mental health in Canada and the fact that we all need to be aware of it, we are all affected by it and we all need to take action.

There have been discussions among the parties and I believe if you seek it, you will find that there is consent for the following motion: That this House pledge its support for the Not Myself Today campaign and urges all Canadians to show their commitment to improved mental health and affirm the pledge of the campaign, "Mental health can no longer be ignored. We are all affected. We are all touched by it".

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

* * *

● (1520)

PETITIONS

ABORTION

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present two sets of petitions.

The first petition calls on Parliament to speedily enact legislation that restricts abortion to the greatest extent possible.

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is again signed by members from western Manitoba.

The petitioners call on the House assembled 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.

[Translation]

KATIMAVIK

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I am presenting a petition signed by over 300 young and not-so-young Canadians who are very frustrated by the government's decision to eliminate funding for Katimavik.

The petition specifically calls on the government to recognize the value of the program for all Canadian communities and Canadian youth.

I urge the government to read the petition and take the opinion of these 300-plus people into consideration.

[English]

OLD AGE SECURITY

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I table today a petition in regard to old age security and the increase in age from 65 to 67.

On that note, the Prime Minister needs to know that what he is doing to the pensions of seniors is wrong. I am prepared to take this issue into the next election and fight for our seniors. We need to protect the right of people to retire at age 65 and we need to ensure that the level of income that our seniors receive is enough to provide for a basic standard of living. Put simply, our seniors deserve better.

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise in the House today to present a petition from hundreds of residents in Kitchener, Ontario in support of Motion No. 312. The principle that basic human rights are inherent and inalienable, not a gift of the state which can be cancelled or withdrawn, is a bedrock constitutional and moral principle of Canadian law in the 21st century.

Therefore, my constituents ask Parliament to ensure that section 223 of our Criminal Code is amended to reflect 21st century evidence and to confirm that every human being is recognized by Canadian law as a human being.

JUSTICE

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present today.

The Minister of Public Safety stood in the House not many weeks ago and told Canadians that if they were against the Conservatives' lawful access legislation, then they stood with pornographers.

I present a petition from members of my riding who beg to differ with the Minister of Public Safety. They have grave concerns about the government's lawful access legislation. In particular, parts of the bill compel telecommunications companies to gather, collect and store personal information from their users and then allow law enforcement agencies to access that legislation without a warrant.

The petition I present today addresses that very grave concern from the members of my constituency.

CANADA POST

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition involves a corporate postal station that Canada Post has suggested it will close in my riding of Davenport. Many people have signed a petition with a lot of concern because they use this postal station every day. It is wheelchair accessible, and there is no other station in that area.

OLD AGE SECURITY

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of constituents from the area of Kippens, Stephenville Crossing and Stephenville in the western part of my riding. They have asked me to present this petition because they object to the Prime Minister's move to increase the age of eligibility for old age security from 65 to 67.

The petitioners say that they find it difficult enough as it is to make ends meet and to have to work another two years to qualify just does not make a lot of sense to them, especially if they work in an environment that is physically challenging, such as fish plants or on the ocean.

They ask that the Prime Minister and the government reconsider this decision and take into account what this will mean in terms of the toll it will take on senior citizens.

●(1525)

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Hon. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the residents in my constituency, I have two petitions.

The first petition calls upon Parliament to confirm that every human being be recognized by Canadian law as a human being by amending section 223 of the Criminal Code in such a way to reflect 21st century medical evidence.

ABORTION

Hon. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from constituents in my riding who ask that we speedily enact legislation to restrict abortion to the greatest extent possible.

ELECTRO-MOTIVE DIESEL

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from the community of London and former workers of Electro-Motive Diesel.

The petitioners want the Parliament of Canada to know that Caterpillar illegally removed equipment from the EMD plant, forced a lockout of its workers in December of 2011, demanded that they take a 50% reduction in wages, slashed benefits and asked them to accept a reduced and insecure pension plan. All the while, these

Routine Proceedings

workers had increased productivity by 20% and the company was making billions and billions in additional profits.

The petitioners want the Parliament of Canada to investigate the conditions of sale of Electro-Motive Diesel to Caterpillar and to immediately enforce any and all appropriate penalties should there be violations under the Investment Canada Act.

We would also like to see the Investment Canada Act strengthened so this does not happen to other workers in our communities.

JUSTICE

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from Newfoundland and Labrador regarding criminal punishment.

The petitioners point out that crime has decreased over the past while and therefore we should put the emphasis on rehabilitation as opposed to just simply looking at criminal punishment as the only way to deal with crime.

The petitioners come from St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, Conception Bay South, as well as Gander.

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my constituents of Kelowna—Lake Country, it is an honour to table two petitions.

The first one is in reference to Canada's 400-year-old definition of a human being. It says that a child does not become a human being until the moment of complete birth, which is contrary to 21st century medical evidence.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to amend section 223 of the Criminal Code in such a way as to reflect 21st century medical evidence.

ABORTION

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is with respect to the fact that Canada is the only nation in the western world, in the company of China and North Korea, without any laws restricting abortion.

As the Supreme Court has said that it is Parliament's responsibility to enact abortion legislation, the petitioners call upon the House of Commons and Parliament assembled to speedily enact legislation that restricts abortion to the greatest extent possible.

[*Translation*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. François Pilon (Laval—Les Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to present a petition signed by my constituents, who are urging the Conservative government to take immediate action and show leadership on the climate change issue.

Routine Proceedings

41ST GENERAL ELECTION

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present two petitions. The first concerns election fraud and is signed by residents of the Toronto area. They are asking the Prime Minister to hold an independent inquiry to discover the truth about who did what in the last federal election and to identify the person or persons responsible. We must protect our electoral system.
[English]

ANIMAL WELFARE

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the next two petitions that I am presenting come from residents of British Columbia. The first petition is from people in the Vancouver area and the second is from people in the Kamloops area.

Both groups of petitioners want the House to look favourably on private member's Bill C-322, submitted by the member of Parliament for British Columbia Southern Interior. The bill seeks to take action to stop the importation of horses for the purpose of slaughter for human consumption. This practice must stop and we must protect our horses.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Thank you for your patience. There have been further discussions, and I believe if you now seek it you will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That this House pledge its support for the Not Myself Today campaign and urge all Canadians to show their commitment to improve mental health and affirm the pledge of the campaign that: "Mental health can no longer be ignored. We are all affected. We are all touched by it."

• (1530)

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

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 questions will be answered today: Nos. 526, 527 and 531.

[Text]

Question No. 526—**Mr. Massimo Pacetti:**

With regard to the Minister of Public Safety's assessment of applications for transfer to Canada by Canadian residents incarcerated abroad: (a) how many applications for transfer to Canada have been submitted by Canadian residents incarcerated abroad to the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) since 2006 and, of these, (i) how many were accepted, (ii) how many were rejected; (b) of the rejected applications, how many have been judged by CSC not to represent a threat to re-offend; (c) of the rejected applications in (b), how many applicants have sought judicial recourse to overturn the Minister's decision; and (d) for the applicants in (c) who sought judicial recourse, how many judgements (i) have been rendered in favour of the applicant, (ii) have been rendered in favour of the Minister of Public Safety, (iii) have not yet been rendered?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Government is committed to making the protection of society the guiding principle in decisions affecting the corrections system. The Safe Streets and Communities Act made important amendments to the International Transfer of Offenders Act to enshrine in law a number of additional key factors in deciding whether an offender would be granted a transfer back to Canada. These factors would include whether, in the opinion of the minister, an offender would, upon return to Canada, endanger public safety; continue to engage in criminal activities following his or her transfer; and endanger the safety of any child, particularly in cases of offenders who have been convicted of sexual abuse.

Decisions would also take into consideration whether a criminal has been participating in his or her rehabilitation and cooperating with law enforcement. These amendments reflect the government's commitment to strengthening the rights of victims, increasing the responsibility of offenders and making our communities safe.

With regard to (a), from January 1, 2006, to March 14, 2012, CSC received 1,657 international transfer applications from Canadian citizens convicted and sentenced abroad. Out of this number, the Minister of Public Safety rendered a decision on 730 cases. The other 934 applications are still in process, have been withdrawn by the applicants, denied by the sentencing country, deemed ineligible by either country, or the offenders were released by the other country and possibly deported to Canada.

Of the 730 decisions rendered, the Minister of Public Safety approved 514 and denied 216.

With regard to (b), under both the current International Transfers of Offenders Act, ITOA, and the amended act further to the passing of Bill C-10, the Safe Streets and Communities Act, CSC does not provide an opinion or a recommendation to the Minister of Public Safety. CSC's mandate in processing the applications is mainly to collect, summarize and submit the relevant information to the Minister of Public Safety for decision.

With regard to (c), since 2006, of the number of rejected transfer applications, 36 applicants sought judicial recourse to overturn the Minister of Public Safety's decision.

With regard to (d), 13 judgments were rendered in favour of the Minister of Public Safety, 15 judgments were rendered in favour of the applicants, and four judgments have yet to be rendered.

It should be noted that the total number of judgments does not match the number of applicants because some matters were discontinued.

*Routine Proceedings***Question No. 527—Mr. Massimo Pacetti:**

With regard to the Minister of Public Safety's assessment of applications for transfer to Canada by Canadian residents incarcerated abroad, since 2006: (a) how many pieces of correspondence have been sent to the Minister of Public Safety (i) by applicants, in order to protest the treatment of their file, (ii) by Members of Parliament, in order to protest the treatment of an applicant's file, (iii) by other third parties, such as lawyers or family members, in order to protest the treatment of an applicant's file; (b) for the correspondence identified in (a), how many responses have been provided (i) to correspondence from applicants protesting the treatment of their file, (ii) to correspondence from Members of Parliament protesting the treatment of an applicant's file, (iii) to correspondence from other third parties, such as lawyers or family members, protesting the treatment of an applicant's file; and (c) of the responses by the Minister of Public Safety identified in (b), (i) how many responses have been provided within one month, (ii) how many responses have been provided within two months?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, regarding correspondence—i.e., ministerial dockets—on the subject of international transfers sent to Correctional Service of Canada for response or information, search results indicate that there are over 2,000 entries in CSC's tracking system and archive. In order to determine which of the letters fit the parameters of the question and in order to categorize the types of letters based on the way the question is organized, a manual review would be required.

Moreover, certain international transfer cases are associated with letter-writing campaigns. An individual case may have upwards of 400 letters associated with it. CSC tracks these campaigns in a different manner. A separate, but similar, manual review would be required in order to incorporate this type of correspondence into the response.

In both cases, a manual review could not be completed within the established timeline.

Question No. 531—Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach:

With regard to Health Canada, Sandoz Canada and the most recent drug shortage: (a) what were the latest inspection reports by Health Canada regarding Sandoz Canada and its Boucherville plant in particular; (b) although the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) required Sandoz to improve several production lines at its Boucherville plant, did Health Canada consider this plant to be sufficiently safe; (c) what correspondence did Health Canada and the FDA exchange regarding Sandoz or injection drugs between April 1, 2011, and March 12, 2012; (d) did Health Canada receive a notice from the FDA or Sandoz following the FDA's visit to Sandoz in August of 2011; (e) did Health Canada receive a copy of the letter from the FDA to Sandoz Canada on November 18, 2011; and (f) if so, when did Health Canada receive this letter?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, Health Canada most recently conducted a good manufacturing practice, GMP, inspection from January 24 to February 10, 2012, of Sandoz Canada's Boucherville plant, where products for sale in Canada are manufactured. No risk to the health and safety of Canadians using health products manufactured at the Sandoz Boucherville facility for sale in Canada was identified by Health Canada. A report was issued to the company on February 20, 2012, with the observations of deficiencies noted in the plant. Most GMP inspections result in the identification of deficiencies. This alone does not automatically result in a non-compliant rating. The deficiencies reported in the February 20, 2012, report were not considered to be critical, and a 'compliant' rating was issued. For more information on GMP, members may visit the following link: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dhp-mps/compli-conform/gmp-bpf/index-eng.php>.

Information was exchanged between Health Canada and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, FDA, during the November 2011 and March 2012 period. This information included a heads-up notice that Health Canada received on November 8, 2011, from the FDA, advising of its intention to issue and post a warning letter to Novartis International AG in Switzerland, Sandoz's parent company, regarding three facilities: the Boucherville, Quebec, site and two facilities in the United States. The FDA's heads-up also included a copy of the FDA's deficiencies noted during its August 2011 inspection, FDA form 483. In response to this heads-up, Health Canada Inspectors inspected Sandoz's Boucherville facility on November 17, 2011. As part of this visit, it was confirmed that the only Boucherville product that was ultimately mentioned in the FDA warning letter was not sold in Canada. As such, no risk to the health and safety of Canadians was identified from this product. Health Canada did not receive an advance copy of the FDA warning letter.

In March 2012, the FDA confirmed that no further action would be required of Sandoz subject to the remediation plan to be taken at Sandoz U.S.A. sites and the action plan following the fire at the Sandoz Quebec site. It should also be noted that the U.S. FDA inspection report concerning the deficiencies noted by the U.S. FDA on November 8, 2011, has yet to be finalized.

* * *

[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Questions Nos. 528, 529, 530 and 532 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 528—Mr. Tyrone Benskin:

With regard to the Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations: (a) what is the total budget for the celebrations, broken down by (i) department, federal institution and crown corporation, (ii) province and territory; (b) which programs provided funding for the celebrations; (c) which programs, funds or projects were subject to funding reductions or were eliminated to allow for the celebrations; (d) for each department, federal institution and crown corporation, what projects and activities were or will be funded, by province and territory; (e) for each department, federal institution and crown corporation, what contracts have been made for projects and activities related to the celebrations, including (i) the date the contract was signed, (ii) the parties to the contract, (iii) the amount of the contract, (iv) a description of the contract; (f) for each department, federal institution and crown corporation, what advertising initiatives related to the celebrations have been initiated or are planned, including the cost of each initiative; and (g) for proposals related to programs or activities associated with the celebrations, (i) which proposals came from the government, (ii) which proposals came from outside the government, (iii) what criteria were used for assessing the proposals and for determining which proposals should receive funding?

(Return tabled)

*Privilege***Question No. 529—Mr. Tyrone Benskin:**

With regard to the commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the War of 1812: (a) what is the total budget for the commemoration, broken down by (i) department, federal institution and crown corporation, (ii) province and territory; (b) which programs provided funding for the commemoration; (c) which programs, funds or projects were subject to funding reductions or were eliminated to allow for the commemoration; (d) for each department, federal institution and crown corporation, what projects and activities were or will be funded, by province and territory; (e) for each department, federal institution and crown corporation, what contracts have been made for projects and activities related to the commemoration, including (i) the date the contract was signed, (ii) the parties to the contract, (iii) the amount of the contract, (iv) a description of the contract; (f) for each department, federal institution and crown corporation, what advertising initiatives related to the commemoration have been initiated or are planned, including the cost of each initiative; and (g) for proposals related to programs or activities associated with the commemoration, (i) which proposals came from the government, (ii) which proposals came from outside the government, (iii) what criteria were used for assessing the proposals and for determining which proposals should receive funding?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 530—Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach:

With regard to Health Canada and the drug shortage: (a) what are the various plans that have been brought forward since 1990 to address drug shortages; (b) based on which studies is the Minister promoting a voluntary reporting mechanism for the industry to address drug shortages; (c) what are Health Canada's budgets for inspecting drug manufacturing plants; (d) does Health Canada have a budget for identifying new emergency suppliers in case of a shortage; (e) what are Health Canada's preferred contingency plans in the event of a sudden production shutdown, such as a bankruptcy or a plant fire; (f) since a few producers are the only ones to produce a given drug, what recourse does Health Canada have if a sudden production shutdown affects a sole producer of a drug; (g) what are the fast-track mechanisms for identifying alternatives for drugs in short supply; (h) in the event of a shortage, how does Health Canada prioritize its shipments of stockpiled products; (i) if there is no surplus inventory and if there is no alternate manufacturer, how does Health Canada determine who has the greatest need for the drugs; (j) what solutions based on what is done in other countries around the world have been considered by Health Canada; and (k) has Health Canada considered a solution based on the Swedish model, where a state-owned corporation produces about 2 percent of the country's demand for drugs?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 532—Mr. Hoang Mai:

With regard to the review of individuals receiving the Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB) and the Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB): (a) how many people received financial support from these programs for fiscal years 2006-2007 to 2011-2012; (b) how many people received financial support from these programs for fiscal years 2006-2007 to 2011-2012 in the ridings of Hochelaga and Brossard—La Prairie; (c) for the UCCB, (i) what is the number of investigations begun by investigators, broken down by province, (ii) the reasons for these investigations, (iii) the number of files where individuals had amounts owing, (iv) the amounts claimed by the CRA; (d) for the CCTB (i) what is the number of investigations begun by investigators, broken down by province, (ii) the reasons for these investigations, (iii) the number of files where individuals had amounts owing, (iv) the amounts claimed by the CRA; (e) for the CCTB, in the ridings of Brossard—La Prairie and Hochelaga, (i) what is the number of investigations begun by investigators, broken down by province, (ii) the reasons for these investigations, (iii) the number of files where individuals had amounts owing, (iv) the amounts claimed by the CRA; (f) for the UCCB, in the ridings of Brossard—La Prairie and Hochelaga, (i) what is the number of investigations begun by investigators, broken down by province, (ii) the reasons for these investigations, (iii) the number of files where individuals had amounts owing, (iv) the amounts claimed by the CRA; (g) what are the reasons that could warrant a review of individuals; and (h) what is the number of reviews begun for each of the reasons warranting a review of individuals?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

PRIVILEGE**NATIONAL DEFENCE**

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I was saying when I got up before, I listened with interest to the point of privilege raised by the Liberal House leader with regard to his stolen rocket toys, and I was tempted to say that you were being invited to boldly go where no Speaker before has gone, or perhaps that the Liberal leadership campaign is heading to the ends of the earth, to infinity and beyond.

In any event, I feel compelled to rise to respond briefly to last Tuesday's remarks from the hon. members for Scarborough—Guildwood and Malpeque in relation to the question of privilege from the hon. member for Toronto Centre relating to the Auditor General's spring 2012 report.

The hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood suggested that there is much confusion. After reviewing his comments, I want to help him out with the clear argument I advanced.

First, both hon. members attempted to associate my comments with the notion that ministerial accountability has been dispensed with. That is, of course, patent nonsense. My comments about a distinction between officials and ministers related to the content of the Auditor General's report, and I reference the Auditor General's own publication on how his reports are prepared. As those two hon. members should recall, the issue was one of the branches of their own leader's argument.

Ministerial accountability remains a key principle in our form of government. To give just one example of this, the government's expenditures are presented to Parliament for approval through the estimates process. Expenditures on a replacement for our CF-18 fleet will, if and when such a purchase is undertaken, come to Parliament like all other government expenditures, including, I would note, our current operational costs for CF-18s.

Ministers defend estimates here in the House and at committee. Indeed, I understand, for example, that the hon. Minister of National Defence has made no less than eight committee appearances on National Defence estimates, including one right here in committee of the whole in this chamber.

Next, some of the quotations offered last Tuesday were taken badly out of context. I want to point to a couple. First, both the leader of the third party and his defence critic have quoted from a March 9, 2011, decision of Mr. Speaker Milliken. It might be worth observing that the quotation offered comes from the portion of his ruling where he was summing up the arguments that had been made. It did not come from the portion that was his actual decision. Therefore, the probative or useful content of that in terms of representing the ruling is obviously minimal.

Business of Supply

In my opening comments a week ago, I summed up the arguments of the leader of the third party for the purpose of marshalling my own comments, which followed. However, the hon. member for Malpeque seemed to quote that back the next day, as if I were saying that Parliament was misled. No, that is the exact opposite of the conclusion of my comments. To quote me quoting the leader of the third party is hardly an instructive view of what I was representing to this House. I will not further rebut those or other comments, although I could. I simply wanted to get all of that on the record.

Mr. Speaker, I know you are taking this issue very seriously, and that you will undoubtedly be thoroughly reviewing what has been put before you.

As for the speech given by the hon. member for Toronto Centre on Thursday afternoon, I think my comments from a week ago effectively address his intervention.

Before sitting down, I do want to cut through the clutter of the debating points that were offered to remind ourselves what the substance is of a ruling on a question of privilege. Citation 117, subsection 2 of Beauchesne's *Parliamentary Rules and Forms*, sixth edition, advises that:

It has often been laid down that the Speaker's function in ruling on a claim of breach of privilege is limited to deciding the formal question, whether the case conforms with the conditions which alone entitle it to take precedence over the notices of motions and Orders of the Day standing on the Order Paper, and does not extend to deciding the question of substance—whether a breach of privilege has in fact been committed....

In other words, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Toronto Centre is seeking from you permission to give priority treatment to a motion to refer this issue to a committee to study. Curiously, he is seeking to do something that had already started when he raised this issue on April 5.

As I said last Monday, the Standing Committee on Public Accounts is now seized with the study on the Auditor General's report. While I am on my feet, perhaps it would be useful to give an update on this committee's work. At its planning meeting last Tuesday, it was agreed to have the Auditor General appear before the committee, appear one more time, I might add. Mr. Ferguson appeared on Thursday morning for the second time this month. Moreover, deputy ministers and senior officials are scheduled to attend tomorrow.

In closing, let me commend to the chair the February 25, 2004, ruling by Mr. Speaker Milliken, which I quoted from last week. As I said last week, let us let the public accounts committee get on with its important work.

• (1535)

The Speaker: I would like to thank the hon. government House leader for his further intervention.

[*Translation*]

I would like to remind all members that it is unusual for interventions on questions of privilege or even on points of order to be made as they have in this particular case and on other recent occasions.

[*English*]

The Speaker takes every question of privilege very seriously. I appreciate information being brought to my attention. However, normally allowances are made only to accommodate members who perhaps were not present or who had not had adequate time to prepare their interventions when a matter was first raised.

The Chair's indulgence in this regard, as we have seen over the past few days, should not be interpreted as a licence to rebut or counter every argument made, nor is it intended to allow a debate going over several weeks perhaps. Members are expected to be brief in bringing new information to the matter at hand.

I thank all hon. members for their co-operation. At this point I have heard all I need to hear on this particular case and, unless pertinent new information is to be brought to my attention, I will take the matter under review and come back to the House as early as possible.

The hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood is rising.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I take your advice and your admonition. It is true that we do not want to perpetuate this debate forever.

However, the Parliamentary Budget Officer's observation over the weekend that there were in effect two sets of books being run, while it may not be entirely new information, is certainly information that I would respectfully suggest is of relevance and goes to the very heart of the issue of ministerial accountability, ministerial transparency and ministerial responsibility.

It may be that the issue has been brought out over the past few days. However, I would respectfully crave your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, with respect to whether, if I have an opportunity to review both the House leader's remarks and other interventions, that observation has received sufficient emphasis so that, when you do make your ultimate ruling as to whether the House was misled, the Parliamentary Budget Officer's observation gets sufficiently taken into account.

The Speaker: I appreciate the hon. member raising that point. If he has something new that he wishes me to consider, I would urge him to do so very quickly and also to make sure it is very relevant to the question that the Speaker is being asked to rule on.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—HEALTH AND SAFETY OF CANADIANS

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: There were six minutes left in questions and comments when the hon. member for Etobicoke North last had the floor. I am not sure which party had the last question. I see two members rising and I will try to get both of them in.

The hon. member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel.

Business of Supply

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are debating another good topic by the Liberal Party on the health and safety of Canadians, but the member's speech was focused on the environment and the war on the environment. The economic situation of this country does not make the war on environment any less important or any less pertinent these days.

The government has failed in quite a few areas, but does the member have any other examples of where the Conservative government has failed on the environment file? The member is our environment critic and she is doing a great job.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, there absolutely is a war on the environment. Last summer the government announced that 700 positions could be cut; then we had cuts of 43% to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency. The government then wanted to cut ozone monitoring. Ozone is critical to life on earth.

The questions should be: Should the government streamline upper atmosphere ozone monitoring a year after the discovery of a two million square kilometre ozone hole over the Arctic? What does streamline actually mean? It means gutting. Will the government maintain the integrity of the ozone monitoring program? Will it maintain Canadian contributions to the global observing system for climate in support of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change?

Another area where the government is cutting is water. Water is essential to our health, sustaining our ecosystems and growing our economy. On World Water Day the government gave .7% of what is needed to clean up the Great Lakes.

● (1540)

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is curious that we are actually debating this poorly worded motion by the member for Toronto Centre. One of the things that it says is:

...the House condemn the government for introducing a budget that will repeat the mistakes of the past and put Canadians in danger by reducing food inspection...

et cetera.

If we remember back to the decade of darkness when the Liberal government was in charge of things, it actually cut \$25 billion just in transfers to the provinces. That was among all the other cuts that it made

We have decided not to cut the transfers to the provinces. We have actually increased them to record amounts.

I wonder if the member would stand on her feet today and condemn her previous government for those horrific cuts that went out to the provinces and territories under the Martin and Chrétien regime?

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, we should not be playing politics with the motion regarding a tragedy that took place in Walkerton when 2,300 people fell ill.

The actual report said the contributions to that tragedy were the Conservative cutbacks of the Ontario Ministry of the Environment.

In stark contrast, in 2011 the Ontario environment minister, John Wilkinson, said the government is still paying heed to the lessons

from the Walkerton tragedy. Wilkinson noted that Premier Dalton McGuinty's Liberals had implemented 121 recommendations from Mr. Justice Dennis O'Connor's 692-page report. Mr. Wilkinson said, "We didn't gut the resources that were there to protect people", noting that the government has spent \$30 million on the Walkerton Clean Water Centre and has trained more than 23,000 people.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. friend from Etobicoke North. I want to say publicly what a pleasure it is to serve with her in the House of Commons. She is consistently well prepared. She works extremely hard, as a former scientist, in bringing that knowledge to us in the House.

My concern with one of the things she mentioned, though, was that we might see fewer environmental assessments take place at the federal level as they get hived off to the provinces.

Now that I read the new definition of what will be examined in a federal review—namely that just fish and just migratory birds are the only things the current Conservative Party believes are federal—I think it is almost better that we have no further federal assessments, because they will have so degraded and destroyed the notion of environmental review.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague and friend. We have had the privilege of working together for over 20 years.

One of the things we are most concerned about in this budget is the gutting of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. In fact, it is being repealed. Those laws are in place in order to protect the health and safety of Canadians, our environment, our economy and our livelihoods.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to inform you that I will be splitting my time with the member for Kildonan—St. Paul.

[*Translation*]

I am pleased to rise in the House today to talk about the important work that this government has promised to do to ensure and protect food safety.

● (1545)

[*English*]

The health and safety of Canadians have always been a priority for our government. This is reflected in the work that we do to protect and promote our health. It is also reflected in our investments in food safety. These investments were done with the intention of strengthening our ability to reduce food safety risks. That means better surveillance and early detection and improved emergency response.

As a government, we have acted on all 57 recommendations in the Weatherill report and have funded improvements to the food safety of Canadians. Budget 2012 contains a commitment of more than \$50 million to be invested over the next two years. As a result, Health Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada and CFIA will continue their ongoing support to strengthen and make more effective our food safety system.

Business of Supply

I would like to inform members of this House of the role that Health Canada plays in food safety.

Our government recognizes that a safe food supply is a major contributing factor to the health of Canadians. We all know that safe food and good nutrition are important to all Canadians and their families.

[*Translation*]

For that reason, Health Canada works closely with the Public Health Agency of Canada, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and the provincial and territorial health departments to ensure food safety in Canada. It is important that we all co-operate in order for the work to continue.

[*English*]

Together with our partners, industry and consumers, Health Canada works to establish policies, regulations and standards related to the safety and nutritional quality of all foods sold in Canada. Today I will speak about some of the key changes that our government is making to food regulation in Canada while continuing to protect the health and safety of Canadians.

Health Canada's food scientists conduct detailed and rigorous evaluations that focus on safety. Our safety assessment of food is internationally recognized. In fact, our government scientists are leaders and regular contributors in international discussions related to food safety and standards.

Underpinning all this work is the Food and Drugs Act. This is our primary legislative framework for foods, drugs and cosmetics, and it has served us well. Its solid foundation has helped to protect the health and safety of Canadians for over 50 years, but we recognize that modernization is needed if we are to continue to protect the health and safety of Canadians.

Specifically, our food regulations need to keep up with the advances made in science and technology. We need to keep up with consumers' interests now and in the future.

Finally, we need to be able to respond quickly, efficiently and effectively to current and emerging food safety challenges. Modernization is needed to respond to these changes. In particular, updating the tools available to implement food safety decisions has been identified in the Red Tape Reduction Commission's work. As part of our ongoing discussion with stakeholders, the need for updated tools has also been identified as a priority area for modernization.

I would like to explain how these changes will maintain the scientific rigour with which our government approaches its work while making key changes to reduce red tape.

Currently, once Health Canada scientists have made a safety decision, be it about the safety of a new food or additive, setting the limit for a chemical contaminant or approving a new health claim on a food, it can take many months and sometimes years to implement that decision through a change in the regulations. The current lengthy and cumbersome process causes long delays in the approval of some products that are scientifically proven to be safe. Many of these scientifically proven products have a potential beneficial impact on the health and safety of Canadians. These delays affect our

ability to update food safety standards quickly when new science emerges. For consumers, these delays limit their access to innovative and safe products.

That is why our government introduced targeted amendments to the Food and Drugs Act to reduce these delays and cut red tape while protecting the health and safety of Canadians. The targeted amendments to the Food and Drugs Act are included in the jobs, growth and long-term prosperity act, which was tabled just last week. Including these amendments, the act will allow us to move forward quickly to address these delays while maintaining the science related to this very important work.

Specifically, targeted amendments to the Food and Drugs Act include a new authority for making authorizations and a broader authority for incorporation by reference. These changes will shorten the time it takes for some safe food products to be put onto the Canadian market.

I will take a few minutes to describe each of these new authorities and how they will work together to continue to protect the health and safety of Canadians.

I will start by describing marketing authorizations. Marketing authorizations will be regulations made by the Minister of Health. They will exempt products from specific prohibitions in the Food and Drugs Act and the Food and Drug Regulations.

The marketing authorization will give the Minister of Health an improved ability to act on certain food safety decisions—for example, the approval of some serious health claims for foods or setting safe levels of substances used in food production, such as food additives. The minister will be able to set conditions on the approval of a product or substance, providing more flexibility to address particular risks. This will allow Canada to make these safety decisions at a pace similar to that of our major international partners.

Marketing authorizations must follow an open and transparent process. They will also be subject to the same provisions as other regulations under the Statutory Instruments Act, ensuring such things as review by the Department of Justice and publication by the Clerk of the Privy Council.

It is also important to note that the marketing authorization does not change the scientific process or review. This will be done with the same rigour as our scientists have always used and with the priority to safeguard the health and safety of Canadians.

The marketing authorization only changes the way the decision is implemented after the scientific assessment is completed. By using marketing authorization for these decisions, the government will be able to continue to focus its efforts on safety, while reducing delays in implementing those safety decisions once they are made.

Business of Supply

There will also be a second authority, which will allow more flexibility in the use of incorporation by reference. Currently tables such as approved food additives or authorized food health claims must be written word for word into the Food and Drug Regulations. Consequently, if a change to the list is needed, a regulatory amendment is required, a time-consuming and resource-consuming process that adds no benefit to the safety of Canadians. This regulatory process does not allow Health Canada to respond quickly to updates and advances in science and technology, market trends and/or emerging food safety risks.

This authority will allow Health Canada to incorporate by reference standards and methods, guidelines or other documents into the food and drug regulations, including documents developed by the government.

This could include a list of permitted food additives, certain substantiated health claims or testing methods that were proven to be effective in detecting harmful pathogens in food. Changes will be able to be adopted as soon as the scientific assessment and related comment periods and notifications have been completed.

In addition to continuing to protect food safety, these amendments will also help address the recommendations of the final report of the independent investigator into the 2008 listeriosis outbreak. In the report, Sheila Weatherill noted the need to expedite approvals of food additives when appropriate. These two new authorities respond to Ms. Weatherill's recommendations.

Let me illustrate the importance of these changes by providing an example. Health Canada received an application for a new food additive that could be used in certain processed meat and poultry products to help control the growth of harmful listeria. Health Canada undertook a scientific assessment and determined back in December 2007 that this additive could be safely used.

However, it took another 36 months for the required regulatory changes and approvals to enable this product to be used in Canada. Under the proposed new process, which will include a period for public comment, approvals could take as little as six months after the safety decision is made.

• (1550)

[Translation]

We have a solid foundation that will help protect Canadians' health and safety, but the tools needed to support this foundation are outdated and rigid.

[English]

The targeted amendments to the Food and Drugs Act introduced last week through the jobs, growth and long-term prosperity act will help update the tools we need to help protect the health and safety of Canadians.

These changes demonstrate the commitment that our government has made and continues to make to protect the health and safety of Canadians. The changes put forward will help the government to maintain our high level of scientific rigour but will allow our decisions to be implemented faster, cutting the red tape and delays for the approval process and providing Canadians with safe products.

We will continue to engage and consult stakeholders during the decision-making process. The government's commitment to consultation, transparency and openness will remain. Ultimately these amendments will help the government to respond more rapidly to the pace of change in science and innovation and to play its role in continuing to protect the health and safety of Canadians.

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to pursue where the parliamentary secretary was headed with those proposed amendments to the Food and Drugs Act.

We realize that expediency is very important but we also want to be reassured that safety is paramount, as do all Canadians. We know that we need to do this to foster innovation to help our food industry in this country grow and prosper and to be able to provide more and safer food.

Would the parliamentary secretary reaffirm for us that the primary focus is on ensuring that safeguards are in place to preserve our great food safety record in this country.

• (1555)

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for all of the good work that he has done. As I said in my speech, under his leadership, we have put over \$50 million into ensuring that the food in Canada is healthy and safe. These amendments would not have any impact on the scientific processes or the rigour of the reviews of these new products. The amendments would only change the approval process after the scientific assessments and consultations have been concluded. They would provide tools to allow safe new products with potential health benefits for Canadians to get to market much more quickly. This has been a problem. Sometimes it can take months or years for these great products to get to market.

I can give some examples of the types of products that would be authorized more efficiently and effectively and maybe I will get a chance to do when answering another question.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. parliamentary secretary's interventions in the House are always measured and reasonable. I am hoping he can help me figure something out with respect to the budget.

In strengthening food safety, on page 168 of the budget, \$51.2 million will be provided over the next two years to continue with the recommendations in the Weatherill report. That \$51.2 million will be spread between CFIA, the Canadian Health Agency and Health Canada. Therefore, as I understand it, three different agencies will be getting \$51 million over two years.

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On page 261 of the same budget, \$56 million in ongoing cuts will be made to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Overall, we do not know what that nets out for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Will it get an even one-third of the money? What kind of money comes from the Weatherill report? How will the \$56 million in cuts that are only being made to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency be felt in terms of food inspection?

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, I can reaffirm for my colleague that we did take the recommendations of the Weatherill report seriously. That is where we will be focusing and targeting the investments we are making.

As the member knows, Mrs. Weatherill actually made over 57 recommendations. There were issues that needed to be dealt with. We have taken those targeted investments to ensure we have looked at every one of her recommendations because, at the end of the day, it is our government's commitment to the health and safety of Canadians that is most important and Canadians expect that.

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as hon. members know, Canadians experience better health outcomes than citizens in many other countries. Statistics Canada recently reported that life expectancy in Canada has reached a new high of 80.9 years. We also know that the infant mortality rate has declined since 1982 and, based on data from the Canadian Community Health Survey, we know that almost 90% of Canadians believe that their health is good, very good or excellent.

I am also pleased to note that Canada is a world leader in tobacco control. In fact, smoking is at an all time low in Canada, dropping from 22% to 17% over the last decade. In 2009, we passed the Cracking Down on Tobacco Marketing Aimed at Youth Act. Our government is proud of this work and is refocussing our anti-smoking efforts toward populations with higher smoking rates while investing in initiatives that work. We have also provided leadership to the world on health warning labels and we are the first country in the world to have them on cigarette packages.

Even with the improvements that Canadians now enjoy in their health and safety, we understand that there is a great need yet, much to be done and further improvements to be achieved by promoting healthy living and combatting chronic disease.

Today, chronic diseases and injury are the main causes of death and ill health in Canada. Fortunately, through healthy living and eating, a large proportion of these diseases and injuries can be prevented or delayed. I am proud to highlight the actions taken by our government to ensure that Canadians can feel safe about the food they eat and understand the steps they can take to contribute to their own good health.

Today, societies the world over are all too familiar with the impact of cancer. That is why we support cancer prevention efforts through our joint work with provincial and territorial governments, as well as stakeholders from all across Canada. Funding has been renewed over the past five years for the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer so it can continue its work.

Through the lung health program, the Government of Canada is also helping to improve the health of Canadians. The Government of Canada's \$3.5 million investment in phase 2 of the lung health

program demonstrates a strong commitment to preventing and managing respiratory diseases in Canada.

The Government of Canada has supported the national lung health framework, a stakeholder-led initiative from its initial stages in 2006-08, with an additional three-year, \$10 million investment in 2009. Resulting projects from the lung health program have produced tangible results for Canadians, increasing awareness of as well as improving prevention, early detection and management of lung disease in Canada.

Our government is also working to prevent diabetes and improve health outcomes for Canadians living with diabetes. Through the Canadian diabetes strategy, we are taking a proactive, long-term approach to prevent and control diabetes. Today, many Canadians understand that, in addition to good nutrition and regular exercise, managing one's blood pressure, cholesterol and glucose levels can substantially reduce the risk of developing diabetes and its complications or can slow the progression.

Food safety is the top priority for our government. We have invested wisely in strengthening our ability to reduce food safety risks. This means enhanced surveillance, early detection and improved emergency response. As a government, we have acted on all 57 recommendations in the Weatherill report and invested significant dollars into improving the food safety of Canadians.

Budget 2012 contains a commitment of more than \$50 million to be invested over the next two years. As a result, Health Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada and CFIA will continue their ongoing support to strengthen and make more effective our food safety system. I have some examples of those improvements.

We have improved the national surveillance of listeriosis by adding listeria to the national enteric surveillance program. We have strengthened responses to the outbreaks of national or international food-borne illnesses. The food-borne illness protocol has been updated, strengthened and tested with our provincial and territorial food safety partners. In addition to the listeriosis project, we are planning to conduct community-based surveillance in food-borne and water-borne diseases in two different locations across the country. Plans are in place to expand this testing to five sites.

• (1600)

With budget 2012, we are implementing further improvements to our food regulatory system. These changes will reduce the regulatory burden associated with managing the food system while maintaining our rigorous testing and assessment to ensure Canadians continue to enjoy safe and secure food.

Business of Supply

Every day we hear about the links between healthy weight and healthy living. We also hear about the risks of obesity. This topic and our government's efforts to help Canadians of all ages and walks of life understand this connection between healthy living and good health has been part of this debate. Today more than one in four children and youth are overweight or obese. Rates among children and youth have nearly tripled over the last 25 years, and rates are even higher amongst our aboriginal populations.

All of this comes with a clear human cost. Simply put, obesity increases the risk of developing several major chronic diseases. As a result, promoting and maintaining healthy weights in the early years is critically important. It sets a good foundation for healthier living over time. Overweight and obesity also comes with greater health care costs to the Canadian economy. The direct health care costs of overweight and obesity has been estimated at \$6 billion a year and the indirect costs are roughly an additional \$1.1 billion per year in Canada. That is astronomical.

Last summer, Canada participated in a United Nations meeting on chronic diseases. At that meeting there was clear recognition that obesity was a global health problem and countries have placed a high priority on tackling it. In 2010, federal, provincial and territorial ministers of health endorsed the declaration on prevention and promotion that makes health promotion and disease prevention a priority for action in all jurisdictions across Canada.

In addition, since obesity is such an important issue, governments also endorsed curbing childhood obesity, a federal, provincial and territorial framework for action to promote healthy weights. The summit on healthy weights, which took place in February, was another example of federal, provincial and territorial collaboration. This topic has been very important to Canadians all across our country. It was an opportunity for representatives of diverse sectors to focus on healthy eating, active living, creating supportive environments and promoting multi-sectoral partnerships. Summit participants identified actions to promote and maintain healthy weights in children and youth.

For most Canadians, responsibility for school health lies with the provincial and territorial governments and school boards. Children's nutrition provides another example of federal, provincial and territorial governments working together for Canadians. The joint consortium for school health is a federal, provincial and territorial partnership that brings health and education sectors together to promote the health of children and youth in the school setting.

The Canada prenatal nutrition program is yet another important collaborative program. It assists communities in providing nutritional information and breastfeeding support to prenatal and postpartum women facing challenging life circumstances. Work is also under way to champion healthy living within jurisdictions through collaboration with relevant sectors, such as health, sport, physical activity, recreation and education.

I am pleased to see that the federal government is leading so much of this work. Leadership means bringing everyone together, ensuring we share knowledge and best practices, encouraging dialogue and ensuring we take collaborative action. The federal government will continue to act as a convenor in mobilizing all partners and

partnerships. In this way, we can build on all the good initiatives and resources across the country.

I was particularly pleased to note that, at the summit on healthy weights, the federal Minister of Health announced \$4 million to add new elements to the nationwide healthy eating awareness and education initiatives in collaboration with others. This will promote healthy eating, such as eating more fruits and vegetables, and will provide nutritional advice to Canadians. It is also critically important to build our understanding and fill gaps in our knowledge about obesity so we can help to make a difference in children's lives.

To that end, our government is investing in obesity-related research through the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, or CIHR. CIHR's Institute of Nutrition, Metabolism and Diabetes has made obesity a strategic research priority since 2002 and it provided \$34 million in 2010-11 alone for research that helps us assess and identify the most effective interventions.

• (1605)

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague, the hon. member for Kildonan—St. Paul, not only for her work on this file, but for the work that she continues to do for children and the protection of our families.

We know that obesity among children has been accelerating. It has almost tripled in the past 25 years. We know that obesity in children is complex and comes with many problems and impacts upon their lives, causing hypertension, type 2 diabetes, stroke, cardiovascular disease and a number of others. The important part is also the cost: \$6 billion per year and an estimated \$1.1 billion in indirect costs.

I wonder if she would help members in the House understand what has been done by this government so that we have some influence and how we have engaged other jurisdictions in this sector to help with this important problem?

• (1610)

Mrs. Joy Smith: Mr. Speaker, never before in Canadian history have we had to say that our youth and our children are obese and that it is something we have to work on.

As I talked about in my previous speech, it is the collaboration between the provincial and territorial governments, all the levels of government and the population working together to recognize that obesity is a huge problem with our youth and children. Activity, nutrition and awareness need to be promoted within families, not only within governments. At 65 years of age, I actually learned how to swim. That is a direct impact of the government getting that knowledge out there so we can work together to stop this.

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[Translation]

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I just heard the hon. Conservative member say that it is important for our children to eat healthy food.

How are we supposed to protect our children from unhealthy food when the number of inspectors in the agency is being reduced and the agency's budget is being cut?

I am asking this question of the hon. member opposite. I think we agree that our children must eat healthy food, but I do not think she knows how to guarantee that.

[English]

Mrs. Joy Smith: Mr. Speaker, food safety risks have been addressed, and continue to be addressed, by our government. There were several measures launched in 2009 to enhance surveillance and early detection and to improve response capabilities to food-borne illnesses and emergencies, and to the food safety system itself. In 2012, our government put in \$51.2 million over the next two years to continue these measures.

So, there are many things about the food system that have been incorporated. Inspectors are extremely important. Our government is ensuring that all these measures are put in place so the job can be done effectively and food can be very safe for all Canadians.

I know the government's actions in response to the recommendations of the Weatherill report have been outlined in several progress reports to Canadians. I invite the member to look at the final report to Canadians that was released in December 2011. There are very specific things there that will reassure her about food safety in this country. I cannot go over them now because of the shortage of time.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Random—Burin—St. George's.

As a physician, I want to support this motion because evidence-based policy is at the heart of the practice of medicine. We learn from successes and failures. When a patient dies under our care, we do an in-depth post-mortem and find out why and to find out how to prevent future deaths. Government must be similarly responsible. Cuts must be made carefully, to do no harm to those who depend on the government for their safety and health.

Let us look at a cautionary tale. Under Premier Harris of the Ontario government of the mid-1990s, significant cuts were made to health and safety to find efficiencies, which is a word we hear a lot from the Conservatives, by privatizing water safety and cutting the public health system and the environmental system. It promised, as the Conservatives are promising, that these cuts would not affect public health and safety. However, those cuts resulted in the tragic Walkerton incident where water, contaminated with *E. coli* and *Campylobacter jejuni*, caused the death of seven residents and serious illness in 2,300 other people who still have many of the remnants of that illness today.

I think it is strange that the current government did not learn from that disaster when three senior cabinet ministers in the current government were senior cabinet ministers in the Harris government at the time. The Minister of Finance was attorney general, the

Minister of Foreign Affairs was the minister of community and social services and the President of the Treasury Board was the minister of the environment when those cuts occurred. Justice Dennis O'Connor, who headed the public inquiry investigating the Walkerton disaster, linked it clearly to the cuts and to the privatization of water testing in 1996. Significant "budget and staffing reductions" made by the Harris government "had resulted in reductions in the frequency of inspections, site visits, and contacts" between government inspectors and staff operating the Walkerton water system. The government ignored numerous warnings that cuts and privatization would cost lives, as it is doing now.

If 2000 seems too far in the past, I would like to jog the memory of the three ministers who were in the Harris government at that time and who are now senior ministers in the current government. When people die as a result of poor public policy, government must accept responsibility and learn from its mistakes. If I recall, then-premier Harris had a very long apology to make. The government can recall another incident in 2008, which is closer to home and closer in time, under the watch of the current Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, when 22 people died and 57 became ill as a result of a listeriosis outbreak in a factory. Cuts to food inspection meant that inspectors often spent as little as 15 minutes examining plants. CFIA was already understaffed at that time, when those cuts were made in 2008. Yet in this budget, the minister of agriculture cut the already decimated Canadian Food Inspection Agency by \$56.1 million and 100 inspectors, on top of the \$33 million that was already cut last year. Canadians have the right to expect the food that they buy is safe, especially in light of history.

There is an important thing to remember here. As Albert Einstein said, insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. Yet, the current government in 2014 and 2015 will cut \$200.6 million from Health Canada and 840 science-related jobs. The cuts to public health will equal \$68 million. A public health agency is supposed to look after the health of the public and protect it from infectious diseases.

The natural health products directorate in Health Canada will also be cut. It looks after the safety of natural health products. Many times, due to poor manufacturing standards, harmful contaminants are found in imported natural food products. The directorate is supposed to ensure that what Canadians are buying in natural food stores is safe. So there is another example of cuts that are going to endanger the lives of people.

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We see cuts in the aboriginal health programs: suicide prevention, for instance; maternal and child health programs in the Inuit communities. Suicide rates among the Inuit are 11 times the rest of Canada, yet these cuts are going to occur anyway. There is an unacceptably high rate of infectious diseases due to overcrowding and lack of potable drinking water in aboriginal communities, yet these cuts are going to be made. There is a 40% cut to the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami health budget and this is going to be unacceptable, as we have heard from the leaders there.

• (1615)

It is unconscionable to cut from the most vulnerable and deprive them of the tools they need to improve their lives, especially given the Prime Minister's moving apology, which in hindsight seems quite the performance.

Health Canada, as federal regulator under the Food and Drugs Act, is responsible for assessing and monitoring the safety and efficacy of drugs marketed in Canada. Just last fall, the Auditor General reported that Health Canada had not adequately fulfilled its responsibility for ensuring the safety and accessibility of prescription drugs, often taking multiple years to assess and respond to pharmaceutical drug safety issues which put the health and safety of Canadians at risk.

The Auditor General said Health Canada does not collect information to assess and make decisions. The Auditor General found that targets could not be met due to lack of resources. But again, Health Canada is being cut \$200 million this year. The Auditor General said the transparency of clinical trial information is lacking, even after five years of the Conservative government promising to fix it. Why? Because of lack of resources in the food and drug directorate. Yet this is being cut.

Health Canada has become so inefficient and ineffective that Canadians are becoming more dependent on the United States food and drug administration to flag food and drug safety incidents. The Auditor General found that the department of health has not fulfilled most of its responsibilities for assessing pharmaceutical drugs. Yet there are cuts to this department.

Thirty per cent of the budget of the Canadian federal tobacco control strategy is being cut, yet the strategy has been the cornerstone of Canada's strategy to curb tobacco use. Having the amount of adults who smoke lowered by 10% and 60% among youth is an important thing. Tobacco causes lung cancer, heart disease and vascular disease. Yet at the same time the government is cutting 35% of the tobacco control budget. It will collect \$480 million more this year in annual federal tobacco taxes.

The lives of an estimated 37,000 Canadians every year are lost due to stroke, cardiac disease, heart disease and vascular disease. Five million Canadians still smoke. Smoking costs our health care system \$4 billion a year in direct health care costs, but the tobacco control budget is being cut.

Overall, unconscionable cuts to health care would put the lives of many Canadians at risk. The government made the choice to do so and to put the lives of these Canadians at risk by cutting essential services in health, environment, food safety, and search and rescue

operations while investing \$10 billion in jails and \$30 billion in F-35 fighter jets.

Some cynics have suggested that investing in jails is the government's solution to mental illness and homelessness, but the role of responsible government is to ensure that even in the most difficult times, Canadians can count on essential services that protect their health and their safety.

No one is being a Pollyanna here. Everyone knows that in different fiscal times cuts have to be made. However, when a government places jets and jails ahead of the health and safety of its citizens, it can be accused of incompetence. When a government ignores the evidence of the Ontario government's experience with loss of life in Walkerton and its own experience with the listeriosis outbreak, that incompetence becomes callousness. It can be justly accused of playing politics with Canadians' lives.

• (1620)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, we have been speaking a lot today about food safety.

While I support the motion, I do it primarily because I am familiar with the cuts to environmental protection and what that will mean for Canada in the future.

I am curious about the member's view of the Weatherill report. I found it interesting in the Weatherill report that her initial conclusion and the climate in which she made her decisions about the listeriosis outbreak was that we live in a world in which large-scale manufacturing and single plants are more likely. By their very nature, producing cold cuts in large-scale factories such as Maple Leaf Foods as opposed to lots of small facilities that support local farming communities was inherently more dangerous than the smaller local producers.

Does my hon. friend have any comments on the benefits of local agriculture as opposed to large, concentrated industrial facilities?

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, we all want to support small farms, small businesses and small manufacturing enterprises. After all, these are the people who produce about 65% of the jobs in our country.

However, it does not really matter whether it is a very small enterprise or a very large enterprise, there must be inspection of the sanitary surroundings, whether people are taking the due precautions in terms of washing their hands, wearing gloves, wearing hairnets, wearing masks, and that the food itself is tested before it is packaged and it leaves the store and goes on to the shelf.

Business of Supply

This is the only way that Canadians, especially Canadians who are compromised because of their health and chronic disease, who have Crohn's disease and who have other problems, know the food they eat is safe.

That is why Canadians pay taxes.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on her speech on a topic that appears to worry everyone, because the members on the other side spend all their time making decisions without properly consulting the public about issues as important as this one.

We get that feeling over and over. For instance, there was the pharmacy crisis with the closing of the Sandoz plant. Does the hon. member not agree that the government employs a kind of magical thinking regarding self-regulation by companies that are expected to audit their own operations and decide whether everything is in order?

In the pharmaceutical crisis, we saw that the market does not regulate itself all on its own, and that government intervention is necessary. Does she not see a parallel here, regarding the Conservative government's short-term vision?

• (1625)

[English]

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, what we see is a bunch of trained seals who stand and clap every time someone speaks across the way and who parrot everything they are told.

However, the way the cuts have been made, 100 inspectors out of the food inspection program when it has already, as a result of lack of resources, as Justice O'Connor said, caused a listeriosis outbreak, what happens?

Canadians are not fools. The government continues to say, "trust us", when its track record is so terrible, including the F-35 and not telling the truth about that in the House, including assuring people things will be fine and they are not. We have seen E. coli, listeriosis, salmonella in food because of a lack of resources in food safety.

It is okay for the government to say, "trust me", but I do not think anybody does anymore.

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I stand today to speak to the opposition day motion put forward by the Liberals.

Clearly, when we look at this most recent budget and the associated legislation from the government, the Conservatives have proposed drastic cuts to essential services and legislation that protects Canadian citizens, including cuts to Canada's food safety infrastructure, public health, environmental protection and public safety. Conservatives argue that money will be saved by finding efficiencies and deny that the drastic measures they propose to take will put the health and safety of Canadians at risk.

I find it impossible to understand how the government can cut an entity like a search and rescue facility and not see the danger inherent in that. In fact, if we look at the maritime rescue sub-centre in St. John's, Newfoundland, the 12 employees there and the number

of lives that have been saved as a result of their work, and we are talking about 600 lives saved annually as a result of the work that has been done, where they have helped take part in rescue missions, how can the government not understand or see that by cutting the maritime rescue sub-centre and the service it provides, lives will be lost? That is what is so serious about this.

We have a maritime rescue sub-centre in Quebec and one in Newfoundland and Labrador, in St. John's. The Quebec sub-centre has been given a one-year reprieve. It has to do with the language issue, and that is perfectly understandable. In fact, it is not a reprieve it needs; it needs to ensure that the centre does not close at all. The same is true for St. John's.

We can point to example after example of where lives have been saved. People will give sworn testimony that if it were not for the maritime rescue sub-centre in St. John's, Newfoundland, their lives would have been lost. That is what is so fearful here. The government suggests it will save a million dollars by closing down the sub-centre in St. John's, making it part of the joint rescue centre in Halifax and the one in Trenton. Talk about putting a price on lives. That is what is so serious about this.

The centres should not be closing. What I do not understand is that the Auditor General will report in the spring of 2013 on search and rescue. Why is the government moving ahead at this point in time? Why is it not waiting until we get the report from the Auditor General, an independent party, someone who is going to look at this from a non-partisan view? We should be getting his recommendation with respect to search and rescue, instead of taking the chance that by closing down life-saving centres like the maritime rescue sub-centres in both Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador, we end up with the possible loss of lives.

No matter who we talk to, it is not conceivable that there will not be loss of lives, because we know how dangerous it is to work on the ocean. We know how volatile conditions can be in Newfoundland and Labrador when working out on the ocean. This does not just apply to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. This applies to people who work in the offshore industry, who are from all parts of the world. This applies to people who travel on *Marine Atlantic* who are from all parts of the world. This applies to people in the fishery. It applies to anyone who is on an ocean-going vessel who is trading products from other parts of the world. It is not just a Newfoundland and Labrador issue. This issue impacts all Canadians, but it also impacts people in other parts of the world.

This is one aspect of what is so serious about the cuts that the government is making to essential services.

Then we look at what is happening with respect to the hosing down of the vehicles in Port aux Basques and in Argentia. Again, these are both ports in Newfoundland. The vehicles need to be hosed down because the soil in Newfoundland is contaminated. It has what is called the potato wart and it has potato cyst nematode. The problem we have is if that contaminated soil leaves Newfoundland and Labrador, it could ruin the potato crops in Prince Edward Island and in New Brunswick. This is something that no one wants to see happen.

Business of Supply

•(1630)

We had an incident several years ago where that very thing happened. Because the contaminated soil got to P.E.I., the U.S. stopped importing potatoes from P.E.I. for a period of time. We do not need to see this happen. We are talking a multi-billion dollar industry. For the sake of what? How much money is the government saving by refusing to continue to do the hosing down of these vehicles?

Interestingly enough, the government has said that it is still going to continue, but it is not going to take responsibility for it. Who has responsibility for the safety of the food that Canadians consume and other people consumer if it is not the federal government?

It is saying that, yes, the vehicles will have to continue to be hosed down, and a power hose is used to do this. They are inspected and hosed down to ensure that the contaminated soil does not leave Newfoundland and Labrador. However, if the government is going to stop taking responsibility for that, whose responsibility does it then become? The government has made reference to the private sector.

I am sorry, but I would like to think that governments would take responsibility for food and not leave it to the private sector in terms of the safety of the food we are eating.

We have a handful of jobs. We have four jobs in Port aux Basques and two in Argentinia, and the government has said that it is sorry, but that those jobs will not continue to exist because it does not need them anymore.

I do not understand how the government can possibly look at this and consider it a cost savings, something that it needs to do or anything of the magnitude that it needs to deal with its deficit. There are so many other measures that it could take, in fact, especially when we look at the building of megaprisons and this whole idea of giving corporations tax breaks.

There is a time for everything, if the government is going to give wealthy corporations a tax break. There is nothing wrong with profit, but at the end of the day, there is a time to do it and how much. This is not the time to do it, especially if, on the other hand, the government has to cut jobs like those at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, those jobs that are so important. These are in rural communities, by the way. Port aux Basques and Argentinia are two rural communities. Do members know how important that handful of jobs are in those rural communities? It would be the same as if we were talking about 1,000 jobs in a larger community. These are well-paying jobs that need to stay in those communities for the very reason that it ensures the safety of the food Canadians will eat.

When the budget was brought in, the government talked about the 19,200 jobs that would be lost and said that maybe 7,000 or 8,000 would be through attrition. That still means about 13,000 jobs will be cut. If the government is going to cut that many jobs, it is going to impact services, there is no doubt about it, and it is going to impact essential services.

To suggest that the majority of those jobs would be cut from the centre, for example, from Ottawa, is foolhardy. We know differently. Newfoundland and Labrador is today seeing jobs being cut—not just

from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, not just from the maritime rescue sub-centre, but also from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

Let me give an example. Fishers need to renew their licence. A lot of these fishers do not own computers. A lot of these fishers do not even know how to access the Internet. What do they do? They go in to the rural offices where there is someone at the counter who will take their money, help them apply for their licence and off they go. It is easy. It is a service among the services that the front-line individual provides.

However, the government is saying that they have to go online, that it will not provide that service anymore. A service, one job in a rural community, again, is very important to that rural community, but is also very important to the people who avail themselves of that service.

•(1635)

We are seeing cuts to Service Canada and cuts, to Environment Canada. Everywhere we look we are seeing cuts all in the name of dealing with a deficit that was brought on by the government when it knew better. Now Canadians are having to pay the price.

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that my colleague spoke so passionately about the budget, but I would like to ask her how her party failed, profoundly, to provide any meaningful climate change action while in government? While her party was in government, greenhouse gas emissions rose by 30%.

We are hearing a lot of rhetoric today about environmental protection. Could the member please explain that dichotomy?

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, the issue we are dealing with here impacts a number of fronts, including the environment.

All we need do is listen to the Minister of the Environment and the parliamentary secretary to know that what we did was way above what the government is doing with respect to the environment and the measures that were put in place.

The reality of the situation is that the government is doing absolutely nothing. It has the worst record so far in terms of any government when it comes to the environment. We see jobs being cut. We see scientists being muzzled. The reality is that, as far as the government is concerned, there is nothing to worry about in terms of the environment.

The government should talk to the scientists and the environmentalists, the very people the government is trying to muzzle, and it will hear first-hand how important it is that we pay attention to the environment.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my hon. colleague what she thinks of the government's decision to scale back environmental processes.

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I do not see how the government can scale back environmental processes and expedite them without missing information. If there are 100 criteria to assess as part of an environmental impact assessment, and the government decides to speed things up, there are two ways to do that: either increase the number of people doing the assessments or assess fewer criteria.

Take airplanes, for example. If 100 points must be inspected to assess the condition of a plane, and inspectors decide not to inspect 50 of those points, then the plane crashes, maybe the problem was with one of the 50 points not inspected.

I think it is dangerous to apply that logic to the environment. What does my colleague think?

[English]

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, I think it is common sense. If the government is going to talk about a regulatory process, whether it is with the environment or some other aspect of society, the reality is that if it is inconclusive, if it is not all-encompassing, something will get left out.

When the government is trying to shortchange or shorten a process, something will get overlooked. What is what is so fearful is that we have a government that is quite prepared to shortchange this, to cut corners in order to move things through quickly without any respect or consideration for the environment. Instead, it responds to big business and oil companies when, in reality, we should be working hand in hand.

Everybody should recognize the importance of ensuring we have a comprehensive environmental process that can work hand in hand with the businesses that are concerned and certainly with Canadians.

• (1640)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have heard speaker after speaker from the Liberal Party talk about all the great things they have done.

The reality is that the Liberals had 13 years in government and accomplished absolutely nothing when it comes to the environment. Greenhouse gas emissions actually increased under the Liberals' watch. They signed the Kyoto protocol but then admitted that they never had any intention of actually implementing it. They just thought it might be a good policy thing to win some votes for them.

On this side of the House, of course, we have invested in parks. A beautiful new park in my riding is coming online, the Rogue Park.

We have invested over a billion dollars in securing our natural heritage around this country, working with our partners, Ducks Unlimited for example.

I wonder if the hon. member has actually taken the time to read the budget and look at all the wonderful announcements contained in this budget to help people with jobs and the economy. If the member has done that, will she stand in her place and actually vote with this government, because that is what the Canadian people—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Random—Burin—St. George's, a short answer, please.

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, in terms of the member's commentary, there is a lot that could be debated there. The reality is that I cannot get past the negativity in the budget in terms of the cuts to see anything positive worth talking about. Jobs are being lost, essential services are being cut and it is the government that is doing it.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): 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 Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, Pensions; the hon. member for Davenport, Housing; the hon. member for London—Fanshawe, Pensions.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Barrie.

[English]

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time today with the distinguished member for Calgary Centre-North who tells me that her home is referred to as awesomeness.

I am glad to rise in the House today to join my colleagues in this important debate. I am here to speak to what our government is doing to ensure that first nations and Inuit receive the nutrition they need to lead healthy lives.

We recognize the link between access to healthy food and the promotion of health, well-being and the prevention of chronic disease. One of the reasons we are modernizing our food regulations is to keep up with the needs of Canadians. The changes put forward will not only help our government maintain a high level of scientific rigour but they will allow decisions to be implemented faster, cutting red tape and delays for the approval process in providing Canadians with safe products. They will help our government respond more quickly to the pace of change in science and innovation and play its role in continuing to protect the health and safety of Canadians.

These changes will not just help all in Canada but will specifically be of benefit to first nations people and Inuit. We are making strategic investments to promote nutrition and improved access to healthy foods in first nations and Inuit communities.

Food security is linked to a variety of factors, and meeting these challenges requires the contributions of multiple sectors working together. Our government is working with aboriginal partners, provincial and territorial governments, and other sectors to look at how to best address these factors and help improve food security.

With an annual investment of \$60 million, the nutrition north Canada program is one response to the complex issues facing the challenge of healthier foods for northerners. The program provides a retail subsidy that helps northerners living in isolated communities access healthy food at lower cost. The program focuses the subsidy on perishable healthy foods that have to be flown into isolated northern communities all year round.

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I remember two years ago when the health committee, of which I am a member, toured Nunavut and looked at some of the health challenges. The cost of perishable goods was enormous in some of these isolated northern communities. Obviously, this is something the federal government assists with and it is a very important issue that we are addressing.

Preliminary program data demonstrates that nutrition north Canada is supporting improved access to healthier foods for northerners. Between April 1 and September 30, 2011, more than 80% of the subsidy went toward healthy foods, such as produce, milk and dairy products, meat and alternatives, and grain products.

As part of the nutrition north Canada program, Health Canada receives \$2.9 million annually to support culturally appropriate retail and community-based nutrition education initiatives. These activities increase the knowledge of healthy living and eating habits, develops skills for selecting and preparing both healthy store-bought foods and country foods, and strengthens retail community partnerships.

Community activities include the promotion of healthy foods, cooking skill classes, school-based projects, in-store taste tests and grocery store tours. Health Canada has also supported communities with planning, training and developing partnerships with local stores and other community partners.

Early success is reported for the nutrition education initiatives 2011-12, which include stronger linkages with local stores, stronger nutrition and healthy eating education, cooking skills development and coordination with other community programs. Over 300 community-based activities were offered in 2011-12 and over 50 community workers were trained.

The nutrition north Canada program also subsidizes country or traditional foods when available through local stores or when bought from processing plants that are registered with the program. Even though this is a first step for nutrition north Canada, it shows that the government recognizes the importance of country foods to the health and well-being of first nations and Inuit.

A healthy way of eating that includes traditional or country food has been associated with lower levels of heart disease and diabetes. These foods contain less fat and sugar than many store-bought foods and contribute important nutrients needed for good health. Other benefits of traditional food include physical activity during harvesting and have cultural and spiritual significance.

• (1645)

Our government also recognizes the importance of quality nutrition in enabling children to reach their fullest developmental and lifetime potential. We are working with first nations leaders, other levels of government, partners and stakeholders to ensure access to high quality health programs that promote a healthy start in life for first nations and Inuit children.

Maternal and child health programs, like those supported by Health Canada, have been shown to have a positive effect on the physical, psychological and social development of all family members.

The aboriginal head start on reserve is one of the programs supporting the healthy growth of approximately 9,000 first nations

children and their families living in over 300 first nations communities across Canada by funding community-based early childhood intervention programming that addresses the developmental needs of children from birth to six years of age. Health Canada's aboriginal head start program promotes the health and wellness of first nations children and their families through culture, language, social support, education and parental involvement programming, health promotion and nutrition.

In the aboriginal head start program, children learn how to make healthy food choices through snack programs or meals using Canada's food guide. They may go on field trips with staff, parents and other family members and participate in traditional food-gathering activities.

The maternal child health program supports home visiting by nurses and family visitors for first nation pregnant women and families with young children.

Health Canada is helping to address factors that impact maternal and infant mortality in first nations and Inuit communities by providing information on maternal nutrition and supporting the programs that aim to promote healthier lifestyles and behaviours, such as the reduction of smoking. The program also helps by increasing access to quality prenatal care and regulated birth attendants. The maternal child health program provides a co-ordinated approach to maternal and child health services with strong links to elders, nursing and other community-based programs.

Together with the maternal child program, the Canada prenatal nutrition program is working to improve the adequacy of the diet of prenatal and breastfeeding women; increased access to nutrition information services and resources to eligible women, particularly those at high risk; increased breastfeeding support; and increased knowledge and skill-building opportunities in maternal and infant nutritional health programs among those involved in this program.

The brighter futures program provides funding to first nations and Inuit communities for activities supporting improved physical and mental health, child development, parenting skills and healthy babies. Funding facilitates community-directed and designed programming that addresses local priorities. As such, communities may choose to use the funding to promote linkages among social and health programs, including education, health, child and family, and provincial systems.

With the goal of supporting healthy childhood development and overall mental health, communities may choose to use brighter futures funding to support activities such as in-school breakfast programs, traditional food cooking classes and healthy eating and nutrition workshops.

Through these programs, this government is also supporting the work to address the challenge of childhood obesity. This issue is of particular concern for aboriginal children and youth as rates of obesity are significantly higher among this group than among the general Canadian population, and aboriginal children are becoming obese at a very young age. Obesity is strongly linked to high rates of chronic diseases, including type 2 diabetes. First nations people are three to five times more likely to experience type 2 diabetes than non-aboriginal Canadians.

Since 1999, the aboriginal diabetes initiative's main objective is to reduce type 2 diabetes by supporting health promotion and disease prevention, including healthy eating and active living, through activities and services delivered by trained community health workers and health care providers. More than 600 first nations and Inuit communities have access to health promotion and diabetes prevention activities through the aboriginal diabetes initiative.

I hope I have helped to inform this important discussion today by outlining the efforts and partnerships that our government is undertaking to build healthier first nations and Inuit communities. The issues I have outlined today point to the needs that we as a government must focus on and work together with first nations and Inuit leaders and provincial and territorial partners to support first nations and Inuit communities in having the healthiest lifestyle possible.

• (1650)

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his concern about health. We are concerned about the health of all Canadians across Canada but particularly our first nations people. We are concerned about obesity and diabetes.

Nutrition North Canada is helping to provide good-quality foods, the kind they cannot grow in the north, by providing a subsidy to retailers and wholesalers for perishable and nutritious foods, such as fruits, vegetables, bread, meat, milk and eggs.

I am just wondering if my colleague could expand a bit more on what Health Canada is doing to make sure the support for these communities to choose healthier foods is made available.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, it is wonderful to have a Minister of Health who is a former health minister in Nunavut. She is well aware of some of these challenges, and Health Canada is addressing these with vigour.

In terms of Nutrition North Canada, Health Canada has received \$2.9 million annually to support culturally appropriate retail and community-based nutrition education initiatives in 76 fully eligible first nations and Inuit communities to deal with just that. The initiative increases northerners' knowledge of healthy eating and improves their skills in selecting and preparing healthy store-bought and traditional or country foods.

To support retail and community partnerships at the local level, Health Canada is working with retailers who operate in isolated northern communities on initiatives that promote healthy choices within stores that are affordable.

As I mentioned before, I remember being just shocked when I went into a grocery store in Iqaluit at the cost of some of the

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perishable items. They are sometimes five or ten times the cost it would be in Ottawa or Barrie where I live.

Obviously this is an important program. The \$2.9 million is very well used to support this in ensuring that healthy foods are available in these remote communities.

• (1655)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was laughing when you gave me the floor because I had just asked my colleagues if the subject had changed.

The member talked about a number of first nations health policies. That is fantastic, but that is not what we are talking about. We are talking about the fact that the government opposite says that Health Canada is a bit like home insurance: you can insure for half the value of the home because there will never be a problem and the house will not burn down.

My question is: what is the member talking about?

[*English*]

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my opposition colleague finished up by talking about insurance and asking how this is relevant to our discussion on the Food and Drugs Act. Obviously the nutrition of Canadians is central to the Food and Drugs Act. The fact that some Canadians are in more vulnerable situations is incredibly relevant. Health Canada has always played a leadership role and under our current Minister of Health has increased its leadership in this area. I am incredibly proud of the work she and this government have done. Nutrition is of critical importance to Health Canada.

We need to ensure we do our best to protect these individuals by providing them with access to healthy food and healthy lifestyles.

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the member for the extraordinary work he does in his community, especially his local hospital. He has been an incredible champion for his local hospital and for the health care of all the people of Barrie. He was a mentor of mine when I was elected.

I wonder if he might comment on how devastating the unilateral Liberal government cuts of 1995 were on his local hospital and the growing community. That followed five years of NDP government in the province of Ontario where no investments were really made in health care. I wonder if he could reflect on how the two opposition parties have really let down his riding in the past.

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Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, what an appropriate question from such a wonderful MP for Oak Ridges—Markham. Obviously, the cuts to Ontario medical schools during the NDP government in Ontario had a devastating effect across Ontario. We still face doctor shortages today because of it. The 40% slashing to provincial transfers for health had a devastating effect on health systems across the country. I am just so happy that we have a Conservative government in Ottawa that has put a focus on the health of Canadians and done incredible work in enhancing Canada's health care system, not like the slash and burn days with the provincial NDP and federal Liberals.

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the *Kingston Whig-Standard* on June 10, 1991, someone made this comment: There is a choice between jobs and the environment. The same person, later in his career, went on to say, "We didn't get it done" with regard to the environment. Who was that person? The former Liberal leader.

So I find it very interesting today that my colleagues from the Liberal Party are talking about environmental protection when clearly their track record speaks to the contrary. They saw greenhouse gas emissions rise significantly under their mandate, while they took no action to combat climate change. They also saw questionable economic policies, which they support to this day.

By contrast, our Conservative government has taken a balanced approach to protecting the environment and promoting economic growth. Since we have taken office, we have seen an enormous expansion of the Canadian economy and we have seen stability through recessionary times, but we have also seen improvement in Canada's environment. We have had stability in funding programs for environmental programs that see real results. For example, earlier this year we announced our inventory of greenhouse gas emissions for 2009-2010 and, even though during that period our economy grew by 3.2%, which is a great thing, our greenhouse gas emissions held steady. Why is this? It is because of balance. It is about working with stakeholder groups, with the public, in a way that we can ensure economic growth while seeing real reductions in emissions.

To contextualize this, I want to talk a bit about our government's investments and track record in the environment, to set some things straight, because we have heard so much rhetoric about cuts to the environment and no action, whereas that is really the case with the former Liberal government. Since 2006, we have invested billions of dollars in cleanup mechanisms, clean-energy technology, clean-energy regulation actions, cleanup for federal contaminated sites; we have developed transportation sector regulations and next-generation clean transportation initiatives, which we support through budgetary measures; and we have invested \$27 million to improve Canada's weather services. It goes on and on.

Frequently, my colleagues from the Liberal Party vote against these measures. So I am not sure how they can stand up in the House of Commons and talk about cuts when they do not support programs that work in our country. Furthermore, when we look at the economic action plan 2012, which is a plan to create jobs and economic growth, we also see significant investments in the environment. We have \$50 million of increased funding for the protection of Canada's species at risk, we are committing to the

creation and funding of a new near-urban national park in Rouge Valley, we are committing to continued support for Canada's lakes including Lake Winnipeg and Lake Simcoe and we are providing expanded tax relief for clean-energy generation equipment. All of these sorts of things are positive, outcome-based measures to protect Canada's environment, yet my colleagues opposite vote against these. They characterize these as cuts.

My colleague has been talking about the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency. Funding for this agency is stable; it has actually increased this year. She voted against that. I just find it surprising that the members have not taken the time to look at the budget bill and realize that there are some very good things to support Canada's environment in this budget, and there is continued support since 2006 when we took government.

There was some argument in the House earlier today about Ontario's environmental policy. Recently, we have seen some policy in that province increase electricity costs by 41%, where we have actually seen a reduction in jobs because of that policy. Again, it is not about balance. We want to see real outcomes while ensuring economic growth, and our government has a track record of doing so.

I will continue with regard to greenhouse gas emissions and regulations around that, because we have heard a lot about that today. Our sector-by-sector regulatory approach, which we are committed to funding through the budget, will actually see a real reduction. We have committed to 17% from the 2005-level target, which we are close to meeting. The International Institute of Sustainable Development said we are on the right track with that policy and our budgetary measures speak to that and support it.

● (1700)

The other thing I wanted to talk about was budget 2012 providing further funding of \$35.7 million over two years to further strengthen our tanker safety regime, including ensuring appropriate legislative and regulatory frameworks related to oil spills and emergency preparedness and response. This means that in certain confined Canadian waterways, tanker operators must take a marine pilot with local knowledge on board before entering a harbour or a busy waterway, and in special circumstances more stringent measures may be taken. This is another concrete example of a budgetary measure where we are protecting Canada's environment but also ensuring we are being wise stewards of taxpayer dollars.

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I do not know why we cannot talk about real solutions here. We are not talking about the reality of this budget. It includes very strong measures to support environmental protection. We are seeing positive outcomes with our government's plans, including the air quality management system. We are seeing reductions in particulate matter. We also have our clean water management plan, which is seeing real cleanup in Canada's Great Lakes. We are seeing a reduction of pollution in these areas. I would hope my colleagues opposite would realize that there are measures in here that are designed to work, but they also designed to be good stewards of taxpayer dollars.

I will close with the responsible resource development component of budget 2012.

Over the next 25 years, the Canadian energy and mining sectors are projected to provide trillions of dollars in economic growth for our country. Therefore, for us as legislators, the question is this. How do we recognize that this is a competitive advantage for our Canadian economy? How do we develop these precious resources sustainably but ensure we have environmental protection? This is a question we take quite seriously.

Certainly, coming from Alberta, a province that is at the forefront of this issue, I hold the issue very close to my heart. I think we are striking the right balance. The responsible resource development section of budget 2012 will ensure economic growth that we can drive to decision points through a rigorous environmental assessment process. Not only is the environment sensitive, but so is our investment sensitivity climate. Therefore, on some of these projects where there are very narrow windows to market, we can actually drive that to a decision in a predictable and timely way. By no means does that mean we will see reduced environmental protection. That is just not the case. We feel we can have that rigour in environmental assessment through an open, transparent and predictable process but also ensure we have a timely decision-making process for industry.

I do not understand why we cannot have that debate in this House. It is always focused on rhetoric on one side or the other. This is about balance in this country and ensuring that Canada's competitive advantage for our economy is secured, but also that our natural heritage continues to be protected for years to come. Therefore, I urge my colleagues opposite to actually take the time to understand the components in the budget, to realize that there is a large amount of investment in Canada's environment and to move forward from there. We have seen over the last six years that we have had a great track record of investing in Canada's environment and seeing real results.

The last point I would make is to ask my colleagues opposite to point to key measures the Liberal Party has taken to actually move Canada's environmental protection regime forward. Again, I think it is important to note the failure of their government to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It signed us on to a protocol that now would only see 13% of global greenhouse gas emissions included in it. We have been taking a more robust approach in asking all major emitters around the world to come to the table to have binding targets, to have transparent reporting on their emissions. That was just not the case in the previous Liberal government.

I hope today that, instead of focusing on falsehoods and rhetoric, my colleagues opposite will have a look at what is in the budget, which is millions of dollars for Canadian environmental protection, and support it because it will mean the long-term economic prosperity of our country but also the environmental protection of Canada's great natural heritage.

● (1705)

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member asks why we cannot have a debate in the House, but it seems that every time we try to have a debate, the government imposes closure, but I digress.

The member also talked about concrete budget measures to protect our environment. I recall one so-called concrete budget measure, two Conservative budgets ago. I think it was to fund carbon capture and storage in Alberta. We just found out, again as it was announced with great fanfare and the Prime Minister did a photo op, it was announced last week that TransAlta was pulling the plug on this project.

Is it because the government's environmental regulations just have not been strong enough to encourage TransAlta to undertake this project, which it has now abandoned?

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, carbon capture and sequestration is a great area of technology in which our government has invested.

In fact, in budget 2012 we supported numerous initiatives to support research and development across a spectrum of clean energy technologies, which have been very successful. In fact, there are other carbon sequestration projects that are working quite well in Canada right now. We see that at the Weyburn site. This is very exciting.

If my colleague is so concerned about supporting CCS projects and clean energy projects, why would he vote against a budget which so strongly supports research and development and innovation measures across the country? His party continues to vote against this.

If the member truly believes in research and development and continuing innovation in our country, he should support this budget and the millions of dollars of support in that sector?

● (1710)

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am trying to address some of the questions that my hon. colleague asked.

I will not so much digress, but kind of put a different spin on this. The government has been quite closed about its activities. It sort of lets things out in broad strokes, but when it comes down to the details, it is not very forthcoming.

What I hear from my constituents, although I live in an urban riding, is their concern about what they do not see in the budget, the nuts and bolts of how these things will be accomplished so they can make informed decisions.

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That is the message we bring, the question of how the government will do this. To say it is going to do something is one thing, but how is it going to be done? What are the nuts and the bolts, the actual play by play of the budget?

Could my hon. colleague respond to that?

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, my colleague talked about putting a different spin on things, and I am really glad to hear that. The spin we hear from the NDP, when it comes to the economy and the budget, is that it is opposed to whole sectors of our Canadian economy. It has gone to the United States to lobby against Canadian jobs.

When the member asks about the implementation of our budget, it is a concrete plan for jobs and economic growth in our country. We believe in implementation through a balanced approach. We want to ensure that we have sustainable economic development of our natural resource sector, protection of Canada's environment, but also to ensure that we are wise stewards of taxpayer funding.

Again, it is a different spin. If the member is so concerned about the budget, I certainly hope that he will support the investments we make to protect Canada's environment and social services across the country in a sustainable way.

Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is a sense in the House, and I hear it all time, that industry and resource development are automatically the enemies of the environment.

As we have been doing a study in the environment committee, we have been doing the national conservation plan and setting up a framework for that. We have had several witnesses testify about the fact that, clearly, they have a different perspective. They have talked about the fact that industry is as keen on development and protection as anyone.

Could my hon. colleague expand on and comment with regard those witnesses who have testified to this?

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the vast amount of work he has put into the environment committee and this study.

We have heard from ENGOs, academia and industry that we can find that sweet spot, that balance on working landscapes to protect the environment and ensure that we have sustainable resource development. That is really what this study has been about, developing a plan that has national conservation priorities that people can adhere to, where we can leverage programs that are working in communities.

I thank the member for his continued support of this plan.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Malpeque.

Why does the Conservative government insist on copying the Americans on whatever works the least for our neighbours to the south? Does it not feel like this is the U.S. Congress, in light of this gigantic, omnibus budget bill, which touches on everything and runs in all directions?

The Conservative government has turned a budget implementation bill into an omnibus bill, an ideological steamroller that allows the Conservatives to push through important measures that deserve a thorough review, but without too much controversy or any serious, careful examination. What we are doing here today is nothing more than a mock debate.

Never before have we seen a Canadian government try to amend so many laws under the guise of budget implementation. Back in 2010, the Conservative government used the same scheme to amend no less than 24 laws, but this time, the government is smashing its own record. It is using a 431-page budget bill to amend no less than 70 laws. In almost every case, these amendments have little to do with the budget or any financial issues in general, but they have everything to do with the Conservative ideological agenda.

In fact, barely 30 of the 431 pages have to do with any fiscal measures, while no less than 151 pages amend legislation surrounding environmental protection. That is why our colleague, the hon. member for Etobicoke North, proposed that the government at least agree to remove the part regarding the environment and introduce it as a separate bill.

The government is once again showing its complete contempt for the parliamentary process and its utter disdain for parliamentary democracy as we practice it here in Canada. As a result, the Standing Committee on Finance will be the only way to review, albeit in a jumble and all at once, an unheard of quantity of changes and shifts, often serious and significant, but on which the committee has little or no expertise. And yet this government is completely unwilling to consider any amendments, by saying that it is not in our tradition to make amendments to a budget implementation bill.

In doing so, the government is thwarting not only Parliament, but also Canadians, who will not be allowed to speak out on the pros and cons of these many measures.

We cannot intelligently debate or properly scrutinize in a budget issues as crucial as the weakening of several pieces of legislation and the elimination of a number of environmental regulations, the end of protecting fish habitat, the power given to the government to reverse decisions by the National Energy Board, the weakening of the Food and Drugs Act and the power given to the minister to make exemptions from that same act. Nor can we properly scrutinize in a budget bill the countless changes made to areas as disparate as assisted human reproduction, the abolition of the Inspector General position at the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, the gradual change in the old age security eligibility age to 67, the cancellation of thousands of immigration applications, the end of the requirement that the Auditor General audit the financial statements of a series of agencies including the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, the end of the requirement that the President of the Treasury Board report to Parliament every year on how he is implementing the Public Service Act, and so forth.

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All these complex and contentious matters cannot be properly examined at the same time. The Liberal motion we are debating today warns the government against this questionable haste that jeopardizes the health and safety of Canadians, especially in a context of budget cuts where the government is cutting the scientific capacity of Environment Canada, Statistics Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, to name only three examples.

It is not as though the Conservative government has shown an exceptional capacity to openly and thoroughly debate a number of issues simultaneously. On the contrary, this government avoids questions, turns a deaf ear to objections and does not want to hear contrary arguments. For example, how many times have we asked the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to justify why he is closing the rescue centres in St. John's and Quebec City, a move that many experts say will put lives in danger on the St. Lawrence River, in the gulf and in the Atlantic.

• (1715)

Why are they closing these centres when there is every indication that there will be no real savings, when the minister's own staff is skeptical about it, and when the Commissioner of Official Languages has pointed out serious shortcomings in the delivery of these essential services in French? Members of the Conservative government and caucus will bear responsibility for this thoughtless, ill-conceived and dangerous measure taken without proper debate.

I will give another example. It is cruel of the government to, without a valid reason, force tired, ill and disadvantaged Canadians to work two more years before they are able to receive an old age security cheque from the government for \$540 a month. The government maintains that this measure is the only way to ensure the sustainability of the program. However, we have been trying to tell the government that many studies, including its own, those of the chief actuary, the parliamentary budget officer and the OECD show that such is not the case.

What does the government think of these studies? It should stop evading the question. I challenge my Conservative colleagues to show that I am wrong about these studies, which they probably have not read. I invite them to read these studies before punishing Canadians and forcing them to work to the age of 67. Such serious matters should not be buried in a budget. They should be diligently studied and properly debated.

In conclusion, we must vote in favour of the Liberal motion, not only because the measures I just talked about are inherently bad, dangerous and unfair and not only because they stem from the ideological dismantling of the federal machinery under the guise of improving federal finances, but because they are an affront to parliamentary democracy, which does not belong to the Prime Minister or the Conservative party, but to the Canadian people.

• (1720)

[English]

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to go back to something the parliamentary secretary said a little while ago, that it was too bad we could not have debates in the House about the environment. That is exactly what we are doing here. I want to thank members for raising it. However, we are faced with a situation in which buried in a budget bill are some good things

and some bad things, but mostly bad things about the environment and about what will happen to the regulation system in Canada's environmental regulatory structure.

Could the member comment further on some of the very bad things that are coming to us as a result of this being in a budget bill, not in an environment bill?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is completely right. The question is why put in a budget, for example, the power for the minister to decide otherwise that the National Energy Board would make about a mega project like a pipeline? This is something that should have been scrutinized as such, in a bill as such, or an amendment of the existing law. However, do not do that under the cover of a budget. This is completely unacceptable.

It is one example among many others where, clearly, the government is using the budget as an excuse to come with this agenda without any debate, not only with us but with the people of Canada.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is similar to the last question, but it is on the process.

What we have with the budget and the budget implementation act is a 425-page document, 150 pages of which basically cover areas of the environment where oversight agencies are being gutted. We are seeing the fisheries habitat being undermined, the ability to monitor fisheries habitat and to protect it. Yet the bill, with 150 pages related to a whole series of complicated areas in the fisheries and the environment will not go to an environmental committee to be studied in-depth or to the fisheries committee to be studied in-depth. It is going to a finance committee. I really think that is unacceptable.

Could my hon. friend comment on what he thinks of this process and how it really affects the ability of this place to debate serious issues in an all-comprehensive way?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, it is an insult to the parliamentary democracy that Canadians are so proud of. They are very proud of their parliamentary democracy, but the government has no respect for it.

The government has decided to go ahead without proper debate on a bill that is going in directions that would weaken a lot of our laws. The government wants to avoid controversy and go through with its agenda without respecting any democratic process within this House, but it is the Canadian people who will be affected. I am very upset about this and I want to take the opportunity to say this to my Conservative colleagues in the hope that they will speak to their Prime Minister for once.

• (1725)

[Translation]

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am glad that my Liberal colleague pointed out that a number of changes have been included in the budget. I would like to draw his attention to page 363 of the third part of this huge document, which covers changes to the Telecommunications Act. These changes will enable telecommunications companies with less than a 10% market share to enter the market.

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This is the first time this has come up. We have protected our Canadian companies for a long time. I would like my colleague to comment on that. Does his party support this government measure or not?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has put her finger on another topic worthy of our consideration. Why is that included in a budget bill? I listed some of the subjects, but there are others. She is quite right to mention another very important issue, the question of Canadian ownership of our industries, particularly in the field of culture and communications.

That is something the Standing Committee on Finance will not be able to study thoroughly. I wonder if they will even be able to spend half an hour on it, although Canadians, through their parliamentary representatives, should be examining this fundamental issue. This House is being transformed into a copy of the worst examples the American Congress can offer.

In the meantime, this government, which wants burden us with two elected chambers and no mechanism to resolve disputes between them, is trying to transform the House of Commons into an American Congress in the worst sense of the term. Good things sometimes happen in the United States, but we do not need to copy their worst practices in terms of parliamentary procedure.

[*English*]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on this Liberal opposition day motion.

I think it is important to mention a couple of key points in the motion to put it into perspective. The motion states:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government, and specifically the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the President of the Treasury Board, has failed to learn the painful lessons from Walkerton which proved that cuts to essential government services protecting the health and safety of Canadians are reckless and can cause Canadians to lose their lives; and further, that the House condemn the government for introducing a budget that will repeat the mistakes of the past and put Canadians in danger by reducing food inspection, search and rescue operations, and slashing environmental protections, and call on the government to reverse these positions.

It really is not too late for the government to pull back on some of the proposals it has in the budget and the budget implementation bill. There are very serious areas that need to be reconsidered.

The budget, on page 261, states that \$56.1 million will be cut from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. That means cuts to operations of the federal agency responsible for monitoring food imports and food production, the agency that is the first line of defence for consumers in this country.

On page 168, the government has attempted to claim it is spending an increase of \$51.2 million to CFIA. The government's response, when asked about the cuts, always comes back to this \$51.2 million. I want to outline what that is really all about: it is \$51.2 million to the CFIA, public health, and Health Canada all together. That will not redress the seriousness of the \$56 million cut, and it will indeed undermine our secure food safety system.

We all remember—and I certainly do, because the Minister of Agriculture joked about this at one time—that it was under this government's watch that 23 Canadians lost their lives as a result of listeriosis. Now what do we have coming from the government? We

have cuts to the very agency mandated to protect our food supply and cuts to some of the various policy and administrative initiatives that were started as a result of the Weatherill report following the listeriosis crisis.

However, the threat posed to Canadians through these cuts is only part of this growing crisis. On page 219 of the budget, the government has decided that in terms of labelling issues, consumers can fend for themselves. If they find something they do not like or do not trust, they can call the company involved.

Oversight of labelling should be a responsibility of the Government of Canada. It has the authority and the expertise. It has the power to tune up companies that may abuse the labelling issue, but instead, now the government is saying there is going to be a tool on the CFIA website that a consumer can look at to determine whether or not the label is correct. Then the consumer can go to Superstore or Loblaws or Sobeys, or whatever, and face the management and complain about the label. What good is that going to do? Not a thing. It is the government abdicating its responsibility for labelling in Canada. That is what is really happening here.

The announcements directly contradict assurances the minister gave Canadians only days ago about food safety and labelling for meat and other products. Appearing on the CBC radio program *The House* on April 14, the minister said that the CFIA “will continue to do spot checks on the shelves after the fact and make sure that the audits follow through, that the labels are factual and that they have the information consumers need”. He added, “When it comes to meat, labels are still pre-approved and they’re still checked before anything hits the shelf.”

● (1730)

The agriculture union, on the other hand, differs from what the minister said, and it has provided more public information than has the minister with regard to the budget.

In terms of cuts to the CFIA, a total of 308 positions will be lost, 247 indeterminate and 61 term positions. Just fewer than 200 of those are located in the national capital region. Technical positions are prominent among the remaining cuts right across the country. The loss of some 100 inspector positions completely undoes the staffing action taken in the wake of the listeriosis crisis.

While the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food insists that front-line inspectors will be unaffected by budget cuts, CFIA executives say, “I don't know how you take 10% of your budget and not deal with the front line”, meaning that front-line inspectors are actually affected by these cuts.

Ever since the government came to power, we have had this problem with it when it talks numbers. The parliamentary secretary, in answer to a question today, talked about the numbers of people the Conservatives have put in place in terms of inspection since they have come into government, but when we ask for specific numbers—how many people are in each position and specifically what they do—they can never answer that question with actual numbers. When we ask the president of CFIA at committee, the officials can never really give us an exact number of inspectors.

As we know on the F-35 issue, we cannot believe and we cannot trust the government, and in this case we are talking about food security.

Let me turn to a question on the broader aspect of food safety. On the one hand, we are talking about food that is in stores and imported foods and the responsibility of the government to ensure, for the protection of Canadians, that the supply of food is safe; on the other, we are talking about the responsibility to ensure that no actions by pests happen in Canada moving across the country, which is a great difficulty in terms of our food supply position.

Today I asked a very serious question of the minister. We know from having talked to people in Newfoundland that six inspector positions at Port aux Basques and Argentia are being eliminated. Inspectors in those six positions inspect vehicles for soil that may be up under the tire wells or on the vehicles in some fashion, soil that could have golden nematode or potato wart in it.

Generations of federal governments have accepted the responsibility that potato wart and golden nematode do not move off the province of Newfoundland to the mainland through soil on vehicles and create problems in the potato industry in my province of Nova Scotia, in New Brunswick or in the rest of Canada. This is a very serious issue: if we had golden nematode on Prince Edward Island, our number one industry, the potato industry, would be virtually destroyed. We would be shut out of the markets around the world.

This is a serious problem, and the government, through its cuts, is putting industries on the mainland at risk by not washing and inspecting those vehicles. It claims it will do some inspections, but the parliamentary secretary in his answer today said that, “CFIA resources should not be involved in vehicle washing”; I ask, why not? It is the responsibility of the government to ensure that contaminants do not move across this country.

As a last point, food inspection agencies in other countries—whether it is imported food, food within the country or preventing contaminants from moving—are paid for out of the public treasury. The government tries to download costs onto industry, whereas other countries pay from the public treasuries and it is not seen as a subsidy under WTO rules.

On the one hand the Conservatives are putting the industry at risk and on the other they are making our food industry, our farming industry, non-competitive in this country. The government is going in a direction that is absolutely hare-brained and wrong-headed.

● (1735)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am shocked by the hypocrisy that was just

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demonstrated by the member for Malpeque. I would say I am speechless, but here I am asking a question about it.

The bottom line is that the member has completely forgotten his own party's tragic record in government when it comes to protecting producers in this country. When it came to BSE, which nearly wiped out an entire industry called agriculture in this country, the Liberals were so negligent in their handling of this serious issue that farmers in my own area lost millions of dollars, wealth they have yet to regain. That was all as a result of inaction on the part of the Liberal Party.

When the member stands in this House and speaks in the fashion that he just did, he is forgetting his own party's record. The hypocrisy of his speech is at the heights of which I have not heard since elected in 2006.

This government has acted responsibly. We have acted emphatically in support of agriculture and Canadians from coast to coast. The Liberals are the ones who cut provincial governments. They are the ones who wear all of those scars from the 1990s. Shame on them.

Hon. Wayne Easter: By golly, Mr. Speaker, if that member wants to see hypocrisy all he has to do is watch his answers from question period any day in the House of Commons. He can watch them on TV and he will see hypocrisy at its height. That is what we get from that member every day in the House of Commons as we question Conservative election fraud, robocalls, and on and on goes the list.

I will say that the member should be worried about food safety. As I said in my remarks, it is under that government's watch that 23 people died as a result of listeriosis. The cuts in this budget would put food safety at risk once again in this country. Food safety is being put because the Conservative government has its priorities wrong with expensive F-35s, more jails and the list goes on. The member needs to—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. I am sure there are other hon. members who would like to pose questions.

The hon. member for Pontiac.

● (1740)

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, unlike my colleagues, I actually want to ask a question.

I paid close attention to my hon. colleague's contribution to this debate. I am particularly concerned for my riding, which has many farmers. They are concerned about the impact of food safety on two fronts. First, they are concerned that Canadians will lose confidence in their products and consume more foreign products. Second, they are concerned that this could have a health impact on their families.

Could my hon. colleague comment on those two concerns from my riding?

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Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, if there is one thing we can be assured of it is that Canadian farmers produce high quality products. However, we have to understand that we are dealing with perishable products and things happen in transport and by lack of refrigeration. Things happen in processing plants, as we have seen with listeriosis.

From the farm side, we can be assured that there is absolute quality, but with the government's move, there is actually less inspection of imported products. That is worrisome.

Canadian producers are required to produce under certain rules. They are not allowed to use certain pesticides, herbicides and so on that could be dangerous to human health. They have to produce under tight environmental rules as well. As a result, their cost structure is quite high.

Those producers have to compete with producers in other countries who may use some of these products. There are two problems here. One, they may be non-competitive because other countries' producers do not abide by the same rules and quality standards that we do. Two, the inspectors at import positions are not in adequate numbers to do the job to check the quality of the product coming in. It is a serious issue for consumers and producers.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Medicine Hat.

I appreciate this time to talk about a topic that affects each and every one of us personally, and that is food safety. Just like every other Canadian I want to be able to sit down and be assured that the food on my plate is safe. That is why it is so important that I tell the House about the commitment that this government has made to the health and safety of Canadians and to having one of the best food safety systems in the world. This commitment stands true following budget 2012.

Here is the most important thing that I have to say today. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency has not reduced and will not reduce staff or cut programs that would in any way place the health and safety of Canadians at risk. The opposition and union bosses have shamefully suggested that the decision made in March in the budget, and the agency's overall modernization agenda, are intended to reduce Canada's investment in food safety or somehow diminish the agency's role in it. This is completely and utterly incorrect. Our government is fully committed to modernizing our food safety system and the opposition should get on board for the good of all Canadians.

Budget 2012 identified funding of \$51 million over two years for the Public Health Agency of Canada, Health Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency for key food safety initiatives.

We all know change is difficult, especially the new third party in the House. But in this case, as was the case for the Liberal Party in the last election, change is necessary. The risks associated with the food supply are constantly changing and the changes being undertaken by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency will allow the agency to focus its resources where they are most needed.

Budget 2012 decisions affecting the Canadian Food Inspection Agency were founded on three key principles: create no reduction or impact on food safety capacity, minimize the effect on the front line

in non-food safety related activities, and reduce administrative costs through shared services and other efficiency measures.

I would like to explain how the agency will adjust some programs for efficiency without compromising food safety or other services provided to the public. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency identified a number of opportunities to reduce costs associated with management, administration and other internal functions. In some cases the agency has found better ways to operate. I know this is difficult for union bosses and the opposition to accept, but we know taxpayers appreciate that we are seeking to use their money more responsibly.

The reduction of internal costs represents approximately 50% of all the agency's reduction initiatives. The truth is that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency is reducing its executive workforce and is standardizing executive and management support organizations to be more efficient and to eliminate inconsistencies in tasks, levels and classification of administrative staff.

Corporate support for the agency's recently adopted internal governance structure will also be streamlined. This corporate support currently rests in various parts of the organization. Processes and services associated with a range of internal activities will be streamlined. These include human resources, accounting, corporate management, business transformation, audit and evaluation, and communications. The agency will be reducing expenditures associated with professional service contracts and other external costs by \$4 million annually.

For some reason the Liberals pretend that they have never found, and would never find, savings in the budget. The truth was revealed on October 27, 1999, in the *Telegraph-Journal*, and I quote:

Allan Rock and his colleagues are systematically dismantling Health Canada's enforcement of public health and food-safety standards...systematically reducing the number of food inspectors in the field.

That is from the former Liberal government. The Liberals forget their history and are doomed to repeat their history of being relegated to third place election after election.

Another way efficiencies will be realized is by eliminating duplication and saving on transportation costs.

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency already share national headquarter facilities. They will eliminate duplication in certain corporate services in the areas of information technology, communications, human resources and real property services. In addition, the two organizations will merge related services. They will also pursue opportunities to collaborate on costs related to maintaining fleet vehicles.

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I would like to explain a little more about the thoughts behind planned efficiencies. Over time, businesses expand, start up and close. The traffic of products changes. Industry and producers end up, for example, using alternate inspection stations.

• (1745)

Business processes also change and new technologies emerge, reducing the need for Canadian food inspection staff to be in close proximity to certain regulated parties. These changes have created opportunities for the agency to reduce operating costs by consolidating office space and divesting quarantine/inspection stations that are not being used any more.

Currently, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency has a number of administrative offices across the country that will be combined or reduced. The agency also has three quarantine/inspection stations that will no longer be used: the Monchy Quarantine/Inspection Station in Saskatchewan, the Coutts Quarantine/Inspection Station in Alberta and the Nisku Quarantine/Inspection Station in Alberta. The agency will consolidate a number of offices and divest three inspection stations to optimize the use of its office space and increase administrative efficiency. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency services will be maintained, regardless of which office is considered for consolidation. Only the location will change.

Similarly, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans will consolidate the coast guard sub-centre in Quebec City. DFO remains dedicated to the safety of all Canadians in ensuring that timely and appropriate maritime search and rescue coordination and response services are available to all mariners.

Public safety is, and always will be, an important government priority. In both instances, service to Canadians will not be impacted as a result of any office consolidation. The CFIA initiative is expected to be fully implemented by 2014-15. It will not compromise food safety. Rather, this initiative is directed at gaining efficiencies and cost savings without impacting service delivery.

Similarly, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency will consolidate some of its laboratory services in both the east and the west to continue to provide the highest quality of service possible in an efficient and effective manner. In eastern Canada, current activities at the agency's laboratory in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador will be transferred to two Canadian Food Inspection Agency facilities in Charlottetown, P.E.I. and Dartmouth, Nova Scotia.

These facilities are more modern and better equipped to handle the complex food and plant diagnostic testing required by industry in support of food safety and market access. The St. John's facility is in need of significant upgrades and investment to maintain current services, while the Charlottetown laboratory offers access to more modern facilities, equipment and greenhouses. It also has a highly secure bio-containment space that will enhance service delivery in both diagnostics and research support. The Dartmouth laboratory has molecular diagnostic capability and multiple high-tech analytical chemistry instruments that are not available in St. John's. Food safety and fertilizer testing will move to the Dartmouth lab while remaining plant health work will move to the Charlottetown lab.

None of these changes will impact food safety in any way. I fail to understand how the opposition members think that verifying quality

of fertilizer has anything to do with food safety. A lot could be said for fertilizer.

In British Columbia, my home province, the agency will be moving its activities from the Centre for Plant Health at the Sidney laboratory to the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada research station in Summerland. This move will ensure the important work is carried out in a modern, better equipped facility with a larger pool of scientists working together. No disruption or change to levels of service will result from this change.

The key word here is "change", but managed change, responsible change for the good. Through these actions and the resulting efficiencies, this government will continue to demonstrate its commitment to having one of the best food safety systems in the world. The opposition is stuck in the past and needs to wake up and support the government's plan to modernize and improve even further our world-class safety system.

• (1750)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, testing fertilizer is an important responsibility. It may not be directly related to food safety but members would be amazed how often the fertilizer does not come up to what is listed on the bag. It is a responsibility of the Government of Canada. If that is not up to par, then farmers are paying for a product that they are not getting. That can be serious.

This is just one case among many for which the federal government is abdicating its responsibility to Canadians. How can the member stand in his place and support the government doing this? It is putting the food safety system at risk and not looking after labelling. And this little issue, as he calls it, of inspecting fertilizer, is a very important point for the many farmers in this country and he just sloughs it off. It is irresponsible.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member, I guess, for his response as I did not hear a question there. I guess the only problem that he has with it is that it is moving out of his own province to Dartmouth.

Essentially, the same quality of testing that we do at CFIA will still be there but it will just be in Dartmouth instead of his home province. I am not sure how that answers his question but the same proficiency that is there will still be there in the future.

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Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I would like all hon. members to maintain a critical and open mind on the subject of the superiority of Summerland as a centre for plant virology. Very good science is being done there. The Centre for Plant Health in Sidney and, of course, it is in Saanich—Gulf Islands, but it was placed on Vancouver Island in 1965. I have an email here from one of the virologists who was involved at the time confirming that it was specific to the importation of plant material that represented threats, such as the plum pox virus, which is the kind of thing we do not want in the centre of a fruit growing area. Ideally, we want it on an island so if there is an accident we are not contaminating an economic region of significance and importance in terms of fruit growing as we know in terms of vineyards and other fruit.

Now I am not saying that we cannot do good science in many places but I am hoping that members will look at letters from scientists, as I am able to present them to this House.

• (1755)

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Mr. Speaker, I would like to respect the hon. member's comments and the fact that it is moving from her home riding. I understand there are some concerns she has. It is our responsibility as government, though, to look for efficiencies and to make a program work at a better price, essentially, to save taxpayer money. That is the bottom line. The same rigorous standards will be there whether they are in Sidney or in Summerland, so we look at efficiencies that way.

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague spoke about changes to the fish habitat regulations. Over the last month or so, I have heard from many different constituents across the country about how we need to ensure that we have transparency and clarity in what we define as fish habitat, both for the protection of species and for ensuring that we have that balance and working landscape.

I would ask my colleague if he would talk about this balanced principle in the context of his constituency and why these changes are so important.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Mr. Speaker, it draws in again to what department should be dealing with what in government. With regard to the DFO, it has been given a responsibility in the interior that, it could be debated, is not its responsibility. We are dealing with that as a government and ensuring the proper departments within our government are dealing with appropriate matters.

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to provide reassurance to Canadians that this government is fully committed to preserving food safety and environmental protection.

Canada has a solid reputation for the safety of our food supply. We are proud of it and we are committed to maintaining it. I say shame on the opposition for attempting to tarnish the world-class reputation of our food system.

Our government's new responsible resource development initiative is good news for both the environment and investment in Canada's energy sector. Budget 2012 contains \$165 million over two years for responsible resource development that supports our twin goals of enhanced environmental protection and job creation for

Canadians. This means that Canada will have a better, more focused and effective environment protection program while continuing to attract investment in our resources, which creates jobs.

Speaking of our economy, this brings me to the important services provided by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Under significant investment by our government, this agency continues to strengthen Canada's food safety system in response to the globalization of the food supply. New and emerging risks and advances in science and technology protect Canadian families.

When it comes to funding support, budget 2012 identifies funding of \$51 million over two years for the Public Health Agency of Canada, Health Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency for our food safety initiatives. This funding commitment has been consistently reflected in previous budgets, budgets that the opposition voted against, I may add. I am not sure how the opposition justifies demanding a stronger food safety system and then voting against food safety investments. I guess that is Liberal logic.

In budget 2011, the government invested \$100 million to modernize food inspection and in the previous four budgets the CFIA also received incremental investments to improve the food safety system and hire new inspectors. I know there are concerns about how changes at the CFIA will affect its work and how the agency will continue to protect the health and safety of Canadians, and that is reasonable.

What is not reasonable is the opposition fear-mongering when it knows full well that our food system is and will continue to be among the safest in the world. I am here to reassure members that changes being made are to the agency programs that do not impact food safety. The agency will continue to protect the health and safety of Canadians.

I will explain how the agency will continue to focus on its core mandate of animal and plant health, consumer protection and food safety.

It is true that the agency will adjust some programs that are not related to food safety. Indeed, the changes will allow the agency to focus its resources where they are needed most. Unlike the opposition, we believe that it is possible to save taxpayer dollars without affecting food safety.

It is also true that, like all federal departments and agencies, the CFIA is contributing to the government's deficit reduction plan. The agency will realize reductions of \$56 million by 2014-15. The changes the agency is making as a result of budget 2012 will better reflect the goal of focusing on activities that deliver its core mandate and better position the agency to receive change agenda over the next five years.

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To achieve this, the agency is making some important key changes. First, it is focusing on its core mandate of food safety, animal and plant health, and consumer protection, programs important to Canadians, by transferring some of its activities to other fully qualified people or organizations.

Second, it is modifying programs to reflect current scientific knowledge. This includes consolidating scientific expertise in better equipped facilities.

Third, it is improving service and simplifying requirements for industry by building single window access to a number of Canadian Food Inspection Agency services and program specialists, and reducing the regulatory burden.

Fourth, it is increasing administrative efficiencies by streamlining administrative processes and consolidating some corporate services with its portfolio partner, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

In nearly 50% of the agency's deficit reduction plan, reductions are delivered from internal, administrative efficiencies. These will not affect agency front line delivery programs.

- (1800)

Union bosses will not like that but Canadian taxpayers will.

Activities that are not directly related to the safety of food, animals and plants, including some inspection activities, have been assessed carefully and adjusted. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency will continue safety related work.

The Liberals sure have a poor memory if they think that working in the private sector to create efficiencies and save money is a bad thing. The member for Wascana reported such activities when he was agriculture minister. I will quote something from the *Victoria Times Colonist* of July 14, 1994. It reads:

Agriculture Canada is looking at ways to shift responsibilities to the industry which could in turn lead to privatization of certain inspection procedures, said [the member for Wascana].

The opposition Liberals either have a bad memory or they are hypocrites. Either one may explain why they are now the third party.

I will elaborate on the previously announced transfer of the provincial meat inspection responsibilities to some provinces. As I already emphasized, the CFIA has a critical mandate of protecting the safety of Canada's food supply and the plant and animal resource base, as well as consumer protection. The agency is refocusing its resources on programs that support that mandate. In doing so, the agency will be transferring some of its activities to other fully qualified organizations. As announced in August 2011, the CFIA is returning provincial meat inspection responsibilities, previously provided on a contractual basis, to the provinces of British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, to align them with other provinces. This inspection activity has been focused on verifying compliance with provincial standards in these provinces. This initiative will be fully implemented by January 2014 with the provinces assuming this appropriate responsibilities.

Union bosses and the opposition are shamefully claiming that by doing so we are cutting inspectors and endangering Canadians. This transition does not affect federally regulated establishments and does not compromise food safety in any way. I want to reassure all

members that the ultimate food safety outcomes of these inspection systems will not change. All meat produced in Canada, either in federally or provincially inspected plants, must and will continue to meet the safety requirements of the federal Food and Drugs Act.

The CFIA has provided meat inspection services to provincially regulated establishments in those provinces for a number of years. In all other parts of the country, inspection of provincially regulated establishments is delivered by the provinces.

I will explain. Canada has always had federal and provincial inspection systems. The main purpose of federal inspection is to enable meat for sale through export and interprovincial trade. Meat that is intended to be sold out of the province or exported out of the country must be inspected in federally registered plants. These are the plants where the CFIA is responsible for inspection. This is the point I want to make about meat inspection services to provincially regulated establishments. These arrangements are not part of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's legislated responsibilities. This is why the agency will be returning the delivery of provincial meat inspection back to the provinces where it belongs.

I want to reassure all members that CFIA officials will continue to work closely with provincial counterparts as this seamless transition takes place and not disappear, as the opposition seems to think. Returning the delivery of provincial meat inspection to those provinces will allow the agency to focus its efforts on its core mandate. This means that it will be able to focus on programs important to Canadians. The agency will be able to focus on food safety. I want to reassure Canadians once again that products sold or produced in Canada will continue to meet our high food safety standards.

I would like to speak to the CFIA initiative that cuts red tape but I am running short of time so I will jump down to the end of my speech.

The opposition seems to be of the opinion that our current food safety system is as good as it can get. Our government, however, knows that there are always improvements to be made. Yes, our system is superior compared to other countries but our government is always seeking ways to improve it. We are fortunate to live in a country with a strong food safety system and one that is continuously evolving in a responsive and responsible manner. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency will continue to maintain that fine reputation. Protecting the health and safety of Canadian food remains the government's top priority.

Business of Supply

•(1805)

Hon. Lynne Yelich (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the OECD report said that the nation's food safety was ranked as superior based on factors such as: the rate of food-borne illness; inspections; education programs; use of agricultural chemicals; strategies for bioterrorism; risk management; and food recalls. Overall, Canada has nudged up a spot in the international food safety ranking of 17 countries to tie the United States for 4th spot, as well as earning accolades as one of the best performing countries in the 2010 food safety performance world ranking studies.

If we already have a good standing in the world, according to the OECD report, imagine where would we place now with the investments that we have made with budget 2012 and how we support food inspection. Would the member care to expand on that?

Mr. LaVar Payne: Mr. Speaker, Canada has a great reputation in terms of the Food Inspection Agency, what we do in Canada, as well as the funding we have provided over the last number of budgets. In particular, we have added another \$51 million to help with food and health safety inspections to make Canada even better, while eliminating a lot of red tape so the organization that does the inspections for us will be able to do a much better and efficient job for Canadians to ensure that their food is safe.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, on its face, the issue of consolidation of facilities may seem to be a way of saving money. However, in reading the budget and listening to the debate, I cannot figure out how it is going to save money.

I ask the hon. member for Medicine Hat this. If we take a quarantine facility, with its scientists, virologists and the expertise that has existed there for decades and we move that function to Summerland, would the 1,000 virus-free trees that have been developed there for studies, for fruit and vineyards, and that is a part of the intellectual capacity and scientific ground that is available there, also move? Is there new money going to the Summerland facility? These viruses must be studied and quarantined and must be done at a world-class level.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Mr. Speaker, the member from the opposition is an independent individual. We are relocating a number of scientific areas into greater areas of expertise and more modern facilities to ensure that all of the services we provide through inspection agencies such as Agriculture and Agri-food Canada are the best in the world.

•(1810)

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have heard two questions from the opposition while I have been here. One was with respect to jobs and where the station would be moved. The other was from a member, a former minister of a previous government, who asked about the composition of a bag of manure. Neither related to food safety at all.

The only people I have heard talking about food safety tonight are the members on the government side. Would the member from Alberta give us a few more updates on what this government is doing with respect to food safety for Canadians?

Mr. LaVar Payne: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Huron—Bruce is a colleague of mine on the agri-food and agriculture committee.

We are protecting the safety of individuals. There has been a number of questions with respect to whether we are cutting inspectors. The answer is we are not reducing staff or cutting programs that would impact the health and safety of Canadians in any manner. We are returning inspectors to the provinces where they belong, under provincial jurisdiction, and rightly so as they are responsible for that.

I would also add that our agriculture minister has been outstanding in terms of what he has done to try to open markets for Canadian farmers, cattlemen and hog producers right across the country and around the world.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before I call the hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, I will let him know that I will have to interrupt him at 6:15 p.m., about three minutes into his speech, because that is the end of government orders for today.

The hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, indeed, I am nothing if not life interrupted. I want to thank the House for allowing me to speak at this time.

I want to address some of the issues brought up by the member for Medicine Hat and the downloading of services, which is rich considering the Conservatives condemned the Liberal government for so many years, saying that we had downloaded services to get rid of a deficit. However, now we hear the same sort of language, but that is okay when it is switched around.

I want to get into public safety and talk about one of the issues on the east coast, and that is both sub-centres for search and rescue. One is in Quebec City and the other St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. It is such a shame at this point, given the small amount of money and efficiencies created, which was illustrated by a good question from my colleague for Saanich—Gulf Islands, who, for the record, is not an independent. She represents the Green Party.

I would like to talk about the east coast and this measure. The efficiencies created by this do not come near the deficiencies created in the realm of public safety. The government has taken two operations that function extremely well and are vital in a chain of command for search and rescue on the east coast of our country and has moved them to Halifax and Trenton. I am not saying that there is anything wrong with the establishments in Halifax and Trenton, but the problem is with local knowledge that is tapped into it, not to mention the language barriers in Quebec City. Local knowledge, which is vital and has been talked about by bureaucrats, experts, members of the Coast Guard and DND, has been completely ignored.

Business of Supply

We had no indication that this was coming. We could not foster a larger debate on this because we never knew this would be cut. However, there was some debate on it this morning in a private member's motion when a lot of these points were brought forward, especially from Newfoundland and Labrador.

In support of the motion, we need to look at the folly of some of these decisions that are made under the guise of efficiencies created and the money that we save. I am alarmed by the idea that putting Canadians at risk is so easily dismissed in this debate.

Let us flashback to 2004-05 when I first arrived here. We talked about creating efficiencies in the department, and I was a backbencher on the government side then. However, the opposition, most notably the Conservatives, were vehement in their defence of public safety.

Yet we have this the debate now. One wonders, if the Conservatives felt that efficiencies would be created, why they would shut down debate. We were at a stage back 2004-05 when the Conservatives wanted to foster the debate. Now, god forbid, if we bring up public safety, whether it be food inspection or search and rescue, all of a sudden we find ourselves in a position where we are not allowed to discuss it.

Just this morning, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence said that response times for search and rescue were not a conversation for this place, but a conversation for the bureaucrats or the people involved in the department. There is no doubt that it is a big conversation they need to have, but why can we not discuss in the House?

We support this motion for the sake of public safety. That is the debate we should have here and that is why I encourage all members to support the motion.

● (1815)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): It being 6:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

[*English*]

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 nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

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

● (1845)

[*Translation*]

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

(*Division No. 185*)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Angus
Ashton	Atamanenko
Aubin	Ayala
Bélangier	Bellavance
Bennett	Benskin
Bevington	Blanchette
Blanchette-Lamothe	Boivin
Borg	Boulerice
Brahmi	Brison
Brosseau	Caron
Casey	Cash
Chicoine	Chisholm
Choquette	Chow
Christopherson	Cleary
Comartin	Côté
Cotler	Crowder
Cullen	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Davies (Vancouver East)	Day
Dewar	Dion
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Dubé
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseau	Easter
Eyking	Foote
Freeman	Fry
Gameau	Garrison
Genest	Genest-Jourdain
Giguère	Godin
Goodale	Gravelle
Groguhé	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (St. John's East)	Hassainia
Hsu	Hughes
Jacob	Julian
Karygiannis	Kellway
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Latendresse	Laverdière
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Liu	MacAulay
Mai	Marston
Martin	Masse
Mathysen	May
McCallum	McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Michaud
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Mourani
Mulcair	Murray
Nantel	Nash
Nicholls	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—Windsor)	
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	
Sitsabaiesan	St-Denis
Stoffer	Sullivan
Thibeault	Toone
Tremblay	Turmel
Valeriotte—	

Business of Supply

NAYS

Members

Adams	Adler
Aglukkaq	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Armstrong
Ashfield	Aspin
Baird	Bateman
Benoit	Bernier
Bezan	Blaney
Block	Boughen
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Calandra	Calkins
Cannan	Carmichael
Carrie	Chisu
Chong	Clarke
Clement	Daniel
Davidson	Dechert
Del Mastro	Devolin
Dreeshen	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Dykstra	Fantino
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Galipeau	Gallant
Gill	Glover
Goguen	Goldring
Goodyear	Gosal
Gourde	Grewal
Harper	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hawn	Hayes
Hiebert	Hillyer
Hoback	Hoepfner
Holder	James
Jean	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kent	Kerr
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Leef
Lemieux	Leung
Lizon	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
McColeman	McLeod
Menegakis	Menzies
Merrifield	Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	Norlock
Moore (Fundy Royal)	O'Neill Gordon
Nicholson	Oliver
O'Connor	Paradis
Oda	Penashue
Opitz	Preston
Payne	Rajotte
Poillievre	Reid
Raitt	Richards
Rathgeber	Rickford
Rempel	Schellenberger
Richardson	Shea
Saxton	Shory
Seeback	Sopuck
Shipley	Storseth
Smith	Sweet
Sorenson	Toet
Strahl	Trottier
Tilson	Tweed
Trost	Van Kesteren
Truppe	Wallace
Uppal	Warkentin
Van Loan	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)
Warawa	Wilks
Watson	Wong
Sky Country)	Yelich
Weston (Saint John)	Young (Vancouver South)
Williamson	
Woodworth	
Young (Oakville)	
Zimmer — 149	

PAIRED

Nil

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I declare the motion lost.

[*English*]

OPPOSITION MOTION—PENSIONS

The House resumed from April 26 consideration of the motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Pursuant to an order made Thursday, April 26, 2012, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion of the member for London—Fanshawe.

● (1850)

(The House divided on the motion which was negated on the following division:)

(*Division No. 186*)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Angus
Ashton	Atamanenko
Aubin	Ayala
Bélanger	Bellavance
Bennett	Benskin
Bevington	Blanchette
Blanchette-Lamothe	Boivin
Borg	Boulerice
Brahmi	Brisson
Brosseau	Caron
Casey	Cash
Chicoine	Chisholm
Choquette	Chow
Christopherson	Cleary
Comartin	Côté
Cotler	Crowder
Cullen	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Davies (Vancouver East)	Day
Dewar	Dion
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Dubé
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseau	Easter
Eyking	Foote
Freeman	Fry
Gameau	Garrison
Genest	Genest-Jourdain
Giguère	Godin
Goodale	Gravelle
Grogohé	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (St. John's East)	Hassainia
Hsu	Hughes
Jacob	Julian
Karygiannis	Kellway
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Latendresse	Laverdière
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Énard)
Liu	MacAulay
Mai	Marston
Martin	Masse
Mathysen	May
McCallum	McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Michaud
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Mourani
Mulcair	Murray
Nantel	Nash
Nicholls	Pacetti
Papillon	Patry
Pécllet	Perreault
Pilon	Plamondon
Quach	Rae
Rafferty	Ravignat
Raynault	Regan
Rousseau	Saganash
Sandhu	Savoie

Scarpaleggia
Sella
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)
Sims (Newton—North Delta)
Sitsabaesan
Stoffer
Thibeault
Tremblay
Valerioté — 129

Scott
Sgro
St-Denis
Sullivan
Toone
Turmel

Watson
Sky Country
Weston (Saint John)
Williamson
Woodworth
Young (Oakville)
Zimmer — 149

Adjournment Motion

Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Wilks
Wong
Yelich
Young (Vancouver South)

NAYS

Members

Adams
Aglukkaq
Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambrose
Anderson
Ashfield
Baird
Benoit
Bezan
Block
Braid
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)
Calandra
Cannan
Carrie
Chong
Clement
Davidson
Del Mastro
Dreeshen
Dykstra
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Galipeau
Gill
Goguen
Goodyear
Gourde
Harper
Hawn
Hiebert
Hoback
Holder
Jean
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kent
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lauzon
Lemieux
Lizon
Lukiwski
MacKay (Central Nova)
McColeman
Menegakis
Merrifield
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Nicholson
O'Connor
Oda
Opitz
Payne
Poilievre
Raitt
Rathgeber
Rempel
Richardson
Saxton
Seeback
Shiple
Smith
Sorenson
Strahl
Tilson
Trost
Truppe
Uppal
Van Loan
Warawa

Adler
Albas
Alexander
Allison
Anders
Armstrong
Aspin
Bateman
Bernier
Blaney
Boughen
Breitkreuz
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Bruinooge
Calkins
Carmichael
Chisu
Clarke
Daniel
Dechert
Devolin
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Fantino
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Gallant
Glover
Goldring
Gosal
Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hayes
Hillyer
Hoepfner
James
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kerr
Lake
Leaf
Leung
Lobb
Lunney
MacKenzie
McLeod
Menzies
Miller
Norlock
O'Neill Gordon
Oliver
Paradis
Penashue
Preston
Rajotte
Reid
Richards
Rickford
Schellenberger
Shea
Shory
Sopuck
Storseth
Sweet
Toet
Trottier
Tweed
Van Kesteren
Wallace
Warkentin

PAIRED

Nil

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I declare the motion defeated.

ADJOURNMENT MOTION

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

* * *

● (1855)

[*Translation*]

PENSIONS

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, during the recent debate on pensions, it was said that seniors will have more problems because of the intention to raise the age of eligibility for old age security from 65 to 67 years.

We are truly worried about this. What will seniors do during those two years? We already know that seniors are in a delicate position. Many seniors live in poverty, and it is hard for them to get by.

The government wants to raise the age of eligibility for old age security from 65 to 67. These people do not necessarily have the means to live for two years without an income. Not everyone can continue to work after the age of 65. I know that the fishers in my riding would find it very difficult to keep working. The fishers and the people who work in the processing plants will have a very hard time continuing to work after they turn 65. It is already very difficult for them to keep working past 55. Unfortunately, they do not have a “freedom 55” plan like some people in the rest of the country. These people do not have the luxury of stopping work at 55.

Quite frankly, I wonder what this government plans to do for people who are 65 and cannot go on working. They no longer have the means or the physical strength to continue working in factories and processing plants. They simply cannot go on.

So I ask the government: what are these people going to do? For those two years, people will be forced to either continue working and perhaps endanger their health and safety, or ask for social assistance.

Either way, this downloads the costs onto the provinces. If we shift the costs to the provinces, are we really saving anything or is this a false economy?

Adjournment Motion

I have a few questions for the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety or the minister. They might be able to shed some light on what is going to happen to these seniors who are unable to work past the age of 65. Do we really want to shift responsibility for their fate onto the provinces? Is this really a question of transferring costs from the federal to the provincial level? What is the federal government's game plan? What does it want to do with our seniors?

• (1900)

[*English*]

Ms. Candice Hooppner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, sadly, the opposition continues to mischaracterize the necessary changes we need to ensure the sustainability of the old age security program.

Let me be very clear. No seniors currently receiving benefits would see any reduction to their benefits. The changes we are making would begin in 2023 and would gradually, over a period of six years, raise the age of OAS eligibility from 65 to 67 years. This would give Canadians a chance to prepare, which the opposition seems to ignore.

The opposition also refuses to acknowledge the facts in this debate. While people are living longer, our birth rate has been falling. By 2030, for the first time ever, we will have more people over the age of 65 than under the age of 20. The number of seniors will double over the next two decades. This is not unique in the world. The United Nations reports that, in 2005, 10% of the world's population was 60 years or older. By 2050, that proportion will more than double, to reach 22%.

Today, we rank 27th in the list of countries, in terms of average age. These are facts that the opposition cannot ignore. By 2030, Canada is projected to be the eleventh oldest country in the world and the eighth oldest of the 34 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD, countries.

This is a staggering increase in a relatively short period of time, and it comes with a high price tag. Again, it is something the opposition obviously does not understand.

The annual cost of the OAS program is expected to triple between 2010 and 2030, from \$36 billion to \$108 billion. At the same time, our seniors population is rising. The ratio of working-age Canadians to seniors is expected to fall from 4:1 in 2011 to 2:1 in 2030.

Our government is making responsible decisions so that OAS will be sustainable for generations to come. We are also giving Canadians a very good chance and a long period to prepare for this change.

When the opposition has a chance to support seniors, it votes against our measures every time. This is responsible government making responsible decisions, and we ask the opposition to support it.

Mr. Philip Toone: Mr. Speaker, I find the parliamentary secretary's arguments engaging, but they are wrong.

We are saying we are giving people more time to prepare for their incoming poverty, and that is not an acceptable position for any government to take, to give people more time to prepare so they can become poor and unsatisfactorily supported by their government.

The real question here is: Is there any need to do this? If we speak to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, the answer to that is no.

We are creating a false argument. The government is trying to spread fear among the Canadian population when none is required. This country is an old country. It is a mature enough country to understand when it is being sold a bill of goods.

The government really needs to speak to real accountants and not just ideologues and see what it can do to help seniors. The NDP has a clear platform on how we want to help seniors. We are looking forward to the day in 2015 when we are going to actually start putting that into effect.

Ms. Candice Hooppner: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is ducking the issue. If we are interested in job creation, economic growth and the financial well-being of Canadians, we have to address the future affordability of OAS.

It is the responsibility of the federal government to think of the future and to act in the long-term interests of all Canadians. Private sector economists, financial institutions and former Bank of Canada governors have confirmed that we must act now to make the OAS program sustainable.

Unfortunately, the opposition parties have chosen the low road. Baseless fearmongering and wilful ignorance of the need for change does not serve the interests of Canadians. We will not follow the opposition approach of sticking our heads in the sand and pretending we are oblivious to the upcoming changes. We have to face up to the reality that there will be fewer workers for the number of retirees.

• (1905)

HOUSING

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to rise in the House representing the riding of Davenport in Toronto on this very important issue. This is one of the most important issues that people in my riding face. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities has noted that the lack of affordable housing, the shortage of rental housing, is the number one issue affecting municipalities from coast to coast to coast. That includes large urban centres, small towns and rural municipalities.

I rise this evening on the issue of housing because we continue, during question period, to get answers from the government regarding its lack of a plan for affordable housing. We have the Minister of Finance hectoring Canadians and telling them that their household debt is too high. He does not go into one of the reasons that their household debt is so high, which is because of plummeting wages, but we will leave that for another day. He says that Canadians need to reign in their household debt. At the same time, the Minister of Human Resources says we have solved the affordable housing crisis, that we have solved the crisis of the lack of affordable rental stock in Canada, because interest rates are low and Canadians can simply buy a house.

That answer just does not cut it. I am here tonight to allow the minister—or the minister's associate, as the case may be—to provide an answer to the House and to Canadians for whom the issue of affordable rental housing is not just an esoteric question but a question of daily struggle.

In January, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities came up with a three-point plan, which it presented here in Ottawa. This was a really pragmatic approach to the lack of rental housing. The federation had really taken a look at it; it had taken a look at the way the government is oriented toward market solutions, and it came up with three proposals. One was the building Canada rental development direct lending program to stimulate investment in new market-priced rental units. The second was the rental housing protection tax credit to preserve rentals and stop the serious erosion of existing low-rent properties through demolition and conversion to condominiums. The third was the eco-energy rental housing tax credit to encourage and help landlords to retrofit their buildings. These were three very practical, very prudent, very sensible suggestions.

There was not a single word about this in the budget. Therefore, I would like to ask the government why there was silence on the most important issue facing Canadians from coast to coast to coast, affordable housing? Why was it left out of the budget?

Ms. Candice Hooppner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Davenport frequently does ask questions of our government in regard to housing.

In fact on February 6, he suggested that the Minister of Finance's concern with household debt levels was inconsistent with statements by the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development in support of home ownership.

I want to assure the House that no such inconsistency exists. Our approach is balanced and sound with the goal of ensuring that Canadians from all walks of life and all parts of the country have access to housing that meets their needs. Whether through rental housing or home ownership, the vast majority of Canadians are able to meet their housing needs in the marketplace. We recognize that this is not possible for all Canadians.

That is why we have policies in place to support the full range of housing options: home ownership for those who can afford it, rental housing for those who need or prefer this option, and housing assistance for those whose needs cannot be met in the marketplace, including low-income families, seniors, people with disabilities and first nations people on reserve.

In addition, our government, through CMHC, has invested an estimated \$12.5 billion in federal housing assistance since 2006, investments that have improved living conditions for thousands of low-income Canadians and helped to build stronger communities from coast to coast to coast.

We continue to invest heavily in housing. This year, through CMHC, the Government of Canada will invest approximately \$2 billion in housing. Of this amount, \$1.7 billion will be spent in support of almost 615,000 households living in existing social housing. Because the hon. member asked specifically about Toronto,

Adjournment Motion

I would like to point out that an estimated 267,200 households in Ontario, living in existing social housing, receive this support.

In addition, communities across Ontario are also benefiting from the three year federal investment of more than \$240 million provided under the investment in affordable housing funding that is aimed at reducing the number of Ontarians in housing need.

Our government is working hard to ensure that people in Toronto, in Ontario and in communities across the country have access to safe, suitable and affordable housing.

● (1910)

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for her efficient answer.

I wish that our world here in Canada looked the way her speaking notes make it look. The fact of the matter is whatever the heck the government is doing around housing, it is just not working. It is like saying we have a leaky roof, so we put some gaffer tape over half the hole, and we are looking after the roof. That is not the way this is going to work for housing.

Housing is not like any other issue that Canadians face. This is a basic key determinant of health. That is not in dispute by anyone.

My hon. colleague talked about the investments the government was apparently making. The federal agreements for much of our social housing stock are expiring. They are going to begin to expire shortly. This is going to threaten the viability of about a third of Canada's social housing stock.

I want to ask my hon. colleague, how does she square the circle? Those agreements are expiring. Those people are wondering what they are going to do with their affordable housing. The government has so far provided no answers, no certainty to hundreds of thousands of Canadians.

Ms. Candice Hooppner: Mr. Speaker, we have invested more than \$2 billion under Canada's economic action plan to renovate existing, and build new, social housing across the country.

We continue to provide \$1.7 billion a year in support of almost 615,000 households living in existing social housing. We are also delivering on our 2008 commitment to invest \$1.9 billion over five years in housing and homelessness programs. We are spending about \$407 million annually to address housing needs on reserve.

We will continue to work with provinces, territories and other stakeholders to deliver made-in-Canada affordable housing solutions. We have specific funding for affordable housing for seniors, the disabled and for those off-reserve and on reserve. We did all of this in spite of the opposition parties that voted against us every single time we tried to help people. Unfortunately, the NDP does not have a lot of credibility on this issue because of its voting record.

Adjournment Motion

PENSIONS

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I asked for this late show to follow up with the minister regarding the question I asked in the House about old age security. The minister quoted from a speech I made in which I said that we need a plan in place and we need the structures in place to deal with this dramatic shift in our country's demographics. The minister said that she agreed with me. If she does indeed agree, I would encourage her to continue to convince the government to reverse its decision to change the age of retirement from 65 to 67.

As I have already said, we need a plan in place to ensure there is adequate investment in the security of seniors, because there will indeed be more seniors. To prevent poverty and ensure dignity in retirement, we need to make investments and budgetary decisions now that will properly support our aging population.

Big business tax breaks, jails for unreported crimes and fighter jets costing billions do not meet the needs of Canadians as they look ahead to retirement. These are not the smart investments that will maintain our social safety net.

Old age security is sustainable. We can afford it. The Parliamentary Budget Officer has made it clear time and time again that no changes are needed. Because of the government's wrong-headed decisions, it is seniors who will suffer in the future.

A report just released by the NDP found that OAS and GIS make up more than half the income for about 1.2 million seniors, or 28%. For females, it is about 38% who get more than half of their income from OAS and GIS. For 510,000 seniors, or 12% of Canada's seniors, OAS and GIS make up more than 75% of their income. These are all individuals with incomes under \$20,000.

Females make up 80% of those for whom OAS and GIS make up 75% or more of income. Of those for whom OAS and GIS make up 75% or more of income, 89% do not have an employer pension. Right now about 34,000 persons who are 66 or 67 are currently poor; without their OAS and GIS, about 129,000, or 95,000 more, will be poor. Without OAS and GIS, the poverty rate for these seniors increases from about 6% to 25%. The loss of OAS and GIS for senior households who have someone aged 66 or 67 would increase their poverty rate to nearly 40% in Atlantic Canada and to 50% for single females.

Surveys of recent retirees suggest that many seniors are not in a position to simply work two more years in response to changes to old age security. This population is unable to work for two more years.

I would say that any plan to change OAS is absolutely unacceptable. The government needs to take poor seniors into account when it does its budgeting, but it has not done so. This country cannot afford to make changes to the OAS and leave more and more seniors living in poverty.

•(1915)

Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that the member opposite, even in her own words, understands that the government needs to act in a responsible and forward way to secure the financial future of seniors. It is disappointing that the NDP

appeared to either not understand the situation with OAS or refused to acknowledge it.

The fact is that Canadians are living longer, healthier lives than past generations and we will be relying on retirement income for longer periods of time. As David Dodge, who is the former governor of the Bank of Canada and deputy minister of finance said, we need to address the fiscal problem of old age security. He also said that denying it would not make the problem go away. He said that we are "15 years late in getting started...and, because labour participation rates will start to fall later this decade, we're up against the wall". We need to ensure that our retirement income system can adjust to this trend and stay strong and sustainable for generations to come, and that changing demographics do not affect the affordability of the OAS program.

As I said earlier, the number of Canadians over the age of 65 will increase from 4.7 million to 9.3 million over the next 20 years. Consequently, the cost of the OAS program will increase from \$36 billion per year in 2010 to \$108 billion per year in 2030. OAS is the largest single program of the Government of Canada and it is funded 100% by annual tax revenues. This is a situation that must be addressed and it takes government leadership to do that. Again, it is disappointing that the NDP members do not acknowledge this.

Right now there are four working-age Canadians to every senior and by 2030 this will shrink to two. This is the issue. If we were going to ignore the coming demographic changes, we would simply be passing the buck to a future Parliament and to future generations, including our children. The choice would be to raise taxes to such an extent that they would cripple our economy or parliamentarians would be forced to do the unthinkable and examine the very sustainability of this program. We refuse to allow this to happen. We will make the common sense changes now, with a lengthy notice period, to ensure the sustainability of this program.

I will clarify once again that no current seniors will lose a penny because of these changes. The gradual increase to qualify for OAS from 65 years of age to 67 will begin in 2023 and finish by 2029. This is over 11 years away. The opposition should stop playing politics, stop fear-mongering and support our common sense changes to ensure the very sustainability of this very cherished social benefit.

• (1920)

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, this has nothing to do with common sense. This is about undermining our social safety net. This is about pitting one generation against another. Yes, there will be more seniors. We have known that for 40 years. What has been done? Nothing. The Conservatives have undermined health care, affordable housing and now they are undermining the old age security system.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer made it very clear. Yes, it will cost more but as we have an increased number of seniors we will also see an increase in our gross domestic product. Right now it costs 2.3% of GDP to support seniors. By 2030, it will be 3.3%, about the same as in the 1990s. By 2030, it will begin to decline right back down to where it is now, with a further decline to 1.4%.

This has nothing to do with supporting seniors of the future. It has everything to do with the fact that the government does not believe in being government, it does not believe in our social safety net and it does not believe in Canadians.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Mr. Speaker, that was a little extreme but thankfully Canadians have elected a strong, stable Conservative majority government because of our economic track record and because they trust us to take care of the economy of the country. After hearing that tirade, I think it is very obvious why.

Adjournment Motion

The numbers speak for themselves. According to the Chief Actuary, the number of basic OAS recipients is expected to almost double over the next 20 years. According to the opposition, who will pay for that? I guess the opposition members think that money will appear out of thin air. This will change and this change will affect the ratio of workers to retirees increasing the burden on working Canadians to an unsustainable level.

Again, sticking one's head in the sand and denying the facts will not make them go away. Sadly, the opposition refuses to acknowledge the realities of our aging population and instead is playing political games.

In 2023, which is 11 years from now, we will gradually raise the age of OAS eligibility from 65 years of age to 67 years of age. We are making these changes to ensure the sustainability of the program for future generations of Canadians.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): 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 7:23 p.m.)

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