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(HANSARD)

Thursday, September 20, 2012

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

CONTENTS

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, September 20, 2012

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)
[English]

CANADIAN SECURITY INTELLIGENCE SERVICE

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under the provisions of Standing Order 32(2), it is my pleasure to table, in both official languages, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service's public report for 2010-11.

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HELPING FAMILIES IN NEED ACT

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-44, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code and the Employment Insurance Act and to make consequential amendments to the Income Tax Act and the Income Tax Regulations.

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

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Orders 104 and 114, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 29th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding membership of committees of the House.

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

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations and I believe if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That the membership of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be amended as follows:

Mr. Armstrong, (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley) for Mr. Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River)

Mr. Gill (Brampton—Springdale) for Mr. Kerr (West Nova)

Mr. Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest) for Mr. Hawn (Edmonton Centre)
Mr. Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine) for Mr. Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh).

The Speaker: Does the hon. Chief Government Whip 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)

* * *

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I believe there is consent from all parties to adopt the following motion. I move:

That, at the conclusion of today's debate on the opposition motion in the name of the member for Outremont, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion be deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred to Tuesday, September 25, 2012, at the expiry of the time provided for Government Orders.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Hull—Aylmer have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this 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)

* * *

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the House gives its consent, I move that the 29th report of the Standing Committee on Procedures and House Affairs, presented to the House earlier today, be concurred in.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Routine Proceedings

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)

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PETITIONS

SERVICE CANADA

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present. The first one requests that the federal government reinstate Service Canada representatives to process employment insurance claims for Canadians.

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition calls upon the House to confirm that every human being is recognized by Canadian law as a human and calls on the House to amend section 233 of the Criminal Code in such a way as to reflect 21st century medical evidence.

BLOOD SUPPLY

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a petition today from citizens from across northwestern Ontario, including Thunder Bay and Manitowadge.

They are petitioning the government in the wake of Thunder Bay losing the only stand-alone blood plasma clinic in Canada. They point out that we will now have to import U.S. blood, much of it from paid U.S. donors, which would put the supply at risk.

They are asking the government to take action to protect our blood supply by moving to re-open clinics like the one in Thunder Bay and increasing the supply of plasma from unpaid volunteer Canadian donors.

PENSIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I table a petition today with regard to our OAS, GIS and CPP programs. Constituents believe very passionately that individuals should have the right to retire at 65, and that the government should support our most valuable pension programs.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition that concerns the proposed megaquarry in Melancthon Township in Dufferin County, Ontario. This would be the largest open-pit quarry in Canada at over 2,300 acres.

The petitioners are concerned with a number of issues, including the fact that the proposed megaquarry threatens the Grand and Nottawasaga river watersheds, including various freshwater fish species. They are asking that the Government of Canada conduct an environmental assessment under the authority of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act on the proposed Highland Companies' megaquarry development.

COMMUNITY ACCESS PROGRAM

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to table a petition on behalf of many Ottawa residents who are urging the government to reinstate funding to the community access program. Sadly, the Conservative government is disconnecting Canadians from their communities, business opportunities and government services. They are shutting people out of the online conversations that are shaping our society.

I am pleased to table this petition on behalf of many local residents.

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have three petitions to table.

In two petitions the petitioners note that section 223 of the Criminal Code is 400 years old, is from British common law, and that it is time to have a discussion to change that. In one petition the petitioners call for a debate on the issue; in the other, they call for Parliament to change the definition.

• (1010)

ABORTION

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the third petition, the petitioners call on Parliament to enact legislation that would limit abortion to the greatest extent possible.

CHILD AND YOUTH NUTRITION STRATEGY

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition regarding student nutrition. Forty per cent of elementary students and 62% of secondary school students do not eat a nutritious breakfast. School nutrition programs are highly effective in providing children with nutritious diets, yet Canada remains the only G8 country without a national nutrition program.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to provide national leadership in support of child and youth nutrition programs, to develop a national child and youth nutrition strategy in consultation with stakeholders across the country, and to develop partnerships with farmers and food producers to stimulate economic development.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to rise today to present two petitions.

The first is signed by members of my constituency, particularly from Salt Spring Island. They are writing on a matter of national concern, which is the pending closure of the Experimental Lakes Area.

In the House, the Minister of the Environment told us that we are going to move on to other areas that need study. This is perhaps a deep misunderstanding of the unique global importance of 58 lakes that allow the only global opportunity for whole lake experiments. We must not let this precious scientific resource pass away from research capability.

Government Orders

Mr. Speaker, the second petition comes from constituents in the riding of my bench mate, the member for Thunder Bay—Superior North. Residents of Thunder Bay have signed this petition to help British Columbia's urgent priority to stop the Enbridge pipeline tanker scheme.

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QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—CANADIAN ECONOMY

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP) moved:

That this House acknowledge that the Canadian economy is facing unprecedented risk and uncertainty; recognize that many regions and industries across Canada have already suffered significant job losses in recent years; urge all levels of government to work together to build a balanced 21st century Canadian economy; and insist that Canada's Prime Minister meet with his counterparts in Halifax this November at the National Economic Summit being held by the Council of the Federation.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for reading the motion we are debating here today. As the official opposition, we feel it is important to remind the House that the central theme of our campaign during the last election can be summed up in two words: working together.

The major recession of 2008 taught us that it is crucial that we begin working with our partners, such as Europe and the United States, but of course within the context of the Canadian federation, that is, in co-operation with the provinces and territories.

So, imagine our surprise yesterday to hear the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons mock the idea of meeting with the provinces and territories to discuss the economy.

Immediately after the general election of October 14, 2008, I looked at the list of measures mentioned and I highlighted them in yellow. I would like to offer the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons this important tool so he can use it to highlight the appropriate parts of our platform the next time he wants to read it.

• (1015)

[*English*]

What did the Conservative Prime Minister have to say following that general election? He had a six step program. Four of those steps were to hold meetings. Let us read them together. Step number two was about discussing the global financial crisis and strengthening the Canada-European Union economic partnership at Friday's Canada-European Union summit. We would be meeting with the European

Union. Number three was about summoning us to meet that fall and tabling an economic and fiscal update before the end of November. Number four was about participating in the G20 finance ministers meeting November 8 and 9 and calling for a further G7 finance ministers meeting to build on progress. The final one was about convening a first ministers meeting on the economy to discuss with the premiers and territorial leaders a joint approach to the global financial crisis.

[*Translation*]

He is obviously in no way a stranger to the idea of working together. In fact, there was a time when our Prime Minister found that so important that four of his six proposals involved working together.

What has happened since then? He now has a majority in the House. The Conservatives have such little need for others that they do not even convene the cabinet. When was the last time there was public notice of a cabinet meeting?

They get together in small groups and then inform the ministers about decisions that were made regarding their portfolios. That is his way of doing business.

[*English*]

Let us look at some of the bare economic facts that we think militate in favour of holding and attending that meeting in Halifax with the provinces and territories.

One would be the trade deficit. Right now the current account trade deficit in Canada is \$50 billion. That is goods, services, investments and cash transfers. That is a record high. That is the number given to us by the Toronto Dominion Bank.

Another would be unemployment. This is worth noting, because we always hear the expression "net new jobs". Here is the real number: there are 319,000 more people unemployed today than prior to the 2008 recession.

Let us consider manufacturing job losses. I was in southwestern Ontario on a jobs tour last week. I spent four days meeting with municipal officials, meeting with unemployment groups, meeting with chambers of commerce. Let us look at the manufacturing job losses in the last 10 years. In November 2002, there were 2.33 million manufacturing jobs in Canada. In August 2012, there were 1.80 million manufacturing jobs. Some 530,000 manufacturing jobs were lost in the last 10 years.

Under this government, it is worth noting that despite the rebound since the 2008 recession we are still at a net loss of 316,000 manufacturing jobs, almost exactly the number of additional people unemployed today over 2008.

We now have the highest household debt in Canadian history. Over the past 10 years, household debt in Canada has risen by 135%, while disposal income and nominal gross domestic product have risen by 54%. The average Canadian now has a record high debt load equal to 154% of his or her disposable income.

Government Orders

Finally, productivity is another key indicator. Under this Prime Minister, labour productivity has grown by an average of 0.5% per year. These are the worst six years of productivity growth since Statistics Canada began tracking the statistic in 1961. That is the Conservatives' record. That is what they are hiding from when they start making stuff up about our policies and our positions. That is why they do not dare go and meet the provincial premiers and those responsible for the territories. It is because they have nothing to put on the table except this lamentable record. That is what they have done to the Canadian economy.

Canadians used to be able to count on a decent job with good benefits and a pension they could rely on, but those jobs are disappearing fast. More often than not, they are being replaced by part-time precarious work in the service sector.

[Translation]

When Canadians look at the statistics and the facts coming out of Ottawa, they see that we have lost 500,000 good jobs in the manufacturing sector. Those jobs came with pension plans, but have been replaced with precarious jobs in the service sector without pension plans.

This is another debt the government is bequeathing to future generations, a social debt because future generations will have to look after retirees who do not have enough money to live with dignity.

In a country as rich as Canada, it is scandalous to have so many seniors living below the poverty line. The NDP is focused on working to ensure that no Canadian senior lives below the poverty line.

The trade deficit is \$50 billion, and household debt is higher than it has ever been. Yet the government is giving the richest corporations tax cuts to the tune of \$50 billion. Clearly, the Conservatives have their own priorities. These tax cuts are not for ordinary people. They are for the rich, particularly those with preferred access to the Conservative trough. We live in a time of unprecedented risk, and as I said yesterday, we are entering a period of extremely dangerous turbulence.

We are not making the most of our experience, our credibility and our expertise. But we are running a very large country, and we know how to work with regions that are in difficulty. We also have an equalization formula, and we know how to work under those circumstances.

When the serious crisis began in Europe, Canada could have offered to be at the table to give advice and assistance, and to share its experience.

No one, especially not me, ever spoke about cutting a cheque, but that is how the Conservatives like to twist reality: as soon as they were asked why they were not working with the Europeans, they said that the Europeans wanted a cheque for billions of dollars to maintain their extravagant lifestyle. Baloney! What we want is a Canada that is respected on the world stage.

• (1020)

[English]

Some of the challenges we are facing are, of course, driven by global forces, but the truth is our fate and our future is still very much in our hands. The greatest challenge we face today is not a failure of ability, it is a failure of leadership.

[Translation]

There are basic principles in public administration. This generation knows that we have to take environmental, economic and social factors into account every time we make a decision.

Basic sustainable development principles such as internalization of costs, polluter pay and user pay need to be applied. But really, the Conservatives could not care less.

[English]

It is extraordinary to watch the Conservatives go. Usually, coming especially from a law and order government, one would expect that if a company had practices that did not correspond to and conform to the law, the government would change the practices and order them changed to correspond to the law. What did the government do? It changed the law to make it correspond to the practices. That is what it is doing by gutting environmental legislation and leaving the largest ecological debt in the backpacks of future generations. The cleanup is going to be enormous, the cost insurmountable. That is the Conservatives' legacy to future generations.

Failure to enforce and apply existing Canadian environmental legislation has as a result that we are bringing in an artificially high number of U.S. dollars. That is contributing to keep the Canadian dollar artificially high. Everyone, whether it is the OECD, the Coulombe report prepared for Industry Canada, or Mark Carney, admits it is the high Canadian dollar that is the principal cause of at least 50% of the manufacturing job losses, and the Conservatives are not doing anything about it.

Slowly but surely, the Conservatives are dismantling the balanced economy that we built up in Canada since the Second World War. The difference between us is we know that governments played a role in establishing that balanced economy. The Conservatives refuse to acknowledge that. They believe that there is a pristine market that arbitrates all of these things on its own.

We know and understand that in a country as large as ours with a population of only 34 million, we have been able to hold ourselves together because government has always played an active role. That is what the Conservatives are trying to dismantle. That is why we are here to stand up and say they have to change their ways. They have to start talking with their partners across Canada and come to results that favour the Canadian economy for the future instead of dismantling it the way they are doing it.

After 50 years of constant economic growth in Canada, how is it possible that the government is now telling Canadians that we can no longer afford the types of programs that have always identified us? We can no longer afford old age security, employment insurance, and health care.

Government Orders

• (1025)

[Translation]

With such economic growth in Canada, how is it possible that the government has suddenly discovered that we can no longer afford old age security and employment insurance programs, and universal and free health care? Because they are draining the government's economic capacity. It is not surprising that we cannot afford these programs when the government gives away \$50 billion in corporate tax cuts. Thus, the government has created the problem, which it proposes to remedy by cutting services. That is absurd and shows a lack of vision. That is another reason they are refusing to meet with the provincial premiers.

Young people are already paying the price.

[English]

Young people in Canada are being told by the government that they have no choice, that they have to accept less. If this continues we will be the first generation in Canadian history to leave less to our children than what we ourselves received from our parents. We find that totally inadmissible.

[Translation]

We believe that economic stability is dependent upon the ability to work together. The business world, of course, and also the workforce and government must work together to build a strong and balanced economy for the 21st century. That is our vision.

[English]

We can build an economy that creates wealth and prosperity for generations to come. Sadly, working together has not been the government's strong suit. Rather than invest in our workforce, the Conservatives trample on the collective bargaining rights of our workers. Rather than making the investments in infrastructure, research, and education that will allow businesses to thrive, they hand out billions in corporate tax breaks to well-connected industries.

I urge people to go to southwestern Ontario. When we think of people losing their jobs in a closed factory, we think first and foremost of the families and the effect that has on them. I urge people to meet with members of the chamber of commerce, meet with people at city hall. They will tell us that the plant is no longer part of their tax base. The city no longer has the money to take care of its basic infrastructure. It is a vicious circle that is being installed now, a vicious spiral downward for many of those municipalities.

That is where the government can and should be playing a role, but it would have to be at the table with the province to find those solutions. That is why it is so unacceptable that it is absent from these discussions. It prefers to finger wag and lecture. That is its only approach.

Canadians have the drive, talent, and ingenuity to compete with anyone in the world. However, prosperity does not happen overnight and it does not happen by accident. The challenge we face is not the failure of ability, it is the failure of leadership. We all recognize that government cannot do everything. Of course, a strong and vibrant private sector is always going to be the backbone of a vital, thriving economy, but there is also a commonsense role that everyone

understands for government in shaping our economic future. The economy we have today took decades to build, decades of investment by business and government on behalf of all Canadians, and investments in education. The only way to create wealth is to create knowledge.

Our infrastructure is falling apart. Municipalities have the responsibility for 40% of infrastructure spending and 8% of the tax base in Canada. It is not going to happen. There is a deficit of over \$100 billion in infrastructure. That is something else that the federal government can and should be playing an active role in if it is willing to talk with the provinces and territories.

Of course, investments in energy have also laid the groundwork for our economy to thrive in the last century. I was very proud in the last election to stand up, and I was only the Quebec politician to do so, in favour of loan guarantees for Newfoundland and Labrador to develop green renewable hydroelectric energy on the Lower Churchill. That is the type of vision we could have in Canada. Can everyone imagine the partnering opportunities? The places in Canada with the most consistent wind currents are often the latitudes with the largest concentrations of first nations. We see tragedies like Attawapiskat and the failure of the federal government to fulfill its responsibilities. Instead, it attacked, finger wagged again and blamed the victims.

Look at the opportunities we are missing to put in place a green renewable energy infrastructure across Canada and partner with first nations. That would be a vision for the future and the Conservatives do not believe in any of that. With the right leadership and the right choices, our economy could reach greater heights in the years to come.

• (1030)

[Translation]

But that will only happen on one condition: we must work together. The government must stop going on the attack, reprimanding, lecturing, believing that once a decision is made there is no other pertinent information that can be brought to bear on the issue or produce a positive outcome.

I am pleased to re-read today's motion.

[English]

That this House acknowledge that the Canadian economy is facing unprecedented risk and uncertainty; recognize that many regions and industries across Canada have already suffered significant job losses in recent years; urge all levels of government to work together to build a balanced, 21st century Canadian economy; and insist that Canada's Prime Minister meet with his counterparts in Halifax this November at the National Economic Summit being held by the Council of the Federation.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate you on your new post. I am sure we will have an interesting year.

I want to ask the Leader of the Opposition a simple question and I am hopeful that he will provide a very short answer.

Government Orders

We clearly disagree on tax issues. One of the main things we have disagreed on in the past is the GST increase. We believe in lowering taxes and the NDP voted against the GST decrease, not once but twice. I would ask the opposition leader if he agrees with his current NDP finance critic, who said the following, “Cuts to the GST...take us in the wrong direction. I am very proud that our caucus stood opposed to that”.

Does the NDP leader still feel proud to go with the finance critic in saying that the GST reduction was wrong?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, what is wrong is that the government is still giving billions of dollars in subsidies and tax reductions to gas and oil companies. That is what is wrong.

Some of the worst polluters in this country are getting billions of dollars of taxpayers' money, and that is what is a scandal.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the responsibility of national leadership goes beyond the Prime Minister's office. It extends to the Leader of the Opposition's office. His attack on western Canadian and the important jobs in western Canada did absolutely nothing for national unity. The resources of western Canada contribute to Canada's economy.

I would like to quote from an editorial, and I would ask the member to listen very carefully.

Don't blame Canada's high dollar and high resource-export earnings for the decline of manufacturing. Bank of Canada governor Mark Carney is telling the country. The resource boom is a great opportunity for Canada, and we have to learn to take advantage of it.

My question to the Leader of the Opposition is, will he apologize to western Canadians for his attack on western Canada and acknowledge that all of Canada benefits from all natural resources from coast to coast to coast?

● (1035)

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, what we have been saying since the beginning, and it applies in all regions of Canada, is that the basic rules of sustainable development require us to internalize environmental costs and apply the rule “polluter pay”. That is not setting one region of the country against the other. That is a different vision for development in this country.

What we are saying is that wherever people are and in whatever industry, whether they are in northern Quebec in a mine or in the oil sands or developing offshore in Atlantic Canada, the same rule applies. They have to take into account the effect of everything they do on future generations.

We will never do what the Liberal Party did when it was in power. Eddie Goldenberg admitted, in a speech in March 2007 before the London Economic Club, that when the Liberals signed Kyoto they did it as a public relations stunt. His exact words were that they did it to “galvanize public opinion”.

That is why, under the Liberals, Canada went on to have the worst record in the world for greenhouse gas production. Something different is going to happen in 2015. A party will say what it is going to do once elected, and once we are elected, we will do what we say.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Leader of the Opposition for his detailed vision about a real economic plan for Canada.

This spring we saw the Conservatives' hidden agenda with their omnibus budget bill, Bill C-38, where without any notice to Canadians they cut EI benefits, had massive cutbacks in so many areas and gutted environmental regulations.

My question to the Leader of the Opposition is this. Does this negative experience with Bill C-38 not explain and detail to us why it is so important to have consultations with the provinces and territories about how we work together as a country?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question and for zeroing in on the aspect of Bill C-38 that was the gutting of our environmental legislation.

Let us take one concrete example. Going back to 2009, there was a piece of legislation that was a world model. It was 100 years old: the Navigable Waters Protection Act. I remember the night. I was in a parliamentary committee here in Ottawa. We had canoeing and outdoors groups from all over the Ottawa and Gatineau region coming to the parliamentary committee.

They watched, gobsmacked, as the Conservatives, which was less of a surprise, with the culpable complicity of the Liberal Party voted to gut the Navigable Waters Protection Act. That is the record of the Liberals on the environment. This year they are completing the work.

We know the budget bill that we saw in the spring went after that legislation again. I remember the so-called Minister of the Environment, today in foreign affairs, saying that it was the greatest job killer. Imagine that, saying that a piece of legislation that has protected navigable waters in Canada for over a century, a model for the world, was a job killer. That is the Conservative vision.

They do not understand that in the 21st century, economic growth, protection of the environment and social responsibility all have to go together.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate you on your new post.

I am sitting here in some astonishment because when my colleague from this side, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, asked her question about the hon. member's plan to raise the GST, he avoided answering the question.

Then in answer to the next question, he actually said, I answer questions because I am a real leader. However, the answer that he gave made it very clear that he was going to go after industry in my province of Alberta and that he was going to pass on the cost to consumers. He was going to make our gasoline, our goods, all go up by implementing a carbon tax that would drive up costs to consumers across this country.

I represent a lot of young families and I can tell members that there is one thing that young families, senior citizens and people in low-income positions cannot handle, and that is a rise in the cost of everyday goods.

Government Orders

What he has planned has been articulated by himself and others. I would ask that he admit that if he were ever in power, he would raise the GST and raise the cost of goods and services for all Canadians through a carbon tax, which would devastate families across this great nation.

• (1040)

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, if we look at the Sydney tar ponds, it is tar, not oil. The Sydney tar ponds is a mistake from decades ago that we are cleaning up now. The government is paying \$750 million of taxpayer money to clean up one site. That is what it is costing.

We can say that in the 1950s and 1960s we did not know what we were doing. That it is the type of mess that we left. We know that on the books this year we have \$7 billion of further cleanups we are responsible for now.

It is inexcusable that, for the same young families the member just evoked, the children and grandchildren in those families are going to be left with a bill for tens of billions of dollars of cleanup and entire ecosystems that will have been destroyed and not available to those future generations.

That is the difference between the Conservatives and us. They do not even understand the basic principle of sustainable development. We intend to apply it.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the leader of the official opposition if, in his comparison between trade deficits and ecological deficits, he would advance the need to actually do something about the climate crisis rather than point fingers back and forth across the aisle.

The previous Liberal government had a plan in place. It would have reduced emissions. It would have—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Elizabeth May: I am sorry, Mr. Speaker, I cannot be heard.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Actually, Mr. Speaker, the government that I was part of in Quebec City had a plan in place to reduce greenhouse gases. That is why we reduced greenhouse gases.

I was actually at the Kyoto conference, in Montreal. I can inform my colleague that the Liberal Party never did a thing. That is why it has the worst record in the world.

During that conference, I remember its minister, who went on to become its leader, saying that, all of a sudden, he did have a plan, but nobody was ever able to see it. When the Liberals finished their mandate after 13 years, they had done nothing on global warming and they did, indeed, have the worst record in the world.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity to respond to the NDP leader's motion this morning, because I do not actually entirely disagree with its premise. Indeed it is true that the Canadian economy is facing unprecedented risk. I simply take issue with where that risk is coming from, because I and most Canadians know that the real unprecedented risk here to the Canadian economy is the NDP leader himself.

The NDP leader and his risky economic schemes would ruin the Canadian economy and threaten the jobs of thousands of Canadians. He admitted it only moments ago, as he was encouraging us to highlight measures like his carbon tax in his platform 2011. I took his advice. I highlighted it as he encouraged, revenues by year. It is a \$21 billion carbon tax on our Canadian families, and that would be an absurd thing to do. It is a regressive carbon tax plan that means a \$21 billion increase in absolutely everything including gas, groceries and electricity.

I also highlighted the NDP leader's massive \$33 billion corporate tax increase in platform 2011. Again, he is the one who encouraged it. He is the one who has admitted it. Canadians need to know the truth. His destructive plan to hike taxes on job-creating business by nearly \$10 billion a year would mean that Canadians and their employers would be crippled as they try to cope with the ongoing economic turbulence.

However, what about his unprovoked attack on the natural resource sector, which we just observed? He labelled this a disease, which if successful, would bring one of the key economic drivers of the Canadian economy to a halt. Even worse, his embrace of dangerous economic protectionism and his rejection of expanding Canada's trading relationships would close the door on Canadian exporters looking to grow in the global marketplace.

No matter what plank of the NDP leader's economic platform we examine, the objective is the same: take more money out of the pockets of hard-working Canadians through higher taxes, grow bloated bureaucracies through uncontrolled government spending and watch Canada's deficit spiral absolutely out of control. The NDP leader's economic policies would return Canada to the failed and tired big government experiments of the 1960s and 1970s that nearly bankrupted western governments and sent unemployment skyrocketing. Canada cannot afford such risky and costly economic experiments from the high tax and big government NDP, especially during today's global economic turbulence. Indeed, global economic challenges and uncertainties remain.

• (1045)

[*Translation*]

Outside our borders, the global economy remains fragile, and any potential setbacks would clearly have an impact on Canada.

Canadian businesses must also face ever-increasing competition from emerging fast-growth countries, as well as challenges associated with the aging population and demographic changes.

*Government Orders**[English]*

Fortunately Canada is facing these challenges from a well-established position of strength and with a comprehensive and forward-looking agenda that will deliver high quality jobs, economic growth and sound public finances. Economic action plan 2012 will allow Canada to meet these challenges and emerge from them in a stronger position than ever.

[Translation]

This action plan will further improve our record of achievement by helping even more Canadian workers, businesses and entrepreneurs unleash their potential to innovate and thrive in the modern economy, benefiting all Canadians for generations to come.

Because they are focused on the drivers of growth and job creation—in other words innovation, investment, education, skills and communities—the new measures in economic action plan 2012 will strengthen and catalyze the talents of Canadian workers, entrepreneurs and job creators, who will be the engine of our economy.

[English]

In today's motion, the NDP leader claims he is urgently concerned about the state of the economy and Canada must have an economic summit to talk about it. However, the NDP leader goes on to suggest, in his motion, that the talk does not have to be held for a few months. Is that what we call urgent?

As an aside, I hate to break it to the NDP leader, but the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance interact quite regularly with their provincial counterparts to discuss major economic issues. The NDP leader himself acknowledged in his speech moments ago that meetings have been planned. I am here to tell him that they have also taken place. In fact, the finance minister, as he does every year, will convene an in-person meeting in December with all provincial and territorial finance ministers to talk about the state of the Canadian economy and other related issues.

On the other hand, apparently the issue of the economy and jobs only recently dawned on the NDP leader. He is a bit late to the game and needs a few months to draft yet more ways to help the economy, to go along with his carbon tax and his plan to hike taxes on job-creating businesses by \$10 billion a year. What other ideas will the NDP come up with? A GST hike? A new tax on everyday financial transactions? A new personal income tax hike? Maybe it will be all of them and maybe even more. When it comes to the NDP and its high tax agenda, the sky is the limit and the pockets of Canadian families are the target.

However, do not worry. We will be spared all these tax hikes and all these ideas for a few months, until we have that economic summit to talk about the urgent economic issue. That is just ridiculous. Imagine if we were to wait for months to hold a summit on an urgent issue. Imagine a family faced with an emergency like a sudden and unexpected need to fix its roof. Instead of dealing with it right away, would the family wait for a couple of months and schedule a meeting to talk about what it might or might not do to fix it? Of course not. It is clear the NDP leader does not understand how busy Canadian families deal with their problems. They do not sit around. They roll up their sleeves and they get the job done.

That is exactly what our Conservative government has been doing in response to the ongoing global economic turbulence with economic action plan 2012. Economic action plan 2012 is a positive, forward-looking plan to help build a stronger economy and a better life for all Canadians, their families and their communities. Unfortunately, it is also a plan that the NDP leader rejected mere seconds after its release, for no other reason than ideological partisanship.

● (1050)

[Translation]

First, our economic action plan includes a new approach to supporting entrepreneurs, innovators and world-class research.

As a world leader in post-secondary research with a highly skilled workforce, Canada has strong fundamentals for innovation.

In order to take advantage of these fundamentals, we set up an expert panel led by Tom Jenkins of Open Text in Waterloo. We asked this panel to determine the reasons why Canada is lagging behind in terms of innovation. And now, we are responding to the panel's recommendations in order to create high-quality jobs through investments in the following areas: education and training; basic and applied research; funding opportunities for businesses with the potential to become globally competitive; and better linkages between public research and market needs.

[English]

Among other things, this includes doubling the industrial research assistance program to better assist research and development by small and medium-sized companies. It will support innovation through procurement by connecting small and medium-sized companies with federal departments and agencies to build their capacity to compete in the marketplace. It will help high-growth firms access risk capital by committing significant funds to leverage increased private sector investments in early-stage risk capital, including by making available \$400 million to help increase private sector investment in early-stage risk capital and support the creation of large-scale venture capital funds led by the private sector. It will also support private and public research collaboration through internships for graduate students and funding for business-led research and development networks.

Unbelievably, these and many more positive job-creating measures were summarily rejected and opposed by the NDP leader within mere minutes of their announcement.

However, there is more that the NDP leader has shockingly opposed.

Government Orders

To compete effectively and succeed globally, Canadian job creators need more than bright ideas. They must be supported by a modern regulatory environment that promotes competition, business investment and economic growth.

[*Translation*]

That means a competitive and effective tax regime, a financial system that works well and access to global markets. That is why economic action plan 2012 includes key commitments in all these areas that will make it possible to improve conditions for business investments and fuel the next wave of job creation.

[*English*]

This means we are transforming not only how we innovate but also how we regulate. We are supporting responsible resource development that creates jobs and improving the review process for major economic projects to make it more timely and transparent, while protecting the environment and introducing legislation to modernize the regulatory system to realize our objective of one project, one review in a clearly defined time period. These actions are all fundamental to our prosperity.

Ultimately, our success as a nation also rests upon maximizing the power of our greatest asset, our people, and unleashing their full productive potential. With that in mind, economic action plan 2012 invests significantly in training, including job creation by small businesses and opportunities for underrepresented groups in the workforce.

For instance, we are extending the temporary EI hiring credit for small business for one year to reduce the cost of hiring new workers. This will benefit approximately 536,000 employers whose total EI premiums were at or below \$10,000 in 2011, reducing their 2012 payroll costs by about \$205 million.

To target the labour market more directly, we are also investing \$50 million through the youth employment strategy to assist more young people in gaining tangible skills and experience and connect them with jobs in fields that are in high demand.

At the other end of the demographic scale, we are also funding the extension and expansion of the successful third quarter project. That is a product of my home province of Manitoba, which helps employers find workers over 50 who have the skills they are seeking.

Plus, we are investing an additional \$30 million to enable more Canadians with disabilities to obtain valuable work experience and ensure employers are aware of the invaluable contribution persons with disabilities can make to their business and to the Canadian economy.

Economic action plan 2012 also recognizes the contribution that aboriginal people can make to the labour market as the youngest and fastest growing segment of the nation's population. To help first nations participate more fully in Canada's economy and benefit from its growth, economic action plan 2012 announces that the government will work with partners to introduce a first nation education act. It also proposes \$100 million to support first nations education as well as \$175 million to build and renovate schools on reserve.

● (1055)

[*Translation*]

The action plan includes commitments to help first nations fisheries and to improve incentives for people living on reserves who benefit from the income assistance program in order to encourage those who are employable to take advantage of training opportunities. It also includes \$27 million to renew the urban aboriginal strategy in order to improve economic advancement opportunities for aboriginal people living in major urban centres by supporting projects that respond to local priorities and promote local activities, such as job training and initiatives related to skills development and entrepreneurship.

[*English*]

All these pro-growth efforts will be supported by the responsible and sustainable fiscal management that our government has embraced from the outset. It is a prudent approach that will see a return to budgetary balance in the medium term.

In keeping with this fiscal discipline, we will implement moderate restraint in government spending by refocusing government programs, making it easier for Canadians and businesses to deal with their government and modernize and reduce the back office. These actions will yield real dividends for Canadian taxpayers and have already helped make Canada the envy of the world when it comes to government finances with the best fiscal position in the G7.

As noted by Moody's Investors Service when it renewed Canada's leading AAA credit rating, Canada's:

...economic performance and government financial position have held up better than most other top-rated sovereigns to the effects of the global recession.

Listen to the words of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce:

We've got a strong example of the positive effects of good policies even closer to home—Canada. Why has our northern neighbor recovered faster and more robustly from the global recession than nearly all other major economies? [It is] due to a series of smart policy decisions.

Canada has transformed its economy while other nations continue to struggle... [I]t is growing faster than many of its competitors. It has recovered all the jobs lost in the recession...

Let's take a lesson from the north and tackle these priorities now.

Our government is proud to state that our economic action plan 2012 and our Conservative government's economic leadership have delivered real, positive results for Canadians. Despite what the NDP leader would have us believe with his constant talking down of the Canadian economy, the facts are clear. Since July 2009, almost 770,000 net new jobs have been created. More than 90% of those jobs have been in full-time positions. This is the best performance on job growth among all G7 countries.

As noted by RBC senior economist Dawn Desjardins:

Government Orders

Canada has experienced quite a good recovery in the labour market compared to almost every other area of the globe.

Even better, both the International Monetary Fund and the OECD expect Canada to be among the fastest growing G7 economies over the near term.

These are impressive achievements, especially during a time when the global economy remains fragile. However, our government is not relying on its past accomplishments. We are forging ahead with a responsible and prudent plan to bolster our economic growth and create jobs.

The NDP leader on the other hand is pushing ahead with a dangerous scheme of carbon taxes and a massive business tax hike that would destroy the Canadian economy and kill jobs. The NDP leader is a risk that the Canadian economy cannot afford, especially now. That is why I encourage all members of this House to vote against today's motion and the NDP leader's high tax, deficit spending economic policies.

• (1100)

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to point out a couple of facts that the hon. member may not be aware of, the fact for instance that the Conference Board of Canada recently gave Canada a C grade for income inequality in this country. We are now above the OECD average in terms of increasing inequality in Canada. We are witnessing the erosion of our social safety net, including EI and OAS. Moreover, we have gone from a \$26 billion current account surplus to a \$50 billion deficit. A key part of that has been the manufacturing deficit, which has increased six-fold. Indeed, Ontario now has 8% unemployment, and under the current government we have lost over 300,000 manufacturing jobs.

My question for the member opposite is why would the Prime Minister not meet with the premier of Ontario and the other premiers and leaders right across this country to address these pressing economic issues affecting the daily lives of Canadians in Ontario and right across this country? Why will they not meet?

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure where my colleague was when I made my lengthy speech, but I believe I suggested that a meeting is planned in December between all of the finance ministers and the Finance Minister of Canada, who is responsible for this portfolio.

Aside from that, let us talk about the misleading representation of the facts by my colleague. The facts remain that the IMF and the OECD both project that Canada is going to have among the strongest growth in the G7.

The World Economic Forum also rated our banking system as the world's best.

Another fact is that *Forbes* magazine ranks Canada as the best place for businesses to grow and create jobs.

Despite every attempt this government has made to encourage the NDP to side with us, to put forward a plan to help small business, to help them grow, to help the economy grow, the NDP has voted against every single plan we have put forward. Even so, we now have the strongest job creation in the G7 and are expected to maintain the best fiscal position in the G7 for years to come.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): My congratulations to you, Mr. Speaker. Your appointment is very well deserved. You will do a great job in the Chair for the House.

I would ask the parliamentary secretary to comment on how much confidence she has in the numbers cited by the leader of the official opposition. He just threw one out here that nearly knocked me out of my chair. He said it cost \$750 million to clean up the Sydney tar ponds. The tar ponds had to be cleaned up. The money was allocated under the past Liberal government. The federal government provided \$280 million and \$120 million came from Premier John Hamm. That is \$400 million in total. The leader says it is \$750 million. I hope the pilot who will be flying me into Sydney tonight is able to judge a bit better than the Leader of the Opposition. I do not want to hear him say, "We are going to miss the runway. I will be between Sydney harbour and the Mayflower Mall."

Is this ramped-up rhetoric and bloated fairytales, which are nothing close to reality when it comes to the economy of this country, what we can expect from the leader of the official opposition?

• (1105)

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for that insight because he is actually right. These are fictitious numbers, just as the Leader of the Opposition misled the media and Canadians about not having a carbon tax in his platform, which today he admits and encourages us to highlight in the platform. He is misleading again with these numbers. I recognize and I appreciate that the Liberal member sees that for what it is. It is a fable, a fantasy, and not to be trusted. Canadians know better than that. That is why they have trusted this government to lower taxes.

What we are going to see from the NDP is a higher tax agenda. We are going to see that party impose severe trauma on our families, with its \$33 billion corporate tax hike and its \$21 billion carbon tax.

As we saw earlier, the Leader of the Opposition also twice failed to address the question about the GST increase advocated by his finance critic. He refused to answer because he knows very well that Canadians are sick of hearing about the higher tax agenda of his party. He knows he is going to raise the GST. We will not let that happen; we believe that Canadians pay too many taxes already. We are going to maintain this low tax plan and move ahead on an economy that is growing.

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, like others I would like to join in congratulating you on your new assignment and post.

What we are debating here today is an NDP motion that reminds Canadians about everything that is wrong with the concept of the NDP possibly forming government in this country. The motion is all about process; there are no actual solutions in it. The one action item that is in the motion itself is one that, by the way, this government acts on all the time.

Government Orders

I had two round tables and two meetings with other ministers of culture and language this summer, one in Edmonton and one in Winnipeg. We meet with our counterparts all the time.

The Leader of the Opposition did not take the opportunity to mention that he has only now reformed himself into someone who believes that the federal government should work with the provinces. One has to wonder how it is that he is the same person who castigated all of Canada's western premiers as being just messengers of the Prime Minister. He insulted Brad Wall. He insulted Christy Clark. He insulted Alison Redford. One has to assume he insulted the premier of Manitoba as well. He said they are all messengers of the Prime Minister. He had never met any of them but attacked them personally by saying that they were simply messengers, and now he is suggesting that we need to work together.

That member is the first leader of the opposition that I can remember who actively participates in provincial politics, campaigning in a byelection in the province of Ontario trying to elect a New Democrat and doing the same in British Columbia while at the same time saying Parliament should work with the elected governments that may not be New Democrat. For someone who wants to be the prime minister of this country it is irresponsible to attack other premiers whom he has never met and does not know, castigating them as messengers and then involving himself in provincial politics, picking fights with premiers who have been elected by the people of those provinces.

How is it a proper approach for someone who wants to be the prime minister of this country to attack premiers and then to say that this Prime Minister needs to do a better job of working with them? It is pathetic.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, I am glad that the minister was able to share that with Canadians.

Let me share something more on this topic because I know it is of great interest. I am holding in my hands a snippet of a Postmedia news article from May 15. I will read it for the House and Canadians. It states:

New Democratic Party leader dismissed on Tuesday criticism of him from the premiers of B.C., Alberta and Saskatchewan, saying they're simply acting as [the] Prime Minister[']s "messengers" in the NDP's fight with [him] over the impact of the oil sands industry on the Canadian economy.

Here is what the leader of the opposition said, as quoted in the article:

He's not going to try to contest that. What he's going to try to do is send in messengers to take that argument to me. I'm not responding to any of them.

Is it not interesting to see the hypocrisy taking place in the House of Commons when someone asks one side to do a certain thing and yet rejects doing that very same thing themselves?

It is despicable. Canadians ought to know about it. I am glad we are able to share this information with them today so that they can see the misleading statements and misleading information coming out of the NDP leader's mouth.

• (1110)

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would also like to congratulate you on your new position. It is great to see you in the chair.

I would like to pick up on the member's comments about Canada's deficit and the importance of the deficit in relation to the economy. The Conservative government has created the largest deficit in Canadian history, at \$50 billion. My question for my colleague across the way is this. How does she account for her criticism when the government has accrued the largest deficit in Canadian history and actually outspent every other Canadian government before it? What about her comments on keeping the deficit low? I wonder if she could comment on that.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, I would remind the member of the actual facts of the matter. It is a fact that Canada has the lowest net debt-to-GDP ratio in all G7 countries. We have actually survived the global economic recession better than almost any other country in the G7. In fact, we were the best. That is the crux of the matter.

The NDP does not want to admit that we have done such a good job. In essence, its members vote against every measure that we continue to pursue to continue to grow this economy.

I would ask the member to think seriously about how he represents his constituents here in the House when he votes against tax relief for families; reductions in taxes for job creating corporations; and the environmental changes in our budget that will allow major projects to go forward and develop so that people in the north and in different provinces and regions can benefit. He ought to look at what is in his heart and do the right thing and vote in favour of the upcoming budget implementation bill on the government side.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time today with my colleague from Scarborough—Guildwood.

To be clear, Liberals will support the motion before the House today. In the context of an increasingly risky situation globally and growing economic inequality domestically, the premiers believe it would be useful to have a national economic summit. They will hold one in November and they have invited the Prime Minister to attend. Indeed, he should be there.

The government has been far too arbitrary, far too unilateral in dealing with other orders of government within the federation on energy, the environment, employment insurance, immigration, health care, pensions, the criminal law and so forth. The provinces have asked for collaboration and the government has repeatedly turned its back. That is no way to run the federation. It breeds ill will and distrust and that should stop.

Therefore, on the all-consuming topic of the economy, yes, the Prime Minister should show up in Halifax in November. We need a fully coordinated "Team Canada" approach to economic recovery and growth. To get that, it helps if people can sit down at the same table and share their perspectives in a constructive way. On that score, the leader of the NDP could take some lessons on getting along with provincial leaders.

Government Orders

His first foray into federal-provincial relations was widely perceived as an attack on western Canada. He did not express himself in terms of conciliation or co-operation. It was all about confrontation and conflict. He set the resources sector against manufacturing. He set western jobs against eastern jobs. He described a zero-sum game in which, if the west won, then the east must lose, and vice-versa. That is a mug's game. One does not earn friends and build co-operation in western Canada by depicting our economy in that region as a disease.

When the western premiers expressed their dismay, the leader of the NDP went further on the offensive. He dismissed them as mere messengers for the Prime Minister. That truly is insulting. Worse still, he said, "I'm not responding to any of them". In other words, the premiers are just not worth his time. That is what the leader of the NDP said. It is all on the public record. Now he is promoting meetings with the premiers as a great step forward. This is either a huge example of hypocrisy or a conversion on the road to Damascus of historic proportions. The object here is not the leader of the NDP. The object is the Prime Minister and he should be in Halifax in November.

Apart from our Canadian banking system, which the right-wing Reform-Alliance crowd wanted to compromise and give away to the Americans back in the 1990s, and thank goodness for Paul Martin and Jean Chrétien who said no to that bad advice and preserved for Canada the best banking system in the world, Canada has one other major global advantage in coping with international economic uncertainty. That advantage is our federal debt ratio. It stands at just under 35%, which is low by global standards.

Back in the 1990s, it was a crippling 70%. Let us think about that. Seventy per cent of the gross domestic product was offset by the federal debt. The federal books had not been balanced in more than 25 years. The Canadian economy was a basket case, a candidate for honorary membership in the third world is how it was described by the international financial media. This is the situation that was faced by a Liberal government that was elected in 1993.

We faced it and we fixed it. The books were balanced by 1997. We ushered in a whole decade of surplus budgets. The debt came down. We slashed that federal debt ratio in half. Taxes came down, interest rates remained low and stable and the economy grew. More than 3.5 million net new jobs were created, employment insurance premiums were cut 13 years in a row, transfer payments to the provinces were raised to an all-time record high and major investments were made in infrastructure, innovation, children, families, skills and trade.

• (1115)

In 2006, we left for our successors a strong economy and the best fiscal record in the western world. Sadly, the Conservatives played fast and loose with that situation from the get-go. Long before there was any recession to blame, they increased federal spending by three times the rate of inflation. They eliminated all the contingency reserves, all the prudence factors from the federal budget process and they put the country back into deficit again before, not because of but before, the recession arrived in the fall of 2008. Therefore, once again, Canada is confronting serious economic challenges.

Broadly speaking, these challenges are in two categories: one, is very tepid economic growth overall; and the other is increasing inequality among Canadians. These are the priorities that should command the government's attention. However, all Canadians hear from the government is that one note monotone Conservative mantra about austerity, austerity and yet more austerity, effectively kneecapping the federal government to make it as irrelevant as possible.

What else could the federal government do? As a start, it could help the most vulnerable low-income families. It could do that in part by making its tax credits refundable, to use the technical language of the tax department. In other words, the tax credits for children's sports, children's arts, home caregivers, volunteer firefighters and so forth would become equally available to all Canadians. Right now they are structured in such a way that low-income people are effectively excluded. That should be fixed as a matter of fairness to ease inequality.

Another thing it could do is ease off its payroll tax increases. It seems unreasonable and counterproductive that it keeps hiking EI premiums by about \$600 million per year, when job creation needs to be the priority. However, EI payroll taxes keep going up under the government by \$600 million per year, and that is a job-killing tax on jobs.

It also needs to back off on its new secret EI benefits clawback, just introduced this past summer. It is a clear disincentive to employment, it unfairly punishes seasonal workers and others and it contributes to inequality among Canadians.

Those are just a few practical, affordable, doable things that the government could and should do right now.

Let me conclude on a matter that could well benefit from some strong federal-provincial discussions. That is the painful set of circumstances facing young Canadians. Unemployment among young people under the age of 25 remains at recession like levels, close to 15%. Two hundred and fifty four thousand fewer young Canadians are employed today than before the recession in 2008. Another 165,000 have just stopped participating in the job market. They have given up.

Among other things, Canada needs a big push in support of learning and skills across the country. From preschool to graduate studies, continuous high calibre learning is vital to the strength of our economy and the well-being of our society. While respecting provincial jurisdiction over education, the Government of Canada needs to be more than an idle spectator when it comes to this key determinant of Canada's ability to succeed economically and Canadians' ability to live fulfilling lives.

So much more should be done by an engaged and energetic federal government to partner with provinces and educational institutions to help make Canadians the best educated people in the world. We will thrive in a difficult global economy by the quality of our brain power. That is the key to productivity.

It is good public policy for the federal government to support early learning and child care, to support the removal of financial barriers to post-secondary studies and skills, the amelioration of student debt and curiosity-based research and innovation.

• (1120)

One final point is the government's obligation for aboriginal education. It should take the cap off first nations' access to post-secondary education and fill in the gap between what the provinces pay on non-aboriginal children and the much lower amount the government pays on aboriginal children.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, much of what my colleague has said about the Conservative government and the work it has done in the past is true.

The hon. member has vast experience in government. He has been in the highest echelons of government and so when he speaks, we should all listen. I have a question for him because he has been there.

Why would a government that came to power in 2006, with a huge surplus, frivolously spend Canadian taxpayers money? An example is the \$50 million spent on gazebos and boardwalks in the riding of one of the ministers. Imagine if that \$50 million was spent exponentially across the country. Let us imagine how much money the government has wasted.

Because the member is so experienced, what would prompt a government to do that?

Hon. John MacKay: Politics.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, as my colleague from Scarborough—Guildwood, who will speak in a moment, just said, I suppose what prompts it is, unfortunately, politics.

What would be interesting would be to hear the conversations that went on in the Conservative caucus after \$50 million was taken from the border infrastructure fund and somehow put into Muskoka by various mysterious means. What did the rest of the members of its caucus say about where their \$50 million was? One member received such gross advantages and the rest of the caucus was discriminated against. There is a matter of internal unfairness there.

In that period of time, in the first year or two after the government came into office, the spending was profligate. Federal government spending was increased, and this is long before the recession arrived in the last half of 2008. In the period between 2006 and 2008, the increase in the government spending was three times the rate of inflation. That was clearly unsustainable. The government was clearly warned about it by the Department of Finance, but it was done for political reasons nonetheless.

• (1125)

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I received an email from one of my constituents, Glen. He talks about meetings with the Prime Minister and the premiers. He says:

—I give our Prime Minister...full credit for providing this necessary leadership.

I have followed politics for many years, and...observed past Federal-Provincial meetings as being a waste of time. (I have to tell you that I even felt sorry for Pierre Trudeau and Jean Chretien when the 10 Premiers "ganged up" on the Federal Government.) In short, I observed meetings and premiers that were not committed to problem solving. Instead these meetings provided an opportunity for self promotion

Government Orders

and the display of ultra egotism. As a taxpayer, I felt these meetings were a waste of time and money.

When meetings are deemed necessary, the Prime Minister should call meetings—not the premiers....

To paraphrase Steve Jobs, the Prime Minister must be vigilant against the "bozo explosion." The constant whining and bickering of our provincial leaders is getting to be a little tiresome.

Would the member for Wascana like to comment on that?

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, it is undoubtedly true that political leaders, whether they be prime ministers, premiers, mayors, reeves or heads of municipal governments, all have their partisan axes to grind. That is an inevitable part of the political process.

I do not think the federation is improved by giving partners in the federation the back of a hand. Unfortunately, that is the impression a lot of the premiers have with respect to the current Prime Minister. From time to time he will speak to one or two of them privately, but there is something to be said for the strength of our federation for all the leaders to come around the table every now and then and to be seen to be acting in concert together.

The burden of proper behaviour needs to be on all of them, not just on one side or the other. Canadians are watching and they need to demonstrate to all Canadians that they are actually achieving something constructive and not just trying to pass the buck.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend my colleague, the member for Wascana, on what I thought was an absolutely excellent outline of Canada's fiscal history. He was, in many measures, front and centre in some very critical decisions on Canada's fiscal history in the last number of years. We in the Liberal Party recognize his contributions. I do not know if some colleagues across the way quite appreciate him in the way that we do.

An hon. member: That's a fair comment.

Hon. John McKay: My hon. colleague says that's a fair comment.

Mr. Speaker, I want to start by talking about an article I read in *The Globe and Mail* this week by Brian Lee Crowley and Robert Murphy. Mr. Crowley is a well-known Atlantic Canadian. I would describe him, and I hope he would see the description the same way, as very much a fiscal conservative. In fact, he has been working with the Department of Finance. He wrote a book which talks about what the U.S. could learn from Canada's recent fiscal history, particularly the period of time in which the Liberal government was in power.

The article states:

Canada faced an even larger fiscal crisis in the mid-1990s than America does today, and our achievement dwarfs anything being proposed in Washington. By acting decisively, Canada resolved its crisis quickly and with surprisingly little pain. Since the memory of this momentous achievement is fading, or is unknown to the younger generation—

—and may I say colleagues opposite—

—it is worth recalling how it unfolded.

Government Orders

In the mid-1990s, the Canadian federal government had been in budget deficit for two decades. A third of all federal revenue was being frittered away on interest on the debt. A Wall Street Journal editorial from Jan. 12, 1995, declared that the country “has now become an honorary member of the Third World in the unmanageability of its debt problem ... it has lost its triple-A credit rating and can’t assume that lenders will be willing to refinance its growing debt.”

May I add as a parenthetical comment that my predecessor in Scarborough East had a lot to do with trying to keep Canada's AAA credit rating in some of the worst part of the 1995-96 crisis.

Deliverance came the following month when the centre-left Liberal government tabled its historic budget. This document was a defining moment in Canada's fiscal history.

More astonishing than the bold plans for a massive rollback was the fact that Ottawa actually did what the document said. Total spending fell by more than 7 per cent over two years, while program spending (excluding interest) fell by almost 10 per cent. As a share of the economy, federal spending fell from almost 22 per cent to 19 per cent during the same period. By January, 1998, federal employment was down 51,000 – about 14 per cent. Ottawa ran 11 consecutive budget surpluses beginning in 1997/98. With the federal government paying down its debt and the economy expanding, total public debt plummeted over the following decade.

The article went on in effect to prescribe medicine for the U.S. economy.

I do not pretend to, nor want to, engage in that debate, but it is worth remembering that Canada was there and we are no longer there. I want to point out again that there was an enormous political price to be paid by prime ministers Chrétien and Martin, the Liberal caucus and the Liberal Party. I came here in 1997. We came within four or five seats of actually losing a majority. Part of it had to do with the difficulties of the fiscal medicine we had to impose.

• (1130)

No budget is ever presented in a political vacuum and in 1997 it was a very difficult environment for us. The rewriting and reinventing of political history by the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance is all part of a misinformation campaign by the Conservatives. The Conservatives inherited a \$13 billion surplus and in a few short years turned it into Canada's largest deficit in history, having run deficits ever since. They even brag that this year they will have less of a deficit than they had last year, or they brag about how we compare to other countries. Certainly we are doing terrifically compared to Greece, Portugal, Spain or Italy. The Conservatives do not mention that maybe we are not quite so hot when we compare ourselves to Germany, Sweden or Norway, which is of course a better economy.

There is a good reason why this is studied as a political economy, because political decisions can be good and they can also be bad. The political courage shown by former prime ministers Chrétien and Martin and the Liberal caucus has brought Canada into a relative state of fiscal health and the Prime Minister has been dining out on it ever since. Gutless political decisions such as cutting the GST have, for the foreseeable future, killed any chance of ever going into a fiscal balance.

Politically gutless decisions such as ignoring Confederation partners and refusing to meet with them creates Confederation chaos, with premiers fighting with each other and with policy incoherence. Gutless political decisions that cater to the Conservatives' 35% base and ignore the rest are simply that, just creating anger and apathy.

How can a government say it knows how to manage the economy when the number of unemployed Canadians has risen 34% during its mandate? These 1.4 million unemployed Canadians are not impressed by the so-called management of the economy by the Conservatives. How can the Conservatives say that during the last four years there are more unemployed people in agriculture, construction and manufacturing trade and still say they know how to manage the economy?

Of course the answer is tax cuts. If people are unemployed, it is tax cuts. If they have just had their pension lopped off, the answer to that is tax cuts. If they are bankrupt, tax cuts are really going to work for them. If their industry has been devastated, tax cuts are going to be the answer. If they have cancer, that is tax cuts. For unrest in the Middle East, tax cuts. It is simply the Mitt Romney robo-answer to all our ills. Tax cuts will save us from everything. Do they never ask themselves the fundamental question of how we got ourselves into this mess in the first place?

So Crowley and Murphy are right in the sense that the U.S. could look to Chrétien and Martin for inspiration, but I am perfectly prepared to admit that the political and economic contexts are quite different.

This motion should be supported. However, it would be more supportable if its author did not go around creating his own chaos. Calling the premiers the Prime Minister's messengers and remaining mute on various issues that are of great national interest erodes his credibility when presenting a motion such as this. In his own trips, refusing to actually meet premiers again erodes his credibility with respect to the presentation of his motion. As the Conservatives rightly say, the NDP has opposed every free trade agreement. One cannot be a credible economic leader unless one deals with various opportunities to create trade in this country.

The Prime Minister does need to consult with the premiers, and he does need to do it much more quickly. He does need to do it, and therefore we in the Liberal caucus will be supporting this motion.

• (1135)

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I like the member for Scarborough—Guildwood very much. I respect his time in this House and his observations on many issues. He used some pretty strong language, though, suggesting that our government was “politically gutless”. “Politically gutless” is perhaps something that would be better attributed to a political party that got elected saying it would scrap, kill and abolish the GST and then did none of those things, versus a political party like ours, which said we would reduce the GST and then actually followed through on our platform commitment.

Government Orders

However, one has to wonder, and I will give him an opportunity to respond, that if our record of economic management is so appalling and so awful and so “politically gutless”, why did the Liberal Party and the member opposite vote for Conservative budget 2009, Conservative budget 2010 and all the Conservative ways and means motions to put those budgets in place? If it is so awful and so terrible, why was he so politically gutless in voting for it?

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, only a Conservative could take what is an awful economic situation and say this is wonderful.

They have taken \$90 billion out of the fiscal framework and said, “Look what good boys we are. Haven't we done a terrific job? We are now running endless deficits and we know how to manage the economy”.

A politically gutsy prime minister would in fact get himself back into fiscal sustainability sooner rather than later. However, at this point, there is no hope that we will in fact achieve balance.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his comments, and I thank him and the previous speaker from his party for their support for our call for the federal government to meet with the territorial and provincial leaders at the upcoming meeting this fall.

I also want to recognize that during a previous government led by his party, it was a period of very dramatic spending cuts, some of the deepest social spending cuts in the history of the country. A former prime minister bragged they took us back to the spending levels of the 1950s, and pollution increased to unprecedented levels under that government.

However, my question for him is this. Does he support the position of our party and the position of the leader of the official opposition in matters concerning the environment? Does he support the basic principle of polluter pay? Does he support that principle in that motion?

• (1140)

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, members will remember that one of the former leaders of our party actually put this forward in the context of an election. There is absolutely no doubt that we have to price carbon. There is no issue about that. We felt that was a particular approach that could be taken, to price carbon.

We have policy incoherence in this country because there are provinces that actually price carbon.

However, again, on the theme of gutlessness, the party opposite will not approach this and actually spreads misinformation about my colleague's party on this very issue.

We have to price carbon. If we do not price carbon, then we will continue on with the political incoherence that currently exists. That is regrettable. It certainly is something that should be taken up at a leaders' conference.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if my colleague would comment on the vacuum of strong national leadership that emanates from the government benches and from the New Democratic Party?

On the government side, they see no value in terms of having first ministers' meetings.

From the New Democratic Party, there seems to be this divisive attitude and dismissive attitude of premiers and the roles they actually play.

Because he has been a part of a majority government, I wonder if he would comment on the value of actually having a first ministers' meeting where we have the federal government sitting down, working with provincial premiers.

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, I just want to paint a contrast between how prime ministers Chrétien and Martin handled things and how the current Prime Minister handles things and, frankly, how the NDP leader handles things.

I remember very clearly, in the old railway building across the street, the then prime minister sitting down with the premiers and negotiating, over a number of days, the transfers, particularly health care transfers and social transfers, and setting out a 10-year timeframe so that the premiers could understand and would recognize that this is the amount of funding that would get transferred to them.

That settled Confederation issues for many years. That is the way to do things.

It is wrong to dismiss the premiers and it is wrong not to meet with them.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for London—Fanshawe.

I rise today in the House to voice my strong support for the motion at hand. I also want to thank our leader for introducing this motion, which speaks to the top concern of so many Canadians, the future of our economy.

The Canadian economy is indeed facing unprecedented risk and uncertainty. A country as small and economically open as Canada, of course, is not immune to the problems of those around us. The weakness of the American economy and the ongoing crisis in Europe are serious concerns.

Already Canada's export of value-added products is steadily shrinking and our overall trade deficit is growing dramatically. In July, Canada ran the worst merchandise trade deficit in history. In fact, since the Conservatives came to power, Canada's trade balance has gone from a \$26 billion surplus to a \$50 billion deficit.

• (1145)

[*Translation*]

We are aware of how weak the American economy is and of the ongoing crisis in Europe. Canada's exports of value-added products are steadily declining, and our trade deficit is skyrocketing. In July, Canada experienced the worst trade deficit in its history. Actually, since the Conservatives came to power, Canada's trade balance has gone from a \$26 billion surplus to a \$50 billion deficit.

Government Orders

[English]

The high value of the Canadian dollar is further hampering demand, rendering many of our exports uncompetitive and making imports more attractive to consumers. New Democrats believe in trade that works for Canadians and Canadian business, and the Conservative trade agenda clearly is not fitting the bill. At the same time, the record high level of household debt is suppressing demand and hurting our economic growth.

Over the summer I took the opportunity to travel the country and met with Canadian businesses, finance ministers and chambers of commerce. I heard from them about the difficulties they face and saw clearly that while the Conservatives use a lot of rhetoric on the economy, the facts tell a very different story.

The Conservative plan to stimulate the economy through corporate tax cuts has failed to stimulate economic growth. Corporations have not reinvested their excess cash into their businesses and instead they are now sitting on more than \$500 billion.

Unfortunately, it is Canadians who have to deal with the negative effects of weak Conservative leadership, including the job losses that have already plagued many regions and industries across Canada. Some 1.4 million Canadians are unemployed, and this number has remained virtually unchanged over the last year.

Unemployment and economic growth has been highly divergent across the country. For example, over 43% of Canada's unemployed live in Ontario alone. In Newfoundland and Nova Scotia, there are 10 unemployed people for every vacant job compared to 2 unemployed people for every vacant job in Saskatchewan.

As Mark Carney, the Governor of the Bank of Canada, recently noted:

These broad shifts in demand for and supply of labour are contributing to rising inequality. Over the past 20-plus years, incomes in Canada have increased nearly twice as fast for earners in the top 10 per cent as for those in the lowest 10 per cent. The share of the top 1 per cent is now the third highest among member-countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development after the United States and the United Kingdom.

That level of inequality is growing. Just to put it in comparison, the last time inequality in the U.S. was as severe was during the 1920s. Moreover, labour's share of the national income is now at its lowest level in half a century across most advanced economies, including Canada.

Peter Jarrett, Head of Division for Canada in the OECD economics department, argues that:

Canada is blessed with abundant natural resources. But it needs to do more to develop other sectors of the economy if it is to maintain a high level of employment and an equitable distribution of the fruits of growth.

The major drivers of GDP are not spending in Canada. Canadian households are facing record high debt levels, significantly hampering consumer spending.

Businesses are not reinvesting their profits in the economy, and government is pursuing austerity, which economists have told us will have contractionary effects on the size of our economy.

What all this means is that more and more Canadians are struggling from paycheque to paycheque while the Conservatives cut services they rely on and corporations sit on half a trillion dollars in cash. Yet rather than taking action to correct these imbalances, the Conservatives are stubbornly pursuing an austerity agenda that has only exacerbated them.

Avery Shenfeld, chief economist at CIBC, recently argued for infrastructure investment, noting that:

...if growth falters, Canada's Plan B can't depend on monetary policy, given how low rates [in Canada] already are. Trying to squeeze more growth out of housing and debt-financed consumer spending might not be the best option given longer term risks associated with excesses on both those fronts. Instead, the push to growth should come on the fiscal side...

Canada's premiers have agreed that maintaining a strong and growing economy is their top priority. They are concerned about weak economic growth among our traditional trading partners and recognize the need to adapt to the growing economic strength of several emerging economies.

However, the premiers understand that intergovernmental co-operation between provincial, territorial, and federal governments is essential to these concerns. They themselves have argued that to fully engage all the economic forces in the country, the two orders of government must be working together. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister's approach to federal-provincial relations is marked by disengagement, division, and lack of negotiation.

Jennifer Wallner of the University of Ottawa's school of political studies has noted, "Despite the call for open federalism...the government has developed a policy agenda with considerable implications for the provinces and territories without bringing them to the table".

In fact, it has now been three years since the last meeting between the Prime Minister and Canada's premiers, and despite his rhetoric about focusing on the economy, the Prime Minister has refused to join our premiers at the Council of the Federation's National Economic Summit in Halifax this November. Especially at a time of economic fragility and unbalance, the Prime Minister should be meeting with our premiers on a regular basis, not refusing to meet with them even once in three years.

Canadians should be wary of a government that prefers unilateral action over intergovernmental cooperation, that prefers ramming legislation through Parliament over proper due diligence, and that prefers stubbornly pushing forward with failed corporate tax giveaways over making strategic investments in programs that will help Canadians and promote growth.

A strong, balanced economy will not be created by a small group of hardline Conservatives in Ottawa. Canada's most prolonged period of sustained growth was marked by investment in innovation and an influx of value-added jobs.

Government Orders

New Democrats believe that the federal government has a commonsense role to play in making strategic investments in education, innovation, and infrastructure to provide an economic climate where business and households can thrive. We believe that the government should ensure that Canada remains a country with a well-balanced economy that does not leave any part of our country behind. That is why we are asking our colleagues here in the House of Commons to support this motion and to get this country moving on the right track.

• (1150)

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask my colleague a question, but first I will give her some new information that perhaps she was not aware of.

The Prime Minister meets regularly with the premiers. In fact since 2006, he has met or telephoned the premiers nearly 250 times. I wanted to share that, because obviously members opposite have not done their homework.

I want to ask my colleague a question, because I think it is an important question. The Leader of the Opposition did speak to the carbon tax in the platform of 2011 when he mentioned it in his speech. In fact, he tried to hand us the highlighter on this side so that we could highlight in the platform where that carbon tax is. Of course, I did so, and it is a \$21 billion tax on families.

I will read a quote from a caucus colleague. I would like my colleague to answer whether or not she feels the same frustration that her colleague, who is the natural resource critic, has in his quote. This is the quote where he expressed his frustration, "...the federal government seems to completely reject the policy...which allows us to put a price on carbon."

Does my colleague from the NDP share this frustration of her colleagues with regard to this question?

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, I am not interested that the member has perhaps been reading a Day-timer of the Prime Minister.

We are calling for the Prime Minister to assume the responsibility, as leader of the country, to meet with the provincial and territorial leaders across Canada to discuss the pressing, urgent economic needs of Canadians from coast to coast to coast. That is what we are pushing for.

Rather than campaigning on cooperation, debate, and discussion, and then trying to ram through a hidden agenda in a massive omnibus budget bill that erodes the services that Canadians across the country rely on, we are calling on this Prime Minister to have the confidence, as the Prime Minister, to sit around the table with the leaders across this country and have an open and honest discussion about the well-being of Canadian households and businesses across the country.

• (1155)

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Parkdale—High Park for her comments and for what she has brought to this discussion.

The Conservatives often talk about the net new jobs that have come to light over the years. They even reference that many of them have been full-time jobs. It leads us to think that there are many more people working in the country. I am wondering if the member could comment about the unemployment rate. Has the unemployment rate correspondingly gone down or has it gone up? Could she comment about the unemployment rate that currently exists?

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is pointing to a key issue here for so many Canadian families. We have 319,000 more Canadians unemployed today than before the last recession, and we have lost 500,000 manufacturing jobs.

However, one thing we know is that when people lose decent-paying manufacturing jobs, jobs that have supported them and their families and provided benefits for them and their families, the jobs that they get to replace them does not always pay them very well. We often find people in temporary and part-time jobs. Therefore, unemployment is up, which is why so many Canadian families are struggling.

The Deputy Speaker: A quick, 30 second question from the member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that will be tough.

Whether it was prime ministers Trudeau, Martin, or Chrétien, we believed in the importance of first ministerial meetings. That is how we have accomplished great things like the health-care accord.

My question to the member from the official opposition is this. Does she not see inconsistencies in terms of her own leadership from within the NDP when we have the leader of the official opposition taking shots at western Canada and then refusing to meet with premiers? There is an inconsistency there. Does she not believe that the leader of the NDP is wrong not to apologize to western Canadians and to premiers for ignoring the concerns they wanted to express?

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, let us talk about inconsistencies. One of the biggest inconsistencies we have seen of late is the government signing the Kyoto accord and then using it as a public relations measure and allowing pollution and greenhouse gas emissions to significantly rise in the country and put us in a position where we could not meet our international obligations. That is a massive inconsistency that frankly Canadians are very embarrassed about.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, congratulations. It is good to see you in the chair.

I am very pleased to be speaking to this motion by the Leader of the Opposition because it is very important that we have the opportunity to highlight the impact of the job losses in Canada's manufacturing sector. The figures from Statistics Canada are staggering. Canada has lost nearly 400,000 manufacturing jobs since the Conservative government took office in 2006. We have lost over 40,000 manufacturing jobs this year alone.

Government Orders

We are currently at a historic low in terms of manufacturing jobs going back to when these statistics were first gathered in 1976. I would like to note that this low is quite significant because both our labour force and population have grown significantly over this same period. In other words, there are fewer manufacturing jobs in Canada now than there were in 1976.

Of particular note, the textiles and clothing sector, which, according to Statistics Canada, has long been one of the largest manufacturing employers in the country, was the hardest hit among manufacturing industries. From 2004 to 2008, manufacturers and textile product mills saw almost half of their jobs disappear. Another particularly hard hit sector is the automotive industry and members will know about this. Statistics Canada reports that automotive parts manufacturing lost more than one-quarter of its employees from 2004 to 2008, while motor vehicle manufacturing lost one-fifth. That is 15,900 jobs. Those who earned their living and supported families and our communities from the automotive sector saw their job numbers go from 139,300 to 98,700. This effectively cancelled all the strong economic growth that we experienced from 1998 to 2004.

In my community of London, there has been a steady, long-term erosion of jobs and it has been particularly hard hit by the most recent closing of manufacturing plants. Tragically, the city's manufacturing sector has been shrinking at a rapid rate and auto sector jobs have all but disappeared. These lost jobs were the good-paying jobs needed to support families and communities.

Just this year, more than 700 jobs were lost at Electro-Motive Diesel in London. Air Canada Jazz cut 200 maintenance jobs at London International Airport and Diamond Aircraft has been reduced to a fraction of the workforce compared to a year ago. People may recall the problems faced by Diamond in the development of a new jet. Unfortunately for London, the federal government declined to assist the company in its efforts and jobs have been lost. In the neighbouring community of Talbotville, after the Ford assembly plant was shut down in 2011, a total of 1200 jobs were eliminated. Now Timken will close, leaving 150 more people out of work.

It is not just manufacturing. We have seen 36 jobs cut at Service Canada in London. This loss of front-line workers creates tremendous hardships for the people in the London region who need help with their employment insurance, CPP concerns, GIS problems, and CPP disability benefits. These Service Canada workers were highly skilled and very professional in their effective delivery of services to my constituents, services they need and deserve.

There has also been the elimination of all support staff at Wolseley Barracks. The important work done by that staff with regard to the efficient functioning of the base leaves members of the Canadian Forces without the supports they need to do their jobs, and compels CF personnel to do jobs for which they are not trained and takes them away from the jobs for which they have been trained. We have seen the end of front-line service at Citizenship and Immigration Canada. There are no days of the week when the office is open to the public in London. For all those individuals who are required to contact CIC, this closure is an unforgivable hardship.

● (1200)

The jobs lost in London were good paying jobs. They were jobs that supported the infrastructure of our community. They were critical to the future economic health of London. These were good jobs with pensions.

Now the retirement savings of those hard-working people are at risk and so are their pensions. Their ability to pay into CPP no longer exists. Some workers in London are still looking for the pension benefits they spent years paying into. There are many hundreds of them. Nortel pensioners and Beta Brands pensioners are still waiting for benefits years after their employers left the city. These are not only lost jobs. These are lost pensions, lost hopes, lost security.

Sadly, where there has been job growth it has been concentrated in the service sector and part-time work, where pension benefits are limited or do not even exist. That is what too many Canadians face, and it is unconscionable.

This economic downturn is being used as an opportunity to attack retirement security in Canada. More and more companies are opting out of defined benefit pension plans. With a defined benefit pension plan, employees receive a set monthly amount once they reach retirement. It is an amount they can depend on because it is based on the participant's salary and length of employment. With this plan the employer is responsible to provide specified sufficient funds to secure the future retirement of an employee. An employee can therefore retire knowing, to the penny, the kind of resources available and the lifestyle he or she will be able to maintain.

More companies are attempting to make the switch to a defined contribution plan, where the employer defines the amount that will be contributed to the employee's pension plan on a regular basis. The amount contributed is then invested by the employer in a selection of investment options within the plan. The amount the employee will receive upon retirement will vary based on the amount contributed and the performance of the investment. In a defined contribution pension plan all of the investment risk is placed on the employee and there is no way at all to predict what the retirement income will be.

According to Stats Canada, the number of people who are members of defined benefit plans dropped by over 100,000 between 2007 and 2011. According to the *Globe and Mail*, a survey of Canadian plan sponsors earlier this year found that only 42% of publicly traded companies with defined benefit plans still had them open to all employees, while 39% had closed their plans to new hires and 17% had closed them to all employees. I would also like to note that Stats Canada states the number of members with a defined contribution plan has risen by just under 100,000 between 2007 and 2011.

In the private sector, employees in Canada are also in pension jeopardy. There has been an increase of more than 100,000 individuals who do not earn any pension at all. That is 100,000 fewer people with a pension plan than in 2006. That means 100,000 more people may need to rely on the GIS to make ends meet when they do retire.

Retirement security in Canada is changing, and this shift is not for the better. With losses and cuts to private sector pensions and threats to public sector pensions, Canadians will have less money upon retirement.

Young people today are facing high unemployment rates and a delayed entrance into the workforce. Young families today are earning less money than their parents did. Now, due to the government's recent changes to the OAS and GIS, workers will have to wait two more years before they are eligible to collect benefits.

The writing is on the wall. There will be a retirement crisis for the post-boomer generation unless we make some drastic changes, and to be clear, changes such as cuts to the OAS are not the type of changes that I am speaking about. We need to strengthen all three tiers of our pension system and in particular, we need to see a doubling of the CPP.

We live in a very rich and privileged country. We are experiencing an economic downturn. However, investing in job creation will have a far better outcome for our communities than corporate tax cuts and billion dollar jets that are made abroad.

The benefits are immense and will last well into the future. Only with job security can we have retirement security.

Canadians deserve nothing less.

• (1205)

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I sat and listened carefully to the member for doom and gloom on the other side of the House during her presentation. I find it ironic that we get preached at by Ontario New Democrats who probably remember, like I do, the four and a half years when the leader of the Liberal Party was the NDP premier of the Province of Ontario. He created the worst economic recession in the history of any province in the country. Ontario is still trying to recover from the years when the leader of the Liberal Party was the Ontario NDP premier.

Given the fact that my friend on the other side and her colleagues campaigned in the 2011 election to bring forward a \$21 billion carbon tax that would completely cripple Canada's economy, how can she stand in the House today and cite doom and gloom on an economy that is doing better every day under the leadership of this government?

• (1210)

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, I would appreciate it very much if the member would understand that I am the member for London—Fanshawe and I am here to serve my constituents. I will do it with every effort, unlike the members opposite who have basically taken a strong economy and put it into the ditch.

In terms of the recession of 20 years ago, I would like to remind the House, and the member, that at the time we were elected in

Government Orders

Ontario we were in the fifth quarter of an economic downturn. The Conservative government of the time's response to that was to cut transfers and shift the burden of unemployment from the feds to the provinces. It created a very difficult time.

Also, the member needs to be very careful about what he says. He is getting his facts mixed up. We support cap and trade. I wish that they would understand that.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party is going to be supporting the motion. The reason we are supporting the motion is that we recognize the valuable role that first ministers conferences play in trying to build the support and consensus that is necessary to assist all Canadians to prosper and to have a sense that the governments are working together.

On the one hand we have the Conservatives who do not see the benefit. That is the reason we have the motion before us today. We want them to understand the importance of having first minister types of meetings take place. An excellent example of that would have been the health accord, which was achieved because of first ministers conferences.

Does the member not see that the NDP needs to apologize? There is a great deal of hypocrisy there, when the NDP will not even meet with premiers to talk about bizarre statements from the leader of the NDP who went on a verbal attack of the western provinces and pit region against region. Does she not see the merit of her leader apologizing to Canadians for that?

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, I am very appreciative of the support from the Liberal caucus. It is absolutely essential that there be co-operation.

If the Liberals had read the NDP platform, like the Conservatives apparently have, they would have noted that in every case there is a very clear direction that whatever we do as a federal government we will do in consultation with the provinces and the territories.

As a member of the party of Tommy Douglas, the father of medicare, I am very concerned about what the latest budget has done in reducing health budgets by \$31 billion across the country. That is going to be very difficult for health care.

As to his final statement, my leader made it very clear that unless we have co-operation, unless we talk about the fact that our economic activity has a consequence, in every part of the country, we are not going to be able to protect either the economy or the environment of the future.

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am really delighted to rise in my place today to speak to the NDP motion.

On May 2 of last year, Canadian voters chose to elect a strong, stable, national Conservative majority government. It was a great day for Canada. That evening, on my election win, I was reminded of a movie that I saw, and some of us in the room will probably remember it, called *The Candidate* with Robert Redford. At the end of the movie, Redford, who was a democratic senatorial candidate who was not supposed to win the election, ended up winning. He looked across the room at his campaign consultant and he mouthed, "What do we do now?"

Government Orders

We on this side of the House knew exactly what to do. We had a plan called the economic action plan. The voters of Canada voted in favour of it and gave us a strong, stable, national majority government because we had a road map and we knew what we were doing. I know a lot of people on the other side were mouthing, “What do we do now?” and they still do not know what they are doing.

The NDP policies are rooted in failure. The NDP has a proven track record in Ontario. It and other provinces, and countries around the world, including Greece, are the jurisdictions the NDP is asking us to follow and take lessons from.

When my father came to this country in 1947 as the only survivor from his family, he came with three things. He came with a number on his arm, the shirt on his back, but most importantly, he came with hope in his heart. When I go to citizenship swearing in ceremonies, new immigrants to this country all come with hope in their hearts. They come with hope in their hearts because Canada is a land of opportunity where they can find a job. A job for new immigrants and for Canadians is not a disease. It is hope. It is hope because we have this great country called Canada and our government is on the right track.

The number one priority for Canadians and what really matters to them is the economy, job creation and long-term prosperity. At a time when the global economic recovery remains fragile, especially in the United States and Europe, our government is focused on creating jobs, economic growth and securing long-term prosperity for future generations of Canadians.

This is something our government has been focused on for some time. Faced with the deepest global economic recession since the 1930s, the government took the necessary action to protect the economy, Canadian jobs and Canadian families. It is because of the decisive action by this government that Canada finds itself in a position of relative strength among the industrialized world.

Contrary to what the NDP would have us believe with the non-stop bashing of our Canadian economy and our country, we are in a very envious position. Many of us will also remember the show, *Dragnet*. Sergeant Friday would say “Just the facts, ma’am”. Let us consider the facts. Since July 2009 nearly 770,000 net new jobs have been created, nearly 90% of them are full-time positions.

This is the strongest growth among G7 countries over the course of the recovery. In addition, both the IMF and OECD project Canada to be among the fastest growing G7 economies over the near term. The three credit-rating agencies, Moody's, Fitch, and Standard & Poor's, have all reaffirmed our triple-A credit rating. In fact, it was Fitch that recently praised Canada's economic and fiscal leadership by saying:

Years of fiscal responsibility and a strong institutional setting created the conditions for an effective fiscal policy response to the global financial crisis. An early commitment to balance the budget over the medium term placed Canada's fiscal credibility ahead of many peers.

Simply put, Canada's fiscal fundamentals are solid and sustainable, but solid government finances are meaningless words to the NDP and its failed 1970s socialist mindset of big government, big bureaucracies and big deficits.

Nevertheless, we are focused on protecting and growing Canada's economy and building on our relative advantage compared to our G7 partners. However, to truly understand the strength behind this performance, we have to consider the hard work that took place long before.

● (1215)

I am talking about the actions our government has been taking to pay down debt, lower taxes, reduce red tape, and promote free trade and innovation. To start, our government paid down significant amounts of debt when times were good, and kept our debt-to-GDP ratio well below that of our G7 counterparts. As a result, when the economic downturn hit Canada, we had the fiscal capacity necessary to respond and to hold onto our G7 leading record as other nations began to pile vast amounts of unaffordable new debt onto old.

The NDP leader clearly does not value the initiatives our government has taken to keep Canada's economic record strong. For evidence of this we need to look no further than the NDP voting record. When Canada was facing the worst of the global economic recession, the NDP responded by voting against Canada's economic action plan. The NDP voted against tax relief for families and businesses. The NDP voted against investments in infrastructure, R and D, and skills training. The NDP voted against support for manufacturers, forestry, the unemployed and more.

Unfortunately, rather than support initiatives that would help Canada's economy, the NDP would rather support initiatives that would harm Canada's economy. What harmful economic schemes are the NDP pushing? Our Conservative government is focused on what matters to Canadians, such as creating jobs, promoting economic growth and ensuring long-term prosperity, while the NDP wants to attack growing sectors of our economy and impose \$10 billion in higher taxes on businesses. The NDP advocates that we close off Canada from the rest of the world and do not trade.

Canadian taxpayers should hold onto their wallets because, unfortunately, there is more. The NDP leader supports a job-killing carbon tax. This would increase the price of everything including purchases such as gas—

● (1220)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, it is incumbent upon members of the House to actually speak the truth. The member is making up facts. He should apologize.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): That is a point of debate.

The hon. member for York Centre.

Government Orders

Mr. Mark Adler: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, the NDP carbon tax would increase the price of everything, including purchases such as gasoline, groceries and electricity. That would mean less money in the pockets of Canadian families and less money to pay their bills. According to the NDP's election platform, it plans to take \$21 billion out of the pockets of Canadian families to pay for its carbon tax scheme. To me, this sounds like a costly and unnecessary burden on Canadian families, Canadian businesses and the entire Canadian economy. That is certainly not what my constituents want to see.

While our Conservative government is talking about job creation, the opposition is focused on job destruction. That is why in these uncertain economic times Canadians continue to trust our Conservative government to keep Canada's economy on the right track. Even as we speak global economic headwinds from outside the country threaten Canada. Many are rightly concerned about the impact of the situation in Europe, and Canada is no exception. However, while others fail to address their challenges, Canada has chosen to lead by example.

Given that Canada has fared better than most countries, it is worth highlighting some of the measures our government has taken to ensure that Canada's economy remains strong.

One key component of our government's strategy is the expanding of our trade opportunities and creating the conditions necessary for our homegrown businesses to compete in the global marketplace. The pursuit of free trade is key to our growth agenda. Through structural reforms like trade liberalization, Canadian businesses and their workers will be able to compete in the global marketplace.

Our government's trade agenda has already made Canada one of the most open and globally engaged economies in the world, something which the protectionists and isolationists in the NDP adamantly oppose with their anti-trade agenda.

In six years we have signed free trade agreements with nine countries and are in negotiations with many more. We have also concluded foreign investment promotion and protection agreements with 11 countries and are in active negotiations with 14 others.

By the end of this year, we hope to conclude negotiations for a free trade agreement with the European Union. On this front, a few weeks ago the Prime Minister met with German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Ottawa to strengthen dialogue on this key initiative. In fact, during her visit, Chancellor Merkel remarked on how initiatives taken by Canada during the global economic recession helped Canada sit in a position of strength. She said, "Canada is an example for how one can actually emerge from a crisis in a robust way."

Adding to this trade agenda, Canada is also joining the trans-Pacific partnership negotiations. We are actively pursuing new trade and investment opportunities in large, dynamic and fast-growing economies such as China, India and Japan. This reflects our belief that freer and more open trade is a key stimulus for global economic recovery.

Combined with our free trade commitment is our continued tariff relief to enhance the competitiveness of Canadian manufacturers and importers. In all, our government has eliminated more than 1,800 tariff items and provided more than \$435 million in annual tariff

relief to Canadian businesses. As a result, Canada is now the first tariff-free manufacturing zone in the G20.

These measures build on our proven record of support for entrepreneurship, investment and growth.

Since 2006 our Conservative government has been making a concerted effort to promote investment and reduce regulatory burdens that only serve to impede business growth.

In 2011 *Forbes* magazine ranked Canada as the number one country in the world for doing business and cited our strong economic recovery and competitive tax system.

Yet, those who wish to invest in Canada's resources have been facing an increasingly complicated web of rules and bureaucratic reviews that have grown over time, adding costs and delays that can deter investors and undermine the economic viability of major projects. This approach is not economically sound, nor is it environmentally beneficial.

Our government responded by introducing system-wide improvements to streamline the environmental assessment review process for major economic projects that would put in place a one project, one review system in a clearly defined time period. These measures will make project reviews more predictable and timely, reduce duplication and regulatory burdens, and enhance consultations with aboriginal peoples, while protecting the environment.

Along with promoting investment and our support for free and open trade, the government continues to support a low tax environment required to create jobs and growth.

In 2007, prior to the global crisis, Canada passed a bold tax reduction plan designed to make Canada a low tax destination for business investment.

● (1225)

Canada's competitive tax system plays a crucial role in supporting economic growth. These tax reductions will leave more money for the private sector to reinvest in machinery, equipment, information technology and other physical capital that will further boost productivity in businesses across Canada. Furthermore, they will allow businesses to hire additional workers and offer higher wages as they expand production and take on the world.

Government Orders

Our government also continues to create the right conditions to enable Canadians and Canadian business to feel confident to invest, create jobs, participate in the global marketplace and grow our economy. One of these conditions includes a sound and stable financial system. Even as global economic conditions worsened during the crisis, Canada's finance system was stable and well capitalized with one of the most effective regulatory frameworks in the world. As a result, Canada did not suffer one single bank bailout nor failure.

Canada's enviable financial system did not lessen the government's resolve to act when it was under threat by outside forces. Make no mistake: the threats were real. As credit markets around the world began to freeze, the prospect of total financial economic breakdown became a realistic concern. Even in Canada, businesses were finding it difficult to get the basic financing they needed for everything from inventories to payrolls. The seriousness of this threat meant that traditional approaches just would not work.

In Canada we understood there was a critical need for our government to take steps to ensure the financial system could get secure access to the funding it required so that consumers and businesses would be able to access this much needed financing.

Today Canada has the world's soundest banking system for the fifth year in a row, as affirmed earlier this month by the World Economic Forum. In addition, the Financial Stability Board's peer review praised Canada for the government's response to the global financial crisis and highlighted the resilience of Canada's financial system, calling it a model for other countries.

The strength and resiliency of the Canadian financial system has served us well during the recent global economic and financial crisis and will continue to do so as we face a global economic situation that remains fragile and uncertain.

Unfortunately, NDP members would rather that we tinker with Canada's financial system. They feel that a time of economic uncertainty is the right time to test risky economic schemes like another tax, this time a financial transactions tax on everyday financial transactions. Fortunately, our Conservative government is adamantly opposed to the NDP's tax schemes.

With one of the most successful economies in the world today, Canada offers many advantages as an investment destination and partner for global business. Canada's competitiveness, excellence, depth of talent, innovation and creativity offer a great environment to potential investors from around the globe. That being said, there is still a lot of work to be done and our government recognizes that Canada cannot become complacent with its past successes.

It is pretty clear that when it comes to creating jobs for Canadians, the last place the government is looking for ideas is the NDP. As outlined during my speech, when it comes to creating the kind of economic growth that will mean a greater future for Canadians and their families, this side of the House knows the best route to getting there.

In fact, the NDP's grand plan to help the economy is to hold meetings months down the road. It is simply outrageous. The simple fact of the matter remains that when it comes to initiatives that will help Canadians, the only thing the NDP seems capable of doing is

voting against them and finding ways to tax everything Canadians do.

Unlike the NDP, our Conservative government has a plan to support job creation and economic growth through Canada's economic action plan 2012. Therefore, I urge all members to join with me in opposing the motion and the NDP's risky economic high tax schemes which would only jeopardize Canada's fragile economic recovery.

• (1230)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two questions for the hon. member for York Centre.

First, we agree, on both sides of the House, that you need sound facts and strong evidence before you develop economic policies. When the Conservatives came to power in 2006, they inherited a budget surplus of about \$13 billion. In a year and a half, even before the recovery program and the recession, that surplus had been used up, largely because the GST was reduced by 2%. We are talking about a loss in revenue of \$8 billion to \$10 billion a year. If we look at the Department of Finance's own figures in terms of the benefit of reducing the GST for economic growth, we see that, for every dollar lost in revenue, only 30 cents of additional revenue in gross domestic product was actually created.

If they had really wanted to spend the \$13 billion on something other than paying down debt, they could have taken a more efficient approach. For instance, they could have developed an infrastructure program that would generate economic spinoffs to the tune of \$1.50 for every dollar invested.

Could the hon. member for York Centre comment on the seemingly unwise budget choices of the Conservative government? Also, since he says that the NDP lives in a fantasy world when it comes to policies, could he tell me if he agrees with the polluter pay principle that the NDP has put forward for the whole country?

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Adler: Mr. Speaker, the member said he had two questions and I did not detect even one.

However, we on this side of the House know what is meaningful to Canadians. They want policies that will create jobs, long-term growth and economic prosperity and that is exactly what our economic action plan is doing—not regressive taxation and higher taxes. We have created a low-tax environment and been praised by all the international organizations, from the OECD to the World Economic Forum and *Forbes*.

The only black sheep in all of this is the NDP members. They are the only negative naysayers. They have to sit down and wonder if maybe we are doing something right.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will highlight a specific issue and relate it to why first ministers' discussions are important.

Government Orders

Manitoba has a wonderful pork industry, providing hundreds of jobs for our province, everything from the barns to the slaughterhouses. It is an area of economic opportunity for the province of Manitoba, and there could be other provinces that also look at the pork industry as one with good potential. There is something happening internationally in regard to Korea, a great consumer of pork products. I suggest that the federal government has a role in that.

Indeed, both the Province of Manitoba and the federal government need to play a role. Other provinces could also play a role. One reason we need to have first ministers' conferences is to deal with issues of that nature and others. In this case it could be just be agriculture ministers. In other cases it could be—

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

The hon. member for York Centre.

Mr. Mark Adler: Mr. Speaker, I find it passing strange that a member of the Liberal Party would speak about pork. If anyone would know about pork it would be a member of the Liberal Party.

It was the Government of Manitoba that during the past provincial election said it would not raise taxes. It increased taxes by over \$18 million.

An hon. member: An NDP government.

Mr. Mark Adler: Yes, an NDP government is damaging the pork industry in Manitoba, particularly in Brandon, Manitoba, the city my wife hails from, so I know it well. It is a great city.

We are on the right track. We have a plan to reduce the deficit in the medium term. We have a plan that Canadians chose overwhelmingly last May to endorse, and we have a plan that is recognized by all kinds of worldwide economic organizations, which give us the credit that is due because we have the best Minister of Finance in the world, under the leadership of the best Prime Minister in the world under our economic action plan.

• (1235)

Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if my colleague, the member for York Centre, is aware that the respected economist Jack Mintz predicted that the NDP's proposed \$21 billion carbon tax in its 2011 campaign platform could increase gasoline prices for the Canadian consumer by 10¢ a litre. What does the member for York Centre think about that and the NDP's campaign promise to introduce a carbon tax?

Mr. Mark Adler: Mr. Speaker, it is passing strange that the only people who do not remember the carbon tax proposed by the NDP are the NDP members. Everyone else knows that a carbon tax would be devastating. The NDP members think it is better that government controls Canadians' money, rather than the people. We on this side of the House feel, as do most Canadians, that Canadians should be in charge of their money and that Canadians know the best way to spend their hard-earned money, not the government, as the NDP is proposing.

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, various members on the opposition side today have brought forth worrisome facts, including the largest budget deficit in Canadian history; soaring youth unemployment, from a base of

8% to almost 15%; cuts in vital services in northwestern Ontario and rural Canada and all of Canada.

The Conservatives claim that theirs is the party of trade but the TD Bank has publicly been worrying about the \$50 billion trade deficit, the biggest trade deficit in 41 years.

Is it not time now to change the name of that economic syndrome from the Dutch disease to the Conservative Canadian disease?

Mr. Mark Adler: Mr. Speaker, I suggest that it is time for the New Democratic Party to change its name to the "Old Democratic Party", because these are the same old principles and story we are hearing from them that we heard in the 1960s to 1970s. It is time to renew. It is time for its members get with the program. It is time to join with the rest of Canadians, all the international organizations and the other G8 countries in recognizing that Canada is the number one performing economy, the best place to do business and the best place for people to get a job.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is surprising to see the enthusiasm opposite for the proposition that the Prime Minister ought not to meet with the premiers of the country in an economic summit at their request. I cannot understand why there is so much enthusiasm opposite to vote against meeting with the premiers to talk about the future of our country.

This is the new kind of government. The new program the member opposite wants everyone to get with is that Ottawa will go it alone, that the Prime Minister knows everything and that the government does not want to hear from the provinces.

Is this indeed the new program that the member wants all Canadians to accept, that the Prime Minister knows everything and the premiers have no say?

Mr. Mark Adler: Mr. Speaker, our Prime Minister has met with the premiers approximately 250 times since 2006. That is a record that will stand in perpetuity.

What is ironic is that the leader of the member's own party refuses to meet with the western premiers and will meet with only those premiers who agree with him, which I suspect is a smaller and smaller group as days go on.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to speak to the motion presented today by the leader of my party:

That this House acknowledge that the Canadian economy is facing unprecedented risk and uncertainty; recognize that many regions and industries across Canada have already suffered significant job losses in recent years; urge all levels of government to work together to build a balanced, 21st century Canadian economy; and insist that Canada's Prime Minister meet with his counterparts in Halifax this November at the National Economic Summit being held by the Council of the Federation.

Government Orders

I suppose we could call it a bland motion, or what people like to call a no-brainer, something that we can all agree upon: co-operative federalism in working together to solve the economic problems of the country. This is not something new to Canada. What is new, of course, is that the last time the Prime Minister met with the premiers was in November 2008. The 256 meetings he is talking about—perhaps with individual premiers at photo ops, on election platforms, or who knows where—are not what we are talking about here. We are talking about the premiers of this country who met in July in Halifax and sent an invitation to the Prime Minister to meet them in November to talk about the economic future of the country. I do not know what is so wrong with that.

The premiers' concern about maintaining a strong and growing economy in Canada is a top priority. They are concerned about the weak economic growth with our trading partners and the need to adapt to the growing strength of several economies. They called upon the Prime Minister to meet with them in November, and what we seem to be getting over here is a resounding no, that Conservatives will not meet with the premiers at their request to talk about the future of the economy. That is very surprising. Maybe they want to shy away from some of the facts. The fact of the matter is that when they took power, we had a trade surplus of \$25 billion. Now we have a trade deficit of over \$50 billion, a slide of some \$75 billion under their watch. They continue to brag about being focused on jobs and the economy, yet we have in excess of 300,000 fewer jobs now than before the recession, and that is over a period of four years.

The member for York Centre said a few moments ago that the Conservatives had a plan for economic growth. They had no plan in 2008 when they were elected at the beginning of this crisis. There was no crisis, according to them. There was no crisis, they had no plan and they almost lost office because of it. That is the kind of economic record the government has for economic leadership. It was forced into trying to respond to the economic crisis after it was in denial for several months and throughout an election period.

Why does the government need to meet with the premiers? The premiers have problems of their own. The premier of Newfoundland and Labrador is faced with an unemployment rate that is more than 5% higher than the national average, at 12.7% to be exact, from the latest figures in August from the Newfoundland & Labrador Statistics Agency. The youth unemployment rate in Newfoundland and Labrador is over 20%. That is a shocking statistic.

• (1240)

The motion refers to uncertainty in the economic future. Housing starts in Newfoundland and Labrador are down this year and projected to be down for a further two years, despite a rise in 2010.

We have uncertainty about the oil and gas future in Newfoundland and Labrador in terms of production. Production is going down and a new oil production field at Hebron is not coming into play until 2016-17. These oil production declines are causing economic uncertainty in Newfoundland and Labrador.

We have seen significant job losses in fish plants in Marystown. This fish plant has operated successfully for decades. Port Union has seen permanent job losses, with no replacements in sight.

These are economic uncertainties that seek solutions and co-operation from the Government of Canada and the premier of the province.

Our leader today spoke about the job losses in the manufacturing sector across the country, half a million job losses that have not been attended to by the government.

The member for York Centre talked about how the OECD praised Canada's economic performance. Let us look a little deeper into what the OECD had to say about Canada.

Peter Jarrett, the head of the Canada division at the OECD economic department, had this to say, "Canada is blessed with abundant natural resources". We would agree. We have them in Newfoundland and Labrador in mining, the fishery and offshore oil and gas. Forestry and mining is throughout the country. Out west we have the oil and gas. He continued to say, "but it needs to do more to develop other sectors of the economy if it is to maintain a high level of employment and equitable distribution of the fruits of growth". All members of Parliament should be paying attention and listening to that statement.

That is where we are coming from. Our leader has said this. We want prosperity in Canada, but we want prosperity for all. We want the positive benefits of economic activity, natural resources and employment to be spread around. Let there be an equitable distribution of the fruits of our resources and growth.

That is why it is important to meet with the premiers of our country who represent all the various regions in their provinces. We have to listen to what they have to say. We have to listen to their ideas, respond to their concerns about their regions and the employment and economic needs of their regions. What we need is a balanced economy and we will not get that if the Prime Minister wants to go it alone without consulting with other leaders.

Members opposite have thrown disdain on meeting with the premiers.

I heard someone over there say that it would be just a photo op. We have these economic summits with the G8 and the G20 and what do we see on TV? We see a big photo op, a very expensive photo op. Nevertheless the leaders have their picture taken together. What can we expect? However, that is not the purpose of the meetings and neither is that the purpose of meeting with the premiers. To show that kind of disdain for the premiers is to show a shocking level of arrogance on the part of the Government of Canada, not economic leadership.

Government Orders

We need real leadership from the government. We need a government that listens to other people, one that listens to the legitimate concerns that have been raised about an economy that may be performing in some respects reasonably well but showing serious uncertainties for the future and an unbalanced economy with respect to manufacturing versus resource extraction and a failure to recognize that we need to ensure that everyone in all regions of the country gets to participate in a more equitable way in the products of our economic activity and employment.

• (1245)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the remarks of the member for St. John's East are well-thought out. I especially agree with his points on the growing inequity within Canada and the need for a first ministers meeting.

When the premiers made the request in June, they thought it through. They did not ask to meet the Prime Minister on areas of disagreement they had, which may be equalization and some other areas. They asked the Prime Minister to meet on the economy and trade, areas which are important to all Canadians.

There is nothing like having the whole group of first ministers come together and bounce ideas, from all political perspectives, off one another and come up with a plan. The premiers know at their level that the spin they are getting from the government on trade, as the member for St. John's East mentioned, is just that, spin.

We have had the biggest July trade deficit in the history of recording of trade deficits. Under the government's watch, our trade deficit has been increasing consistently, even though the minister travels the world.

Those are important points, and I agree with the member. Could he expand his views on real activities on trade versus—

• (1250)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for St. John's East.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, I will note, as I am sure the hon. member is well aware, that in his province, the unemployment rate is 11.7%. That shows again the inequitable nature of the distribution of employment and opportunities across the country.

It is not surprising that his premier, Premier Ghiz, along with Premier Dunderdale and the others, would want to meet with the Prime Minister to discuss ideas as to how to resolve some of these economic issues. Part of the role in a federation like ours is that there be the kind of co-operation, particularly, as the member points out, when they are not here to pick a fight. They want to work together. We have a Prime Minister who says that the government will not to co-operate with the provinces, that it will not sit down and talk about how to solve some of the underlying problems in our economy, and that is a shame.

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find it a little hypocritical when the opposition wants to talk about trade.

I would first highlight an article that was in last week's *Economist*, which talked about international trade: "The IMF, for example, thinks that trade will grow by 5.1% in 2013 on the back of a

strengthening economy". Although the article itself in total is not positive about trade, it sees there is expansion for 2013.

Recently, the IMF said, "The 188-country organization expects Canada's economy will grow modestly, by 2.1% this year and 2.2% next year – virtually unchanged from the IMF's forecast in April".

Our government has put forward a very pro-trade forecast for what we want to see happen. If the New Democrats are so interested in trade, could the member please tell me why they oppose every trade agreement we try to negotiate?

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, there is a difference between supporting trade and supporting particular agreements that do not meet the needs of Canadians.

Assuming the government was doing a great job on all these trade agreements, why are we \$75 billion worse off in trading now than when it took power? These trade agreements themselves cannot be very effective if they are putting us into a tailspin in economic trade.

We are suggesting the government is failing to do what it says it is planning to do. We support international trade. Otherwise we would not be complaining about the trade deficit that the government has been running up ever since it has been in power.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today to the NDP's opposition motion, which states:

That this House acknowledge that the Canadian economy is facing unprecedented risk and uncertainty; recognize that many regions and industries across Canada have already suffered significant job losses in recent years; urge all levels of government to work together to build a balanced, 21st century Canadian economy; and insist that Canada's Prime Minister meet with his counterparts in Halifax this November at the National Economic Summit being held by the Council of the Federation.

It is unbelievable that we are forced to table a motion in the House of Commons calling on the Prime Minister of Canada to meet with the provincial premiers. In my memory, this is the first time that a Canadian prime minister has travelled so much to meet with foreign prime ministers and presidents. He spends his time everywhere except Canada. Sometimes we have to wonder whether he truly wants to be Prime Minister of Canada.

• (1255)

[*English*]

The Prime Minister is more interested in meeting at the G20, G8, G7 and all the other meetings except meeting with the premiers of our country who represent every Canadian across the country. My province has economic problems and it is not going that well.

Government Orders

When the Conservatives say that they have created 770,000 jobs, they are not talking about the fact that we lost 430,000 jobs. They are not talking about Canada Post laying off people in Fredericton, New Brunswick at the call centre and then opening a centre in Bathurst, paying workers \$12 an hour with no benefits at all. The Conservatives are not talking about those jobs. The workers lost all their benefits and Conservatives are not talking about that. They are not talking about the closure in New Brunswick of VIA Rail service three days a week from Halifax to Montreal. They are not talking about CN wanting to remove the rails in 2014.

[Translation]

The Conservatives do not talk about that. They do not talk about the 430,000 jobs lost in Canada. They do not talk about the cheap-labour jobs created or the people who have lost their benefits and pension funds.

What did workers in this country do to be hated so much by the Conservatives?

The Conservatives do not meet with workers, but instead pass all kinds of laws that hurt all of the organizations that provide benefits to workers.

They are not talking about cutting VIA Rail service by three days a week in northeastern New Brunswick, between Halifax and Montreal, or about CN's plans to remove the railway tracks between Moncton and Bathurst.

What will happen to economic development in the regions if the best infrastructure needed for economic development is eliminated? What are we to make of cuts to employment insurance that will force workers to accept jobs that pay 70% of what they normally earn?

The government says that it is a pilot project to encourage people to work. They had the nerve to send a letter to workers informing them that if they earn \$450 a week while receiving EI benefits, they will receive \$225 in benefits.

However, what they do not mention is that if a person earns \$80 a week for eight hours of work at \$10 an hour—the minimum wage—\$40 will be deducted. The person will receive \$5 an hour less than the minimum wage. That is what they will receive. It was this government that introduced this bill that does not help the economy or workers.

Employers have told me that they would call people to work one day a week when they needed their services. Now these workers are telling them that they do not want to go to work because they do not want to be paid \$5 an hour. That is what the Conservative government has put in the Employment Insurance Act.

Take the example of Canada Business - New Brunswick, an organization that supports regional economic development in New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Nova Scotia with 60% funding from ACOA. The Conservatives cut all funding. They cut the 60% to Canada Business—New Brunswick. How can there be economic development when ACOA, which is supposed to support regional economic development, had budget cuts of \$18 million?

Furthermore, our premiers have asked to meet with the Prime Minister of Canada and the answer is no. What an insult to the premiers of our provinces. They want to meet with the national leader to find solutions.

The Conservatives just said that the NDP is against free trade, against trade with foreign nations. We do not oppose all agreements with other countries.

● (1300)

[English]

What we are saying is that we do not believe in free trade; we believe in fair trade. That is what has to be negotiated. It has to be fair, not just open to sending our jobs to other countries and getting nothing back.

In New Brunswick three pulp mills have closed in Miramichi, Bathurst and Dalhousie. The whole fishery has gone down the tubes. Why can we not have a secondary industry, such as processing, and keep the jobs at home? Instead of having free trade and sending our fish to Japan, why can we not process the fish here at home? Instead of sending our logs to Finland, why can we not do secondary processing of our wood and keep the jobs at home? Why can we not do that? Why can we not work together?

The Prime Minister has said that he is not going to meet with the premiers of the provinces. That is a shame. The Conservative members of Parliament should talk to their leader and tell him that the premiers want to meet with him.

There are eight Conservative members of Parliament from New Brunswick. They know that the premier of New Brunswick wants to meet with the premiers of all the provinces. What are they telling the Prime Minister? Are they telling him that the premier would like to meet with him and the other premiers, or are they just following suit and not saying anything, because their captain, the Prime Minister, has said no? Are they scared of being disciplined? What is the problem? Are they worried?

This is the first Prime Minister I have seen who hates workers. When Canada Post was going to give its workers an increase of 2%, the Prime Minister introduced a bill in the House to bring the increase down to 1.5%, and all the Conservatives voted with him. Those workers already had a promise from their employer that they would receive 2%.

I really hope the Prime Minister will change his mind. Instead of having meetings just with world leaders, I hope he will also have meetings with the premiers of our country. Is he ashamed? Is he shy? Is he ashamed of the leaders in our country? Is he worried about his image? Is he worried that they will say something bad about him? Is he worried that people will tell him that they do not agree with him? Is that what he is worried about?

I hope that members will vote in favour of our motion and tell the Prime Minister to be polite and to meet with the premiers of the provinces. He should meet with them. It is the right thing to do as the leader of our country. He is the leader of Canada, not the leader of the world. He should have that meeting out of respect.

Government Orders

• (1305)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, the Liberal caucus will be voting in favour of the motion because we have long believed there is a great deal of benefit when a prime minister recognizes the need to meet with the premiers in order to achieve consensus and build our country. An excellent example of that is the health accord, to which I made reference earlier, which was a 10-year pact which in essence provided long-term funding.

The question I have for the member is one of consistency. He said what an insult it is to the premiers when the Prime Minister refuses to meet with them. How does he contrast with his own leader, the leader of the New Democratic Party, who refused to meet with premiers based on his allegations about natural resources taking away jobs from eastern Canada, pitting different regions of Canada against each other? Then as the leader of the New Democratic Party he in essence accused the premiers of being lapdogs to the Prime Minister. How does he reconcile his position in this motion?

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, if anyone has pitted one region against another, it is the Conservative Party and the Prime Minister. He could have done something good for the Atlantic region instead of saying that we are a bunch of people who do not want to work. Government ministers rise here, in public, and say that the people down home prefer to go on EI and go hunting instead of working, and that people should have their grade 12 to go on employment insurance. If the Conservatives would stop making those insulting comments, maybe we would not be as divided as we are.

Instead of bringing unity to our country, the Prime Minister is dividing us. He is the one who is doing it. Instead of helping our country and helping people get jobs, we are losing all our jobs down east. It is not fun to see what is happening. Our people have to go out west to find work and earn a living while we are losing jobs down home. He has a job to do to bring unity. He is the Prime Minister.

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Brampton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find it very curious that the member would stand and say not to be divisive and try to lecture to the members on this side and our great Prime Minister when Mr. Mulcair refused to—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. I remind the hon. member not to use the given names of other members of this place.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition refused to meet with the premiers of Alberta, British Columbia and Saskatchewan after he talked about Dutch disease. He said he would not meet with them because they are just messengers. Is that the message of unity the member is trying to lecture to us about?

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister of our country refused to have a meeting with all the premiers, is that respect for the people of our country? The Prime Minister was elected, not with 38% of the vote as he says, but with 22%, because 38% of 60% of people who voted makes 22%. He was asked by all the premiers of the country. He did not say no to one. He did not say no to two. He said no to every one of them. We are asking him as the Prime Minister of the country to meet with the premiers.

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the enthusiasm of my colleagues, including my colleagues across the way.

I appreciate the opportunity to talk about this issue. Right off the bat it seems interesting that we are here today, especially after what we have heard from provincial leaders and the Chamber of Commerce in relation to some of the remarks that the NDP leader made before the session closed for the summer.

I take issue with the NDP leader's non-stop bashing and talking down of the Canadian economy. As I and many Canadians know, the stock market and the confidence of consumers are based on the confidence of the leaders. That gentleman wants to lead the country. He is applying for the job of prime minister. I think that a person who is mature enough to recognize what he needs to do for the country would also be mature enough not to downgrade our economy and not pit one part of the country against another, or province against province. It is not helpful at all.

I would suggest that as a result of his negative comments our stock markets have been affected. I cannot see how they could not be affected. People invest as a result of confidence in their leaders and confidence in the economy. Our country is a world leader when it comes to economic confidence, but that did not appear in the NDP leader's comments.

The global challenges that we face are real. The world is in an economic crisis, which we hope we will see the end of very soon. It has an impact on Canada. On this side of the House for the last five years we have been saying that Canada is certainly not immune to the financial burden it places on the other economies, especially with regard to the United States and the amount of trade that we do with it, as well as Europe and the amount of trade that we want to do with it. However, the opposition parties, the NDP in particular, are opposing free trade agreements even though there is an obvious net benefit to Canada and Canadians. We are trying to grow our economy through trade because that is simply the best way to do it, especially given our natural resources, our competitive advantages in farming and agriculture, and manufacturing and resource materials. We have a tremendous opportunity to be a world leader for many years when it comes to economic drivers and Canada's economy.

The leader of the NDP should step back and first apologize for degrading our economy and trying to pit one part of the country against another, province against province, the west against the east and the east against the west. It has been tried before. He should be ashamed of himself for doing that.

The facts are very substantive in relation to our performance over the last five or six years. Canada is the economic leader in the G7. In fact, we have heard many comments from world leaders about how well Canada's economy is doing and how others want to emulate our economy. Even the largest economies in the world have suggested that they want to emulate some of the steps that we have taken in Canada.

I want to mention three or four important facts before I get into the substantive part of my speech.

Government Orders

Since July 2009 we have had 770,000 net new jobs created, 90% of which are full-time jobs and 75% of which are in the private sector. Any economist will tell us that those are good fundamentals coming into a world economic crisis. This speaks to the steps we have taken in cutting our debt and stimulating our economy. This speaks volumes in relation to our government's control of the economy and our understanding of the economy and what we have done in relation to that.

On that note, I have been here for over eight years and I do not understand the position taken by the NDP in the past. I hope that it changes in the future.

Mr. Speaker, you may not remember but the New Democratic Party actually voted against Canada's economic action plan. Mr. Speaker, I see the look of surprise on your face. There was \$45 billion of economic stimulus injected into the economy by this government over a period of some years and the NDP voted against that. It included things such as waste water treatment centres across the country to clean our water, the clean energy fund and the green infrastructure fund. Billions of dollars went into the economy to create jobs, for such things as green energy, roads and bridges, a better quality of life for Canadians. The NDP voted against those initiatives.

If the NDP had its way right now, Canadians need to recognize that we would not be in the great economic position we are in. We would be in a much different position. There would be unemployment lines and lineups for food. Quite frankly, we are the leader in the world right now as far as having the best economy, the best economic record, and the best employment rates overall.

• (1310)

Third, both the IMF and OECD project that Canada will be among the strongest in growth of the G7 in the future. It is not just the past or present, but it is projected into the future by two independent world economic forums and organizations that Canada is going to be number one in the future as well.

The list goes on, but those are three obvious fundamentals to our economy. Any economist can point to those things and judge an economy based on that performance.

I want to talk about some of the references that have been made by world leaders. The largest economy in the world, Germany, has lauded Canada, and I quote Chancellor Merkel:

Canada's path of great budgetary discipline and a very heavy emphasis on growth and overcoming the crisis, not living on borrowed money, can be an example for the way in which problems on the other side of the Atlantic can be addressed. This is also the right solution for Europe.

I appreciate that from the Chancellor, from an independent person who has nothing to gain by applauding Canada's position, our economic fundamentals and the steps we have taken. She has said clearly to the world that we are doing the right job and that other countries in Europe in particular should follow suit. I think that is a great thing to say about our Prime Minister and cabinet and what they have been doing.

As I mentioned earlier, I think we do have a problem in this place. That problem is the Leader of the Opposition and his trying to pit one part of this country against another.

I lived through the national energy program in northern Alberta and saw the devastation that caused, not just to the economy of Alberta or the west but to the economy of the entire nation. I think he clearly needs to step back and reassess what he is doing and what his position is on these particular matters. Not only does it hurt our economic fundamentals but it also speaks to the separatist agenda. I am not prepared to step forward in any way and position in a positive light what the Leader of the Opposition is doing for this country. It is just not healthy nor beneficial.

I want to refer to a report put out in June by the Canadian Chamber of Commerce. As most people in this place know, the Chamber of Commerce represents the business community of the country. The business community, through the chamber, wanted to talk about Canada and see whether it was suffering from Dutch disease. This is an article I read. However, this particular article says that the Leader of the Opposition, the NDP leader, is wrong about his assumptions of Canada's suffering from Dutch disease.

I also want to talk briefly about some of the benefits that the Canadian oil sands generate in economic benefits across the country. I will quote directly from page 7 of this report, which states:

TD Economics estimates increased exports of Canadian oil and investment in machinery and equipment and in infrastructure in the Canadian oil sands accounted for one-third of the economic growth in Canada in 2010 and 2011.

That is right, 33% of the economic growth.

I represent that area. Right now, I think that 99% of the oil sands are in my riding, the parts that are being extracted, which is one-third of the economic growth in 2010-11, which is no small effect to the Canadian economy.

The report goes on to say:

High levels of investment in the resource sector have led to strong demand for parts, machinery and equipment, fabricated metal and other durable goods, as well as for services—professional, technical and in finance and transportation, for example. Businesses across the country have benefitted from this increased demand, not just those in Western Canada. For example, one out of 12 oil sands manufacturers and suppliers are from the Kitchener-Waterloo region...

That is one out of twelve; one out of twelve are from Kitchener-Waterloo. The report goes on:

According to the Canadian Energy Research Institute (CERI), between 2010 and 2035, new oil sands projects are expected to contribute \$63 billion to Ontario's GDP.

That is speaking of the future and our economic performance in the future, and that is not Canada's GDP; that is Ontario's GDP. Clearly, it is a great future to look forward to.

Not only do we make sure we have economic performance and job growth in this country but we also make sure we take care of the environment, have environmental integrity and put that obligation on the resource sector in particular and on the businesses that are creating these issues.

• (1315)

However, the report from the Canadian Chamber of Commerce goes on to say:

Employment...as a result of new oil sands investments is projected to grow from 75,000 jobs in 2010 to 905,000 jobs in 2035.

I know that most scientists in northern Alberta and most companies are pessimistic. I can tell members that because I see what they do. They also under-project their figures, for the most part.

It is amazing that there will be 905,000 jobs in 2035. We are going to have a tremendous growth in the oil sands sector.

Indeed, I want to reiterate a couple of other things the report says.

The report quotes Pierre Duguay, the Deputy Governor of the Bank of Canada:

“From a macroeconomic point of view, the reallocation of resources is a sign of health...”

This is talking about Dutch disease, in particular, and is found on page 8 of the report:

“...is a sign of health, not disease — it is a sign of a vibrant, dynamic economy adjusting to significant shifts in demand by putting resources to their most profitable use.”

Mr. Duguay made that statement to the Canadian Association for Business Economics on August 28, 2006.

The report goes on to state:

As for the Netherlands, where the term “Dutch disease” was originally applied, “very little systematic and long-term net adverse consequences of natural gas development on the manufacturing sector were found.”

So, even his suggestion that the Dutch disease is working against the economy and the manufacturing sector in the Netherlands is a bogus claim. Clearly, our economy is doing extremely well.

I think what I would like to do, as well, is talk about some of the comments made by the Leader of the Opposition and about what our premiers have said in relation to them, because as I said, there have been attacks on western Canada by the Leader of the Opposition. He is trying to pit one part of the country against another. It has worked before for some previous leaders, but I think Canadians are sick and tired of that kind of situation and that kind of proposition, because we understand that it is one Canada and that we all speak with the same voice for the benefit of Canada.

Let us listen to what British Columbia Premier Christy Clark said of the Dutch disease and the campaign by the Leader of the Opposition, the leader of the New Democratic Party, against the natural resource sector. She said:

I really thought that this type of thinking was discredited and it had been discredited for a long time. It's so backwards...

She went on to say, “I think that's just goofy”.

What I hear him saying is, “you know Western Canada, we don't want you to make that big contribution anymore...”.

I'm sorry, that is not what this country was built on.

The Premier of Saskatchewan, Brad Wall, declared that the NDP leader's “facts are wrong and what he's doing is very divisive for the country”.

Even my own premier, Alison Redford, who of course has to protect the interests of the province, is a premier who is new and understands the fundamentals of economics and certainly what this country is built on and how we are much better together, stronger than when we are separated. She declared, referring to the comments by the leader of the New Democratic Party:

Government Orders

To have this idea that you want to be a national leader, and then target a particular province or a particular resource that is fundamental to the economic development not only of Alberta, but Canada, is ridiculous, and I'm terribly disappointed.... It's not appropriate, and it's not based on a real understanding of either Alberta's role in Canada, or Canada's role in the world.

I myself can clearly see that this is an opportunity to try to divide to be better for himself. I think it is very negative for the country and it certainly does not befit a person who wants to lead the country and be the prime minister of all peoples of Canada. I think it is, quite frankly, an embarrassment and not a position that a national leader should take.

As members know, I do represent the oil sands. I have about 5,000 Quebeckers, for instance, in my riding and probably about 35,000 people from Newfoundland and Labrador in my riding. I have many people from Cape Breton, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. I talk to these people on the street, because I have lived in Fort McMurray for 45 to 46 years now. Originally when he got elected a year ago, people laughed because they thought some of the positions he took were a bit of a joke, saying that it was Dutch disease and trying to pit one part of the country against the other.

● (1320)

I explained to them that he is actually a leader who is sworn into the Privy Council. He is a leader who is actually brought in on the secrets of the country, able to make decisions on them and advise the Queen and the Prime Minister. He is an individual who leads a large caucus in this area. A big part of Quebec is obviously represented by that leader, and yet he wants to pit one part of the country against the other. Not only is it immature, quite frankly, but he and his party should seriously look at it as their strategy for the future, whether they want to go down that road, because the road has certainly been destroyed and I do not think any Canadians want to do that.

With the natural gas situation in British Columbia, oil and mining on the Prairies, the Ring of Fire in Ontario, Plan Nord in Quebec, the hydro power in Atlantic Canada and mining in Canada's north, Canada's resource sector presents greater potential to create even more jobs and more economic growth from today and into tomorrow, not just in Alberta and British Columbia but all across this great country of ours, whether it be northern Quebec, Ontario or, indeed, the Northwest Territories. We have a great opportunity to identify and make the world a better place.

Mr. Speaker, you were at the dinner in northern Alberta, in my riding of Fort McMurray—Athabasca, where almost \$1 million was raised to send to Africa. It was very touching to see the oil sands companies and local businesses of all stripes come to the table and donate significant money for one dinner on one night and be able to send \$1 million to Africa. I say that only because in the finance committee last year, I think it was October, I heard evidence from three or four different groups that the oil sands area I represent is the most generous area in Canada per capita. It donates more money per capita than anywhere else in Canada through the United Way and many other great groups. It was clear from listening to the witnesses that they appreciate what the people in Fort McMurray are doing. They do have great jobs and opportunities.

Government Orders

When I moved to Fort McMurray, there were 1,700 people. Today, there are more than 100,000 people. Those people are not from Alberta. The majority of them are from areas in Canada that are disadvantaged as far as jobs go. They are bringing their families to Fort McMurray and are staying. They have grandchildren there. They are building a much better part of the province. I very much enjoy them. They are bringing cultures from all over Canada, whether they be from the north or Newfoundland. I would suggest that my community has more people from Newfoundland and Labrador than anywhere else in the world. I spoke to a former premier from Newfoundland and Labrador yesterday, who said when he met me that Fort McMurray is the second largest town in Newfoundland. It is not actually in Newfoundland, but driving down the streets of Fort McMurray, people would think it is.

I am saying this because those people are looking for a new future. They see the gold rush. They see what can be brought in. The people going to Fort McMurray are going there for a better quality of life, and they send money home. I was told by one individual at one of the plant sites that the oil sands industry is the number one economic generator in Cape Breton, for instance, suggesting that somewhere around \$6 million a week goes to Cape Breton from Fort McMurray oil sands workers who travel back and forth between the communities.

When I say back and forth, I want to emphasize that what is happening in northern Alberta is going to be happening across northern Quebec, northern Ontario, British Columbia and, of course, Newfoundland and Labrador. Canadians are going from one part of this country to the other to find jobs, to find a better quality of life and to find what their ancestors came to Canada for, which was to have a better quality of life. They want to make sure our government is concentrating on the economy and what is best for them, and that is exactly what we are doing.

I would ask the NDP leader to step up, stand up and apologize to the people of the west, Canada and Quebec for trying to pit one part of this country against the other. It is shameful.

• (1325)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague opposite for his speech, even though I completely disagree with almost everything he said.

I have a very simple question for him. I do not know if he read the premise of today's motion, but what it is calling for is simply that the Prime Minister meet with the provincial premiers in Halifax in November.

First of all, why do the Conservatives not want to support this motion? Also, will the member give us a real answer, instead of simply insulting the Leader of the Opposition, and tell us the real reason the Prime Minister of Canada does not want to meet with the provincial premiers, all together, in November?

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, I assure the member that I know what our cabinet is doing. I know our parliamentary secretaries went to over 10 meetings this summer with individuals across the country to ensure that we get the message of Canadians, of provinces and of

provincial leaders. That is why the Prime Minister and all of the cabinet meet regularly with premiers as is necessary. This is no surprise. We see these summits on TV. They are meeting constantly.

As a previous parliamentary secretary, I know that I was speaking to many cabinet ministers in Saskatchewan, British Columbia, Alberta, from time to time Ontario and other places, even the mayor of Montreal and cabinet ministers from the previous Quebec government. I met with those people regularly. Many of them had my cellphone number and they would call me.

I am certain that it is no different for cabinet ministers in this particular case because the business of the country is not done in one day a year. It is done on a consistent basis, 365 days per year. This is a government that listens to Canadians and acts in the best interests of Canadians on a consistent basis.

• (1330)

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to be able to pose a question for the member for Fort McMurray—Athabasca. Being from Prince Edward Island, I know many of the well-paying jobs for Islanders are also in Fort McMurray. Certainly the member referred to Newfoundlanders, but there are a fair number of Islanders there as well.

The member talked passionately about the strength and the potential in our country and in the various regions. Coming from an area as rich as Fort McMurray, I suppose it is easier to have such optimism. Here in the Liberal Party we believe in a prosperous Canada but a prosperity that is profoundly shared. I regret to say that we are not feeling that sharing in Prince Edward Island. Some of the other well-paying jobs that are actually in Prince Edward Island are in the civil service. When the government cut the civil service, it cut it by 5% across the country but 10% in Prince Edward Island.

My question for the member comes back to the motion. The speech was a very good speech about national unity and about not dividing the country. What is wrong with having the first ministers of this country in the same room to compare notes and to try to find solutions? What is wrong with bringing them all together? That is what the motion is about and that is what I would like to hear the member talk about.

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, I was not going to refer to the last time that a leader of this country pitted one part of the country against the other, but I will say it now. It was a previous Liberal leader. If members were in Alberta during the national energy program that the Liberals imposed on Alberta over our own resources, they would have found that it devastated not just communities but entire sectors of the province, and in particular Fort McMurray.

Government Orders

I was there at the time. There were about 600 businesses in Fort McMurray, but after the NEP came in there were two businesses left: a government-run monopoly of 649 tickets and my parents' business. It clearly says that under a Liberal regime businesses can only succeed if they are run by the cheapest people in the world, a.k.a. my parents who are great, hard-working people, or a government-run monopoly. That is the record of the previous Liberal government.

We are not going to pit one part of this country against another. We are going to work together on a consistent basis, not when they try to jiggle our chain to make us do it by some political motion in this place but on a consistent, day-to-day basis as we need to do from issue to issue. For the best interests of Canadians, for the best interests of the long-term economy of Canada, we are going to do that job. We are not going to take lessons from the Liberal government that pitted parts of this country against each other and ruined our economy in Alberta for 20 years.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Prime Minister has been named “world statesman of the year”. He has been declared “a champion of democracy, freedom and human rights”, so we do understand why the premiers would want to meet with him. However, he is doing even better. He is meeting with them one-on-one, and that is face time with a world statesman.

The member for Fort McMurray—Athabasca has articulated very well how the oil sands are contributing to the jobs, growth and future prosperity of Canada but I would like him to explain how the oil sands are helping pensioners across Canada.

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, the member's question is very good because 25% of the Toronto Stock Exchange is made up of oil sands companies. The people who own those oil sands companies are teachers' pensions and pensions of seniors in many different sectors of the country. Those are the people who own the oil sands. They are doing very well by it.

I would like to answer the question in another way. I have been there a long time and those people who came from around Canada to work in Fort McMurray during the late 1970s and early 1980s are retiring now. Their children and grandchildren are staying in Fort McMurray and it is great news indeed. I have many friends who are 55 or 56 years old who are retiring with pensions of \$3,500 or \$4,000 a month after 20 years of service with some of the bigger plants such as Syncrude and Suncor. They have great pensions. Many of my friends now are travelling the world and coming back to Fort McMurray to visit their grandchildren.

Is that opportunity available in other parts of the country? Yes, it is, but clearly the oil sands has done very well for many people. Many middle-class lower income earners from around the country who were looking for a positive future came to the area 20 or 25 years ago, and they are coming to the area today. They are getting better pensions, a better return on investments for their stocks and a much better quality of life.

I say, come to Fort McMurray and work. It is a great place to start. It is a great place to have a family. It is a great place to live.

• (1335)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Fort McMurray—Athabasca seems to have a rather selective memory since he comes from the same region as the Prime Minister, who, not all that long ago, described the Atlantic provinces as having a culture of dependence and talked about building a firewall around Alberta. We have no lessons to learn from this government on issues of national unity and how to create a balanced economy in this country.

I am a member of the Standing Committee on Finance alongside the member for Fort McMurray—Athabasca, and I found that interesting. We want to have national policies that help all Canadian industries, but the Conservatives seem to have forgotten a few things. One example is employment insurance. Last spring's reform has resulted in labour shortages in some regions. I completely understand the problem, which the member has explained several times.

But the changes hurt regions like mine, Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, and the Atlantic provinces. Business people are telling me that they are going to lose skilled workers they trained themselves. These workers are leaving the region for various reasons related to the development of seasonal work, which still accounts for a significant number of jobs.

I would like the member to comment on the changes that were supposed to help the economy as a whole but are helping just some regions and hurting others. That is what the Conservatives have offered up to date.

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, I understand the member's concern but I would suggest that he do a bit of light reading. It is called the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, so the businesses in his area are represented by this group. It talks about whether Canada is suffering from Dutch disease and it speaks generally about the NDP's position and the leader's position. It says it very clearly. These are business people representing business people doing the job for him. I think he should do the job for himself.

I have a copy here and if he would like it, I would be happy to table it. It is very clear. It sets out what Canada's economy is doing and how great it is doing in every part of the country, how Quebec is benefiting from it, how Ontario is benefiting from it and how Atlantic Canada and Newfoundland and Labrador are benefiting from it.

Clearly, all of Canada is benefiting from the natural resource sector and I wish the member would take a copy of the report, read it and understand it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I hope that the member will pay closer attention to the speech I am about to give than he did to the question I just asked him. I will be sharing my time with the member for Hull—Aylmer.

Government Orders

The motion has already been read in the House. We are asking the Prime Minister to show some leadership for once and meet with the premiers who are members of the Council of the Federation during a conference to be held this November in Halifax about how to address the economic uncertainty that Canada is still experiencing. Such proof of leadership is critical given that, contrary to what the government would have us believe, there has been very little communication between the federal government and the provinces and territories concerning economic issues.

The government can talk about individual meetings all it wants, but some issues need to be discussed and explored in depth by all of the regions together. Unfortunately, despite the promises it made in the past, the Conservative government has done nothing to make this happen. We think that this is critical to raising awareness of the flaws in the Conservatives' economic policy regardless of all of the claims they have made so far today and will likely continue to make for the rest of the day.

At the end of the day, the Conservatives did nothing and brag about being responsible for getting Canada through the last recession—even though things are still uncertain now—and for getting Canada through this period relatively unscathed in comparison to the global economy.

But according to most economists and analysts, this is not because of the policies they are implementing, but simply because of Canada's existing financial, economic and banking structures.

Before I continue, I will give some examples of bad Conservative economic policies, policies that represent opportunities the Canadian economy could have had if the right decisions had been made. I will start with their arrival to power in 2006. Members will recall that we had a budget surplus. During their first mandate, the Conservatives decided to reduce the GST by 2%. This was a political and economic move that they bragged about, even though economists said that it was probably the worst way to stimulate the economy. They did it. Since 2006, this has represented a dead loss for the Canadian treasury of between \$8 billion and \$10 billion a year, so nearly \$60 billion overall.

But the Conservatives chose the worst way to invest this \$13 billion surplus to best stimulate the Canadian economy. That is what economists told them. That is what we told them. And that is what everyone who knows a thing or two about economics told them.

I mentioned in one of my questions that for every dollar lost in GST revenue, the Department of Finance and most people who study the multiplier effect of such decisions are clear: only 30¢ is put back into the economy. This means that economic growth represents only 30¢ on the dollar of what we lose in revenue.

If the Conservatives truly wanted to effectively stimulate jobs, if they wanted to go in this direction by eliminating the surplus, they could have made other decisions. They could have invested in infrastructure. Canada has an infrastructure deficit of about \$130 billion. If they had taken every surplus dollar and invested it in Canadian infrastructure, every dollar would have brought in \$1.50 in economic growth. That would put us in the black.

If they had wanted to invest in housing, the return would have been \$1.50 for each dollar invested in housing infrastructure. If they

had wanted to take measures intended directly for the disadvantaged and the unemployed, the return would have been even better still: for each dollar invested in these measures for the least fortunate, the unemployed and the most disadvantaged people, \$1.70 in economic growth would have been generated.

By lowering the GST, the government generated economic growth of 30¢ for each dollar lost. In addition, in terms of revenue from the tax on company profits, the economic growth is also 30¢ for each dollar eliminated or lost.

So the choices the Conservatives made are economic. They tried to justify them but, at the end of the day, instead of investing the \$13 billion surplus in paying down the debt, they could have made better choices that would have done more for the Canadian economy.

The government's choices were not made in consultation with the provinces, even though this government and the members who have spoken so far are talking about great communication. It is a unilateral gesture.

● (1340)

I was talking about the \$13 billion surplus that had been eliminated in a year and a half because the GST was lowered by two percentage points, among other things. We were in a deficit situation even before the recession, even before the economic stimulus packages. This government claims to be the appropriate manager of public finances. But it must realize that, aside from that period of a year and a half when this government had a budget surplus that it inherited when it was elected and that it changed into a deficit, we still have a deficit. We are celebrating a very important anniversary in 2012. It is the 100th anniversary of a balanced federal Conservative budget, because the last balanced budget under the Conservatives, before the one they inherited in 2006, was in 1912. Do you know who the prime minister was then? Robert Borden.

I know that the Conservatives really enjoy talking about the NDP's economic performance. If we look at the Department of Finance's own figures in the performance analysis of the federal and provincial governments in terms of balanced budgets and proper management of public funds, we can see that all the NDP provincial governments have the best performance economically, as well as in fiscal management and balanced budgets. They are far ahead of the Conservative and Liberal governments. It has been so since 1982 or 1987, depending on which year you choose as a reference.

Once again, in terms of sound management of public funds, the Conservative government has nothing to teach us and we have nothing to learn from it.

Government Orders

We also have to realize that what the Conservatives are doing—once again, generally without consulting the provinces and using a completely one-sided approach—is an impediment to the country's potential growth. I am talking about the restraint measures during this period, among other things. Let me refer you to the last budget and probably the upcoming budget, if we rely on the rumours going around. The Conservative government has started to promote its restraint measures and to talk about cutting 20,000 jobs in the public service, as well as cutting the budget of various departments by 5% to 10%.

Once again, we are talking about general cuts of 5% to 10% at all levels and no notice is being taken of whether we are cutting the fat, as the Conservatives are fond of saying, or whether we are cutting into the bone. I can tell you that, in plenty of departments, many of the austerity measures implemented—the budget cuts—were cuts into the bone. The Conservatives do not care. They are applying the 5% to 10% cuts to everyone, regardless of the impact it will have.

The Conservative government's austerity measures have been criticized by this side of the House, of course, but also by rating agencies. Fitch and Moody's condemned the austerity measures and warned the government not to go too far because austerity measures are dangerous in times of economic uncertainty, such as those we are still facing in Canada. However, the Conservatives turns a deaf ear to all the economic wisdom that is shared with them. We on this side of the House are not surprised. The government refuses to listen to anything we say. We saw this before with the budget consultations and in the different stages of Bill C-38, the mammoth bill. The fact that the Conservatives are turning a deaf ear to wise advice such as that provided by Fitch and Moody's is completely irresponsible.

I would like to end by talking once again about the lack of leadership and communication with regard to employment insurance. The measures proposed in Bill C-38 are there to address a local labour shortage problem that is affecting western Canada and other areas. We agree on that. We are waiting for the minister to provide administrative regulations for employment insurance. The implementation of a Canada-wide employment insurance reform with all these measure that have a negative impact on regions such as eastern Quebec demonstrates a blatant lack of vision for the different economic realities of the specific regions. Although it is becoming more economically diverse, my riding of Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, like those of the Atlantic provinces and others, still depends on seasonal work, whether it is in the forestry, fishing, agricultural or tourism sectors. The Conservative are blind. I will tell you who opposed this reform: most of the provincial premiers, including those of the Atlantic provinces.

For us, it is essential that the government choose the path of co-operation, of working together with the provinces, and that is why we are moving this motion calling on the Prime Minister to attend the economic summit being held by the Council of the Federation in November.

● (1345)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are many things I could bring up that the member made reference to, one being a New Democrat budget, possibly in the province of Manitoba.

I was in the Manitoba legislature for many years when Mr. Doer was, and Mr. Selinger has been, premier. I can assure the member that if it were not for the cash cow coming from Ottawa, in terms of transfer payments to the province, Manitoba would have some very serious problems.

That leads to what we are talking about today in today's motion, which the Liberal caucus does support. We do need to see greater communication between the provincial governments and the national government, and part of that communication strategy is to recognize the need for first ministerial meetings.

We have seen the Liberal administrations from Pierre Elliott Trudeau to Jean Chrétien and others where these meetings have had direct benefits, such as the Kelowna accord and the health care accord. I am wondering if the member could highlight the importance of having those types of meetings to achieve national goals, such as the health care accord.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Winnipeg North for his comments. He referred to the performance of the New Democratic government in Manitoba. I could add Nova Scotia, British Columbia and Saskatchewan to the list. New Democratic governments in those provinces have successfully balanced public finances while providing people with better public services, unlike what the Conservatives are doing at the federal level.

He made an excellent point about meetings, and therein lies the problem. Nobody is asking for monthly or even yearly meetings, but the Conservatives have been promising to meet with the premiers for the past three years, and it has not happened yet. Given present levels of economic instability and uncertainty, it is very important for each region of the federation to have meaningful conversations with the Prime Minister.

Individual conversations are all well and good, but I would like to know when was the last time the Prime Minister met with the Premier of Quebec. One-on-one meetings do not get a lot of media coverage. A joint meeting is essential to ensure that all of the regions can talk about the issues and how the government's solutions are affecting them. But that is not happening currently.

● (1350)

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my thanks to the hon. member. I have two very simple questions for him and I would like him to try to provide specific answers.

First, his party's finance critic states clearly that the GST must be increased. Does he agree with that? Second, the chair of the NDP caucus also says that he agrees with the idea of a carbon tax. Does he support that as well?

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to answer the parliamentary secretary in the same manner as she answered me this morning.

Government Orders

In matters of economic policy, we do not talk in terms of individual measures, but in terms of the economy as a whole. I have mentioned the effects of the reduction in the GST. Even before the recession, we fell into a deficit situation. If they had really wanted measures to stimulate the economy, instead of cutting the GST, which, for every dollar of lost revenue, produces only 30 cents in economic growth, they could have invested the money in infrastructure, which would have grown the economy at a rate of \$1.50 for each dollar invested.

I am delighted to answer the second question. Our leader of the opposition has answered it as well. We are in favour of the polluter-pay principle. This is a question to which I would have liked an answer from her previously: is she in favour of the principle, as Canadians are? Some also refer to internalizing costs. This is perhaps the most effective way to solve the problems we are facing, such as climate change and the action taken in Canada.

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to speak today to the motion put forward by the member for Outremont. The motion deals with a pivotal matter, a matter crucial to the future of our country: the economy.

The Canadian economy is facing unprecedented dangers and uncertainty. The world economic crisis and the choices made by this government have weakened the fabric of industry and the job market in several regions of the country. Today, Canadians are hoping that this government will show leadership and openness to dialogue, especially with the provinces. Currently, this government has been content to repeat that the Canadian economy is in good shape. But the imbalances that can be seen are threatening our potential to build a Canadian economy for the 21st century, an economy that is solid, diversified, balanced and beneficial for all.

I am going to ask the hon. members opposite a very simple question. Do they find it acceptable that income inequality is constantly on the rise, as is the case in our country? Do this country's workers, who are up early, working by the sweat of their brow and paying their taxes honestly, not have the right to a greater share of the fruits of our growth?

For 25 years, income inequality has steadily worsened. The income of the wealthiest 20% in our society keeps going up while the income of the remaining 80% keeps going down. Other statistics show that our economy is not working as it should. In 2010, for example, about one Canadian in 10 was living in poverty. This included 546,000 children, a regrettable number. Moreover, Canadian households are facing a record level of debt, now at 152% of income.

Other statistics tell us that the annual income of seniors dropped by about \$1,000 between 2009 and 2010. There is reason to believe that the Conservatives' unjustified cuts to old age security and the guaranteed income supplement will hasten the decline in seniors' incomes.

When they hear the Conservatives tell them that they are creating wealth, the question that Canadians have to ask themselves is this: but who is the wealth creation benefiting at the moment? Under the Conservatives, the wealth being created is essentially benefiting the wealthiest. Growth is necessary, of course, even essential; but it has to benefit everyone. That is not the case at the moment. The

Conservatives have made choices whose result has been to keep most of our fellow citizens outside the circle of those who are actually benefiting.

The government's response to the most recent global economic crisis clearly illustrates the ideology that is guiding its decisions, an ideology that is causing greater economic imbalance. First the Conservatives decided to cut taxes for large corporations, hoping that they would reinvest the money and create jobs, but that never happened. Now those corporations are sitting on over half a trillion dollars, which is lying idle in their coffers rather than driving the economy. This Conservative approach to stimulating the economy does not cut the mustard.

The Conservatives also decided to adopt a policy of fiscal restraint. They told Canadians to tighten their belts even further. Canadians are fed up with having to pay for the Conservative ideology and want to receive the services that their tax dollars pay for. In that regard, this government's cuts to the public service have hit my riding of Hull—Aylmer very hard. The repercussions are very real and quite apparent.

In addition to the serious human and social consequences of losing one's job, this also has major economic implications. The budget cuts are having numerous adverse effects. The most obvious is the reduction in household spending and falling sales for SMEs.

• (1355)

A number of people in my riding have told me that their sales are down. What happens when SMEs see their sales slump? They lay off their staff or shut down completely. It is a vicious circle.

The Canadian economy has been affected by the global economic crisis and by the Conservatives' response to it. Today, four years after the crisis began, uncertainty still abounds.

We still have major challenges before us. Since our economy is open to the world, the economic health of our trade partners has a particularly serious impact on us. Our largest trade partner, the United States, is having a difficult time. Our second largest trade partner, Europe, is in a serious position. Basically, the Canadian economy is confronted with extraordinary risks and uncertainty, and it is especially true that, within Canada, there are major imbalances among the provinces with regard to unemployment and growth.

In this context, Canadians are entitled to expect the country's Prime Minister to at least take the time to consult the provincial premiers in order to look at the various options available.

We are part of a federation, and the Prime Minister has so far been deaf to the provinces' desire to discuss the economy.

The Prime Minister is even refusing to attend the national economic summit in November organized by the Council of the Federation—

Statements by Members

● (1400)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I am sorry to have to interrupt the hon. member for Hull—Aylmer, but the time for the business of supply is up. She will have three minutes to finish her speech after question period.

We will now move on to statements by members.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS*[English]***QUEEN'S DIAMOND JUBILEE MEDALS**

Mr. John Carmichael (Don Valley West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, volunteers are the lifeblood of every community. On Sunday, September 9, I had the opportunity to recognize 30 outstanding volunteers from across my riding of Don Valley West when I presented them with the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medals.

These 30 community leaders represent a wide range of volunteer activities, from leading residents' associations to organizing and coaching minor baseball and soccer programs for our kids; to planting trees and cleaning and maintaining our parks and ravines; to collecting food and clothing on behalf of our local food banks and social service agencies; to spearheading community infrastructure projects, like building a new arena and a cricket pitch; and fundraising for hospitals and arts organizations.

Each of the 30 medal recipients, who represent the essence of volunteerism, helps to make Don Valley West a better place to live.

* * *

*[Translation]***QUEBEC MARKET GARDENERS**

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to salute market gardeners in my riding.

On July 4, a severe hailstorm hit the region, devastating everything. Hailstones the size of golf balls destroyed entire fields of lettuce, carrots, onions and other vegetables. Most producers had to throw everything out. Sixty market gardeners lost almost everything. They worked day and night to clean up their fields and try to reseed. The Association des jardiniers maraîchers du Québec estimates damages on the order of \$50 million.

Unfortunately, existing aid programs are not designed for market gardeners. The federal government must adapt its programs quickly to help our farmers recover from this natural disaster. To date, we are still waiting for the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food to do something.

Farmers in my riding deserve much better. After all, they produce most of the fruits and vegetables in Quebec, and it is thanks to them that we can eat fresh foods every day. Today I salute their hard work and their courage.

*[English]***ARMENIA**

Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to Canadians of Armenian descent on this 21st anniversary of the recognition of independence of Armenia.

I have enjoyed the opportunity to dialogue with Armenian Canadians in my riding and here on the Hill. Armenia made a full switch to a market economy and as of 2012 is the 39th most economically free nation in the world. I continue to be fascinated, both by how far Armenia has come in these two decades of freedom and how strong the will is to continue to build a democratic and vibrant society.

All members of the House are here as the result of the peaceful democratic process governed by the rule of law. Too often we take this for granted. Today, I invite all hon. members to join me in congratulating our Armenian Canadian friends for 21 years of independence, democracy, and progress.

God bless Canada and Armenia.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in areas like Prince Edward Island that depend on seasonal industries, the changes and cutbacks of the EI program are having a devastating effect on thousands of families. People who earn a small amount of money while on EI will now see half their earnings taken away. Low-wage earners will lose money under these changes and wait times are getting longer and longer because of cuts to EI staff and claim centres.

People are struggling in my riding and right across the country. There are many areas where seasonal work is the only option and that is the reality for many people in my district of Cardigan.

These people deserve a federal government that understands their hardships and the struggles they face. They deserve a federal government that will stand up for them, not destroy the programs they need the most to provide for their families when there is no work available.

These changes are unacceptable and I urge the government to reconsider these devastating changes that will hurt so many people on Prince Edward Island.

*Statements by Members***YUKON**

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all Yukoners for a fantastic summer. I was able to amass more than 18,000 kilometres, travelling to every community in our great territory. To better serve our communities I opened additional offices. I was honoured to announce continued record levels of funding to multiple arts and cultural activities, celebrations and festivals; and to deal with northern housing challenges by opening affordable housing units for seniors and independent living units for people with FASD to improve their quality of life and access to support. I announced investments in critical infrastructure and consultations with Yukon stakeholders for our path to the future; investments in education, from literacy to innovation, to better place Yukon people for Yukon jobs; and support for our youth career opportunities through 60 summer student job placements.

I would like to congratulate Watson Lake's Olympian, Zach Bell and team alternatives, Jeane Lassen and Brittane Laverdure.

Our Prime Minister understands how remarkable the people of Canada's true north are. I end with his quote, "Our country's greatest dreams are to be found in our highest latitudes".

* * *

• (1405)

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the mid 1970s, over 40 oil refineries operated in Canada. Today, there are only 19. Burnaby is home to the last remaining major oil refinery in British Columbia. The Chevron refinery employs 250 people and provides one-third of metro Vancouver's gasoline. This refinery gets its oil from Kinder Morgan's Trans Mountain pipeline.

Chevron may now close because it is starved of feedstock. Chevron has applied to the National Energy Board to secure a guaranteed supply of oil from Kinder Morgan. I am intervening in the National Energy Board process to try to save the refinery, while demanding it operate at the highest possible environmental standards. The Conservative chair of the natural resources committee quipped to the *Globe and Mail* that he does not care if the refinery closes as long as it means more oil exports for Alberta.

I am fighting to keep the Burnaby refinery open while making it cleaner. I am fighting to keep 250 good-paying local jobs and gas prices low. What are the Conservatives doing? Where is their national energy strategy?

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Ms. Eve Adams (Mississauga—Brampton South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been a busy summer in Mississauga. I spent it attending community events, meeting with residents and veterans and continuing to work hard on their behalf. It was especially wonderful to host over 2000 of my neighbours at my annual community barbecue. I would like to thank all of the wonderful volunteers who pitched in on a hot and sunny day to make it such a success.

My community is hard working and it was wonderful to hear my neighbours speak of their continued support for our Conservative

government's economic action plan to create jobs and keep taxes low. I am not the only one proud of our government's work and our Prime Minister. The World Economic Forum has recognized the work of our government and has ranked Canada's banking system as the soundest in the world for the fifth year running.

It is not just our economy that is capturing international accolades. Former President Bill Clinton, former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and retired General Colin Powell have honoured our Prime Minister with the World Statesman of the Year award for his international leadership, which will put him in the company of renowned leaders like former PM Margaret Thatcher.

Congratulations to the Prime Minister.

* * *

JIM JORDAN

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the late Jim Jordan, who died Tuesday morning, just 16 days after his 84th birthday. Mr. Jordan was the member of Parliament for my riding of Leeds—Grenville from 1988 to 1997. Jim, as he was affectionately known to everybody, was born into a political family. His father was a successful municipal politician in Hungerford Township.

Of all his achievements as member of Parliament, Jim may be best remembered for his tremendous efforts in convincing the government of the day to help finance a four lane highway stretching from Highway 401 at Prescott to Ottawa. That single achievement, Highway 416, has been a lasting and continuously growing economic benefit to both Ottawa and my riding, as well as making it much easier for many to commute to the city for work.

On behalf of all members, I wish to express my condolences to his children Dr. David, Bob, Paul, Tom, Mike, Dr. Andy, and Joe Jordan, who was the first son to directly succeed his father as an MP, and their families

* * *

[Translation]

ATIKAMEKW OF MANAWAN FIRST NATION

Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was lucky enough to take part in a powwow at the Atikamekw of Manawan First Nation. This northern Lanauidière community welcomed me with open arms and introduced me to a rich culture and many wonderful people.

Although this community was already dealing with chronic underfunding and an astronomical drop-out rate, its funding was just cut by another \$430,000. So I was amazed at how warm and welcoming these people are. Manawan is one of the few aboriginal communities where the traditional language is still widely spoken, and yet this community receives no financial assistance to fund its cultural programs.

Statements by Members

If language is the soul of a nation, why would we wait until the Atikamekw language is dead before offering our support? This question and many others arose from my visit. I hope the government will take appropriate action.

* * *

• (1410)

[English]

ENHANCING RCMP ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Delta—Richmond East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to say that last night Bill C-42, the enhancing Royal Canadian Mounted Police accountability act, passed second reading. This bill would give the RCMP the tools it needs to enhance trust and restore accountability in its ranks.

The positive response to our government's proposed reforms has been heard loud and clear. This legislation is urgently needed. I was also pleased to hear that the NDP has stated it supports this legislation. However, it seems it cannot keep from playing some parliamentary games, even on bills it supports. The member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River read word for word the same speech that the NDP public safety critic had read on the previous day.

The NDP needs to get serious and work with our government to pass these very vital reforms.

* * *

PUBLIC SERVICE OF CANADA

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if the Conservatives are looking for inefficiencies and public expenditure, they need to look no further than their own record: a bloated cabinet; more and more reliance on special advisers and ministerial officers; and over \$1 billion spent in the past five years on temporary help services for jobs that should have been done by the full-time employees of the public service.

The government cannot fire 184 professionals from Health Canada and expect no impact on public health. It cannot cut air safety programs and expect no impact on security. When 900 workers are fired from Service Canada, that is 900 people who will not be there to service our seniors with their pensions.

Canadians deserve better. Good governance begins with the relationship of trust and respect between public service employees and political leadership. Canadians deserve quality public services and the professionals who provide them deserve our thanks and support.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the NDP has a dangerous economic plan for Canadians. He wants to impose a carbon tax on Canadians, which will increase the price of gas, electricity and groceries. It will also kill jobs.

The NDP platform clearly states on page 13 that the NDP “will put a price on carbon through a cap-and-trade system”, which is the same as a carbon tax.

Canadians were clear in the last election: they want a government that focuses on the economy, job creation and prosperity. That is why they elected our Conservative government.

We will continue to focus on what is important to Canadians: keeping taxes low for families and job creators.

* * *

[English]

SYRIA

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, recently the Canadian embassy in Syria's web page posted a warning, which read, “Canadians who are leaving Syria by land into Lebanon should know that we advise against all travel to the border region”. I applaud the embassy for protecting Canadians in these border regions, but I wonder why other mechanisms of government are not equally mindful of the dangers.

For example, residents of Syria, with a need for consular services from Canada, are required to travel through this war ravaged territory to Amman, Jordan. Those engaged in the immigration process must make that perilous journey, often with young children and family, to our embassy before returning via the same treacherous route. Many have been threatened and some killed in the process, all for the sake of a face-to-face meeting.

Canada should not be forcing people into dangerous situations like this. Allies, such as Australia, for example, are conducting immigration interviews by phone. Why is Canada not able to do the same and why does it continue to put people at risk when other methods would accomplish the very same thing?

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition has been hiding from answering the following straightforward question: Would the NDP impose a carbon tax? The answer he is so afraid to say out loud is that, yes, it would impose a carbon tax. The proof is simple as it says it right in the party platform. It reads in black and white that the NDP would generate \$21 billion from this carbon tax.

I ask the leader of the NDP to finally come clean and admit it. The NDP want a carbon tax, a tax that would raise the price on everything, including gas, electricity and groceries.

It is clear to me that Canadians do not want any part of the NDP's carbon tax scheme, and who can blame them?

Our government will continue with its low tax plan for jobs and growth.

Oral Questions

●(1415)

[Translation]

GASOLINE PRICES

Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, instead of pulling fabrications out of their overactive imaginations, the Conservatives should stop twiddling their thumbs and take action to put an end to one of their government's worst fiascos: skyrocketing gas prices.

Imagine this: Quebeckers and Canadians filling up their tanks have to pay 36% more than six years ago, all because of the Conservatives' irresponsible inaction. This 36% increase means that families have to make many sacrifices. They are cutting their spending on travel, food, clothing and school supplies. They are depriving themselves of the basics to be able to afford the Conservatives' gas price hikes. Enough is enough.

It is all well and good to waste time launching unfounded attacks, but if my colleagues opposite have any political will left, they will attack this problem that is affecting all families across the country.

* * *

[English]

LEADER OF THE NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in a twist of contradictions, the NDP leader has begun attacking Canada's trade balance. He continues to spread false deficit numbers to mislead the Canadian public. He also fails to grasp the irony that if the NDP's reckless and irresponsible anti-trade agenda were imposed, Canada's trade would be zero.

These policies, along with a new \$20 billion carbon tax, would kill Canadian jobs and stall the economy.

We encourage the NDP leader to read Andrew Coyne, who today wrote:

A country whose economy is growing relatively slowly, compared to its trading partners, will buy rather less from them, and sell rather more. Its trade deficit will accordingly shrink. Conversely, a country that is growing quicker than its partners will experience an increase in its trade deficit. POP QUIZ: Which country would you rather live in?

Sadly, it is the NDP policies—

The Speaker: Oral questions, the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons said that employment insurance creates “incentives for people to be unemployed.” We hear the same type of comments from his colleague, the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, who thinks that employment insurance is too lucrative.

Does the Prime Minister agree with his ministers? Does he believe that employment insurance provides people with an incentive to be unemployed?

[English]

Does the Prime Minister agree that employment insurance is, to quote his House leader, “an incentive for people to be unemployed”?

[Translation]

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, employment insurance is essential for Canadians who cannot find work. Our objective is to ensure that Canadians are given the opportunity to work.

[English]

In the past, the way employment insurance worked was that people who went back to work lost dollar for dollar everything they gained when they returned to work. For the vast majority of people that is what happened. We are trying to ensure that Canadians can go back to work and continue to benefit.

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is not true to say that 1.4 million Canadians are unemployed because they want to be. They are unemployed because of the failure of the Conservatives' economic policies, which involve, for example, lowering taxes for big business, increasing the age of retirement, preventing workers from obtaining employment insurance benefits and—the Prime Minister's favourite—bringing in temporary foreign workers.

How do these policies help unemployed workers find jobs?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are well aware that this country has a superior track record when it comes to job creation for unemployed workers. More Canadians are working now than before the recession. This is a rare exception among developed countries. We will continue to work to create jobs for Canadians.

* * *

●(1420)

[English]

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL RELATIONS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is not interested in meeting with the premiers. He is not interested in working together. He is not interested in the unemployed. He will travel around the world to Davos, to South America, to China, but he will not even sit down with Canadian premiers. In seven years he has only met with the premiers once, the worst record of any prime minister.

Why will the Prime Minister not even listen to the people on the ground? Why will the Prime Minister not work together with his own fellow Canadians here at home?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): On the contrary, Mr. Speaker. I have met in person or spoken by telephone with Canadian premiers 250 times since 2006. We do these meetings not just with premiers but with other Canadians on a regular basis.

What is interesting is actually the Leader of the Opposition. When asked about the fact certain premiers wanted to meet him earlier in the spring about his comments about shutting down Canadian industry and imposing carbon taxes, he said that he saw no reason he should meet with any of these people.

* * *

[Translation]

FOREIGN INVESTMENT

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the fact is that the Prime Minister continues to ignore the economic problems facing Canadians. The development of our natural resources is important for the economy, but the minister responsible for the takeover of Nexen by a Chinese state company has not said a word about the company's horrible human rights record and environmental record.

Is he aware of those problems and related concerns? Is he aware of that?

[English]

Hon. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada's investment review process is sound. It ensures that foreign investment is of net benefit to Canada.

Our government has a clear track record of encouraging economic growth, job creation and prosperity in Canada. The minister will take the time required to carefully examine the proposed acquisition to determine whether it is in the best interest of Canadians.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we all know natural resources and the oil sands are an important part of Canada's economy. A Chinese state-owned company is—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. Members are once again asked to hold off on their applause until the member is finished asking the question.

The hon. member for Parkdale—High Park has the floor.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, the oil sands are an important part of Canada's economy, but a Chinese state-owned company is now—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Parkdale—High Park has the floor.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, a Chinese state-owned company is now trying to buy a major stake in the oil industry. Is it the Conservatives' plan to let other countries nationalize Canada's resources?

According to a new poll, only 8% of Canadians agree with this deal; 92% either disagree or want more information. Will the Minister of Industry acknowledge these concerns and agree to public consultations?

Hon. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the six criteria that make up the net benefit test are very clear. Any Canadian, including the member opposite, can look them up online in section 20 of the Investment Canada Act. Simply Google the Investment Canada Act and they will be able to find those criteria. They include the level of economic activity; the degree and significance of participation by Canadians in the Canadian business; and the effect on productivity, industrial efficiency and other factors, including the effect on competition within the industry. It goes on and on. I do not have time to list them all, but let us be very clear that the minister will make the decision in the best interests of Canadians.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. Contrary to what he said earlier about the employment insurance reform, the new measures have not been advantageous for the less fortunate. Before, unemployed workers could keep the first \$75 they earned or the equivalent of the first 40% of their benefits. Now that amount is automatically deducted. The problem is that this is going to increase the number of less fortunate people and create an underground economy.

Is that what the Prime Minister wants to do, create an underground economy?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we want to ensure that workers find themselves in a better position when they work, regardless of what they do. That is our objective and we will continue to work toward it. It is a step and we will continue to improve the system in order to help people.

● (1425)

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, either the minister is incompetent or she is misleading the House. Right now, we are asking the Prime Minister the question because he is supposed to be the boss.

The problem is that, when a person earns money, 50% of it is automatically taken away from him. That person will want to hide and will be unable to work. There are people who will work under the table. That is not how this works. The Prime Minister is the Prime Minister of all Canadians.

Will he replace his minister or will he resolve the problems once and for all in order to help Canada's less fortunate?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under the old employment insurance system created by the Liberals, when unemployed workers worked for two, three or four days a week while receiving benefits, they lost every dollar they earned by working. It did not make sense and that is what we are changing: unemployed workers will now keep 50¢ of every dollar they earn. That is much better for them and for the community.

Oral Questions

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, just for the record, if a person was receiving a maximum amount of \$485 in employment insurance benefits, he or she was allowed to keep \$194. Now, with the new system, those individuals are losing—

The Speaker: There is a technical problem with the interpretation. Is it fixed? Okay.

The hon. member for Bourassa.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Speaker, members of the House can now understand the francophones. If they would learn my language, they would see that things would go well.

The problem right now is that people are losing more money than they were under the old system. I have a question for the Prime Minister.

[*English*]

Someone once said that providing for the poor is not a federal responsibility. Who said that? The Prime Minister. Now we are seeing his government abandoning the most vulnerable: EI recipients—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development.

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear. The changes we made are to help Canadians get part-time work to make sure there are not barriers to that, because we know that getting part-time work often leads to full-time work. I can assure members that the vast majority of Canadians who are on EI will be better off when they work part-time.

[*Translation*]

Most unemployed workers who work while receiving benefits are doing better thanks to the changes that have been made; however, we will continue to improve the system to help unemployed workers.

* * *

[*English*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in response to my order paper question, we discovered that CF-18 pilots have shut down one of that jet's two engines 228 times in mid-flight since 1988 due to safety concerns, or nearly once a month. All 228 times our pilots got safely back to the base with the CF-18's remaining engine.

With the single engine F-35, this scenario could have resulted in disaster. Do Conservatives understand this concern of experts in the field? Can they explain why they are ignoring concerns about choosing a single engine aircraft?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, the National Fighter Procurement Secretariat is in place to ensure there is due diligence and transparency in our decision to replace the CF-18s. It includes a number of experts, including two independent members, one being a very well-respected former Canadian auditor general who is working with the secretariat.

No money has been spent on the purchase of any new fighter aircraft, and no money will be spent until the secretariat independently verifies the cost and the requirements to replace our CF-18s.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is just one more an example of the shoddy work done by the Conservatives on this file. Since 1988, our pilots have been saved by the twin-engine CF-18s 228 times: there were two engines. It is easy to see why the CF-18s were a good choice for our forces; this was an insurance policy that pilots will not have with the Conservatives' F-35s.

Can the Conservatives explain why they chose the F-35 when it will not give pilots a second engine that could save them in the event of a disaster?

• (1430)

[*English*]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no money has been spent on the purchase of any new aircraft at this point.

The secretariat is in fact in charge of not only looking at the cost of replacing the CF-18 but also at the requirements of replacing the CF-18.

The Auditor General has told us that we are on the right track and that we are taking steps in the right direction. We are working with his office. I thank all of the officials, including the Department of National Defence, for working closely with the Auditor General's office.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, clearly the minister does not understand the gravity of the situation. Whether it is the math or physics missing from the minister's calculations, I do not know. However, simply put, when a plane loses its only engine, it does not stay in the air.

Rather than spending time and money on an F-35 secretariat to decide whether or not the F-35 is better, why does the minister not hold an open competition to decide what plane meets our national defence interests and those of the pilots we ask to defend this nation?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course part of the National Fighter Procurement Secretariat is the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Air Force. This secretariat is in place to ensure there is full transparency and due diligence while we move forward to make a decision about replacing our CF-18s.

At this point no purchase has been made and no money will be spent until the secretariat reviews the costs associated with replacing the CF-18s and also the requirements necessary to replace the CF-18s.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the F-35 is not the only file where the Conservatives have fallen down on the job. Six months ago, they voted in favour of our motion urging the government to expand the powers of the Chief Electoral Officer.

The deadline has arrived. When will the government take action?

[English]

Hon. Tim Uppal (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the hon. member to his new critic position. This is going to be a challenging position for him because it was his party, the NDP, that had to return hundreds of thousands of dollars in illegal donations from unions. It will be a challenging position for him.

As for the motion, a comprehensive proposal will be put forward shortly.

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that New Democrats co-operated with Elections Canada, and in fact—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Toronto—Danforth has the floor.

Mr. Craig Scott: Mr. Speaker, New Democrats co-operated with Elections Canada and in fact were praised by Elections Canada for that co-operation, while the Conservatives had to plead guilty to breaking election laws. The Conservatives paid the largest fine available and wasted over \$2 million taking Elections Canada to court.

If the minister of state says that something will be tabled, forgive me for not understanding that deadlines are there to be kept. The government promised to answer the committee—

Hon. Tim Uppal (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, again I will say that a comprehensive proposal regarding that motion will be put forward in due course. However, I want to remind the hon. member that hundreds of thousands of dollars in sponsorship was given by their big union bosses in the unions. They had to repay it. It was an illegal donation.

* * *

[Translation]

ETHICS

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to ethics, the Conservatives are a farce and a bad joke. While the Prime Minister's chief of staff takes calls from his lobbyist friends as though it were acceptable, and the Minister of Industry practically moves his office into that of the Ethics Commissioner in order not to waste time, the Conservatives are promising to change the conflict of interest laws, but are not providing any details, nothing, *niet, nada, nemaii*. They are making excuses and already justifying their broken promises.

Why are the Conservatives afraid of tightening the ethics rules?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have already tightened the rules. The problem is that the NDP has already broken these rules by accepting \$340,000 from unions, which is illegal.

I have a very specific question for the hon. member. He gave more than \$3,000 to Québec solidaire, the most sovereigntist party in Quebec. Is he a federalist or not?

• (1435)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have three words to say in this House: in and out. Seriously, the Conservatives can attempt to distract us, but the facts are the facts and they are troubling. People cannot trust a government that is mired in scandals and mismanagement.

The Minister of Industry alone is undermining the credibility of the entire Government of Canada. He was caught red-handed in a conflict of interest by the Ethics Commissioner, who is conducting an investigation of two other matters in which the minister is involved. That is shocking.

As long as the Minister of Industry passes GO and collects \$200, they will have no credibility on the issue of ethics.

[English]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I asked a clear question. I asked if the member was now a federalist. He responded, "In and out." That raises a lot of interesting questions about his position on the country we live in and the Parliament he serves in. Does he believe that his province should be in the country or out of the country?

On this side, we are clear: We want Quebec in. We believe in Canada.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is sad that he is using a maple leaf as a fig leaf to hide the ethical abuse of the government.

Let us talk about the loopholes that the government is refusing to clean up.

Let us take the example of junkets. On the one hand, we have Liberals and Conservatives, and I think even the member for Thunder Bay—Superior North, travelling on an expensive junket on the dime of a mining giant. On the other hand, an MP might take a phone call from an environmental group, for example, and yet on the lobbyist registry those very different actions are treated the same.

Therefore, it is not a question about the travel here. The question is why will they not close the loopholes for this kind of backroom dealing?

Oral Questions

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have made it clear, as indeed did the NDP members of the committee, that the act is working well. We of course introduced this at the start of our term in government. There were some changes that were proposed. We have adopted many of those positions as our own. We are doing further research on the others.

We are acting in good faith. We want the Lobbying Act to be accountable. We want lobbyists to be accountable. We want there to be transparency.

I wonder why the hon. member is so ruffled, because we on this side of the House believe in Canada. On that side of the House there are people who have supported parties that do not believe in Canada. We just asked a simple question—

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

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member would agree with me that there has never been a government that has set the ethical bar so low, and I will not even reference his time as a ShamWow salesman, but even with that low ethical bar, there is still an endless group of ministers and Tory staffers who are doing an endless conga line—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay has the floor.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I am going to ask the minister a simple question. His friend Nigel Wright, and we all know Nigel Wright is a nice guy, but he is lobbied not once, not twice, but three times by his buddies at Barrick Gold. Does the minister think this is ethical, or does he think this passes the smell test? This is a simple question and Canadians want an answer.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the simple answer is that yes, the chief of staff to the Prime Minister has comported himself with the highest standard of ethics. He followed the Federal Accountability Act which increased the stringency of our lobbyist rules. That same act also banned explicitly union contributions. Over five years that party accepted \$340,000 in illegal union money. The member mentioned ShamWow. That party's political financing is all a sham and no wow.

* * *

● (1440)

PENSIONS

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked the government for a separate bill on MP pension reform so that Canadians could see how their MPs support this very important bill in a stand-alone fashion. I did not get an answer.

Is the Prime Minister worried about a backlash from his own backbench members if he does not force this down their throats as part of a single budget bill? I have a proposition for him. How about a separate stand-alone bill and the Liberals will co-operate in fast-

tracking it? This is the kind of thing Canadians expect: transparency from their government.

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can inform the hon. member that we will not have a separate stand-alone bill when it comes to MP pensions or salaries. We will have a budget implementation bill that is focused on jobs, the economy and economic growth in this country, as we indicated previously. I am not surprised that the Liberals and the NDP on the other side have already voiced their opposition to this bill without even seeing it. That is how they operate. However, we are focused on jobs and economic growth for this country and we will continue to be so.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, does the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development just not know that prior to August 5, EI claimants could earn 40% of their weekly benefits without any penalty?

For example, Jennifer is a registered nurse in my riding who is on parental leave. Jennifer worked part-time to fill nursing care shortages and keep up her skills. However, the government now has clawed back 50¢ on every dollar earned, making her worse off with the changes.

Will the Prime Minister explain to this new mom on parental leave why he is taking half her wages for covering nursing shortages? Why is the government basically—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development.

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member conveniently ignores is the rest of the story, and that is if Jennifer had worked more than 40%, every single dollar that she earned would have been clawed back on her EI. That is a disincentive to work. Our country cannot afford that. We have a shortage of skills and labour right across the country in a wide range of sectors, industries and professions. As a government, we want to ensure that Canadians are always better off when they are working. We are working toward that goal and we will continue to work toward that goal.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister said that this helps the majority of people. Let us talk about the majority, and I do not mean an NDP majority of 50% plus one, but the real majority. The basic math shows that anybody who makes \$260 a week or under is penalized under these rule changes. Stats Canada figures show us that part-time workers' median income is \$230 a week. That would tell me that EI recipients who are working part-time are being penalized.

When will the minister admit there is a problem and fix this problem? People are being hurt.

Oral Questions

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure all Canadians that the vast majority of people who are working while on an EI claim will indeed be better off. That was our goal, to ensure we have all the talented work that we can get. We are working to connect Canadians with jobs. That is something the Liberals did not do. We want to help. We will continue to improve the program so that our goals are achieved.

I have a quote from the member for Cape Breton—Canso, who said, “I’m going to give the government kudos on two points.... What they’re doing with the best 14 and with the working while on claim, there were two good provisions within that”

* * *

CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the number of product safety tests conducted by Health Canada has plummeted by 57%. New Democrats worked hard at pushing the government to modernize legislation to protect consumers, and now the government is doing less and less with it.

The government has to do a better job at protecting consumers. Is this incompetence or simply ambivalence to the health and safety of Canadians?

• (1445)

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government took action to give Health Canada the modern tools necessary to remove unsafe products from the market. Thanks to Health Canada’s work, we saw close to 250 dangerous products removed from Canadian shelves just last year.

Health Canada further focuses on education and awareness with industry to prevent unsafe products from even making it into stores.

We have always been on the side of Canadian families first. In fact, since we formed government, we have nearly doubled the amount of investment for consumer product safety. It is too bad the opposition always votes against it.

[Translation]

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, having a Canada Consumer Product Safety Act is one thing; enforcing it is another. One year on, there are fewer inspectors and tests, fines are almost never levied, and companies are taking advantage of the situation. The Conservatives are playing games with consumer safety.

When will the government do what it is supposed to do: increase the number of inspectors on the ground and take the necessary measures to ensure that consumers are protected?

[English]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the member has it all wrong, but I do appreciate the chance to highlight the great work of our government.

Our government banned the manufacture and sale of any products that posed a danger to health and safety. Our government gave

Health Canada the power to recall dangerous products. Our government created rules requiring industry to report serious incidents involving their products.

Our record speaks for itself. We have always worked to protect the health and safety of Canadian families, and I hope that those members get on board with us.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, crucial negotiations continue this week on the Canada-EU trade deal, but Canadians are being kept in the dark.

Provincial governments have been clear. They do not want higher drug costs downloaded onto their already stretched budgets. Seniors are worried they will not get the medications they need.

Yesterday, the minister said he is committed to openness and transparency. I ask him again, will he assure this House that any agreement with Europe will not increase the price of prescription drugs for Canadians in Canada?

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has always sought to strike a balance between promoting innovation and job creation while ensuring that Canadians have access to reasonably priced and affordable drugs.

We continue to consult with the provinces and territories to ensure that the interests of Canadians are reflected in our negotiations with the European Union. These negotiations have been, and continue to be, the most open and transparent negotiations Canada has ever undertaken.

Let me reassure the House that we will only sign a trade agreement that is in the best interests of Canadians.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a government cannot refuse to answer questions and claim to be open and transparent.

This deal could really hurt Canadians and seniors. A report released yesterday said that it could increase Ontario’s drug costs by \$1.2 billion a year.

We should be advancing Canada’s interests in trade agreements, not pushing misguided policies that Canadians do not support.

Let us have some real transparency from the Conservatives for a change. A simple yes or no: will Canadians face increases in drug costs from the European trade deal?

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would encourage that member not to prejudge the outcome of these negotiations.

Oral Questions

Again, let me emphasize that our government has always sought to strike a balance between promoting innovation and ensuring that Canadians do have affordable drugs available. The prices charged for patented medicines sold in Canada are regulated by the Patented Medicine Prices Review Board. This will not change under a free trade agreement with the EU.

Our government continues to consult with the provinces and territories to ensure that the best interests of Canadians are reflected in the Canada-EU trade negotiations.

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INFRASTRUCTURE

Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today in the GTA the Minister of Finance announced a major new positive infrastructure project to benefit GO Train commuters and the economy of the GTA. The project is great news for Toronto. Not only will it reduce congestion on our roads, but it will create new jobs during construction and support hundreds of full-time jobs, once completed.

Could the Minister of State for Finance tell Parliament about how today's announcement on public-private partnership infrastructure projects will benefit taxpayers and the Canadian economy?

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to supporting infrastructure projects that create long-term economic growth and achieve value for taxpayers.

Public-private partnerships achieve savings for taxpayers and improve the efficiency of projects by bringing in private sector capital as well as expertise.

Today in the GTA, in Iqaluit, and in Surrey, our government announced major support for innovative infrastructure through public-private partnership projects that will improve infrastructure, build a stronger economy and create better communities all across Canada.

* * *

● (1450)

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on Monday we were treated to a particularly evasive answer from the minister about where he stands on the owner-operator fleet separation policy. He said that he is not advocating a particular position, but fishermen certainly are. Members across the way have heard from thousands of fishermen throughout eastern Canada and Quebec.

I want to ask the minister to clarify the uncertainty that exists throughout the east coast and Quebec. Will he let us know today, is the owner-operator fleet separation policy off the table or not?

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the whole issue of owner-operator fleet separation is a figment of the opposition's imagination. Those members are creating the crisis.

We engaged with fishermen and interested Canadians across the country as to how we could seek a better fishery, how we could

improve upon the fishery through reductions in red tape, those types of things. We will continue to talk to fishermen across this country, unlike the opposition.

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, tens of thousands of fishermen not just on the east coast but across the country have written to the minister and said that they support the owner-operator fleet separation policy, because to get rid of it would devastate the inshore industry and would devastate coastal communities throughout eastern Canada.

They want an answer from the minister. Will he stand with fishermen and coastal communities and support the owner-operator fleet separation policy?

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this side of the House has always stood on the side of fishermen and will continue to do so, unlike the opposition.

We have made unprecedented investments in the fishery, in our coast guard. We have repaired hundreds and hundreds of small craft harbours across the country that were left in disarray after previous governments.

We will continue to work with fishermen in the best interests of fishermen in this country.

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on this file, the minister seems to have great range.

In one summer he went from using consultations as an excuse to holding imaginary consultations. First, the Conservatives rammed through their devastating changes to the Fisheries Act, which even their former ministers agree will make Swiss cheese out of fish habitat protection. Then they promised to consult Canadians after the fact.

When will anyone be consulted, and when will the minister tell us whom he is consulting and when he will actually hold public hearings?

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we will continue to engage with fishermen and people in the fishing industry across the country.

The opposition has said that a lot of the changes we are making are not good for habitat. We continue to believe that is a false statement. In fact, these changes will allow regulations to be made that will prohibit the import, transport and possession of live aquatic invasive species, among a host of other initiatives.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives realized that they made a mistake by failing to consult coastal communities, so in a desperate and ridiculous attempt to deal with that, they consulted people after changing the legislation. But even then, they did not keep their promises. The people of the Gaspé deserve better; people across the country deserve better.

Will the minister start listening to those who will end up paying the price for the government's decision to gut the fish habitat protection policy, or is he too afraid of what he might hear?

[English]

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we made the legislative changes required to enter into our regulatory process. We are continuing that process. We will be discussing this with people across the country and various groups. We fully intend to do that and we are in the process of making that happen.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Commissioner of the Environment said that the government's approach to reducing greenhouse gas emissions is unlikely to meet Canada's target for 2020. Today there was a report that Arctic ice cover has melted to its lowest point since records began.

Despite the government's new accounting and taking credit for the work of the provinces, what is the government doing to fix the huge deficiencies the commissioner found in the government's ability to meet its climate commitments?

● (1455)

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, my colleague is quite correct. The Canadian Ice Service, which is the foremost authority on the Arctic ice cap, has reported that this year the ice cover has diminished to record lows.

With regard to our climate change policy and reduction of greenhouse gases, I think my colleague must have missed our report just last month that reported we are now more than 50% of the way to achieving our 2020 Copenhagen reduction target.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, an order paper response shows that pilots on the CF-18 have been compelled to do emergency engine shutdowns on average nine times per year. Among other reasons, it appears that birds and jets do not mix well. It is a good thing the CF-18 has two engines.

Since the minister has this single-minded fixation to acquire the single-engine F-35, will he be mandating special glide and ejection courses for the new F-35 pilots?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member knows that the National Fighter Procurement

Secretariat has been set up to ensure full transparency and due diligence in the replacement of our CF-18s.

Of course, on the secretariat also sit members from the defence department and the air force. We also have two independent members, including a very well-respected former Canadian auditor general. They will be working on making sure that all of the steps to date have been independently verified, including the costs and requirements to replace our CF-18s.

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PENSIONS

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it looks like the Conservatives are making a habit of attacking retirement security. Now it is the public sector pension plan that is in their sights, and just months after the Conservatives' reckless attacks on OAS. They are moving step by step to cut pensions and raise the retirement age for Canadians. People are justifiably worried and wonder whose pension the Conservatives are coming after next.

Is the government going to raise the age of retirement so that no one can collect a pension until age 67, yes or no?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would think that from her previous life the hon. member would know that no changes can be made to the Canada pension plan without the consent of the provinces. She should remember that.

When it comes to old age security, we are the ones who are trying to ensure that there is indeed an old age security program there to support seniors when they need it. We are working on the long-term viability of it and we will continue to do so for the sake of our seniors.

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister is refusing to give a clear answer to a simple question. It is funny. This feels like déjà vu, and there is nothing reassuring about that.

The Conservatives' plan for Canadians' pensions is simple. First, they slash old age security, and now they are threatening to make huge cuts to the public sector employee pension plan. What is next? Going after the pension funds of all Canadians? The NDP will not let them do that and the public will not sit back and take it.

Can the minister clearly tell us whether she plans on raising the age of retirement?

Oral Questions

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should know that no changes could be made to the Canada pension plan without the agreement of the provinces and territories.

As a government, we are ensuring that there will be an old age security program in the future for our seniors, when they need it.

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[English]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the policy of the NDP is to hurt Canadian families with a job-killing carbon tax.

Would the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development tell the House of the government's latest measures to help Canadian families, particularly parents of critically ill children?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Leeds-Grenville for his tireless efforts on this file.

This morning I was pleased to introduce in the House legislation that would provide financial support for parents who are caring for a critically ill child, or for a child who is missing or murdered.

Sadly, last night the NDP voted against the ways and means motion that was required to introduce the bill.

My question is, why is the NDP against helping families in their time of need?

* * *

• (1500)

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government talks about strong, self-sufficient aboriginal communities then actively undermines them. The Carcross-Tagish First Nation in the Yukon has successfully managed its own affairs since 2006. It needs a new federal funding agreement by October 1 or this exemplary example, groundbreaking example, of aboriginal self-government will collapse.

While in Carcross last month the Prime Minister said he would instruct his minister to intervene. Will the minister commit today to ensure that by October 1 the Carcross-Tagish First Nation will have the money it needs—

The Speaker: The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Mr. Greg Rickford (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have successfully negotiated the renewal of financial transfer agreements with 10 of the 11 self-governing first nations in the Yukon. Carcross-Tagish is the only first nation to not have renewed its agreement.

Canada has made a fair offer to the first nation and we urge the chief to reconsider that offer. Our government remains ready and willing to work with the first nation toward a renewed agreement.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development handed 900,000 hectares of oil and gas rights in the Beaufort Sea to Franklin Petroleum. Owned by a husband and wife in England, last year Franklin had \$220 in the bank and a corporate value of minus \$32,000. It is unlikely that this company will do any work. These rights, with a massive oil and gas potential, can now be transferred to anyone by only sending a letter to the minister.

Why did the minister fail to protect this valuable resource by exercising his authority under the law and—

The Speaker: The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

Mr. Greg Rickford (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is another “gotcha” moment from the member for Western Arctic. We know why he gets to ask questions from time to time. It is because he voted against the interests of a critical mass of his constituents with respect to the long gun registry. He voted against funding for the Inuvik to Tuktoyaktuk highway.

When it comes to getting things done for northern Canadians, whether it is regulatory frameworks, providing safe work areas for these folks or ensuring there are jobs for northern Canadians, it is this side of the House that is getting it done, not that member.

* * *

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Americans who desert from their voluntary military service betray the trust of their country. When they come here and pretend to be refugees they abuse the generosity of Canada. They waste tens if not hundreds of thousands of dollars of taxpayers' money and clog up the refugee system. They delay justice and protection for real refugees. They should be ashamed of their dishonourable conduct.

Could the government update the House on the latest U.S. deserter who entered Canada under false pretense?

Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am rising to inform the House that U.S. military deserter, Kimberly Rivera, has been removed from Canada and is now back in the United States.

Our government does not believe that the administration of the president or the president himself, in any way, shape or form, is going to persecute Ms. Rivera. In fact, she has had every opportunity in this country, despite the fact that not one of the applications from an American war deserter has been successful in Canada. Each and every one of them has been upheld by the federal court in terms of the Immigration and Refugee Board denying them. It is the right thing to do and we are going to make sure we—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Hamilton Mountain.

* * *

POVERTY

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, food banks across Canada are busier than ever. In Ottawa alone the use of food banks is up between 6% and 8% just over last year. Food prices are on the rise, household debt is at an all-time high, and low- and middle-income families have to work more hours just to get by.

When will the government realize that Canadians are struggling and finally take concrete steps to help them make ends meet?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been doing exactly that for the last six years and every single thing we have brought forward to help Canadians who are facing tough financial times has been voted against by the NDP. Let us face it, whether it is introducing the working income tax benefit to help people get over the welfare wall, increasing the amount that seniors are allowed to be exempt for in the guaranteed income supplement, or increasing the GIS by its largest amount in decades, the NDP votes against it every time. Its hypocrisy is, quite frankly, breathtaking.

* * *

• (1505)

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government has given us the largest trade deficit and the largest budget deficit in Canadian history, stalled economic growth, unemployment well over 8%, youth unemployment double that and now the communist Chinese are allowed to scoop our key resources.

There are 1.4 million unemployed people from St. John's to Thunder Bay to Bella Coola who want to know: When will the Prime Minister rethink his failed economic policies?

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand the Prime Minister is actually going to New York to receive an award for his exemplary leadership not only at home but around the world.

The policies that this government has put in place have helped businesses employ 770,000 Canadians that were not employed before the recession. Our banks are the strongest. They have been noted as being the strongest for the fifth year in a row by the World Economic Forum. Do not talk—

The Speaker: That brings question period to a close.

I will hear a point of order before I move on to the Thursday question.

Points of Order

The hon. member for Sudbury.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to give my hon. colleague from across the way, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, an opportunity to correct an inaccuracy during question period today. I know the government has been making up facts this week, but what he does not realize is that in the last—

The Speaker: Members know that a debate as to the facts is not a point of order. I would encourage the hon. member for Sudbury to maybe bring it up in a different question period.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would ask for the unanimous consent of the House to table the old provisions of the EI Act, as I know the Prime Minister and the Minister of Human Resources did not really have the full low down on—

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I welcome my hon. colleague across the way back to this session. It is as boisterous as when we left it.

In an effort to provide some hope for Canadians that Parliament can work together, my Thursday question this week cites legislation that the NDP, the official opposition, would be keen to work with the government in getting these bills to committee stage. I will name them specifically and see if my hon. colleague can make some mention of them: Bill C-21, political loans; Bill C-30, the lawful access, which has only five more hours of debate until it goes to committee before second reading; Bill C-32, the civil marriage act; and Bill C-37, the victims surcharge act.

The opposition is interested in working with the government to see all of those go through to committee stage and seeks to start this parliamentary session in a hopefully more productive tone than the one that we ended with last session.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, let me formally welcome back all hon. members to the House of Commons from their productive summers in their ridings, which I trust they had, working with and listening to constituents.

Business of Supply

On the government side of the House, we heard loud and clear that the priority of Canadians remains the economy. It is our priority too. Not one person raised with me a desire to see a \$21 billion carbon tax implemented to raise the price of gas, groceries and winter heat. I do not expect the member will see that in our agenda.

I also want to extend a warm welcome, on behalf of Conservatives, to this year's class of pages. I am certain that their time with us, here in our hard-working, productive and, I hope, orderly House of Commons, will lead to lifelong memories.

[*Translation*]

Yesterday, we were able to pass Bill C-42, Enhancing Royal Canadian Mounted Police Accountability Act, at second reading. I want to thank hon. members for their co-operation on that.

I am optimistic that we will see similar co-operation to allow us to finish second reading debate tomorrow on Bill C-37, Increasing Offenders' Accountability for Victims Act, which the hon. Leader of the Opposition talked about.

This afternoon, of course, is the conclusion of the New Democrats' opposition day. As announced earlier this week, Tuesday will be a Liberal opposition day.

• (1510)

[*English*]

On Monday, the House will start debate on Bill C-43, the faster removal of foreign criminals act. This legislation would put a stop to foreign criminals relying on endless appeals in order to delay their removal from Canada and it sends a strong signal to foreign criminals that Canada is not a safe haven. I hope we will have support from the opposition parties for rapid passage of the bill designed to make our communities safer.

Starting on Wednesday, the House will debate Bill C-44, the helping families in need act. Once the opposition caucuses have met to discuss this important bill, I am confident they would want to support the early passage of this legislation as well. It would enhance the income support provided to families whose children have been victims of crime or are critically ill.

If we have additional time tomorrow or next week, the House will consider Bill C-15, the strengthening military justice in the Defence of Canada Act; Bill S-2, the family homes on reserves and matrimonial interests or rights act; and Bill S-8, the safe drinking water for first nations act.

We are interested in Bill C-21, which deals with accountability for political loans and making that consistent with the other political contribution provisions. If we have a consensus among parties to bring that forward, we will certainly do that.

Similarly, if we can see a consensus among parties on passing Bill C-32 as it has been presented to the House, we would be pleased to do that on unanimous consent.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—THE CANADIAN ECONOMY

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: Resuming debate. The member for Hull—Aylmer has three minutes left for her speech.

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am going to back up to put things back in context.

I was saying that we are part of a federation and that, up to now, Stephen Harper has ignored the provinces' desire to talk about the economy. The Prime Minister has even refused to attend the national economic summit that will be held in November by the Council of the Federation. This is a far cry from the open federalism Stephen Harper was calling for not too long ago—

The Speaker: Order, please. It is very important to not use members' names, but to refer to them by their riding or title.

Ms. Nycole Turmel: Mr. Speaker, thank you, and I know that is not the first time you have mentioned that.

This is a far cry from the open federalism the Prime Minister was calling for not so long ago. This is more of a closed federalism. A federalism in which the Prime Minister makes all the decisions and the provinces have no say. Canadians want nothing to do with this kind of federalism. They want a co-operative federalism, a collaborative federalism, and that is what the NDP is proposing. A government must be open to having a dialogue and listening to the ideas of others.

The current economic situation is much too unstable and complex for the Conservatives to be avoiding talking to the provinces. Does the Prime Minister have something better to do in November other than to sit down with the provinces to try to find solutions to our economic problems? What justifies having the Prime Minister miss such a discussion? The least the leader of a federation like Canada can do is consult the provinces that are facing economic challenges as big as the ones we are facing.

That is why I hope the Prime Minister will reconsider his decision and participate in the summit in November.

[*English*]

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to the debates today and I am very troubled by some of the comments I have heard. I refer to the hon. member's final statement about our Prime Minister communicating and meeting with the premiers of our provinces. Just today in question period, the Prime Minister said that he had one-on-one meetings 250 times with premiers. Perhaps the hon. member should listen to what the Prime Minister said. He has, and continues to meet, with premiers as well as many ministers and Canadians all across the country.

Business of Supply

I am from Alberta and I get a little sensitive when the NDP tries to divide the country and blames my province of Alberta for the fact that we have oil and gas resources. It blames Alberta for helping the rest of the country, which we do through the tax base from those oil resources.

I guess the NDP's response was in platform 2011 when it said that it would take \$21 billion of Canadians' money, raise all their costs and put—

• (1515)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Hull—Aylmer.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nycole Turmel: Mr. Speaker, I would say in response to my colleague that I find it difficult to understand this government's position. To help the environment, we proposed a national public transit strategy, which would help the economy, help the environment and create a future for our children, and the Conservatives said “no”. That is what we are dealing with. The Conservatives refuse to talk about a future for our young people or about the economy itself. That is the reality.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, when it comes to strong national leadership, there is a huge vacuum coming from the government benches and also a huge vacuum coming from the New Democratic Party on the issue of strong national leadership. We in the Liberal Party support the need to see conferences for first ministers take place. We know the Conservatives do not believe in first ministerial type meetings.

What is confusing is the NDP leader's position of alienating and pitting one region of Canada against another region of Canada and then refusing to meet with premiers when they asked to meet with him. As the interim leader of the NDP, could the member indicate to the House whether she would have met with premiers had they requested a meeting with her?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nycole Turmel: Mr. Speaker, to answer my colleague's question, we are proposing a solution here today. We moved a motion that deals with the economy and would ensure that all provincial premiers could sit down together to solve a Canada-wide economic problem.

I think that is a very clear example of the kind of leadership the NDP has to offer.

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the hon. member for Hull—Aylmer for her speech on the economy.

After hearing her remarks, I do not want to pass up the opportunity to ask her to mention the impact that the cuts to the public service will have. Without any doubt, her constituency and her region will be severely affected.

What does she think about this approach that the Conservatives are taking to improve the economy and create jobs? Do her constituents really agree that this approach is going to improve the economy and create jobs for them?

Ms. Nycole Turmel: Mr. Speaker, my thanks to the hon. member for that very important question. I actually referred to it in my presentation.

The economic impacts on my region and on the Outaouais are very significant.

I am already seeing a reduction in the quality of life, not to mention a reduction in services to the public or the fact that no alternative solutions are being proposed to help the economy of our region. It is very regrettable; it will be felt where we live and all across Canada.

The goal of bringing together the first ministers really is to talk about the economy, whether of the national capital or of the provinces as a whole.

[*English*]

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am grateful for the opportunity to rise in the House today against the NDP's risky economic scheme and for our Conservative government's positive record on jobs and economic growth.

I would like to focus my remarks on our government's extensive commitment to long-term prosperity through the expansion of Canada's international trade relationships, something the isolationist and anti-trade NDP strongly opposes.

Our government understands that Canadians' standard of living depends on growing trade and investment, unlike the NDP, who would destroy our future prosperity with a job-killing carbon tax. That is why economic action plan 2012 actively pursues new trade and investment opportunities, particularly with large, dynamic and fast-growing economies. Our government has already made Canada one of the most open and globally engaged economies in the world.

No matter what the NDP says, our positive record speaks for itself in the results we have achieved. Both the IMF and the OECD forecast that Canada will be among the fastest growing G7 economies in the years ahead. The economy has created almost 770,000 net new jobs since July of 2009, with approximately 90% of them in full-time employment. Canada continues to have the strongest job growth among all G7 countries.

What is more, just a month ago we received high praise from our neighbour to the south when Tom Donohue, the president and CEO of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, stated:

We've got a strong example of the positive effects of good policies...Canada. Why has our northern neighbor recovered faster and more robustly from the global recession than nearly all other major economies? Due to a series of smart policy decisions.

...Canada has effectively addressed challenges...

We cannot rest on our laurels. We will continue to stay focused on what matters to Canadians, jobs and economic growth, including by embracing trade with our international partners.

After years of neglect by the previous Liberal government, in just six years we have reached free trade agreements with nine countries and are negotiating with many more. We have also concluded foreign investment promotion and protection agreements with 11 countries and are in active negotiations with 14 others.

Business of Supply

For example, we are optimistic that our negotiations with the European Union will soon produce an ambitious free trade agreement that facilitates greater trade and investment between Canada and Europe. This agreement would improve access for Canadian businesses to the EU's \$18 trillion economy and 500 million consumers. The potential to Canadian workers and their families from a Canada-EU free trade agreement includes a 20% boost in bilateral trade and a \$12 billion annual boost to Canada's economy.

That is exactly why John Kirton of the G8 Research Group at the University of Toronto praised our government's approach by stating:

...opening of negotiations for a full free trade agreement between Canada and the European Union, one of the biggest economic spaces in the world. Canada is on the offensive here and that's really the way to go.

Just a few weeks ago, the Prime Minister met with German chancellor Angela Merkel in Ottawa to strengthen dialogue on this key initiative.

● (1520)

Obviously our government's approach to trade and the economy is working. Chancellor Merkel herself said:

Canada's path of great budgetary discipline and a very heavy emphasis on growth and overcoming the crisis, not living on borrowed money, can be an example for the way in which problems on the other side of the Atlantic can be addressed.

Combined with our free trade commitment is our continued tariff relief to enhance the competitiveness of Canada's manufacturers and importers. In all, our Conservative government has eliminated more than 1,800 tariff items and provided more than \$435 million in annual tariff relief to Canadian businesses. As a result, Canada is now the first tariff-free manufacturing zone in the G20.

Our government continues to create the right conditions to enable Canadians and Canadian businesses to feel confident to invest, create jobs, participate in the global marketplace and grow our economy. Made in Canada measures like tariff relief have helped and will continue to help create jobs for Canadians, increase investment and innovation and improve productivity.

With all its talk of tax increases, the NDP forgets that our trade exports sustain one in five Canadian jobs, including exports of value-added products manufactured right here in Canada and also in my riding of Mississauga—Streetsville.

However, we must not forget that Canada's largest historical trading partners, the United States and Europe, are going through a prolonged period of slow growth that could well continue for a long period of time. We will not be able to rely on these trading partners to the same extent we did in the past. That is why we must develop new markets and create new opportunities in dynamic parts of the world if we are to keep raising our standard of living.

Our country's long-term prosperity is linked to reaching beyond our borders for economic opportunities that serve to grow Canada's trade and investment. Deepening Canada's trade and investment relationships in large and fast-growing export markets around the world is a key part of keeping Canada strong and growing. Our government is committed to increasing Canadian exports and creating the conditions necessary for our homegrown businesses to compete in the global marketplace.

While the NDP members posture aggressively to shut down trade, they seem to forget that the total value of our imports and exports in 2011 was equivalent to about 63% of the Canadian GDP. Our Conservative government understands the role trade plays in sustainable economic growth. That is why we continue to open markets to increase Canadian exports as part of the most ambitious trade expansion plan in Canadian history.

In the past few years, our government has been aggressively expanding commercial relations with the Asia-Pacific region to create jobs and economic benefits. The opportunities for Canada in this dynamic region are vast, with an economic growth rate that is two to three times the global average.

That is why our government is actively pursuing a whole host of trade initiatives throughout this region of the world. Unlike the NDP, which opposes free trade with Norway, Liechtenstein and even our North American partners through NAFTA, our government knows that trade with the Asia-Pacific region is the key to jobs, growth and long-term prosperity in Canada.

Consider the trans-Pacific partnership, for example. The TPP's current membership represents a market of 510 million people and a GDP of \$17.6 trillion. Not only that, but Canadians are now exporting liquefied natural gas to the Asia-Pacific region. This initiative will allow Canada to diversify its energy exports to growing markets in the Asia-Pacific region, further strengthening its partnerships with Asian economies.

● (1525)

While the NDP wants to shut down the energy sector and pit regions of the country against one another and impose a massive \$21 billion carbon tax, our government is committed to growing our economy, creating jobs and prosperity for all Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

As our ambitious trade agenda expands, so do our export markets. Perhaps of most importance, our government continues to strengthen ties with China, now Canada's second largest trading partner and expected to become the world's largest economy by 2020. In February 2012, Canada announced that after 18 years of negotiation, Canada and China had concluded a foreign investment promotion and protection agreement. This landmark agreement will facilitate investment flows between Canada and China by providing a more stable and secure environment for investors on both sides of the Pacific.

Business of Supply

Canada has a strong network of trade commissioners throughout China who can help Canadian businesses assess the potential of the Chinese market, find qualified contacts and resolve any problems that may arise along the way. Mississauga is home to many successful Chinese businesses that will benefit from this arrangement. This network was expanded in 2009, when Canada opened six regional trade offices to expand our presence to second-tier cities, the drivers of China's economic growth. Our country now has a total of 11 points of contact for Canadian businesses in China.

Foreign direct investment between Canada and China increased more than fivefold between 2005 and 2011, to a total of \$15.4 billion. The potential for increased Canadian investment in China is, to say the least, significant. To make the most of this opportunity, earlier this month we signed the Canada-China Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement. This landmark agreement will facilitate investment flows and provide a more stable and secure environment for investors on both sides of the Pacific, and so will the updated Canada-China tax treaty, which once implemented, will further reduce tax barriers to encourage trade and investment between Canada and China. In the future, we will continue to work with China to increase Canada's competitiveness and sustain future growth.

Our government also wants to deepen Canada's commercial presence in Africa to create opportunities for Canadian businesses and workers arising from Africa's present and future economic growth. Opportunities in Africa for Canadian companies exist in sectors such as telecommunications, agriculture, energy, transportation, infrastructure, natural resources and education. In October 2011, Canada began negotiations toward a free trade agreement with Morocco, Canada's first with an African country.

Here in the Americas, Canada has concluded trade agreements with the United States, Mexico, Honduras, Panama, Costa Rica, Chile, Colombia and Peru. Together, Canadian exports to these countries made up over three-quarters of Canada's worldwide exports in 2010.

In 2011, our government announced that Canada is moving ahead with exploratory discussions to enhance its trade relationship with South America's largest common market, Mercosur, whose members are Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay. Mercosur countries represent an export market of nearly 250 million consumers and account for almost three-quarters of all economic activity in South America.

We know that our approach is working. Even Carol Goar of the Toronto *Star*, certainly no fan of our government, applauded the Prime Minister's trade diversification strategy as "long overdue". While our government is positioning Canada for prosperity, all the NDP can talk about is raising the price on everything, from gas to groceries to electricity, with a risky carbon tax and slamming the door on new trade agreements.

● (1530)

While the protectionist NDP is stuck in the past, we know that the pursuit of free trade is fundamental to our future growth. However, a sustainable growth agenda involves structural reforms, including trade liberalization to allow Canadian businesses and their workers to fully compete in the global market.

Our Conservative government's continued support for trade liberalization is complemented by a strong and effective trade remedy system, which acts as an important safety valve for Canadian manufacturers harmed by unfairly traded imports. Canada's trade remedy system is currently jointly administered by the Canada Border Services Agency and the CITT.

In budget 2011, the government committed to proposing initiatives to ensure that Canada operates an efficient trade remedy system. To deliver on this commitment, economic action plan 2012 will consolidate Canada's trade remedy investigation functions into one organization under the CITT. This initiative will create efficiencies that will help the government maintain and sustain an effective trade remedy system. It will also cut red tape, making it less cumbersome for Canadian businesses to take action against unfair trade practices and will result in government cost savings.

Our government continues to create the right conditions to enable Canadians and Canadian businesses to feel confident to invest, create jobs, participate in the global marketplace and grow our economy.

Compare our actions with the anti-trade policies of the NDP. As even former Liberal finance minister and deputy prime minister John Manley noted: "The current NDP with its current set of priorities, its...views that are pretty much anti-trade, higher taxes, more spending...will not be very welcomed by the Canadian business community."

We know that free and open trade has long been a powerful engine for Canada's economy, and even more so in these globally challenging economic times. We also know that open markets create jobs and economic growth for people around the world.

When exports represent one of every five jobs in Canada and trade generates over 60% of our country's annual economic activity, it is clear proof that our government's efforts to gain deeper and broader access to the largest, most dynamic and fastest growing markets in the world is the best way to create new jobs, grow our economy and bring long-term prosperity and other consumer benefits to families across Canada.

While the NDP wants risky protectionist schemes and a job-killing carbon tax to raise the price of everything, our government knows that increased competition created by open trade leads to lower prices and greater selection of products and services, all of which helps to reduce inflation and keep money in the pockets of hard-working Canadians.

Business of Supply

Our Conservative government understands the importance of market openness to the global economy and has shown continued leadership on the world stage by opposing protectionism and trade-restrictive measures.

Bizarrely, the NDP's plan is to wait and to hold meetings down the road while voting against Canada's action plan 2012, our Conservative government's plan to help create jobs and economic growth today.

Given this strong record and future oriented agenda, I urge all members of this House to do the responsible thing to oppose the NDP's risky economic scheme and today's motion.

• (1535)

[Translation]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my Conservative colleague opposite wanted to talk about the Canada-EU comprehensive economic and trade agreement, and I am happy to do so.

I will talk a bit about my region, Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean. This region is 88% forestland. You can imagine that the forestry industry is very important in this area. My region is even the primary wood-producing region in Quebec. Communities in my riding, such as Ferland-et-Boileau and Saint-Fulgence, depend on this industry.

I know that the federal government has abandoned the forestry industry over the past few years.

I have a question for my Conservative colleague. As part of the comprehensive economic and trade agreement with Europe, does the government plan on requiring secondary and tertiary processing, as well as local investments for the communities that depend on the forestry industry? That would be a great help to the people in my community, the families and workers who depend on the forestry industry.

• (1540)

[English]

Mr. Brad Butt: Mr. Speaker, the facts speak for themselves as far as free trade agreements are concerned.

The free trade agreements signed by the government have led to increased economic opportunities for Canada's exporters. I am fairly sure that the forestry industry in the member's riding will benefit from the fact that we are going to have access to a huge, brand-new European market with a lot of wealth and customers and people they can do business with.

I would think that the Canada-European free trade agreement, once it is concluded by both parties, will be a benefit to his constituents, as it will be to all of Canada.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments about the importance of trade. If we reflect on that for a moment, members will recall that it was the Jean Chrétien, Paul Martin era that ultimately led to significant trade surpluses.

Trade does in fact generate jobs. That is one of the reasons the Liberal Party has consistently supported good free trade-type of agreements. We have also acknowledged the importance of

enhancing trade with our partners to the south. Here one could challenge the government on how it turned Canada's trade surplus into a huge trade deficit.

Having said that, I am asking if the member could look at the motion we are going to be voting in favour of, which in essence says that there is a role for the federal government to meet and work with the premiers to try to build a consensus. Strong national leadership would in fact result in a meeting of first ministers to talk about the importance of Canada's economy and things like trade and the importance of trade surpluses.

Mr. Brad Butt: Mr. Speaker, I believe that the member was here during question period, so he would certainly know that the Prime Minister answered the question.

The Prime Minister meets with the premiers on a regular basis. He talks to the individual premiers regularly. He talks with them about the economy regularly. The other thing the Prime Minister does, which I think is unique, is that he actually does sit down and listen to regional concerns. He does not pit one region of the country against another region of the country to score some political gains.

The Prime Minister supports an overall strong Canadian economy and has signed more free trade deals to ensure that Canadians keep good access to foreign markets than any prime minister in the history of the country. I am proud of Prime Minister for that.

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know that the member lives in a riding very much like mine in the GTA, where people are hard-working Canadians, going to work every day and paying their taxes.

I wonder if the member could comment in particular on what a \$21 billion carbon tax would do to the lifestyle of the people he represents?

Mr. Brad Butt: Mr. Speaker, when I was knocking on doors and in the many interactions I have had with my constituents on a regular basis in my riding, through the many events and functions I go to, including the town hall meetings I have been holding, there was no doubt that Canadians already believe they pay too much tax.

They certainly are not going to accept a brand-new whopping carbon tax that is going to whack up gas prices at the pump by 10¢ a litre and significantly increase the cost of groceries and significantly increase the cost of the natural gas and electricity they need in their homes.

Even more importantly, for a party that talks a good game about public transit, just imagine how municipalities like Mississauga are going to get whacked by the increased cost of diesel fuel and the other things needed for buses and the transit system to move my constituents around.

This is an irresponsible position taken by the opposition members, who should be ashamed for suggesting that Canadians pay a \$21 billion carbon tax. It is shameful.

Business of Supply

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know that the hon. member talked about free trade. He also specifically mentioned our trade agreement with Mexico. Now of course that is NAFTA, our trade agreement with Mexico and the United States.

I am wondering if the member has taken the time to actually read that agreement and its side agreements. A very important side agreement to NAFTA requires Canada, as a signatory, to ensure that it never downgrades its environmental standards for economic advantage and that it takes measures to ensure that Canadians can participate in decision-making, particularly on projects that may impact the environment.

The government, as the member knows, moved in the last budget bill to downgrade all of our environmental laws.

Second, the Minister of Natural Resources has said that all these Canadians who want to participate in the pipeline review are un-Canadian and are terrorists. What would the member like to say about that?

• (1545)

Mr. Brad Butt: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Natural Resources said nothing of the kind.

What we would do through our changes to the economic action plan is to have a streamlined, responsible, effective, one-time, proper and full environmental review, and not duplicate the processes involved but actually rely on our provincial partners who have a lot of expertise as well in environmental review. I call that working together with our partners.

We have indicated that any projects for pipelines or expansions or whatever will be approved solely on the basis of their meeting the scientific requirements, as the Prime Minister has said. That is the commitment we have made and that is what we are going to do. However, we have to be mindful as well that these projects are very important for a region like that of this member from Alberta. These projects are extremely important for the long-term economic viability of, and long-term jobs in, not just Alberta but across the country.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the member opposite, who appears to be a champion of free trade.

I was in Japan last May, and I met a member of the Japan-Canada Chamber of Commerce, who told us that consular services had been completely shut down at the embassy in Tokyo. This man had recruited 150 to 175 Japanese students who are paying to come study at Canadian universities. At the embassy, he was told that he could access our consular services in Manila or who knows where.

Is shutting down consular services in a country without notice really the way to talk about free trade? That is what I would like to know.

[*English*]

Mr. Brad Butt: Mr. Speaker, we certainly encourage companies that do work in different countries. We want to ensure that workers can move back and forth as long as they meet the proper criteria, as

long as the labour market opinions are appropriate and work out and allow workers from companies to come to Canada to work, and vice versa for Canadians to work in other countries.

With respect to specific consular services locations, what we have done is to make the system more efficient. The fact is that we often do not need as many physical buildings. We live in an electronic world and many of these applications are processed electronically or remotely. One could virtually be anywhere and still get these documents processed through online services.

We are providing value for taxpayers in Canada. We are ensuring that we continue to have our services abroad in countries around the world that both Canadians and Canadian businesses and others can get access to. We are moving in a responsible, reasonable manner forward.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the member for Edmonton—Strathcona, it is my pleasure to rise and speak to the motion tabled by my leader.

I will focus my particular remarks on the leader's call for the federal government to show leadership in bringing all of the governments of this country together at one table to reach consensus on the future of our country. I will also speak to his call for a shift toward a more balanced 21st century economy.

Yes, as I would say to all of my constituents when I go door to door, Canadians do want a strong, stable, sustainable economy, but an economy for whom? That was usually a wake-up call for them. They had a dilemma during the election: "Oh, who do we vote for? Who would have thought? New Democrats or Conservatives?" They were concerned about the economy. However, when I would simply ask them who that economy is for, they would say, "Well, you're right. We're not convinced that the direction that this government is going is actually considering our interests. They're considering some people's interests, but not necessarily ours."

As many in the House have said, we now have the highest household debt in history and a 15% rate of unemployment for youth. In my riding, there are three universities. That is a lot of youth struggling to find summer jobs so that they can pay their university fees. There has been a net loss of more than 300,000 jobs over the last few years.

Mr. Speaker, I apologize; at the outset, I should have said that I will be sharing my time, and I am pleased that I will be sharing it with the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

As I mentioned, it is an economy for whom? We still have far too many first nation communities in our country struggling just to have the basic amenities that other Canadians take for granted, and worst of all, a mounting environmental debt. That is a growing legacy. It is an economic cost that the government has chosen to download onto future generations.

Business of Supply

Why would we call on the federal government to show leadership? This country is a federation, and the Constitution clearly sets forth mandates for the federal, provincial and territorial governments. It clearly sets out shared powers for economic development, for environmental protection and for our social system. Therefore, it is critical that the federal government show leadership in convening all of those orders of government. Frankly, that should also include our municipalities and our first nations, something that the government is completely remiss in reaching out to.

Over my career, I have had the privilege to sit at many consensus-building tables where the federal and provincial governments, industry, farmers, first nations and the public have sat and discussed major critical issues, including standards for our energy industry, and reached consensus together, all hearing and receiving the same information and hearing the voices together. It was not divide and conquer; that is what is divisive: meeting one by one behind closed doors.

Not only should the Prime Minister accept the invitation of the premiers to join their economic summit; he should instruct his ministers to start showing leadership for national action in job creation, particularly for our youth and our aboriginal communities. He should encourage the ministers to show leadership in innovations in strengthening public health care.

That is what Canadians are concerned about. We can just look at the polls. I welcome members to come to Alberta and see the number one concern: it is the continuation of public health care. Albertans are asking what the federal government is doing to protect our public health care.

Where is the leadership on a clean energy future? While this government claims to have shown leadership, it has marred the country's reputation by not only downgrading environmental laws, contrary to international commitments, but it has also backtracked on international laws and agreements.

As I mentioned earlier in a question to one of the Conservative members, I had the privilege of working with the North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation. That is the entity under the side agreement to NAFTA. Canada signed on and committed that it would balance economic development and environmental protection. There are a myriad of provisions in there that the government is not obeying as it downgrades and shreds our environmental laws and our environmental review processes.

• (1550)

Whatever happened to the U.S.-Canada clean energy dialogue?

I remember a former minister of the environment in the government who was very proud of that agreement and regularly stood in the House to talk about the discussions that he had with his counterparts in the United States. When my colleagues tried to go to the United States to continue that dialogue on clean energy, they were castigated. They were called "un-Canadian".

This is what trading partners normally do. They get together and they discuss issues in common, and that includes, hopefully, the move by this country toward a cleaner energy future. I commend my colleagues for pursuing that dialogue.

Whatever happened to our commitments under the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation? As I mentioned, under that agreement and under the U.S.-Canada clean energy dialogue, there was a commitment by the current Conservative government to work with the United States to invest in a clean, smart energy grid. Where is it?

It is possible, and I say this as a proud Albertan and a proud Canadian—I am a third-generation Albertan—to exploit our natural resources and protect the environment at the same time. It is pretty simple, yet the government just does not seem to get it. It thinks that only one is possible. It thinks it is fine to downgrade our environmental laws, it is fine to shred laws worked on over the last four decades, it is fine to deny first nations and local communities the right to be heard at the tables where we are discussing these major projects.

Yet that is a complete violation of the commitments under the North American agreement and again a violation of its commitment never to downgrade its environmental standards for an economic advantage. If we look at trade agreement after trade agreement that has come forward from the current government, it has seriously downgraded the environmental provisions that were in NAFTA.

I am encouraged that the Premier of Alberta, to her credit, has joined the call for a Canadian energy strategy. I am hopeful that she will soon expand what she is proposing in an energy strategy to include a dialogue with all Canadians so that we will bring first nation governments to the table, we will bring local communities to the table, we will bring the provinces and the territories to the table. We will all be at one table to move forward to develop a clean energy future for the country.

Regrettably, under the current government's leadership, the dialogue has been very narrowly focused and behind closed doors. I need only mention the scandal around Bruce Carson. We do not know what has happened since then—what has happened to the investment of those millions of dollars, supposedly, toward a clean energy strategy for Canadians. We are still waiting.

Therefore, I call on the government today to follow and take heed of the call of my leader. Let us start that dialogue with Canadians on a clean energy future for Canadians.

To their credit, the CEOs of most of Canada's energy corporations have taken leadership. They have called for a price on carbon for their own industries. That would put us in that direction and force the investment into cleaner energy production.

Why does the government not get it?

To my dismay, a few days ago in this House, one of the Conservative members actually castigated the CEO of Shell for daring to call for a price on carbon that would ensure that we develop the resources in Canada in a cleaner way. I thought they were the friends of the oil and gas sector.

Business of Supply

To ensure genuine competitiveness, we have to put environment into our economic policy. Our trading partners are waiting for us to do that, and many of our trading partners are well ahead of us. Germany, for example, has made a major transformation from a major polluting nation to one of the cleanest nations in Europe and a major exporter of clean energy, as have many of the Scandinavian countries, and as much as the government likes to say it wants a trade deal with China, it castigates China for emitting carbon when China is investing billions in cleaner technology.

I therefore encourage the government and all parties in this House to support a move toward a cleaner energy strategy. Albertans are behind this. They support the idea of a dialogue. They want to be at the table.

I encourage the government to stop the divisiveness, bring everybody to the table, and let us move forward toward the 21st century.

• (1555)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague from Edmonton—Strathcona for, as always, putting forward such a clear, reasonable presentation, from an Alberta perspective, about why we need action on climate.

Earlier today I was unable to finish a question, so I would like to finish it by asking it of her. I was cut off at the point where I mentioned there had been a Liberal climate plan. I was going to go on to say it was introduced quite late. There had not been action for a long time when there should have been.

However, given that the plan was cancelled by Mr. Harper and that we have seen no workable plan since, what does the member for Edmonton—Strathcona think would be in the best interests of Albertans and Canadians in getting a climate plan under way while we still have some time to act?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Excuse me. Before I go to the member for Edmonton—Strathcona, I will remind all hon. members not to use the given names of others in the chamber.

The hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona.

• (1600)

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's question is very well intentioned and I understand the direction she is going, but I would differ in this regard.

In this country, we are long past plans to address climate change. We are long past plans to create a greener economy. What we need is clear legislation, clear fiscal incentives and clear measures to trigger the investment in moving in that direction. I clearly am a strong proponent of law and order for the environment and I believe measures can be taken by the federal government to move us in that direction.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up on the importance of the first ministers meetings. Today we are talking about the economy, and justifiably so, as jobs are on the minds of many Canadians.

I want to go back to the first ministers conference at which they were able to resolve another issue, which ultimately led to the health care accord that we now have. There is a great deal of concern in

regard to that accord. It is going to expire in 2014, and again there is going to be a need for the first ministers to come together. Canadians as a whole, from coast to coast, want to see stronger leadership coming from the Government of Canada, a government that is prepared to say it is committed to ensuring that the funds are going to be in place and that there are going to be national health care standards. The way it best does that is through first ministers meetings. Much as was the case with achieving the health care accord a few years back, these first ministers meetings play a critical role in the best interests of Canadians.

Would the member agree that not only is it important for the Prime Minister to get together this fall but also to look at having regular, ongoing first ministers meetings with our premiers so that we can deal with the social agenda of Canadians, which should be first and foremost in importance in all of our minds?

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for supporting our call, which was made some time ago, for the federal government to take leadership and bring together the provinces, the territories and the first nations governments to discuss the next accord.

However, there is a second reason that we need the Prime Minister to call this meeting and participate. The federal government has a huge responsibility in delivery of health services. It has the power to invest in a major way and transfer dollars to the provinces, territories and first nations and it also has direct responsibility for the health of first nations communities.

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise and participate in this debate. I thank my colleague from Edmonton—Strathcona for being so kind as to share her time with me.

I proudly stand in support of the motion introduced by the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Outremont.

The motion is pretty straightforward. It acknowledges what I think we all recognize, which is that we are in turbulent economic times. We are being buffeted from forces, from economic waves from across the pond, from our neighbours to the south, which are having an impact on us and our economy is going through some stress and strain.

The predominance of the resources sector is having an impact on the value of our dollar, which is impacting manufacturing throughout the country and exporting.

The motion, in effect, states what we have been hearing in the House throughout the past 12 months, that the government and the opposition parties are recognizing that Canadians are facing significant challenges. Canadian provinces, municipalities, businesses and Canadians are facing significant stress and strain as a result of the times before us.

Because the government appears unable to find solutions to make any headway in terms of dealing with those issues and because we are a federation made up of 10 provinces and 3 territories, we are suggesting that we should sit down, as players within the system, and have a discussion about what the strategy should be in order to move us forward. I do not think that is unreasonable, and I commend our leader, the Leader of the Opposition, for having proposed it.

Business of Supply

I want to spend a few minutes talking a bit about some of the challenges facing us and why we should be moving in a direction and why we should be sitting down with premiers of provinces like mine, the premier of Nova Scotia.

Let me talk for a second about what we are faced with at this time, due largely to the fact the Conservatives approach to economics has not been well-thought through and they have been mismanaging the Canadian economy.

Let me highlight a few points. Household debts are at record levels and the Conservatives have done very little to help. There are 1.4 million Canadians unemployed and the Conservatives have done little over this past year to help these Canadians find meaningful work, other than, frankly, to punish them, especially unemployed Canadians in my part of the country on the east coast, where there is a predominance of seasonal industries. People who find themselves unemployed are being punished as a result of changes made to the employment insurance plan.

Students are leaving post-secondary institutions with record debt levels and facing unemployment rates double that of the national level. Students, the best and the brightest, who are poised to take leadership roles throughout our economy, throughout our provinces, throughout our municipalities, throughout our country and internationally on behalf of the country and on behalf of Canadians are not getting the opportunities and are being burdened on unprecedented levels of debt as a result of the underfunding of post-secondary institutions.

• (1605)

There have been 326,000 manufacturing jobs lost under the Conservative government. Not just those jobs, but family supporting jobs and community supporting jobs have been lost and nary a word from the government about what it is going to do about it.

Conservatives continue to cut the corporate tax rate. As a result, there are hundreds of billions of dollars that are sitting idle in corporate bank accounts that are doing nothing but adding to the compensation of chief executive officers and senior executives in those corporations. They are doing nothing to create jobs, to invest in capital, to invest in equipment, to invest in communities, and that is the result of these unprecedented tax cuts the government has made.

We have gone from a \$26 billion trade surplus to a \$50 billion trade deficit and all the while the government prides and cheers itself when it talks about its trade agenda. We know the Conservatives have been engaged in the past few years in extensive trade negotiations with the European community. The government characterizes this as some of the most open and transparent in the history of our country, yet there is utter secrecy. Under the threat of seeing the cost of pharmaceuticals in the country increasing upwards of \$2 billion in extra costs to Canadians, to seniors, to families, nary a word by the Minister of International Trade, or by the Prime Minister or by his colleagues about what is actually on the table. What actual commitment is the government going to make on our behalf?

That is not what I would consider open and transparent trade. I wonder in the final analysis how much benefit it will be to this country. As we have heard before, the government is engaging in

trade negotiations without a solid industrial policy. Conservatives do not know what the clear strengths and weaknesses of the economy in the country are and what they will trade off to the Europeans. It causes me some considerable concern and I know my colleagues share that as well.

The government continues to turn its back on eastern Canada and our coastal communities. We have seen economic development agencies such as ACOA that has had its funding cut for programs that work with communities, programs that have been successful in working with communities at the grassroots to help build local economic development. The government has turned its back on eastern Canada in this respect.

I made reference earlier to employment insurance. In Atlantic Canada we have a preponderance of seasonal industries that the government does not seem to recognize. In the face of overwhelming concern by the premiers of the Atlantic provinces, the government has made unilateral changes to employment insurance that have been and are devastating. This week we have heard examples of how unemployed Canadians are having moneys clawed back. That is just an example.

Since 2009, the province of Nova Scotia, which has been represented by an NDP government, has made significant strides at tackling a very serious deficit problem. It worked with Nova Scotians and brought that province back to balance.

The Conservative government and the Prime Minister could learn a great deal from the premier of Nova Scotia. He and other premiers and territorial leaders could bring a great deal to the discussion about how we are going solve the economic challenges facing our country.

I urge all members to consider how serious and sound this motion is to bring the actors together to find solutions that will fix the problems facing Canada and troubling Canadians.

• (1610)

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Brampton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I heard something in the speech by my hon. friend today that I found quite troubling, but perhaps insightful. The member talked about businesses in our country sitting on money and that there was something wrong with that.

Is the member suggesting that he and the NDP have a better idea, a better way to tell business how to spend its money? Is it their plan to take the money from businesses and choose how to spend it their way or is this a prelude to a carbon tax and saying, "Watch out business, here we come and the carbon tax is going to take your money away?" What is their plan with respect to that? What are they going to do to our businesses?

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, we have seen unprecedented cuts to corporate income tax for banks and profitable corporations with the intent, decided by the government, that the money would then be invested in jobs, capital purchases and investment in communities.

Business of Supply

What have we seen? We have seen bank accounts on behalf of corporations continue to grow. We have seen compensation for senior executives in some of the wealthiest corporations in our country grow beyond all proportion. It has done nothing for the benefit of Canadians, and it is their money. It is foregone tax revenue that corporations are not putting to use.

It is time we started to ask corporations for something for the money taxpayers are giving them.

• (1615)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to focus on the need to have first ministerial meetings.

If we take a look at the crisis that is there today, one can make reference to the economics in which the vast majority of Canadians have a sense of insecurity. They are not sure of the direction the economy is going when they tune into the news, and there is a lot of negative news out there. That causes a great deal of concern. I believe they are looking for a sense of hope and they expect to see their governments working together to address the needs of our economy in order to get that growing trade deficit to disappear and regain the trade surplus we used to have during the Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin eras, and possibly even before that.

There are other issues that Canadians want to see this legislature deal with, but they also want their Prime Minister to sit down with the premiers and work together to try to deal with the issues of our economy and social programs such as the health accord, which is something I made reference to earlier. There are many serious issues related to our aboriginal people throughout Canada that need to be dealt with as well.

Could the member highlight the importance and critical role that these first minister meetings have played in the past and need to continue to function for the future?

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, the member makes an important point.

Those of us who have spent any time in this business recognize what Canadians say repeatedly. They do not want to hear that this is a federal responsibility, or that this is a provincial responsibility or that this is a municipal responsibility. They say that there is one taxpayer and they want all politicians and governments at all levels to work together to help come up with solutions to the problems that are facing them. Working together is what Canadians, Nova Scotians and people in my riding expect to solve the problems.

What do they see instead? They see the Conservative government working unilaterally and making decisions on justice, EI, OAS and the fisheries. However, the download cost is to the provinces, their communities and ultimately to them.

Canadians expect better from us. They expect us to work together, premiers with the Prime Minister and with municipal leaders. They expect us all to sit down to find solutions to the grave problems that face them.

[*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 Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, Employment Insurance; the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, Foreign Affairs; the hon. member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, Fisheries and Oceans.

[*English*]

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Vancouver Centre.

I am delighted to have the chance to discuss this motion, which at its core is about the need for all levels of government to work together to build a balanced 21st century economy. That certainly is something the Liberal Party supports.

First, I have to say it is sad to have to beg a Canadian prime minister to participate in an economic summit with the premiers of the Council of the Federation. It is untenable in a federation to have a prime minister who refuses to attend important meetings with the premiers of the provinces and the territorial leaders. Instead, the Prime Minister prefers to act unilaterally, dictating a new health accord and ramming through costly and harmful crime bills without consulting the provinces and territories, the very entities that will be bearing huge financial costs for these decisions. This is not the way to build a united country or balanced economy. In fact, it is a betrayal of our federation's democratic principles.

Second, I cannot help but find this motion which urges politicians to work together across various regions to be a little hypocritical coming from the leader of a party whose signature economic policy at the outset of his leadership was to pit one region of the country against another. In fact, just a few months ago when the western premiers voiced their concerns about the NDP leader's divisive approach to the Canadian economy, the leader called them the Prime Minister's "messengers" and said, "I'm not responding to any of them". How can the NDP expect a positive response from the Prime Minister to meet with those very same premiers when its own leader says they are not worth talking to?

If we are going to talk seriously about building a 21st century economy, then Canada needs a responsible government that truly stands for fiscal responsibility, equality of opportunity, and a sustainable environment. Canada needs a party that can establish a track record of sound fiscal management. On that count the current government is failing miserably.

In fact, when the Liberal Party came to office in 1993, a previous Conservative government handed us the largest deficit in Canadian history. Members will remember papers like *The Wall Street Journal* openly wondering if Canada was becoming a third world banana republic. Economists were writing that Canada was going bankrupt.

Business of Supply

The Liberal Party went to work on behalf of Canadians and succeeded. It turned that deficit into a surplus. It grew the economy. It created good jobs across the country. During difficult economic times, the Liberal Party balanced the federal budget, reduced federal debt every year, and produced surplus after surplus after surplus. It reduced the size of government without stifling creativity of the nation or demonizing our civil service. The Liberal Party turned Canada into a globally envied model of fiscal discipline. It did all this while investing in a sustainable future for Canadians and their environment. I am proud to say that I was part of a B.C. Liberal government that succeeded in a very parallel turnaround in British Columbia a decade ago.

However, since 2006, what have the Conservatives done? They turned a \$14 billion Liberal surplus into the largest deficit in Canadian history. They took a trade surplus of \$26 billion and turned it into a trade deficit of \$50 billion. This string of deficits started before the global economic crunch, and let no one claim otherwise. The government spent Canada into a deficit before the recession. To say the Prime Minister's economic record is shoddy is an understatement. He continues to disappoint. Gas prices are rising. Groceries bills are rising. Household bills are going up. Family incomes are not keeping pace. The divide between the haves and the have nots is growing larger and larger. In my city of Vancouver and across the country, more and more Canadians are falling behind.

Young people are struggling to find jobs. As an example of that, this summer I hosted a meeting about prospective youth entrepreneurs. A flood of people came out on a sunny summer evening. They were desperate to get some ideas and encouragement to start their own businesses because they were having trouble finding jobs. These are university graduates, intelligent young people who cannot find work because of the economy which is languishing under this government.

● (1620)

In British Columbia, we have a gorgeous natural heritage and tourism is very important. There are thousands of tourism jobs, especially on our coast and throughout British Columbia. The country's top tourism resort is located on the north Pacific coast actually, near Hartley Bay.

The Liberals have committed for 40 years to protect the waters around Haida Gwaii from risks of a massive job-killing oil spill, but the Conservative government has demonized the very people who are concerned about this risk. Citizens, environmental groups, and first nations who wanted to express concern were demonized. When that did not work, the government, in Bill C-38, took pen in hand, and I believe on the back of an envelope wiped out the very heart of our environmental assessment legislation to remove the requirement to assess the risk to salmon streams of pipelines going across the heart of British Columbia's wilderness. That is not acceptable. Tourism is incredibly important to our economy and to job creation. The Conservative government is failing the tourism industry.

● (1625)

[*Translation*]

Last year, the Canadian tourism sector generated \$78 billion worth of economic activity and its share of the country's GDP was larger than that of agriculture, forestry and fishing combined. Tourism is

responsible for the creation of 600,000 direct jobs and 1.6 million indirect jobs across Canada. That is close to 10% of all jobs in Canada. What is more, tourism's slice of the pie is getting bigger every year.

Despite all that, Canada's share of the global tourism market is shrinking. From 2002 to 2011, most countries welcomed higher numbers of tourists. Not Canada. Over the past decade, Canada fell from seventh to eighteenth on the list of top tourist destinations. The government is entirely responsible for this decline.

Other countries invest heavily in tourism promotion. For example, the United States recently allocated an additional \$200 million to fund new tourism promotion initiatives. Not Canada. Canada has cut funding for tourism promotion dramatically.

Given our rich natural and cultural heritage and the unique experiences that tourists can have here, the government should take tourism seriously.

[*English*]

What the government has done instead is it has wiped out enough of the budget of the national parks system so that not only are scientists being laid off, but parks are closing for parts of the season when normally they would be open. What that does is it hurts small businesses, stores, restaurants and tourist services that depend on those national parks. Small businesses are incredibly important to our economy and to job creation.

The Conservative government is failing our small businesses. It failed small businesses when it cut funding from the regional programs that support them. It failed them when it increased EI payroll taxes for businesses. It failed them because it has not changed the small business tax rate even though it has slashed the large corporate tax rate from 22% to 15% since coming into office.

I guess we can see why the Prime Minister has been avoiding the premiers.

With the right leadership, the right choices, and the right ambition, Canada's economy can thrive in the future. We must do better for our remote and northern areas, for our first nations people, for all Canadians. We need to transition to a truly sustainable 21st century economy in all aspects of that word: the people, the businesses, the environment, the economic opportunities. We can do that.

I hope that in November the Prime Minister will hop on a plane to Halifax and sit down with Canada's premiers and start working together. We have all waited long enough.

Business of Supply

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend from Vancouver for her intervention in the debate around the NDP's motion which is audaciously calling upon the Prime Minister of Canada to sit down and discuss the economy with the premiers of Canada. That is what this motion is explicitly saying, because the economic fragility that we still face is something that requires leadership. Leadership often requires a conversation, particularly with the other leaders of this great nation.

Often politics, particularly from the Conservative government, is a form of revisionist history. The Prime Minister claims that the budget his government introduced when the recession was full blown and upon us in Canada, the one that inserted some money and some action into the economy, was one that the government had been planning for all along. However, we know the government ignored the very idea that a recession was upon us. It introduced a budget that it was forced to revoke, a budget which had no stimulus spending in it whatsoever.

As this fragile economy continues, my concern and fear is that we have a government playing the same role again, saying that there is nothing wrong and everything is shiny and bright, when serious and significant statistics show that there is a problem within our economy.

I am wondering if we are going to go through the same show again from the Conservative government as we saw the last time.

•(1630)

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, a hallmark of the Prime Minister and the Conservative government is to say one thing and do another.

People in Vancouver and across the country are concerned about where the economy is going. Small business confidence is down. The housing market is stumbling. An important part of our small business ecosystem is the construction contractors and people who supply the housing market. Even though that market is starting to come back in the United States, it is falling in Canada because of that lack of confidence.

People cannot have confidence in a government that really does not have an overall strategy for the economy, that does not have a strategy for the 21st century economy, and certainly does not know how to work with other partners in this Confederation.

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to review the record of the Liberal Party when it was in government. It withdrew \$30 billion from the provinces. It downloaded the problems to the provinces. In Ontario we were closing hospitals and schools because the Liberals refused to transfer the money they were supposed to to the provinces. The interim Liberal Party leader, when he was the premier of Ontario, finished the job and practically bankrupted Ontario.

By contrast, I would like to look at what is being said about Canada by the OECD and the IMF. They both project Canada to have among the strongest growth in the G7. For the fifth straight year, the World Economic Forum rated our banking system the world's best. *Forbes* magazine rates Canada as the best place for businesses to grow and create jobs. All the major credit rating

agencies, Moody's, Fitch, and Standard & Poor's have affirmed Canada's AAA credit rating.

How can the member stand in the House and contradict this kind of international praise that Canada is getting for the leadership we have shown in our economy?

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, I am always surprised when I hear members across the aisle criticize the Liberal Party's cuts to bring fiscal health back to Canada at a time when their own party was saying to do more, cut more, reduce those social programs, reduce those environmental programs and cut more from the provinces. It is an amazing turnaround.

In terms of the credit rating that the member is talking about, that is the very credit rating that was restored by the Liberal government in the 1990s and early 2000s. It is the same credit rating that is at risk of being squandered by the current Prime Minister with his failure on the economic front and to provide results for our people and jobs, including in my province of British Columbia.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the motion because it is inherently a good one.

I must confess it is kind of rich that the motion is coming from the NDP, which is now calling on the Prime Minister to meet with the premiers, when the NDP leader's first job and first public speech when he became a new leader was to split the country into east and west.

Secondly, this is a party that ridiculed the national energy strategy, saying it was a ridiculous, and now we have the premier of the oil-producing province of Alberta saying she is looking at a national energy strategy. The NDP has never supported trade agreements, and this country depends on trade for 45% of its gross domestic product.

Having said that, I think it is kind of rich that the NDP brought the motion forward when its members have never practised what they are now asking for. That is kind of interesting.

However, let us focus on how we got to where we are today. We are in a huge deficit. Our employment rates are going up, and many people are only employed part time. We have one of the highest youth unemployment rates in the OECD. What we have discovered, as the OECD tells us, is that we have a number of young people between the ages of 15 and 32 who are neither employed nor are they in training or education. These are called NEETs by the OECD. We have a large percentage of NEETs, as large as the United States and as large as many of the failing European countries at the moment.

Let us talk about how we got to this place. When the Liberal Party was in government, we left a 6% unemployment rate and had started programs for young people who were coming out of university so that they could bridge that time to work.

Business of Supply

When the current government came in, it had a \$13 billion surplus, had nine years of balanced budgets by a Liberal government, had a \$3 billion contingency jam jar for any kind of emergency that occurred, as a contingency or prudence fund, but it squandered it within two years. One does not have to be an economist to know that if the government has \$13 billion in surplus and cuts the GST by 2%, which equals \$13 billion, \$13 billion from \$13 billion equals zero.

Long before we even had a recession, that money was gone. The government stood in the House many times and boasted that it was the highest-spending government in the last 30 years in this country. It squandered what it had left of the \$13 billion, blew the \$3 billion contingency fund almost immediately and then refused to believe that the world was going into a recession and it had no backup.

I think it is really rich that the government talks about how it did so well during the recession, that other countries were doing badly and Canada had its head proudly above water. I want to remind the government that it, in opposition, voted against the opposition to bank mergers and the regulation of banks that was brought forward by the Liberal government and Paul Martin. The Conservatives voted against it.

Now the government is taking credit for it. Between the NDP and the government, I do not know who is more bold-faced in being hypocritical. It is very interesting that the government is taking credit for something it did not do.

However, what is sad is that we are in a position today where we see major issues. People love to talk about the Liberal government downloading to the provinces, blah, blah, blah. When the Liberal government ended in 2005, Canada was the number one performer in the world. By Canada we meant the country, the nation, including the provinces. That was because we, as a federal government, understood that our role as a federal government was to hold the federation together, to face the world as one nation, not to balkanize us into little provincial nation states with some provinces sinking and some swimming.

The Prime Minister has not met, once, with the premiers on issues such as health care, productivity or economic development since he came into government. Now he boasts that he does not need to meet with the premiers. In fact he meets with them individually, which is nice.

•(1635)

If he meets with them individually, how does he sustain a federation with everybody rowing in the same direction with the same objectives? What he does when he meets them individually is pit one province against another and try to find ways to divide everyone so we are all scattering in the wrong direction. That is the first major philosophical mistake that the government made, splitting up this country, balkanizing it, turning provinces against each other and letting those who are able to survive, survive, and those who are not able to, sink.

Health care is the biggest example of this. This summer, the Canadian Medical Association talked about the fact that the federal government has failed abysmally. It gave it an F in terms of medicare

and looking after the future of health care in this country and balkanizing the country.

In terms of trade, we know the NDP does not agree with trade agreements but the government says it is going out there finding trade missions, building trade with other nations. However, to have a successful trade policy, we have to have productivity and our productivity is lagging, the OECD tells us, lagging very badly, not only for labour reasons but for spending on research and development as well. We are at the lowest in spending on research and development among the major OECD countries. We are with Greece. We are in company with Poland in terms of spending on R and D.

Under the Liberal government, this country was known to be number one in research and development, in public government spending on research and development. We had communications technology that was number one in the world. We had biomedical technology that made us number one in the world. We were number one in the world in environmental technologies. We no longer are. We are sitting with Poland and Greece in terms of our spending on R and D. We cannot be competitive and build a good trade strategy if we do not have productivity.

One element is R and D and the other one is the labour force. We find that our labour force has dropped dramatically in its productivity, by 4%. That is a huge drop for a small country like ours and the reason is that most people in the labour force are working part time. I know the government likes to stand up here and boast about its flex-time and how everyone is working, albeit part time, and they are sharing jobs. We cannot share jobs and still be productive. Unemployment is high in terms of full-time jobs in this country. We need full-time workers, pulling their weight, moving forward.

We also find that men with post-secondary education in this country are more likely to be hired than women with an equivalent education. That is because women cannot enter the workforce unless they have childcare and early childhood education help so they can go into the workforce. The government thinks all of that is a waste of time, so the government is not investing in its people and in its productivity. If we are not productive, we cannot be competitive.

We are dropping in terms of competitiveness, as I said before. In R and D we have dropped badly while India and China, with whom we are looking to trade, have increased their R and D budgets by 7%. They are moving forward to build a skilled workforce. We find that money spent on training in this country is down since the Liberal government left. We have dropped. Everyone is coasting on the Liberal policy of regulating the banks and this is not good enough. There is no vision or movement forward.

Business of Supply

Creating a country that is productive and competitive, that has a strong economic base and is moving forward means that we have to invest in people. As a small nation, even though we do have some natural resources, that is finite. We need to invest in infinity, which is our people. It means creating opportunity. It means educating them. It means keeping them healthy. It means training them. None of that is happening. It means being competitive. The Prime Minister has said “no” to any aerospace development. We used to be a big player in aerospace, so we find that nothing is happening with the government.

Before I finish, I want to move the following amendment, seconded by the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville. I move that all the words after Prime Minister in this motion be deleted and be replaced by the following: Immediately call a federal–provincial meeting on the economy.

● (1640)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): In order to move an amendment to an opposition day motion, one needs the agreement of the mover or, in their absence, the House leader or Whip. Does the NDP House leader agree to the amendment?

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): It would be awfully nice, in a motion that is dealing with consultation with other parties, if the Liberal Party had chosen to actually consult with us before introducing its motion. There is no agreement.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): There is no agreement for the amendment.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a specific question for my friend from Vancouver Centre.

We are talking about the economy and the role the federal government can play in such a question. There has been some confusion as to the federal Liberal Party's stand on the northern gateway pipeline project as it is proposed.

The Conservative government has already decided that the pipeline should go, regardless of the environmental considerations of the first nation opposition. The Liberal Party initially took a strong stand in this regard, but has since had its interim leader out in our province saying that perhaps there is a more nuanced position.

I am wondering if she can offer us any enlightenment as we seek to have a balance between an effective economy and one that respects our environmental considerations and our obligations to the first nations people of Canada.

● (1645)

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question but I think it was the Liberal Party when we were in government that moved forward to create the Kyoto and Rio agreements and all of those international agreements we had on the environment. We were spearheading that.

Indeed, our position on the gateway has not changed. We are saying that unlike the NDP—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, I will sit down until I can actually hear myself speak.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member has a few seconds left to complete her answer.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, unlike the NDP and the Conservatives, Liberals have never believed in an either/or, black or white, answer.

We believe that the oil and gas economy is extremely important to Canada. The energy economy is extremely important to Canada, but we also do not want bitumen going down the northwest coast of British Columbia, either in pipes across the province or down the coast into the pipelines through Kinder Morgan. We do not believe in that.

We are saying, though, that we should find a way to move non-bitumen oil. We should look at things like refining. We should look at things like using trains to try to move that oil and gas across the province.

There are lots of ways we can have both things. Our position is pretty clear that we believe in finding a solution that will not be black and white, or either/or.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a quick question for my colleague.

We have heard the Conservatives say that the Prime Minister has not had a big first ministers conference, but he has been chatting with premiers one-on-one on the phone and meeting them one-on-one.

Would my hon. colleague not agree that a one-on-one conversation has a very different dynamic than when we meet in a group. In a group we can share ideas, cross-fertilize, come up with a consensus and create a vision but one-on-one we cannot do that. We may never reach a consensus because we can never reach everyone at the same time.

I would like her to comment on that and I would also like her opinion on whether she thinks the Prime Minister's approach, this one-on-one approach, is a little defensive. Maybe he does not want to meet all the premiers at once because he might feel somehow isolated or contradicted.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, I cannot comment on what is going on in the Prime Minister's mind. It defies logic sometimes, I am sorry to say. I do not know why the Prime Minister refuses to sit down and talk with the premiers as a group around a table and come to some kind of consensus.

For me, this is the heart of being a federal government. The federal government is the glue that holds this country together. The federal government ensures that we are all moving in the same direction so that as a nation we can be globally competitive, globally productive and able to hold our heads up as a country.

The member is right. By meeting together we get to talk to each other, we build an understanding of the issues, and we come to a consensus.

Business of Supply

Meeting separately is a great way to pit people against each other. It is a great way to tell people one story here and another story for another group, so we never speak with one voice. I do not know if that is what the Prime Minister wants to do, but I think he is failing abysmally as the leader of the nation called Canada and as a leader of a federal government by not meeting with the premiers.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my good friend from Western Arctic, who will be raising some other good points of northern value.

I represent a riding in northwestern British Columbia, a place that has an incredibly long and rich history, diverse in its culture but also in its appreciation for the natural resources that are our endowment as a people. What we have seen over the last number of years going back to the mid-eighties is a slow and steady degradation of our economy and our ability to put food on the table, our ability to add value to the natural resources that exist in our part of the world. Steadily, both from forces that we can lay at the feet of the various governments and from those market forces that we feel sometimes have a challenge in understanding the human element of the economy, we have been losing our ability to add value to our lumber, fish and mineral resources.

Increasingly we have seen not only governments at peace with the idea of sending out those resources raw, but also an encouragement from those same governments, because there is a short-term benefit to some in the corporate offices to no longer make those investments. It was the condition of contract of doing business in this great country that one would seek to make investments with the consideration of the governments of the day that would benefit the people. Time and time again we have seen what I would describe as neo-conservative governments siding more and more with a narrow interest of Canadians in the broader investment sector and less and less with the general population.

We see it in the motion today, which as I said to my friend from the Liberals, has the audacity to suggest that the Prime Minister of this country should meet with his counterparts, the various premiers of the provinces and territories. This is not at the request only of the New Democratic Party but at the request of those premiers, Conservative premiers, Liberal premiers and New Democratic premiers across this country, who have said in order to, “fully engage all the economic forces in the country the two orders of government must be working together”. The premiers called on the Prime Minister to join them at the Council of the Federation national economic summit in Halifax.

We have the audacity to suggest that real leadership from the federal government and the Prime Minister would require that from time to time he sit down with his counterparts and addresses issues that are at the forefront of the day.

The economy is fragile. There is not a dispute in this place or in the general discourse of this country that our economy is not yet on solid ground. It is reminiscent to me and to many others of a government that believes that simply talking up the economy is enough to replace the fundamental concerns within that economy. Conservatives said this before the 2008 recession. Time and time again the finance minister was on his feet, lauded by his own party

for being a financial wizard, saying the fundamentals are sound and there is no recession. We know he actually believed that, because he brought in a budget that same year that addressed nothing of the economic reality that was coming our way.

To simply try to split hairs and say that the things that happened were a global event and Canada has somehow become an island is an interesting iteration of geography from the government: Canada is an important trading nation on the one hand but an island on the other. Being a stable island, the effects and causes of what happens in the global market no longer come to bear on us. Conservatives had to eat crow and introduce a budget that was counter even to their political ideological nature and say the role of government in an economy happens from time to time to involve itself, to become engaged in that economy in different ways.

The government is remiss to say that, in its history as Conservatives, it has not done this exact thing. The prosperity that has come out of northern Alberta and the oil sands was only possible because the various levels of government sat down with industry and made plans together, designs together, thoughts and actions together to ask how they could take a resource that sits in northern Alberta that is not commercially viable because it did not have the technology or regulations to deal with it. They did not know how to get it out of the ground, make any money and have anyone go to work. It was the various levels of government, municipal, provincial and federal, that became engaged in the question. They forgot to finish the second part of the conversation, which is to ask, once we start it, how much do we want to do and how fast.

• (1650)

Folks like the recently departed Premier Lougheed said that maybe a plan would be a good idea for the oil sands in northern Alberta, because if they went too fast, it would actually have the counter-effect of overheating the economy, not just in that region of Fort McMurray but right across the Alberta economy, the western economy and maybe throughout Canada. Those were Conservatives saying that and raising a fundamental point of resource development, which is that it is a good idea once in a while to have a plan.

We see what a government looks like when it does not have a plan. I will provide Statistics Canada numbers. These are not numbers that New Democrats have pulled out; these are numbers that have been gathered by the federal government. There are 300,000 more unemployed Canadians. Canadians watching will wonder how that number jibes with the number we hear insidiously from the government day after day that there are all these net newly created jobs. The fact of the matter is that since the bottom of the recession, one out of every three new jobs created in Canada has gone to foreign temporary workers. That is not an accident; that is a policy. That is a government telling industry that if it is too inconvenient or expensive for industry to hire a Canadian worker, the government will allow it, through its policy and bills passed through the House of Commons, to hire 200 carpenters from Colombia, 300 plumbers from the Philippines and electricians from wherever.

The government also includes the numbers of temporary foreign workers in its immigration numbers, saying nothing has changed in Canada's immigration policy and the numbers have stayed relatively the same. It is not true, because it has padded these numbers with all the temporary foreign workers who have no ability or right to ever apply to live in Canada. After their two-year contracts are done, they have to leave. They cannot become Canadians.

My family is an immigrant family. We played the traditional role of immigrants all across the world. We came here, invested here and worked hard. I was raised as the first-born of my family coming from Ireland. The contract between my family and the people and government of Canada was to work here, follow the rules, do what we could to build this country up, and we did, as did so many millions of Canadians. However that is not what this is.

• (1655)

[Translation]

During the last election, we talked about working together, not just in Quebec but across Canada. The idea—the role and vision of a Canadian government—is to work together. Today, the Conservative government has the option of working together. Let us work together with the provinces and territories. It is not a bizarre concept or option for Canada, since the provincial leaders have Conservative, Liberal and New Democrat roots.

For me, it is bizarre to see Conservative member after member say that it is shocking, strange or bad for a government to have such a meeting.

[English]

When we look at the fragile state of our economy right now, the average household debt is 154% of its net income per year. That is the average. There are Canadians who owe far more than that. We say we have lost 300,000 manufacturing jobs that have not been replaced and we have lost more than 300,000 net jobs since the bottom of the recession. We have an economic strategy from the government that says to replace Canadian workers with temporary foreign workers because they are cheaper for industry to hire and they are less of a hassle for industry to hire because they cannot join a union or demand workplace safety regulations the same way a Canadian worker can. These are facts.

The Conservatives are entitled to all the opinions they want, but the fact of the matter is that the Canadian economy remains fragile and some of that fragility and weakness is a direct result of a government that says hands off of certain sectors, allows people to suffer on their own and says it will allow the nationalization of our natural resource companies by a foreign country without any concern or bother. The clock is ticking on the Nexen deal. There must be some colleagues within the Conservative ranks who have some concern about a state-controlled company buying the 12th largest player in the oil patch. It must cause some concerns for our energy security and sovereignty. They wrap themselves in the flag in moments of convenience but not in moments when we need them to stand up for Canada, not as some sort of pamphlet that appears at election time but when the questions are being put and decisions are being made.

Meet with the premiers, and they will say the same thing.

Business of Supply

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a fellow British Columbian, I certainly listened to the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley with great interest. However, frankly, even the motion today was surprising to me. It seemed a very odd motion. Perhaps they have been a bit asleep at the switch.

We have acknowledged some economic concerns for a number of years. To be quite frank, all oars have been in the water. The Prime Minister has met more than 250 times, regardless of the government, with the provinces, minister to minister. I certainly know that in British Columbia, as we rolled out the economic action plan, the provinces worked in collaboration with the federal government and municipalities in an unprecedented manner. We know what has happened. We know the great outcome. We have toured the world. We know we are the envy of the world.

However, his leader has put forward a motion wanting the Prime Minister to meet, when he himself actually refused to meet with the ministers from Alberta, British Columbia and Saskatchewan, calling them simply messengers of the federal government. I actually found that very offensive.

For the NDP to put this motion forward today is very surprising.

• (1700)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I do not know my friend from across the way well, but I will allow her to stand later and correct the record that in fact our leader did offer to meet with the premier of Alberta. He met with her deputy premier as she was out of the country. He has not had a request from the other two premiers, one who she knows will be outgoing in some short amount of time.

The Conservatives have somehow made the mistake that a ribbon-cutting event with a premier constitutes consultation and planning and working together and that a five-minute phone call, which we have seen on the PM's agenda, somehow counts as working together with the provinces and territories.

We are simply asking the Prime Minister to accept the invitation. This was not our invitation. It would be rude for us to offer it. It is from the premier of our own province and the premiers of all the provinces and territories that are represented here in the House of Commons.

She finds this confusing. I think we have a lot of work to do here. If the invitation so generously offered by our provincial and territorial leaders confuses Conservative members as to why that would be worthwhile, we have perhaps more work than I thought with this particular government.

Business of Supply

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Kings—Hants put it best some time ago when he said we have a finance minister who cannot add and a prime minister who can only divide. I read that one journalist recently said we have a prime minister who is de-confederating Confederation. He continues to subsidize the oil industry with over a billion dollars of assistance and yet he threatens small fishers in the Maritimes by changing the policy on fishers that would allow them to continue to fish not competitively with large industry.

Could the member speak about the value of meeting, by reflecting on former prime ministers who have met with premiers and resolved a lot of things that were ailing in our country?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I feel some regret that I did not get an invitation to a lot of those meetings so I did not get to see them first-hand.

One leader of Canada once quipped that Canada works well in practice but not in theory. I think what they were suggesting was that this is a diverse and complicated country with a very strong neighbour to the south, spread over a large territory, and it requires constant vigilance and work to keep us together. All parliamentarians and Canadians know that there have been tough times for the country. However, one of the best ways to stay together, be it a Confederation relationship or any kind of relationship, is by talking; it is by actually getting together and finding common cause.

I take great umbrage with the government, not in the fact that it is Conservative or that it has a particular line on how to handle taxes or certain issues. There is an ideology within the government that it actually wants to break government. It wants to break the very idea and contractual negotiation with the people it seeks to represent and lower expectations to the point that there is no government in their lives whatsoever. As Ronald Reagan once quipped, "...government is not a solution to our problem; government is the problem".

The Prime Minister of our country could have said the exact same thing. That concerns me because whatever one's political ideological stripe, let us contribute to the health and welfare of our economy and country. Let us get together once in a while. Should it be so difficult for the Prime Minister to humbly accept the offer from the premiers?

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one of the keys to success is always being able to work and co-operate with others.

This November, the premiers of the provinces and territories are meeting in Halifax at the national economic summit, organized by the Council of the Federation. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister will be a no-show.

From a northern perspective, a major concern is the proposed European free trade agreement that would affect government programs aimed at helping to economically develop the north, for example, the NWT's business incentive policy. The business incentive policy gives preference to registered northern businesses in the Northwest Territories for the government's purchase of products and services. This policy applies to all contracts entered into directly by the Government of the Northwest Territories.

Under the policy, the Government of the Northwest Territories supports the creation and growth of competitive businesses as a

foundation in the Northwest Territories' economy and will, when purchasing goods, services or construction, provide an incentive to NWT-based businesses that recognizes the higher costs of operating business and manufacturing products in our territory. This encourages Northwest Territories-based businesses to create employment and develop necessary experience and business skills and complies with any intergovernmental agreements to which the GNWT must adhere.

It is the last bit that concerns northerners. They wonder if the European free trade deal would mean the end of BIP.

The Prime Minister could allay these concerns by meeting with the northern leaders and the provincial premiers and ensuring that this vital policy is protected.

Another issue that could be discussed is how to properly encourage economic development in the north.

The key phrase for northern economic development is stewardship. Northerners know that economic development in the north means, for the most part, natural resource development. We know the government's approach is to exploit the north's natural resources as fast as possible and damn the consequences, much as the Liberals before them.

A better approach is to sustainably develop resources, to shepherd resources to ensure the longest life of the development to ensure the maximum level of job creation. That is the way northerners look at development. We look at how we can benefit from those developments and how we can build our society.

Proper resource development ensures that the environment is protected. Northerners have learned the hard way that setting standards and maintaining them is the only way to protect ourselves against development. If we do not have that, then the public ends up cleaning up the mess. One only has to look at Giant Yellowknife mines right now where, once the environmental assessment is finished, the federal government will be on the hook for about a half a billion dollars to clean up the mess that is left there.

Another area that the Prime Minister could discuss with northern leaders is how to improve public infrastructure, which would not only aid economic development in the north but improve the life of northerners by reducing costs and, in many regards, would be the best way to strengthen Arctic sovereignty.

The Prime Minister is great at making promises to northerners, but we are still waiting for him to live up to them. For example, take the long-promised harbour at Iqaluit. It is not there yet. We can also consider the airport in Iqaluit, which needs a \$400 million upgrade. These are infrastructure improvements that are absolutely essential to the functioning of Nunavut.

Business of Supply

Improving housing is another type of infrastructure that really needs improvement. The cost of constructing new, healthy homes based on southern Canadian standards has gone through the roof. In addition to the high costs of construction, living in the homes is just as expensive. In addition to the high cost of energy, utility costs are astronomical. The provision of water and sewer service in remote northern communities is invariably by truck: haul it in, haul it out.

The Prime Minister could discuss with northern leaders ways of reducing the high cost of living in the north. Rather than importing a southern lifestyle, we should be developing a sustainable northern lifestyle.

In practical terms, regarding the northern cost of living, sustainability can apply to supply systems, attitudes, materials, local economics and consumption practices. Societal tools for influencing sustainability include full market pricing, based on a complete understanding of all costs such as education, advertisement, incentives, regulations and policy.

One has to view the whole situation in the north to understand what has gone wrong with this attempt to recreate a southern lifestyle north of 60. One example is the cost of heating a home or a business in the north. For most communities in northern Canada, which are beyond the range of a natural gas pipeline or a major electrical grid, in terms of heating costs the last decade has been pure hell.

•(1705)

Over that time, the majority of Canadians enjoyed natural gas prices, which really were no different than they were at the start of the decade. Meanwhile, northern homes and businesses supplied by imported fuel oil have seen their prices go up 300% or 400%. Considering that the number of days requiring heat in homes in the north are double that of southern Canada, the magnitude of the problem becomes apparent. The system is not working for us.

At the same time, these communities generate electricity from the same fuel oil used for heating. The cost to run the coolers and freezers at grocery stores is over 10 times what it would be in Toronto or Ottawa. The increased cost of energy adds to the high cost of food for sale in the stores. Food and energy are linked together in Canada's north just as they are across the world, but in our case to a greater degree of unsustainability.

Transportation of people, goods and energy is another area where cost surge from high energy prices have been an Achilles Heel to the southern lifestyle imported to the north. In the north, distances are great and roads are poor or non-existent. Air travel is based on low volume, small planes and high prices. It can cost more to fly from Edmonton to Yellowknife than from the Alberta capital to Europe. The already costly petroleum needed to heat homes, generate electricity and power automobiles goes up even more when the high cost of northern transport is added in. These high transport costs are reflected in the high cost of food in the north, which is imported from the south.

Yes, there are many things that the Prime Minister could meet on and talk in public with our leaders from the territories and provinces. Many of the problems that northern provinces have are the same as in the northern territories. We need discussion. We need support to

come up with better solutions that promote sustainability rather than subsidized lifestyles that are at great risk at all times.

There has been a call right across the country for a national energy strategy, from provinces, industry and people on the street. They are all saying that we should get together on this, act like other countries in a sane and rational fashion and form the vision of what we have for a Canadian energy system.

Why is the Prime Minister not willing to meet with the premiers who have themselves indicated that they want to do this and have pushed it forward on their agenda? Why is the Prime Minister not able to engage with the premiers on this issue? Why is he content to leave it alone?

This is not the way to govern this federation. We need the Prime Minister to actively engage with the other leaders in the country. We encourage him to do this through this motion today. We plead with him. It is better for the country that he do that.

I hope the Prime Minister is listening today to this debate, that he recognizes the importance of the debate that we are having and why this party is putting this motion forward at this time.

•(1710)

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member intently. Having visited his riding several times, including last summer, I want to say that it is a beautiful riding with wonderful people.

However, the NDP policies do not seem to be consistent with the desire of the people of the north. For example, on the gun registry, the member for the Northwest Territories voted against that. We had action through Bill C-38 to increase the ability for environmentally-friendly development at a fast rate. Again, it was something that would be great for the people of the north, but the member voted against it.

Everything we have done as a government is wonderful for the north, but the people across the way just want to make the north a big national park for the Americans.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, my short answer would be to chuckle at those remarks. I apologize to the member because I really do not view it in the same fashion that he does.

The north needs real answers on energy, there is no question about it. We have some going on right now and we are making changes within our territory. We have something to offer the other territories as well, but we need to bring this together in a national energy strategy.

I feel very confident that we can make these changes, but we need the support of the federal government across the country and the understanding that this is not simply a problem of the Northwest Territories, it is a problem for all of us. That is what standing up and talking about a national energy strategy and willing to commit to that debate will create in the country.

Private Members' Business

• (1715)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It being 5:15 p.m., pursuant to an order made earlier today all questions necessary to dispose of the opposition motion are deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, September 25, at the expiry of the time provided for government orders.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, I ask that you see the clock at 5:30 p.m.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

CORRECTIONS AND CONDITIONAL RELEASE ACT

Ms. Roxanne James (Scarborough Centre, CPC) moved that Bill C-293, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (vexatious complainants), be read the third time and passed.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to speak to my private member's bill, Bill C-293, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (vexatious complainants). This important piece of legislation was brought forward to help the Correctional Service of Canada meet its legal obligation to fairly and expeditiously resolve offender grievances.

I am gratified to see so much support for my legislation from so many members in the House and in committee. The changes this bill would bring to the Corrections and Conditional Release Act would help ensure the complaint and grievance process in the federal penitentiaries is fair and, most importantly, accessible to all offenders, not just a select few who choose to clog up the system with frivolous complaints. Essentially this bill would help ensure that the complaint and grievance process functions as it was originally intended to.

It is clear to me and to so many hon. members in this House that these changes are far long overdue, and this is why I introduced this particular piece of legislation. As I indicated, Bill C-293 proposes to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, or CCRA. Within the CCRA, we find sections 90 and 91, which are the subject of the proposed legislation I have put forward, which is before us today in the House. These sections ensure that all offenders have access to a fair and expeditious grievance system which they can use without fear of negative consequences. This system is not only the law, but it also has many long-term benefits.

In his committee appearance, Mr. Jay Pyke, warden of Kingston Penitentiary spoke of four specific benefits of this process. He said:

First, it provides offenders with a means of redress when they feel they've been treated unfairly.... Secondly, it contributes to institutional safety through the early identification and resolution of problems....Thirdly, it contributes to offender accountability by encouraging offenders to resolve problems through an appropriate means. Finally, the process ensures that CSC's decisions affecting offenders comply with the rule of law.

I want to point out that the majority of offenders using the grievance system are in fact submitting complaints in good faith related to situations affecting their life, liberty or safety of the person, which of course is what the process was originally intended for.

When used properly, this system ensures that offenders are treated fairly and are given a proper way to deal with their grievances. Unfortunately, there are those offenders who choose to abuse the system, submitting complaint after complaint in order to harass a staff member or merely to fill their days. In some cases it has become somewhat of a hobby or even a game.

All of us in the House have heard the stories about the ice cream being too cold, the eggs or potatoes being too small, or the light bulb being too bright. Not only is this an enormous waste of staff time and resources, but it also clogs up the system and negatively impacts those offenders who must wait longer for decisions on legitimate complaints. This is unfair. It is very clear that changes are needed. Bill C-293 aims to do just that. This bill was developed to put a stop to the actions of offenders who purposely exploit the grievance system at the cost of the rest of the offenders in federal custody, not to mention the cost to the Canadian taxpayer.

As we have heard, there is a small group of offenders across the federal correctional system who submit a high volume of frivolous and vexatious grievances. I would refer again to the committee testimony of Mr. Pyke, warden of the Kingston Penitentiary, who said that last year three offenders were responsible for 7% of the 501 grievances and complaints submitted at just one institution. Of course, this would be acceptable if these complaints had any merit, but in fact, as committee members heard, most of these complaints, 86 in total from these three offenders, were merely attempts to draw negative or unwanted attention to a staff member they did not like or a rule that they simply did not agree with.

According to Mr. Pyke, of the 86 grievances submitted by these three offenders, 81 were denied on the grounds that they lacked merit. In fact, only two grievances were upheld as having merit, and the remaining three were upheld in part because of Correctional Service of Canada's untimely response to the complaints, delays which ironically would have been reduced through the passing of this legislation. This is just three inmates in one institution for one year.

• (1720)

Hon. members can well imagine the impact on resources, time and energy if we multiply this across our entire federal correctional system. That is why it is so important that we move ahead with Bill C-293 without any further delay. In fact, Bill C-293 would expand the language within sections 90 and 91 to provide Correctional Service of Canada with a more effective grievance and complaint process, a system that would impose consequences on offenders who submit a high volume of frivolous and vexatious complaints.

Private Members' Business

I would like to take a moment to thank all of the committee members for their thoughtful review of the legislation and for their support of some important amendments that were introduced in committee to further strengthen my bill. I believe that these amendments will ultimately help ensure that this legislation would truly meet its goal of ending the troubling trend of a small group of inmates abusing the grievance system. These amendments will ensure that this bill would achieve its intended objective in a manner that is consistent with the remainder of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act and also the corrections and conditional release regulations.

If we look closer at the amended legislation, we see that it consists of three clear provisions that lead to this worthy goal. First and foremost, the commissioner would have the authority to prohibit offenders who submit a high number of vexatious and frivolous complaints from submitting any further complaint or grievance unless a vexatious complainant designation is lifted. This is in legislation for the very first time. In other words, the commissioner would have the final say on whether or not a new grievance or complaint is heard. Of course, the commissioner would allow an offender's complaint or grievance to be heard if it was deemed that the issue being grieved affects the offender's life, liberty or security of that person. I want to make that perfectly clear.

As I mentioned earlier, one of the benefits of the grievance system is that it encourages pro-social behaviour in offenders. It is certainly not the intent of this bill to slap a vexatious complainant label on any offender and then close the door forever on any hope that the designation would be overturned. That is why the second provision within Bill C-293 states that the commissioner would undertake a regular review of all offenders who have received a prohibition order from a vexatious complainant designation.

As originally drafted, the bill required the commissioner of CSC to review the vexatious complainant designation every six months, and then to provide the offender with written reasons for a decision to maintain or lift that designation. Bill C-293 was amended at committee to indicate that this review would take place once a year rather than every six months. As we heard during committee hearings, a six-month window would likely have become operationally cumbersome for CSC and after reviewing the committee testimony, I agree. I believe that an annual review of the complaint prohibition would be a much more workable provision. In this way it is hoped that the offender would understand the benefits of acting in a positive way and thereby break the cycle of frivolous and vexatious complaints and grievances.

The third provision within Bill C-293 would allow the Governor in Council to make changes to the corrections and conditional release regulations as needed to give further precision to the administration of the vexatious complainant scheme. This is in keeping with the current corrections and conditional release regulations.

I believe that as amended, Bill C-293 is an effective piece of legislation that would help reduce the ongoing abuse of the grievance system by a small handful of inmates. The intent of the vexatious complainant process is not to punish offenders, but rather to hold them accountable for their actions. Bill C-293 would provide Correctional Service of Canada with clear, defined steps that could

be taken to end the activities of vexatious complainants. It also would promote accountability by encouraging offenders to use the complaint and grievance process for the purpose for which it was originally intended.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to speak today in the House to my private member's bill and I urge all hon. members of this House to put their full support behind this bill.

● (1725)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague opposite for her speech.

We examined her bill in the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. As a member of the NDP, I will unfortunately not support this bill and I will explain why shortly.

I have a question about the complaints and grievances offenders file with the Correctional Service of Canada.

Professor David Mullan produced a report in which he made 65 extremely interesting recommendations for changing how the complaints process is handled. Not a single one of these recommendations was taken into account in this bill.

I would like to know why my colleague did not heed the recommendations of an expert in the area.

[*English*]

Ms. Roxanne James: Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, the objective of private members' bills is to fix something that is broken or to improve upon something within legislation.

As someone who supports my constituency, having been elected on May 2, 2011, I am responsible to the Canadian taxpayer. When I learned about this abuse within our correctional system, I was absolutely shocked. I cannot believe that we have allowed this to go on for this long, that a handful of inmates, approximately 20 to 25 inmates, create and log 15% of all complaints. There are 29,000 grievances per year. Over 4,000 complaints, or 15% of the total, are submitted by just a handful of inmates.

This is the problem that needs to be fixed. I am fixing it with this bill. When this legislation is passed, it will ensure that the system will work as it was originally intended to.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is the first opportunity I have had to congratulate you on your appointment. You are a very good choice and we are pleased that you are the Deputy Speaker.

I was very impressed with the member of Parliament. I chair the public safety and national security committee. She was fortunate in that her name was drawn to submit a private member's bill in her first Parliament. I have never had the opportunity to come before a committee with one of mine, but she has. She was very articulate, focused and well spoken. She gave us some statistics. What was interesting to hear when witnesses appeared before us is that even many of the prisoners are upset by the people who bring forward vexatious complaints. Many of them feel that the vexatious complaints may limit the attention that their real complaints get.

Private Members' Business

I would ask the member to comment from that perspective. We understand there is a huge cost. Twenty-five people are making thousands of complaints. How does that affect the other prisoners who may have legitimate complaints?

Ms. Roxanne James: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that my colleague has brought up this question because just recently, during the summer, there was a particular case that went to the Federal Court. It was initiated by an inmate who complained that his grievances were not being heard in a timely fashion. It is interesting that this has been brought up because my bill would actually seek to address that. It would correct a system that has been broken by this loophole that is costly for Canadian taxpayers. Most importantly, it would make sure that the system works as it was originally intended to.

• (1730)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, once again, I really appreciate the opportunity to ask questions about this fascinating bill.

First, I would like to tell the members opposite that I support the principle underlying this bill. The only thing I do not support is the means employed here. Unfortunately, this measure will not prevent vexatious complainants from submitting complaints. As the member opposite probably knows, most vexatious complainants are people with mental illness. This is not the way to help them.

Does my colleague have any other suggestions for how to help people who need help more than they need punishment?

[*English*]

Ms. Roxanne James: Mr. Speaker, a similar question was brought up in committee. Someone from the NDP asked me why I did not submit a private member's bill on another issue or another component that needed to be fixed. My answer is that if members want to put forward a private member's bill to address a particular area of concern, I encourage them to do so.

Most importantly, this bill would address and correct five things. One, it would correct a costly loophole. Two, it would support our hard-working front-line officers in the Correctional Service of Canada. Three, it would hold offenders accountable and guide them to true rehabilitation. Four, I need to point out, because sometimes we forget that we are all responsible for the Canadian taxpayer, that the bill shows respect for the Canadian taxpayer by eliminating waste. Five, and most importantly, as I have stated previously, this change would make the system work as it was intended to.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in this House to speak to Bill C-293, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (vexatious complainants). As the hon. member for Scarborough Centre and sponsor of this bill said, we had the opportunity to study this bill in committee during the last parliamentary session in the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

Since I am on that committee, I had the opportunity to engage in further discussion with the other members about this bill, which seeks to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act. The

purpose of this bill is to limit access to the complaints and grievance procedure by so-called vexatious inmates in order to reduce the volume of complaints. The way we see it, this measure does not deal with the real problem of the complaints procedure, and we think that the focus should instead be on the source of these vexatious complaints.

We had an opportunity to hear from witnesses who told us about delays affecting the entire complaints system. Those who speak in favour of a fair and timely complaints system said that there are extremely serious delays in the processing of complaints, about six months in most cases. We should consider solutions that truly respond to the problems raised in committee, solutions that would allow reasonable delays for processing grievances and would simplify the procedure, which would enable Correctional Services Canada to save time and resources.

At the April 24 meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, Howard Sapers, the correctional investigator, explained that the Office of the Correctional Investigator was created following a bloody and fatal riot at Kingston penitentiary in 1971. The fact-finding commission set up to look into this incident determined that having no credible system to resolve inmate complaints was one of the main factors that led to the confrontation.

In his 2007-08 annual report, Mr. Sapers again mentioned the long-standing concerns of the Office of the Correctional Investigator regarding Correctional Services Canada's internal grievance system. Over the years, they have reviewed numerous complaints regarding access to the internal complaints and grievance procedure. According to Mr. Sapers, the procedure to file complaints and grievances varies and is seriously lacking in uniformity.

Ashley Smith's story is one of the most tragic examples of the poor handling of complaints. There is in fact a full report that shows how that inmate's death could have been avoided. In it, we can read how, despite the fact that the Correctional Service of Canada rejected her seven complaints about her conditions of incarceration, she tried to improve her situation one final time before her death by putting a complaint in a sealed envelope into the complaints box. Only after Ashley's death was the complaint seen as a priority. The report shows that the seven complaints, which had been considered routine, were in fact priorities.

So we see that we have a problem at the moment with the way in which the system of complaints and grievances in our correctional system is working. Mr. Sapers comes to the conclusion that, if there had been a fair, effective and flexible internal process, it would have been possible to considerably improve the excessively restrictive and dehumanizing conditions imposed on Ms. Smith. He feels that her complaints were rejected for no valid reason. In his report, he also recommends that the Correctional Service of Canada immediately review all cases of prolonged solitary confinement associated with mental health problems, paying specific attention to offenders who have already attempted suicide or who display self-injury tendencies.

Private Members' Business

In committee, we heard that a number of vexatious complainants tend to have mental health issues. Labelling them vexatious complainants will probably not prevent them from filing complaints, nor will it help them with rehabilitation. So the risk of reoffending increases and public safety suffers.

What we must consider is that the vexatious complainant label will in no way reduce the number of complaints to be dealt with in institutions, and I will explain why. When the administration is presented with a vexatious complaint, it cannot simply ignore it. It still has to be dealt with, categorized and filed. So the time spent in analyzing the complaint will offset the time savings that the designation “vexatious complainant” is supposed to provide. This bill will result in more work for correctional officers and inflated administrative costs, all for positive outcomes that will be minimal in the extreme.

● (1735)

The Report of External Review of Correctional Service of Canada Offender Complaints and Grievance Process prepared by professor David Mullan, which I mentioned earlier, made 65 recommendations aimed at correcting and simplifying the process. Unfortunately, as I mentioned in my question to my colleague opposite, the hon. member for Scarborough Centre, the bill does not take any of that into account. Not one recommendation was included in this bill. Although implementing these recommendations should have been the focus, the Conservatives decided to ignore the advice of the experts and internal and external review committees, which emphasized the importance of creating the positions of mediators and grievance coordinators.

The NDP supports legislative measures that will make our prisons safer and allow them to operate in a quick, fair and efficient manner. That is why we are in favour of creating these positions, which would help guarantee open access to the complaint and grievance process while reducing the volume of complaints by introducing more informal mechanisms.

Lastly, we understand that for administrative reasons, one year is the preferred timeline for Correctional Service Canada, but we are not convinced that imposing a ban for a full year would be advantageous for the complaints and grievance process. A lot can happen in one year's time. An offender can move or change institutions. His situation can change completely. So, instead of seeing an extension of the length of the ban as a good thing, we believe it could in fact considerably aggravate the situation for the individual in question.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that this bill does absolutely nothing to address the real problem of managing complaints in our prison system. The government needs to take real action, such as taking into account the recommendations of experts like Mr. Mullan and Mr. Sapers, in order to correct a very real, serious problem, to ensure the well-being of CSC employees and complainants, and to prevent terrible things like what happened at Kingston Penitentiary or like the death of Ashley Smith from ever happening again.

That is why I will be voting against this bill. I invite all of my colleagues in the House to have a closer look at this bill and

understand why it will not change anything in the existing offender complaints process.

We have a duty as parliamentarians to take into account the opinions of experts. Here in the House, our duty is to pass legislation that is viable, constitutional and fair. Ignoring the advice of experts and the recommendations made to us is simply unacceptable, even irresponsible.

In the beginning of her speech, the hon. member for Scarborough Centre said that changes were necessary. As I have demonstrated, changes are indeed necessary, and all the experts say that changes need to be made now. What we have now is akin to putting a band-aid two feet away from the wound. It is of no use whatsoever. We should take the time to put all this on “pause”, to rewrite a nice little government bill—I urge the government to do so—that will really get to the heart of the problem.

I encourage the Conservative members in particular to think about that. We have an incredible opportunity to do the right thing, and not just for vexatious complainants. We are talking about vexatious complainants, but this is also about taxpayers; we are the ones who keep penitentiaries running. There are also those who work in penitentiaries: Correctional Service Canada officers and all those who handle complaints.

To conclude, it is our duty to pass good legislation in the best interest of all Canadians and it is certainly our duty not to turn a blind eye on such a big problem by pretending that we are fixing it.

● (1740)

[English]

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this has been a very enlightening bill. I personally was not aware of the complaints process that exists inside penitentiaries until we debated this bill and studied it in some depth in committee.

The first comment I would like to make is that the complaints process inside our penitentiaries is not about being soft on crime, coddling criminals or inmates or, using the rhetoric of the government, hugging a thug. I am sure that when people hear there is a complaints process within our penitentiaries, these might be the kinds of images that come to mind, but that is not what the complaints process is all about. I know the hon. member for Alfred-Pellan touched on this in her speech.

The point of a complaints system is to prevent cruel behaviour that could harm inmates. Inmates are in prison not to be harmed; they are there so that society is protected and so that they follow a rehabilitation program and reflect on their actions. The point is that there must be some regard for their welfare even though they are incarcerated.

Private Members' Business

The complaints system comes out of the violent and deadly riot that took place at Kingston Penitentiary in 1971, during which five correctional officers were taken hostage and brutally tortured. In the end, two prisoners died and 13 others were seriously injured. The damage done to Kingston Penitentiary was severe and shocking, and in the aftermath, a royal commission headed by Justice Swackhamer was established to investigate what had led to the bloody riot. In his report, Justice Swackhamer stated that the lack of adequate attention paid to offender complaints was a contributing factor to the riots and made the following observation:

Grievances of all types are bound to exist among the prison population. Whether those grievances are justified or not, they require to be dealt with so that the order and morale of the institution may be maintained. At present, we heard that such grievances can only be resolved, if at all, when the inmate submits them to the administration. It is clear that the inmate frustrations are created and thrive because the inmates' only avenue of complaint is to the very administration which is frequently the source of its dissatisfaction. It is perfectly evident that at Kingston Penitentiary the total absence of any formula by which such matters could be effectively aired was a factor in the disturbance itself.

The point of a complaints system is very much to keep our correctional officers safe. The job they do is not easy. They obviously work in situations in which they must be vigilant, situations in which there is a certain amount of tension, and problems can occur that can cause physical harm. We have to make sure that correctional officers, who do very good work on behalf of our correctional system, are protected. Therefore, the complaints mechanism is really like a safety valve in many ways.

As Correctional Service Canada itself has said:

Providing offenders with a fair, impartial and expeditious complaint and grievance process...has many benefits. It encourages offenders to deal with issues in a pro-social manner; it empowers them and provides another forum whereby their concerns can be heard and dealt with appropriately. The process can also be used as a monitoring tool to identify trends that are linked to increased tension or discontent among the inmate population.

Bill C-293 seeks to rectify a problem that has arisen over the years. No system is perfect; we know that. When we create a system, after a while we have to re-examine the system to see if we can change it and reform it and make it better to meet changing circumstances. We all understand this as parliamentarians. We come to this place to make laws and institutions better.

● (1745)

Bill C-293 seeks to rectify a problem that has arisen over the years within the inmate complaint system created after the Kingston Penitentiary riot, wherein a very small number of inmates lodged repeated complaints deemed of little or no merit. In other words, these were deemed not to have been made in good faith.

The bill creates in law a category of complainants called a vexatious complainant with the intent of sidelining those complaints to free up the corrections bureaucracy to process more expeditiously what are deemed to be more legitimate prison complaints.

The original version of the bill that we debated at second reading a few months ago stipulated that an inmate designated as a vexatious complainant would be required to provide new supporting information to accompany any subsequent complaints if he or she wished to have those complaints reviewed.

The sweeping changes in the amended version of the bill from committee removes the possibility of the Correctional Service of

Canada investigating further complaints, new information notwithstanding, unless the complainant obtains special leave from the commissioner of corrections to have his or her complaint reviewed.

The original bill also stipulated that a plan be developed to assist the offender to break the cycle of complaints. However, perhaps more important, it contained an exception stipulating that a decision-maker could not refuse to hear a complaint that would result in irreparable, significant or adverse consequences to the offender if not resolved. There is no such provision in the amended version of the bill.

The amended bill allows the commissioner to designate an offender as vexatious once the commissioner is satisfied that an offender has persistently submitted complaints or grievances that are frivolous, vexatious or not made in good faith. However, like the original version of the bill, the new version does not define the term "vexatious" or "frivolous", though such a definition does exist in the commissioner's internal directives.

The vagueness of this internal definition has proven persistently problematic for correctional staff. A 2009 CSC audit recognized this problem and recommended that the definition of frivolous and vexatious complaints and grievances in the internal directive be clarified, along with the definition of "high priority", "urgent" and "sensitive".

There is also no indication in the original or amended bill as to the number of so-called vexatious or frivolous complaints that will trigger a vexatious complaints designation. The bill appears to leave this threshold entirely up to the discretion of the commissioner.

These open-ended notions of the definition of vexatious complainant and of the frequency of complaints deemed vexatious required for this designation to apply leave the door open to interpretation, which in turn will make it difficult for corrections personnel to confidently implement the legislation.

It will also make it difficult for Canadians to fully understand how this new process will function in a fair and constructive manner while pursuing its main objective, which is to stop the flow of egregious complaints that can burden the corrections system and draw scarce resources within it away from treatment programs that reduce recidivism and lead to safer communities.

If we are to presume a fair and effective complaints system in Canadian penitentiaries, it is vital that the commissioner of corrections in designating a complainant vexatious consider the comments of the correctional investigator, Howard Sapers, when he appeared before the public safety committee to comment on the bill:

Bill C-293 sends a wrong message, as it trivializes inmate complaints and it reduces CSC's accountability. Inmate concerns are a unique means to judge the professionalism and the humanity of our Correctional Service. Importantly, what can be viewed as frivolous can be rather significant upon review. What to most people would be very insignificant becomes, because of the nature of prison life, a matter of serious concern to inmates.

Private Members' Business

Therefore, I hope that in its regulations and directives the government will consider these points and ensure that the process that comes out of this legislation via regulations and directives is one that is fair and effective. I think that would be good for our corrections officers and for society as a whole.

● (1750)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, during the introduction of this bill at second reading, I spoke in the House to express my concern about the potential impact this bill could have on the proper operation and security of our penitentiaries.

During first reading of the bill, I was concerned about the fact that the commissioner was being granted the discretion to designate an offender as a vexatious complainant without placing limits on this power by establishing clear criteria. In my opinion, without such criteria, we cannot guarantee that decisions will be made in a fair and equitable manner.

Something else that concerned me at that time was that the bill did not take into account the reality of the inmates being designated as vexatious complainants. The agencies working in penitentiaries and the Office of the Correctional Investigator stated that many of the complainants who could be designated vexatious by the commissioner were actually people who have mental health problems or who are not well educated.

We have to remember that, when this complaint and grievance process was implemented in the early 1970s, the objective was to channel inmates' frustrations by using a constructive process that would allow inmates to participate in improving the living conditions in penitentiaries. So the objective was to improve safety by ensuring that inmates did not use violence to express their discontent and frustration.

It was also felt that this process was a tool that helped ensure transparency and accountability, allowing us to assess the effectiveness of correctional policies and identify problems in Canadian prisons.

Another benefit of this complaint process was that it made it possible to identify individuals with problems, whether mental health problems or low levels of education. Once identified, they could be directed to programs adapted to their circumstances.

The government should focus its efforts on increasing the correctional investigator's capacity to investigate so that he can quickly identify the problems in prisons.

Yes, the volume of complaints is a problem. However, we do not believe that reducing access to the complaint and grievance process is the answer.

In my view, this new bill is likely to cause more frustration for inmates who are unable to access the grievance process. This could in turn increase the level of violence and reduce the safety of inmates and prison workers.

We believe that the most effective way to guarantee open access to the complaint and grievance process, while reducing the volume of

complaints, is to create mediator and grievance coordinator positions.

The Conservatives ignored all the recommendations of the experts and the external and internal review committees. Many of them said it was important to create those types of positions, which would allow prisons to maintain an open-access complaint and grievance process, while reducing the volume of formal complaints through informal resolution.

Our approach is also supported by many experts and stakeholders in the corrections field, including prison law and criminology experts.

Nevertheless, the member for Scarborough Centre seems to have ignored all this, as have the Conservative members of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. Not only did they ignore the experts who came to share their points of view, including the correctional investigator, but they also ignored the recommendations in David Mullan's report on the external review process, which was commissioned by the government itself.

In his report, Mr. Mullan made a number of recommendations regarding various aspects of the complaints and grievance process, including recommendations concerning staff and training. Mr. Mullan made recommendations to improve the informal complaints resolution process. Several recommendations touched on reducing the administrative burden of the complaints process, accountability and involving the offender in the process.

None of the 60-plus recommendations in the Mullan report were implemented or taken into consideration during the drafting of Bill C-213 or in the amendments that were made to the bill later.

Yet the recommendations made sense and the government itself commissioned the report. Why did the Conservatives not implement the recommendations in the Mullan report? Is it because the recommendations are not in line with their ideology even though the experts agree on this issue?

● (1755)

When I was a member of the committee, it became clear to me that the only approach that was acceptable to Conservative ideology was punishing criminals. That is what this is about.

I did not support the introduction of this bill at first reading. Unfortunately, the final version is even more disappointing because the only clause left states that, if the commissioner believes an offender has submitted vexatious complaints, he can prohibit that offender from submitting any further complaints.

I feel that the Conservatives did not listen to James Bonta, an expert witness who testified during the electronic surveillance study. Mr. Bonta is a clinical psychologist who presented a psychological explanation of punishment to the committee. I will read a portion of his testimony:

Punishment can deter or suppress behaviour, but only under certain conditions....It has to be immediate, it has to be the right intensity, it has to be predictable, and it has to be done with the right kind of person....

Private Members' Business

It works really well for people who think in the future, who have little history of being punished, and who think things through. Is this your typical offender? Offenders tend to be concrete thinkers who think in the here and now. They have a long history of punishment. They were raised in families in which most of them were physically abused. Some were sexually abused....

I'd strongly encourage you not to expect deterrence to have a great impact on the behaviour of your moderate- to [even] high-risk offender. You need to put your hope and your money into rehabilitation programs.

It is a clinical psychologist who made this statement to the committee. The first reading version of the bill had a provision to implement this type of corrective program or plan in order to break the complaints cycle. This was a worthwhile approach, but the provision in question is also one of the first ones that the Conservatives members of the committee removed from the bill.

The end result is that most of the provisions were removed from the first version of the bill, leaving only one provision that allows the commissioner to prohibit offenders that he designates as vexatious complainants from filing any new complaints, and another that allows the commissioner to review the complainant's status annually rather than every six months in order to reduce the administrative burden.

We are therefore not at all convinced that a review after one year would help the process, even if it does reduce the administrative burden. Leaving an offender in the system for one year can only increase the administrative burden while jeopardizing the safety of inmates. This will only make the situation worse. The parliamentary secretary on the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security took most of the provisions in the first reading version of the bill and included them in the regulations.

She mentioned that this bill was a legislative burden that would make the administration of the grievance process more expensive. She therefore proposed an amendment, which was passed, to include the administration of the grievance process in the regulations rather than in the act. She wanted the commissioner's authority to prohibit a complainant from filing a new complaint to be included in the act but enforced by the regulations.

These regulations would be submitted to the Standing Joint Committee on Scrutiny of Regulations. Our critic, the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, had also proposed an amendment to ensure that the commissioner, when making a decision, would take into account mental health issues and low levels of education. However, the parliamentary secretary would only include these factors in the regulations. Therefore, we believe that this is an empty promise because there are no guarantees that these provisions will be included in the bill.

I would like to remind my colleagues opposite that the Standing Joint Committee on Scrutiny of Regulations examines the regulations after the fact. In my opinion, this will allow the government to avoid debating this bill, because the experts do not agree with its position.

In closing, I would like to emphasize that this bill only addresses a very minuscule part of the problem. Improving the efficiency of the process is the problem, not just dealing with vexatious complainants who only represent a handful of Canada's inmates.

The government has chosen to ignore the opinions of experts and the Mullan report, which they commissioned. They have decided to punish inmates—and we are only talking about a few inmates, as I mentioned—rather than introducing a bill that really tackles the problem by supporting the grievance procedure while enabling inmates to reform. This bill is not the answer, and it is obvious that we will not support it.

• (1800)

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about Bill C-293, which intends to create a category of vexatious complainants in the correctional system's complaints and grievance procedure. This bill amends section 91 of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act.

I would like to quote section 91, which has to do with access to the grievance procedure: "Every offender shall have complete access to the offender grievance procedure without negative consequences." This section ensures that all inmates in the correctional system have free and equal access to the grievance procedure in the event of problems or threats to their health or safety, for example.

The section is not there by accident. The complaints and grievance procedure in prisons was instituted by a parliamentary subcommittee in the 1970s. At that time, numerous revolts and violent incidents were tainting prisons and making the environment dangerous for everyone—inmates and employees alike. The complaints and grievance procedure was a way to let inmates use something other than violence to express their concerns and resolve their problems.

Today, we are being asked to amend this section that provides inmates with the opportunity to express themselves and to try to deal with a problem or frustrations by a means other than violence. The proposed amendments are as follows:

If the Commissioner is satisfied that an offender has persistently submitted complaints or grievances that are frivolous, vexatious or not made in good faith, the Commissioner may, in accordance with the prescribed procedures, prohibit an offender from submitting any further complaint or grievance except by leave of the Commissioner.

The general idea is to give the commissioner the discretion to prevent certain complainants from filing grievances. Naturally, not every complainant, but only those who the commissioner deems to be vexatious, in other words those whose complaints are frivolous and not made in good faith.

I would like to re-examine the idea of a frivolous complaint. The member for Scarborough Centre, who introduced this bill, gave an example of a complaint that she considered to be frivolous involving a radio. I will cite the example she mentioned in a previous speech.

...an inmate who had an issue regarding a radio that he owned which, after his transfer to a new institution, no longer worked...He then filed another complaint on the same issue while his first grievance was still being evaluated in conjunction with the institution that he had been transferred from.

For someone unfamiliar with prison life, filing a complaint about a radio may seem frivolous. However, my colleague has overlooked some considerations. First, it is very important to remember that, in a correctional facility, what may seem insignificant, frivolous or vexatious to us may, on the contrary, be very important to the inmates. Some things in life that are not important to us, can be important to inmates.

To overlook this difference in perspective is to oversimplify things in this discussion on grievances and complaints. This type of complaint can also very often conceal other frustrations or problems that the inmates are unable to articulate such as conflicts between inmates, long-standing stress, harassment or problems with depression. In this case, the radio was simply the last straw.

In reality, deeming this example futile or not legitimate is in fact a very simplistic solution. It ignores another latent and perhaps more serious problem or one that urgently needs to be resolved. In this case, an inmate with a more serious latent problem who makes repeated complaints would now have his problem deemed not legitimate and he would be prohibited from filing more complaints. The situation would be unresolved and would worsen, without any escape route for that inmate. This is obviously not the right solution.

In this case, this type of complaint is not necessarily about settling a dispute over a radio, but instead provides information on the more general situation in the institution and with the inmates, about the tensions inside the prison walls or with the staff. If we consider this perspective, it is important to keep the line of communication between institutional management and the inmates open and free.

Actually, according to the 2010-11 annual report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator: "The offenders complaints and grievance system is an important barometer for gauging the experience of the inmate population."

● (1805)

We also must bear in mind that 48% of complaints have an extended response time. The time taken to deal with a complaint varies according to its code and coding complaints is a problem as well.

According to the document entitled "Audit of Offender Complaint and Grievance Process, Internal Audit" published by Correctional Service Canada in 2009, 67% of priority complaints were classified as such and only 13% of urgent cases were classified as urgent. What is more, only 64% of harassment complaints were correctly coded.

Making a second complaint, or repeated complaints, about the same subject may be an attempt to attract attention to a problem that is more urgent than it appears, or to a complaint that might have been improperly coded and not handled in a timely fashion. As a result, I stress again that the examples of repeated complaints, or complaints considered to be frivolous, that the hon. member for Scarborough Centre gave in order to justify this bill, do not seem very relevant to me, given all the limitations and different perspectives that it completely ignores.

The hon. member for Scarborough Centre acknowledges that the burden of complaints is very onerous for the prison system and that it is a problem that needs to be solved. I agree with that. But she feels that the bulk of the complaints and grievances comes from a small number of inmates who see writing frivolous complaints as a way to pass the time and that, by forbidding them to file complaints, the problem will be solved.

I am going to quote some examples from the Office of the Correctional Investigator's report for 2010-11:

Correctional Service Canada has reported a noticeable rise in the volume of offender complaints and grievances for the top five subject categories.

Private Members' Business

Indeed, many of the top grieved subjects correspond to topics and priorities that the Office has reported upon in recent years: general 'hardening' of the conditions of confinement; declining quality of dynamic security and staff-offender interactions; inconsistent quality of and accessibility to health care services; access to programming; restrictions on group privileges and individual rights.

So what I gather from this report is that, according to the Office of the Correctional Investigator, the increase in complaints is not a result of frivolous complaints. No, the increase in complaints is rather the result of the inability of recent governments to consider the true priorities in the prison system, priorities that the office has been mentioning in recent years.

The New Democrat members who were on the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security when this bill was studied were in favour of creating mediator and grievance coordinator positions in the correctional institutions, a proposal that the Conservatives felt was irrelevant.

I would like to quote another section of the same report from the Office of the Correctional Investigator:

Institutions with mediators appear to reflect an improved percentage of complaints and grievances resolved at the lowest level.

Institutions that retain a Grievance Coordinator for more than one year appear to process complaints and grievances more efficiently and at a higher rate.

Institutional Heads who place a high importance on the Offender Complaint and Grievance Process appear to reflect a higher percentage of resolved complaints/grievances and a lower percentage of overdue complaints.

I would like to mention that the report is available online. Therefore, I would like to advise the member for Scarborough Centre to read it. I would like to close by saying that I will not be supporting this bill because I think it will lead to more violence in the correctional systems and it in no way addresses the true problems underlying the fact that people file repeated complaints.

● (1810)

[*English*]

Ms. Roxanne James (Scarborough Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, as a newly elected member of Parliament, I was quite excited to be very close on the list and was able to have a private member's bill presented to the House and have it come this far. I thank all my colleagues on the Conservative side of the House for their support of the bill. I also thank the members of the Liberal Party for their support.

We have heard that across Canada the vast majority of Canadians support it. Even the offenders serving time in jail who want their legitimate cases to be heard support it. It is kind of funny that the only people who do not support the bill are the members of the NDP. It is very hard to understand. The only thing I can think of is that it is the NDP opposition ideological thinking that has somehow obliterated its common sense. It just does not make any sense.

As I have stressed throughout every speech in the House, the bill seeks to correct a costly loophole in our correctional system. It would hold offenders accountable for their actions. It would show respect for taxpayers. It would support our hard-working front line correctional officers. Most important, it would fix a small portion of the system that is broken in order to make it work as it was originally intended to.

Adjournment Proceedings

On that note, I am going to give a final plea to the NDP opposition members. I urge them to give their heads a shake. Instead of supporting the poor convicted criminals who try to abuse the system again and again, I ask them to stand with the vast majority of Canadians and support the bill when it comes to vote.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 6:14 p.m., the time for debate has expired. The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 98, a recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, September 26, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

●(1815)

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate you on your recent appointment and I thank Ms. Savoie for her good work. I can name her in the House now that she is no longer a member of Parliament.

I am pleased today to get back to an issue that is very important to Canadian workers who have lost their jobs: employment insurance. When Parliament was still hard at work many weeks ago, I asked a question to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, which had to do with the funds used to continue operations of the Employment Insurance Financing Board of Canada, when millions are being cut in essential services at Service Canada.

We were in the middle of debate on the reforms to employment insurance found in Bill C-38, that Trojan Horse bill that was hiding all kinds of legislation that will have a number of negative effects on our economy, our social programs and our environment. I think that my question deserves more of an explanation than what I received as an answer. That is why I am here today.

Canadians deserve more transparency from this government. It must be accountable for its unjustified actions that affect Canadians. This is a matter that concerns me greatly. Millions of dollars in cuts have been made to Service Canada in recent years; available

resources should be allocated to providing the best possible services to Canadians, who, when applying for employment insurance, are already dealing with mostly casual employees.

In the view of the NDP and of thousands of Canadians, essential services for the unemployed have become inadequate and inaccessible. Workers all across the country who lose their jobs have to wait for weeks, if not months, without seeing hide nor hair of their first benefits. It has become practically impossible to speak to someone at Service Canada about one's own file and one's own situation.

The unemployed see their bills piling up; entire families are falling into complete financial peril. How many people do we know who can go two whole months with no income and still manage to meet their needs? Are we that rich in Canada that we are able to do that? Meanwhile, Service Canada employees can no longer keep up with the demand, or are let go as a result of the draconian cuts that followed the most recent budget.

The government claims that Canadians had a choice to make: eliminate the deficit or have good public services. That choice is completely absurd. Eliminating the deficit is an excellent idea as long as it is not done at the cost of public services and on the backs of Canadians. They need the front-line services and they must not be deprived of them.

Essential services must be maintained and this government will not be fulfilling its commitment to Canadians by closing hundreds of points of service and revamping appeal procedures in order to make them even less accessible. Accessibility to EI is at an all-time low in Canada. Under the Conservatives, although all workers pay into employment insurance, only 37% of them have access to it when they need it.

In conclusion, the government has put in place rules that are so strict that less than one in four people will henceforth qualify for the program. Let us also recall that the government has not contributed to the employment insurance fund since 1990. The contributors to the fund are people without jobs, people with jobs and employers.

●(1820)

[*English*]

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to respond on the continued support this government provides to unemployed Canadians.

The facts are simple. While the NDP members talk a lot, they do not act. When our government took unprecedented steps to invest in Canadians to support them through a tough economic period, the NDP voted against those measures.

While our economic action plan continues to provide skills and jobs for Canadians, the NDP is once again affirming its support for a job-killing carbon tax. NDP members can try to make excuses, but the simple fact is that their voting record demonstrates that they do not support investing in skills, in the trades or in economic development.

Adjournment Proceedings

Our government is committed to supporting unemployed Canadians who have lost their jobs through no fault of their own. We have provided unprecedented support while they are looking for work and upgrading their skills, but we think we can do better to help all Canadians who are unemployed in getting them back to work faster.

[Translation]

Last May, we announced that the employment insurance program would be improved to better serve the interests of Canadians. We are taking action to ensure that the program continues to be flexible and fair and helps Canadians to find jobs.

[English]

We know Canadians want to work, but they often face challenges finding jobs. This is why Canadians receiving EI benefits will now be able to receive enhanced job postings on a daily basis from multiple sources. This will ensure they are made aware of the jobs that are available in their local areas.

Our government will also define what is meant by suitable employment as well as what constitutes a reasonable job search. This will strengthen the requirements for EI claimants to actively look for and accept suitable work.

In addition, measures will be taken to connect EI with the temporary foreign worker program. This link will ensure that employers look to Canadians first to fill vacancies and that temporary foreign workers are employed where they are needed most.

Finally, in response to what we have heard during consultations on premium rate setting, we have introduced legislation to ensure predictability and stability in the EI premium rate.

Over the next few years, the CEIFB will continue to set the rate, but the government will limit the annual rate increase to 5¢ until the EI operating account is balanced. Once the account is returned to balance, the EI premium rate will continue to be limited to 5¢ changes from year to year. The premium rate will be set annually at a seven-year break-even rate to ensure that the EI operating account is in balance at the end of that period.

Given the changes in the EI rate-setting process announced in budget 2012, the government will review the size and structure of the CEIFB to ensure that independent rate-setting is done in the most cost-effective manner.

Let me briefly touch on another subject.

Just today the Minister of Human Resources tabled legislation that would support Canadians by making them eligible for sickness benefits should they fall ill while collecting parental benefits. The legislation would implement the new EI benefit for parents of critically ill children and new financial support for parents of murdered and missing children.

I hope my fellow hon. members can appreciate how this initiative would help employers, Canadians, their families and our economy.

[Translation]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Mr. Speaker, I am talking about hundreds of jobs lost. That means that hundreds of unemployed workers will not have access to employment insurance. Yet the parliamentary secretary is talking about the carbon tax.

What has that got to do with it? As our teenagers would say, whatever...

Hundreds of jobs have been cut at Service Canada. The 2011 Conservative budget cut funding for Service Canada by \$276 million. They slashed their budget by \$183.2 million in 2012. Where are they heading? That is unprecedented. They talk about sustainable development. They want to change the subject and go off on a tangent to talk about the carbon tax. We can also go off on a tangent. We have to take our workers into account. We have to think about our workers.

We are currently seeing an utter lack of commitment on the government's part towards the unemployed, just for the sake of an absurd Conservative logic. The unemployed do not want to lose their jobs. They want to work. They are victims of an economic turmoil that the government is not able to control. The Conservatives are not able to protect jobs and workers. With a fiasco like that, no wonder Canadians are losing confidence in their government.

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, it is important to ensure that the employment insurance program is working effectively and in the interest of all Canadians.

[English]

We announced measures that will help unemployed workers find jobs.

Today the Minister of Human Resources tabled legislation that would support Canadians by making them eligible for sickness benefits should they fall ill while collecting parental benefits. The bill would also implement the new EI benefit for parents of critically ill children and new financial support for parents of missing or murdered children.

Our government is delivering on our campaign commitment to Canadians.

Furthermore, I have to say that I was quite concerned when the NDP just yesterday evening voted against the ways and means motion put forward last night in order to introduce this bill.

I have just two questions for NDP members. What does the NDP have against providing financial support to parents to assist them in this most difficult time when their child is ill or missing or murdered? Why would the NDP not offer support to Canadian families in this time of need?

●(1825)

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise this evening to bring up again a matter that was first discussed when I put the question to the Prime Minister on April 24 of this year. It was one of those rare occasions when I put a question to the Prime Minister and he answered it himself.

Adjournment Proceedings

The question was to explore the contradiction between his government's position that in the Summit of the Americas, which deals with Latin America and Canada and the U.S., we would not allow Cuba to participate, and we joined the U.S. in this exclusion, while at the same time we are expanding our agreements for trade with China. We are expanding the access to Canadian resources for Chinese companies that are increasingly buying up Canadian energy resources and other resources. In answer to the question, the Prime Minister was, at best, attempting to be humorous, saying that China could not be in the Summit of the Americas because it is not in the Americas, and he went on to say that the Summit of the Americas was exclusively for countries that were recognized as democracies.

It weakens the Summit of the Americas to exclude a country as important to the region as Cuba, and we really are on thin ice here in terms of any kind of distinction that can be made in terms of human rights and reasons to exclude communist Cuba while embracing communist China. Having gone through records of Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, I see clearly that Cuba is making far more progress than China at being open to, for instance, religious freedoms.

In Cuba in March there was an open mass in which Pope Benedict was able to perform a mass for Cuban Catholics with President Castro in the front row. In contrast, in China any Roman Catholics who wish to have services hold them in houses in private and are at risk of arrest or detention if they are caught. Certainly the most repressive region on earth, according to many of the reports, is within China, with what is happening now in Tibet with suppression of Tibetan monks and the Tibetan Buddhist religion. We also see repression of other religious groups in China, whether Falun Gong or others. Freedom of religion does not exist at all in China. Since the Olympics in China, Human Rights Watch reports there has been a greater crackdown on freedom of expression within China. Regarding the record on capital punishment, the Chinese government executes prisoners at a very alarming rate. On the other hand, Cuba has commuted the sentences of some people who were on death row, and as of 2010, which is the last year for which I could find statistics, there were no prisoners in Cuba on death row.

There is very clearly some reason that the government prefers communist China to communist Cuba. The obvious reason is that communist China is prepared to pour billions of dollars into the oil sands. However, I ask members opposite if this is sufficient grounds for Canada to sell away our principles, our concerns for human rights, our concerns for freedom of religion or our concerns that we exert ourselves on the world stage as partners with other nations. Surely we should invest in and trade with Cuba. We should also invest in and trade with China. However, it is very important for Canadians to ask how much of Canada we want China to own.

If we are to proceed with a greater relationship with China, we surely must see the text of the agreement that the Prime Minister has already signed with President Hu of China, so we know what rights the Chinese corporations will have to sue Canada whenever they do not like our laws.

• (1830)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before I respond, may I take this opportunity to congratulate you on being elected to the office of

Deputy Speaker. We are looking forward to working constructively with you, having known you for many years.

In reply to my colleague from the Green Party, let me say there is absolutely no contradiction between our policies towards China and towards Cuba. We treat both of them with four Canadian values. We raise the issues of human rights when we have bilateral meetings with them, and Canada's foreign policy includes promotion of democracy, rule of law and human rights.

Canada has had with a relationship with Cuba that goes back to 1945, and not only that: Canada maintains a relationship as one of the only two countries in the hemisphere never to have broken diplomatic relations with the island.

Canada's policy on Cuba is different from that of the United States. We do not have an embargo against Cuba and we do not support their isolation. We believe that by engaging Cuba, we can support its move towards democracy and greater human rights. It is the same policy that we apply to China.

Canada supports democracy and human rights. It is very important for the member to understand what happened at the Summit of the Americas in 2001 in Quebec City, when the Conservative government was not in power. The leaders unanimously agreed that countries would only be joining OAS if they had showed movement toward democracy.

At this current time, the movement to democracy has not gone forward. That is why we are very adamant, but that does not mean that there is isolation toward Cuba; rather, we believe what we are doing here will open up Cuba.

On what the member is talking about, the great things that are happening in Cuba, this will encourage all of that. We will be partners with Cuba in trade and development and we will also be partners in the promotion of democracy and human rights in Cuba.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend, the hon. parliamentary secretary, for his response.

Surely there is more that Canada can do. I agree that it is spectacular in our history that through the entire uprising of the Cuba Revolution, which led to Fidel Castro becoming president of Cuba, we never closed our embassy in that whole time. We maintained consistent relations. I think that is something of which many Canadians can be proud, and surely now we could be the country in the hemisphere that says, in agreement with most of Latin America, that the U.S. has this wrong and that it is time to say that Cuba should be part of the Summit of the Americas so that we can have the kind of dialogue that takes place on a regional basis.

I would also suggest to my hon. friend the parliamentary secretary that the way in which we are currently embracing China means that our forthright advocacy for human rights and religious freedoms in China is taking a back seat to offering them up our resources as we offer ourselves as a compliant resource colony instead of as a partner that pushes for human rights.

Adjournment Proceedings

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear to my colleague and friend on the other side: the policy that we have towards Cuba is made in Canada, not in the U.S.A. This is our policy.

The member is absolutely right that we have not closed our mission and we have not closed diplomatic relations with Cuba. Thousands and thousands of Canadians go every day to Cuba; Cuba is a destination of choice for many Canadians.

In reference to China, the member talked about human rights and the sale of natural resources that she is claiming we are going to be selling off. Let me be very clear that the government engages with China on all issues of human rights. Whenever we meet with them, we talk bilaterally about issues of human rights and bring them to the Chinese leader.

Again, engaging with the Chinese leader is more important. As far as the resources are concerned, let me be very clear: they will comply with the investment act of Canada, not the investment act of China. They will follow our rules, our regulations, and that would become a key element, should that happen.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to answer the questions.

• (1835)

[*Translation*]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to add my congratulations on your appointment as Deputy Speaker of the House. It is a well-deserved distinction.

I would also like to thank the parliamentary secretary for staying here this evening to answer my questions. It is very much appreciated.

I would also like to congratulate our new colleague, the hon. member for Kitchener Centre, on his recent appointment to the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

I rise here this evening to follow up on a question from April 24. At that time, I had asked why the Conservatives were putting our fishery at risk. The minister denied that the changes to the Fisheries Act would jeopardize the fishing industry. He even went as far as claiming that, on the contrary, the changes will enhance habitat protection.

However, if we look closely at the changes to the Fisheries Act and particularly those dealing with fish habitat, it is clear that several of those changes pose a serious risk to the future of the fishing industry.

First of all, the definition of “fish habitat” was changed in the legislation. How can the Conservatives claim to protect fish stocks when the legislation does not even identify its habitat? This creates a legal uncertainty that precludes proper regulation.

Second, the definition of serious harm includes only the death of fish or any permanent alteration to, or destruction of, fish habitat. Such harm is extremely difficult to prove in court. How can we

count the number of dead fish in an isolated case? How can we determine whether this damage is permanent? It would be extremely difficult.

Third, the government introduced the notion of ecologically significant areas but did not define it. Who in this government will be able to define what is an ecologically significant area? And how will it be defined? For the Conservatives who abandoned Kyoto, it does not seem as though they even think the planet Earth is an ecologically significant area. What about a river or a marsh?

We know that each element of the ecosystem is essential to the survival of our fisheries resources. This means that every area is ecologically significant.

Fourth, the new law would protect fish that are part of a commercial, recreational or aboriginal fishery, or fish that support such a fishery. In light of all of the cuts being made to science and the experts being fired, this government does not seem to have the ability to establish the fish food chain with certainty.

Fifth, individuals will no longer have to conduct an environmental study before taking action that could harm fish. They can do it voluntarily or at the minister's request. In a world where companies are focused on externalizing costs, does the minister really think that environmental studies are going to happen?

Indeed, this gives the minister far too much discretionary power to decide whether or not to conduct an environmental study. This government is a leader when it comes to disrespecting the environment.

In short, these changes eliminate the possibility of legal action to protect the fishing industry from potential harm to fish habitat. This legislation will not protect our fisheries. It will undermine the Fisheries Act. By leaving out definitions, it gives the minister far too much leeway when it comes to protecting our environment and our fisheries.

It is extremely naive to believe that environmental assessments will be conducted on a voluntary basis. Is the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans taking his role as protector of the fisheries seriously?

[*English*]

Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I, too, congratulate you on your well-deserved appointment.

The Fisheries Act was established to define federal responsibilities for the management of fisheries and the related protection of fish and fish habitat. The habitat protection provisions of the Fisheries Act, before the recent amendments, were broad in scope, requiring the protection of all fish habitat regardless of their contribution to productive fisheries.

Adjournment Proceedings

Concerns about the broad and even unintended scope of the application of the regulatory regime have been raised by stakeholders across the country. Farmers and landowners have criticized the department over the years for applying its mandate and resources to protect areas with low or no contribution of fisheries, while sometimes insufficient attention is paid to the most significant threats. Also, significant new risks to fisheries have emerged that are not appropriately considered in the Fisheries Act, such as those posed by aquatic invasive species.

Stakeholders have asked us to focus on the significant impacts to significant fisheries. Stakeholders have also asked us to find ways to work more effectively with the provinces and conservation groups. They have asked us to apply our resources strategically to ensure that Canada's fisheries can benefit Canadians today and for future generations.

In responding to these challenges, the Government of Canada is renewing and strengthening its current approach to fisheries protection. As such, through the Jobs, Growth and Long-Term Prosperity Act, this government amended the Fisheries Act to help ensure the sustainability and ongoing productivity of Canada's commercial, recreational and aboriginal fisheries.

The amendments focus the government's protection efforts on recreational, commercial and aboriginal fisheries. They draw a distinction between vital waterways that support Canada's fisheries and those which contribute little to productive fisheries, such as drainage ditches and storm-water management ponds. They also identify and manage real threats to the fisheries, including direct impacts to fish, aquatic invasive species and habitat destruction. Yes, contrary to what opposition members have said, fish habitat and its protection are still an important element of the Fisheries Act.

The amended Fisheries Act provides us with the ability to identify ecologically significant areas and provide enhanced protection for these critical zones. In addition, infractions under the Fisheries Act are now aligned with what is set out in the Environmental Enforcement Act, which provides higher maximum penalties. The renewed Fisheries Act also provides us with the tools to develop effective regulations prohibiting the import, transport and possession of live aquatic invasive species, such as Asian carp which are threatening the Great Lakes.

It is important to add that the rules continue to protect waterways from pollution, as they have in the past, and provide additional clarity on the application of the law. Through these amendments, we are able to establish new, clear and accessible standards for projects in or near water. It makes good common sense that the government should be able to minimize or eliminate restrictions on routine activities that pose little to no threat and at the same time maintain

appropriate, reasonable and responsible protection for Canada's fisheries.

The Government of Canada takes the protection of our country's commercial, recreational and aboriginal fisheries very seriously. Given the extensive nature of the fisheries from coast to coast to coast, we must focus our efforts on the effective protection of these significant fisheries. Their long-term sustainability and productivity are our priority.

● (1840)

Mr. Philip Toone: Mr. Speaker, I have some difficulty with the answer. I thank the parliamentary secretary for having presented the government's position, but I question the validity of the answer.

The idea that we had to reduce habitat protection in order to protect Canadian fisheries from Asian carp does not make much sense to me. Frankly, I do not follow the logic. If we reduce habitat protection, we are actually putting an awful lot of fisheries at risk. Asian carp, as I understand it, is a regulatory question, and I do not think we needed to change the Fisheries Act in order to defend Canadian waterways from Asian carp or any other invasive species for that matter. We have to protect fisheries in order to ensure that future generations can benefit from the same wealth that various coastal communities enjoyed in the past. I believe that the government is completely on the wrong track.

I would like the parliamentary secretary to comment on how invasive species and reducing habitat protection is in any way coherent.

Mr. Randy Kamp: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is missing the point. The changes we made to the fisheries protection section of the act, and are now implementing by developing the new fisheries protection program, are to develop a new focus on the protection of Canada's fisheries.

One of the threats to Canada's fisheries is aquatic invasive species. We felt it necessary to include in these changes the ability to make regulations to control them. Separate from that, another threat to the sustainability and ongoing productivity of Canada's fisheries is the effects on fish habitat. We have not reduced the protection of fish habitat. We are just focusing our protection in a more coherent way.

● (1845)

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

(The House adjourned at 6:45 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Thursday, September 20, 2012

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Canadian Security Intelligence Service	
Mr. Toews	10187
Helping Families in Need Act	
Ms. Finley	10187
Bill C-44. Introduction and first reading	10187
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	10187
Committees of the House	
Procedure and House Affairs	
Mr. Preston	10187
Mr. O'Connor	10187
Motion	10187
(Motion agreed to)	10187
Business of Supply	
Ms. Turmel	10187
Motion	10187
(Motion agreed to)	10187
Committees of the House	
Procedure and House Affairs	
Mr. Preston	10187
Motion for concurrence	10187
(Motion agreed to)	10188
Petitions	
Service Canada	
Mr. Tweed	10188
Rights of the Unborn	
Mr. Tweed	10188
Blood Supply	
Mr. Hyer	10188
Pensions	
Mr. Lamoureux	10188
The Environment	
Mr. Tilson	10188
Community Access Program	
Mr. McGuinty	10188
Rights of the Unborn	
Mr. Benoit	10188
Abortion	
Mr. Benoit	10188
Child and Youth Nutrition Strategy	
Ms. Duncan (Etobicoke North)	10188
The Environment	
Ms. May	10188
Questions on the Order Paper	
Mr. Lukiwski	10189

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Business of Supply	
Opposition Motion—Canadian Economy	
Mr. Mulcair	10189
Motion	10189
Mrs. Glover	10191
Mr. Lamoureux	10192
Ms. Nash	10192
Mr. Warkentin	10192
Ms. May	10193
Mrs. Glover	10193
Ms. Nash	10196
Mr. Cuzner	10196
Mr. Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	10196
Mr. Donnelly	10197
Mr. Goodale	10197
Mr. Rafferty	10199
Mr. Payne	10199
Mr. McKay	10199
Mr. Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	10200
Ms. Nash	10201
Mr. Lamoureux	10201
Ms. Nash	10201
Mrs. Glover	10203
Mr. Donnelly	10203
Mr. Lamoureux	10203
Ms. Mathysen	10203
Mr. Butt	10205
Mr. Lamoureux	10205
Mr. Adler	10205
Mr. Caron	10208
Mr. Lamoureux	10208
Mrs. Ambler	10209
Mr. Hyer	10209
Mr. Harris (St. John's East)	10209
Mr. Harris (St. John's East)	10209
Mr. Easter	10211
Ms. Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	10211
Mr. Godin	10211
Mr. Lamoureux	10213
Mr. Seeback	10213
Mr. Jean	10213
Ms. Doré Lefebvre	10216
Mr. Casey	10216
Mrs. Gallant	10217
Mr. Caron	10217
Mr. Caron	10217
Mr. Lamoureux	10219
Mrs. Glover	10219
Ms. Turmel	10220

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medals	
Mr. Carmichael.....	10221
Quebec Market Gardeners	
Ms. Quach.....	10221
Armenia	
Mr. Chisu.....	10221
Employment Insurance	
Mr. MacAulay.....	10221
Yukon	
Mr. Leef.....	10222
The Environment	
Mr. Stewart.....	10222
The Economy	
Ms. Adams.....	10222
Jim Jordan	
Mr. Brown (Leeds—Grenville).....	10222
Atikamekw of Manawan First Nation	
Ms. Raynault.....	10222
Enhancing RCMP Accountability Act	
Ms. Findlay.....	10223
Public Service of Canada	
Mr. Dewar.....	10223
The Economy	
Mr. Trottier.....	10223
Syria	
Ms. Sgro.....	10223
The Environment	
Mr. Benoit.....	10223
Gasoline Prices	
Ms. Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine).....	10224
Leader of the New Democratic Party of Canada	
Mr. Butt.....	10224

ORAL QUESTIONS

Employment	
Mr. Mulcair.....	10224
Mr. Harper.....	10224
Mr. Mulcair.....	10224
Mr. Harper.....	10224
Federal-Provincial Relations	
Mr. Mulcair.....	10224
Mr. Harper.....	10225
Foreign Investment	
Ms. Nash.....	10225
Mr. Lake.....	10225
Ms. Nash.....	10225
Mr. Lake.....	10225
Employment Insurance	
Mr. Coderre.....	10225

Ms. Finley.....	10225
Mr. Coderre.....	10225
Ms. Finley.....	10225
Mr. Coderre.....	10226
Ms. Finley.....	10226
National Defence	
Mr. Harris (St. John's East).....	10226
Ms. Ambrose.....	10226
Ms. Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue).....	10226
Ms. Ambrose.....	10226
Mr. Kellway.....	10226
Ms. Ambrose.....	10226
Chief Electoral Officer	
Mr. Scott.....	10227
Mr. Uppal.....	10227
Mr. Scott.....	10227
Mr. Uppal.....	10227
Ethics	
Mr. Boucher.....	10227
Mr. Poilievre.....	10227
Mr. Boucher.....	10227
Mr. Poilievre.....	10227
Mr. Angus.....	10227
Mr. Clement.....	10228
Mr. Angus.....	10228
Mr. Poilievre.....	10228
Pensions	
Mr. Garneau.....	10228
Mr. Clement.....	10228
Employment Insurance	
Mr. Easter.....	10228
Ms. Finley.....	10228
Mr. Cuzner.....	10228
Ms. Finley.....	10229
Consumer Product Safety	
Mr. Thibeault.....	10229
Mr. Carrie.....	10229
Ms. Papillon.....	10229
Mr. Carrie.....	10229
International Trade	
Mr. Davies (Vancouver Kingsway).....	10229
Mr. Fast.....	10229
Mr. Davies (Vancouver Kingsway).....	10229
Mr. Fast.....	10229
Infrastructure	
Mrs. Ambler.....	10230
Mr. Menzies.....	10230
Fisheries and Oceans	
Mr. Chisholm.....	10230
Mr. Ashfield.....	10230
Mr. Chisholm.....	10230
Mr. Ashfield.....	10230
Mr. Donnelly.....	10230
Mr. Ashfield.....	10230

Mr. Toone	10231
Mr. Ashfield	10231
The Environment	
Ms. Duncan (Etobicoke North)	10231
Mr. Kent	10231
National Defence	
Mr. McKay	10231
Ms. Ambrose	10231
Pensions	
Ms. Mathysen	10231
Ms. Finley	10231
Ms. Blanchette-Lamothe	10231
Ms. Finley	10232
Employment Insurance	
Mr. Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	10232
Ms. Finley	10232
Aboriginal Affairs	
Ms. Bennett	10232
Mr. Rickford	10232
Mr. Bevington	10232
Mr. Rickford	10232
Citizenship and Immigration	
Mrs. Gallant	10232
Mr. Dykstra	10232
Poverty	
Ms. Charlton	10233
Ms. Finley	10233
The Economy	
Mr. Hyer	10233
Mr. Menzies	10233
Points of Order	
Oral Questions	
Mr. Thibeault	10233
Business of the House	
Mr. Cullen	10233
Mr. Van Loan	10233

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Business of Supply	
Opposition Motion—The Canadian Economy	
Motion	10234
Ms. Turmel	10234
Mr. Menzies	10234
Mr. Lamoureux	10235
Ms. Blanchette-Lamothe	10235
Mr. Butt	10235

Mr. Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)	10238
Mr. Lamoureux	10238
Ms. Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	10238
Ms. Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	10239
Mr. Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)	10239
Ms. Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	10239
Ms. May	10241
Mr. Lamoureux	10241
Mr. Chisholm	10241
Mr. Seeback	10242
Mr. Lamoureux	10243
Ms. Murray	10243
Mr. Cullen	10245
Ms. Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	10245
Ms. Fry	10245
Mr. Cullen	10247
Mr. Cullen	10247
Mr. Scarpaleggia	10247
Mr. Cullen	10248
Mrs. McLeod	10249
Mr. Valeriote	10250
Mr. Bevington	10250
Mr. Fletcher	10251
Division on motion deemed demanded and deferred	10252

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Corrections and Conditional Release Act

Ms. James	10252
Bill C-293. Third reading	10252
Ms. Doré Lefebvre	10253
Mr. Sorenson	10253
Ms. Doré Lefebvre	10254
Mr. Scarpaleggia	10255
Mr. Chicoine	10257
Ms. Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	10258
Ms. James	10259
Division on motion deferred	10260

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

Employment Insurance

Mrs. Day	10260
Ms. Leitch	10260

Foreign Affairs

Ms. May	10261
Mr. Obhrai	10262

Fisheries and Oceans

Mr. Toone	10263
Mr. Kamp	10263

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