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Tuesday, March 10, 2015



Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

CONTENTS

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

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, March 10, 2015

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1005)

[*English*]

CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the 2014 annual report of the Canadian Human Rights Commission.

[*Translation*]

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

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[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

HEALTH

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the ninth report of the Standing Committee on Health, entitled “Vaping: Towards a Regulatory Framework for e-Cigarettes”. Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report. I would also like to mention that the report was unanimous as well.

* * *

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-656, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (fetal alcohol disorder).

He said: Mr. Speaker, it gives me pleasure to introduce this private member's bill, which will amend the Criminal Code to establish a procedure for the assessment of individuals who are involved in the criminal justice system and who may suffer from fetal alcohol disorder. It requires the court to consider a determination that the offender suffers from fetal alcohol disorder as a mitigating factor in sentencing.

A similar bill was earlier introduced and then withdrawn in this Parliament. This bill builds on the previously introduced bill by adopting some recommendations from the Canadian Bar Association that require Correctional Service of Canada to also recognize the existence of fetal alcohol disorder as a disability within that system.

At the justice committee we are currently engaged in a study of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. It is clear that there is a need for legislation. It is also clear that the original version of this bill that was introduced had the support of all parties. My hope is that will result in the fast-tracking of this bill, which is an improvement on the earlier one.

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

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Question No. 936 will be answered today.

[*Text*]

Question No. 936—**Mr. Craig Scott:**

With respect to the government and activities in Sudan or South Sudan of oil and mining companies incorporated in Canada or of subsidiaries of such companies: (a) has the government provided any assistance of any kind, including via the Export Development Corporation, consular assistance or assistance of any other government officials, to a company called the State Oil Company Canada Ltd; (b) which Canadian oil and mining companies, or subsidiaries of such companies, does the government know to be operating either (i) in Sudan, (ii) in South Sudan; and (c) is it the policy of the government to encourage and facilitate the investment of Canadian oil and mining companies in Sudan and in South Sudan, (i) if so, in what ways, (ii) if not, does the government have a policy to counsel against, discourage and prohibit such investment and, if so, through what measures?

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with regard to international trade, the Government of Canada does not have any records or information with regard to the provision of any assistance of any kind to a company called State Oil Company Canada Ltd. The Government of Canada is aware that State Oil Company of Canada and Orca Gold Inc. are operating in the mining and oil sectors in Sudan. This information is publicly available on their respective websites.

Speaker's Ruling

The Government of Canada has implemented a number of national measures against Sudan in response to the human rights and humanitarian situation. These measures include withholding commercial support services. In addition, Canada has implemented United Nations sanctions towards Sudan, UNSC 1591, in connection with the conflict in Darfur, including an arms embargo and an asset freeze and travel ban directed against designated persons. This does not, however, prohibit Canadians from facilitating or initiating business contacts with Sudan, so long as they act in accordance with international sanctions.

Since July 2011, the Government of Canada has offered trade services to Canadian companies wishing to do business in the Republic of South Sudan through the High Commission in Nairobi. Canada's commercial footprint in South Sudan is minimal, due in large part to concerns about political stability, the high costs of doing business and lack of up-to-date market intelligence. A private sector investment conference in Juba took place in December 2013, with Canadian funding to support a session on conflict sensitivity in investment.

The Government of Canada advises against all non-essential travel to Sudan. See <http://travel.gc.ca/destinations/sudan>. The Government of Canada advises against all travel to South Sudan. See <http://travel.gc.ca/destinations/south-sudan>.

Export Development Canada does not have any records or information with regard to the provision of any assistance of any kind to a company called State Oil Company Canada Ltd.

[*English*]

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

[*Translation*]

POINTS OF ORDER

PROCEDURE DURING VOTES — SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to respond to the point of order raised by the Chief Government Whip on February 19, 2015, regarding decorum during the taking of recorded divisions.

I would like to thank the hon. Chief Government Whip for having raised this matter, as well as the hon. House Leader of the Official Opposition and the members for Winnipeg Centre and Ottawa—Orléans for their comments.

[*English*]

In raising this matter, the Chief Government Whip sought clarification of acceptable practices during a recorded division, further to one that had taken place earlier that day. In particular, he requested that the Chair clarify each member's obligation to remain in their seats for the duration of a recorded division, from the time the question is put to the House to the announcement of the results.

The requirements of members during a recorded division are clearly laid out in Standing Order 16, which states:

When the Speaker is putting a question, no Member shall enter, walk out of or across the House, or make any noise or disturbance.

House of Commons Procedure and Practice, second edition, provides further explanation when it states at page 580:

From the time the Speaker begins to put the question until the results of the vote are announced, Members are not to enter, leave or cross the House, nor may they make any noise or disturbance.

Members must be in their assigned seats in the Chamber and have heard the motion read in order for their votes to be recorded.

[*Translation*]

In addition, successive rulings have provided sound guidance for the Speaker in this respect.

On the requirement for members to be present in the chamber to hear the question, the current Deputy Chair of Committees of the Whole stated on June 5, 2014, at page 6257 of the *Debates of the House of Commons*:

In terms of who is or is not eligible to vote, the issue is that the member needs to be in the Chamber in order to hear the question. That is the test for whether they can vote or not.

[*English*]

However, and more directly to the point raised by the Chief Government Whip, each member's obligation does not end there, as they must also remain in their seats until the results of the vote are announced. As Speaker Milliken reminded the House on October 28, 2003, at page 8884 of the *Debates*:

I would urge hon. members that if they want to have their vote count, they must remain in their seats from the time the vote begins until the result of the vote is announced.

Where there is a question as to whether either of these requirements has not been met, our practice typically allows the member to clarify the situation for the House, with the House accepting the member's word, as it must. As Standing Order 1.1 states:

The Speaker may alter the application of any Standing or special Order or practice of the House in order to permit the full participation in the proceedings of the House of any Member with a disability.

Needless to say, the explanation given by the member for Winnipeg Centre, in which he indicated that he was temporarily disabled, self-inflicted though it may have been, was deemed satisfactory to the Deputy Speaker, and there the matter has ended. It would not be the first time that the House, in the face of a situation without known precedent, finds a way to accommodate a member in need.

I would like to thank all members for their attention in this matter and for their continued support in maintaining order and decorum during the voting process.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1010)

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—GOVERNMENT INVESTMENTS

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP) moved:

That, in light of sustained high unemployment since the 2008 recession and the long term downward trend in job quality since 1989 under successive Liberal and Conservative governments, as documented by CIBC, the House call on the government to make the first priority of Budget 2015 investment in measures that stimulate the economy by creating and protecting sustainable, full-time, middle-class jobs in high-paying industries in all regions of Canada and abandoning its costly and unfair \$2 billion income-splitting proposal.

He said: Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I would like to thank you for that very fair and justified ruling that you just gave to the House, which perhaps even set a new precedent for decorum. It was in fact brief and to the point, which was helpful to all members.

[Translation]

I would like to begin by saying that I will be sharing my time with my esteemed colleague from Newton—North Delta.

Canada's economy has a number of weaknesses. That is why we, the official opposition, feel it is essential to have a debate on our economy today.

I know that my Conservative colleagues would rather talk about something else—anything else, actually—but like the vast majority of Canadians, we want a debate and some answers about the economic realities we are facing, including a very high unemployment rate, a weak economy and the deterioration in employment quality over the past generation that is likely to be long term, according to a new report by CIBC.

We believe that the government does not have a plan B. Canadians know that the Conservative government is only interested in developing the oil sector of the economy. It ignores the rest. It is deeply obsessed with a very controversial pipeline and has nothing to say about other aspects of our economy. The NDP is in favour of a highly diversified and more just economy.

[English]

Let us put first things first. We have to understand that despite the Conservatives' current obsession with attempting to change the channel away from economic matters to just about anything else, there is a responsibility for us as parliamentarians to take on the challenges of the day. A clear challenge that is facing us as Canadians and Canadian legislators is the economy.

The statistics prove that we have not seen such worrisome trends since the 2008 recession. This was most recently highlighted in a report by the CIBC, which shows that job quality in Canada has fallen to its lowest level in a generation.

What does that mean? Job quality, as measured, has moved Canadians away from good-paying, middle-class, secure employment to increasingly part-time, insecure, and low-paying jobs that do not support families.

Business of Supply

We would think that this would be a preoccupation for a Conservative government that claims to make such great strides on the economy, but, over a generation, we have seen the quality of employment and jobs in Canada steadily decline under both Conservative and Liberal governments. We would think that the government would seek ways to enhance the opportunities for Canadians and seek ways to solve some of the productivity conundrums that we have been having for far too long, yet the choices being made by the Conservatives are most perplexing because they do not address the needs of the economy.

Sure, the \$2 billion income-splitting scheme that the government committed to, thereby spending a surplus before it had it, helps the top 15% of Canadian income earners. It is fine for the wealthiest Canadians under a Conservative government. Doubling the TFSA will overwhelmingly help that same group of Canadians. It has been demonstrated in report after report that there are not that many middle-income and low-income Canadians with an extra \$11,000 burning a hole in their pocket at the end of the year. However, in a Conservative reality, the people who do have that kind of money, the people who can split their incomes and take advantage of the \$2 billion Conservative scheme at the highest end of the Canadian wealth spectrum, are the priority for the government.

They are not the priority for the NDP.

We saw most recently in the Statistics Canada report in January that we actually lost full-time employment, even in a month when we supposedly did well. What was created, again, was part-time, insecure work.

• (1015)

Over the last year, we have seen the Canadian population rate grow at almost double the rate of job growth in this country. That should worry anybody, because the trend is unsustainable if our population is growing almost twice as fast as new jobs and those jobs being created are precarious, part-time, low-paying jobs. Not only are Conservative practices with regard to our environment unsustainable, but we now see that their practices with regard to our economy are unsustainable, and they are leaving a debt.

We know the Conservatives have added somewhere north of \$155 billion to the Canadian debt in their tenure. We know they have lost 400,000 manufacturing jobs, just since the Conservatives took office. We know that 200,000 more people are unemployed today in Canada than before the recession, yet the Conservatives claim that everything is perfectly fine and there is nothing to do here.

In fact, things are so good, according to the Conservatives, that they have an extra \$2 billion kicking around to help out the wealthiest 15% of Canadians. They have so much money right now and the economy is doing so well that the Conservatives were able to dump in more than \$1 billion on these self-promoting ads that constantly interrupt every hockey game anyone has looked at in the last few years—to do what? They spend more money by far on these ads than they do on food inspection or rail safety. They do more in self-promotion than they do to help out Canadian workers.

Business of Supply

We see youth unemployment doubling the rate of the national average. We know that has not only short-term impacts on young Canadians and their families, but it has long-term impacts on their prospects. For those young people entering into such a weak workforce, it means that they do not go into the professions for which they are trained, with the skills they have invested in. They have to take whatever job might be available in a tough economic market.

We see, in fact, that women's participation in the workforce is at its lowest rate since 2002. For women considering going to work, one of the main factors and principles are the family policies that exist around going to work.

This is why New Democrats highlight and put a circle around the stain of Conservative policies with regard to our economy; the economy that they just do not want to talk about anymore, if members have noticed. We cannot seem to get the Minister of Finance up on his feet in question period anymore. He has been benched and missing in action. Yet Canadians want to know where the solutions are coming from. Where are the ideas coming from? Where is the budget coming from?

Crossing their fingers and hoping things get better in the oil markets is not exactly a plan for the Canadian economy. In fact, over-focussing on just one commodity, as the Conservatives have done with regard to oil for the last 10 years, has put Canada in a precarious place when oil prices fell, as they inevitably do. Yet we have a government in panic mode suggesting that, "Well, we're just going to wait a few more months, and Canadians are going to have to wait with us".

Well, New Democrats are not waiting. We are putting forward proposals that will actually address the needs of the Canadian economy.

Take, for instance, the New Democrat proposal put forward by our leader to lower the small business taxes in this country. Small businesses account for 40% of our GDP and involve 8 million Canadians. Almost 80% of all new jobs are created by small businesses. When we put forward that motion in the House of Commons, Conservatives voted against it, joined by Liberals for some reason.

When we put forward a motion that would help the manufacturing sector, because we have lost 400,000 jobs in that sector, Conservatives, again joined by Liberals, voted against it.

When New Democrats put forward the idea of an innovation tax fund to help us with our productivity and innovation, because Canada lags behind the rest of the world with respect to research and development, we saw Conservatives, again joined by Liberals, voting against it.

New Democrats are going to continue to support a \$15 minimum wage, the \$15 affordable child care to help Canadians get back to work, and an economy that works for Canadians, not against them. We will support an economy that will put Canadians back to work. We will form a government in 2015 that is focused on the interests of Canadians and not on the narrow partisan interests of a government just hoping and praying for re-election.

• (1020)

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his speech. I listened to it intently.

One of the things the member talked about was a \$15 national daycare program. I want to know how the NDP plans to put this big bureaucratic program together, which would not support people in the rural parts of the country, which would not support people on shift work, which could support people who are working during the day, and which would not support people in small businesses who have variable work shifts and variable times when they work and when they do not.

Also, part of the NDP plan involves the provinces contributing literally millions of taxpayers' dollars to this big bureaucratic program. However, we know that many of the provinces across the country are cash strapped and would not be able to participate.

I would like to know how the member can justify putting this big bureaucratic program together, which would only support a very small segment of society and would never be able to be implemented in many provinces, because the provinces would not be able to make their share of the payments.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, suddenly, a small segment of society is every working parent in the country. We think that is a much larger one.

Listening to my friend, I think the Conservatives sometimes suffer from a lack of ambition. When the debate was on in Canadian politics about whether to create a public education system, Conservatives would have said that it is just some big, bureaucratic institution. When New Democrats put forward the idea of a public health care system, I am sure Conservatives of the day asked why we would possibly want a big, bureaucratic health care system. Why? It is because we on this side of the House believe in equality. We believe in opportunity.

I come from rural Canada. I ran a small business in rural Canada. The lack of perception from the Conservatives, saying that rural Canada cannot provide any affordable child care spaces, is a deep lack of ambition and a lack of understanding about rural Canada. That small business owners do not want access to affordable child care is a complete misunderstanding of the small business community in Canada, because they do. I know they do.

That is why New Democrats stand with the small business community. That is why the CFIB, the chamber, and the Canadian manufacturers association all got on board with our policies. I simply do not understand why Conservatives cannot see the light.

Business of Supply

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member is wrong in good part when he makes the assertion that small businesses support his leader's approach to reducing small business loans. The Liberal Party voted against it because it was somewhat of a "dumb policy", to quote others. At the end of the day, there would be no incentive for small businesses to hire. This resolution is about hiring, getting more Canadians employed.

We can compare that approach to what the Liberals have proposed with the EI premium exemption, which would have generated tens of thousands of jobs in every region of the country. Independent, outside stakeholders acknowledged that would happen if the House had adopted that particular policy.

Liberals governed at a time when they inherited a 14%-plus unemployment rate and brought it down to 6%, and that was part of the equation.

Why does the NDP continue not to acknowledge good ideas that would get valuable jobs and get Canadians employed, as opposed—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I ask all members to keep both their questions and their answers to one minute.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, who are we going to believe on this one: Liberals who say that the only solution to fix the Canadian economy is to raid the EI fund again? They took \$56 billion out of it the first time around when they were in office. I guess they got used to the habit of just dipping into a fund and stealing from workers and employers, who put into it for employment insurance, to pad all of their schemes. I do not know how much sponsorship scandal money came out of the EI fund, but we know \$56 billion came out.

We believe in lowering the small business tax rate, not a loan. Maybe the confusion the Liberal Party has is that it voted against something without understanding it, because the proposal from us was to lower it by 20%. Here is what Dan Kelly, the head of the CFIB said about it. He said:

Cutting the small business tax rate by nearly 20% will provide a big boost to small business owners across the country and help them create jobs.

Therefore, who are we going to believe? Are we going to believe the head of the CFIB or the Liberals with yet another EI ripoff scheme that would not create jobs and would only hurt workers and employers in our country?

• (1025)

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to second the motion and thank my colleague for his very powerful introduction.

My colleague and I both have the great privilege of representing constituents from ridings in beautiful British Columbia. That is perhaps one of the reasons we are both so passionate about the motion before us today. Youth unemployment is inexcusably high in B.C., and the government is failing our young people. They cannot find jobs, and yet the government is focused on income splitting. It is almost a joke. That is why, with today's motion, New Democrats are suggesting a plan that would actually help working and middle-class Canadians.

I would like to invite the finance minister or the Minister of Employment and Social Development to Surrey-Newton, where I am

from, and have them tell the young people there, who are desperate to get decent-paying jobs and cannot, about income splitting. They will see how much it resonates with them. They will not be surprised to learn that it does not resonate at all.

The fact of the matter is simple. Income splitting is not helping young people, it is not helping small businesses, and it is not helping middle-class families. Therefore, today New Democrats are calling on the government to take concrete steps to help create good quality jobs, protect and improve existing jobs, and more broadly address the challenges facing the middle class. We are looking for the government to support some practical first steps, including a better workplace minimum wage, fairer pensions, and investments in small businesses. Job quality is at an all-time low. Let us fix it.

Do members know that 98% of all businesses in Canada are small businesses that have fewer than 100 employees? They are the backbone of our country's economy. Surrey is full of small businesses. Surrey Board of Trade CEO Anita Huberman is focused, as is the whole board, on helping businesses grow and thrive in Surrey, with the following goals: business attraction, business research, business training, policy and development advocacy, workplace development, and youth entrepreneurship.

Mr. Speaker, did you know that small businesses contribute almost 40% of Canada's GDP? Small businesses employ nearly 8 million Canadians and created 78% of all new private-sector jobs between 2002 and 2012. Therefore, why are the Conservatives ignoring Canada's small business owners in favour of supporting wealthier, more profitable corporations? They should help Anita and the Surrey Board of Trade grow our community and commit to creating and protecting sustainable, full-time, middle-class jobs in high-paying industries in all regions of Canada.

Since 2006, the Conservatives have cut the corporate tax rate for the wealthiest companies by over 25%, reducing the tax rate from 22% to 15%. Meanwhile, the Conservatives cut taxes on job-creating small business owners by only a mere 1%. Why are the Conservatives not investing more in job-growing businesses?

Business of Supply

When I go home to Surrey-Newton and North Delta this weekend, I will be telling my constituents that New Democrats stood in the House of Commons this week and called on the Conservatives to take immediate action to boost job creation and grow our economy in budget 2015. I am going to tell them that we stood up for working and middle-class families and demanded that the Conservative government cancel its costly income-splitting plan and use those funds to invest in improving job quality for the benefit of all Canadians, not just the rich few.

We are asking the government to implement our plan to help create well-paying jobs in a diversified economy, because New Democrats want an economy that is fair to the middle class. This handout to the wealthy, the Conservatives' income-splitting scheme, will leave regular Canadians falling further behind, and it must be scrapped. New Democrats want a budget that focuses on diversifying the Canadian economy rather than putting all our eggs in one basket. I am very proud to be with a leader of the official opposition who understands this.

● (1030)

I truly hope that when I go home this weekend I can tell the people of Newton—North Delta that the Conservative government supported this motion. There are no more excuses for the government. It can try to change the channel all it likes, but it is failing on the economic grounds because there are too many people without decent-paying jobs.

Over the last decade of Liberal and Conservative governments, we have lost more than half a million manufacturing jobs. There are still nearly 1.3 million Canadians unemployed. Although employment increased in January, it was entirely driven by part-time employment with 47,200 part-time jobs created while close to 12,000 full-time jobs actually disappeared. As well, there has been a major decline in full-time employment for men in our community. We already know that it is very high for women.

Over the last 12 months, employment growth was a meagre 0.7%. Long-term unemployment is still close to its post-crisis peak. Average hours worked remain low, and the proportion of involuntary part-time workers continues to be elevated.

The participation rate, the number of people who are employed or actively seeking work, trended downward all through 2014 and hit its lowest level since 2000. This has been a major contributor to the decreased unemployment rate. As unemployed people give up on looking for work, they are no longer counted in the official unemployment rate, which can cause the rate to go down. The reality is different. The youth unemployment rate is still nearly double the rate for all workers at 12.8% across the country.

The Business Improvement Areas in my riding has a mission statement that goes like this: "Creating a vibrant, safe, and livable downtown; fostering positive community and government partnerships; supporting positive investment climate; collaborating for a safer community; promoting revitalization and community development." In order to foster a vibrant community, we need jobs. In order to have jobs, we need investments in small businesses. In order to have government partnerships, we need a government that listens and responds.

I will conclude with a summary of what we want from the government. In light of sustained high unemployment since the 2008 recession and the long-term downward trend in job quality since 1989 under successive Liberal and Conservative governments, as documented by CIBC, the House calls on the government to make the first priority of budget 2015 investment in measures that stimulate the economy by creating and protecting sustainable, full-time, middle-class jobs in high-paying industries in all regions of Canada. We are urging the government to abandon its costly and unfair \$2-billion income-splitting proposal.

At this stage, I also want to say that when we are in ridings, we have the privilege of meeting with our constituents. Our constituents include the business community. Right now, when I have discussions with the business community in my riding, they tell me that there are huge ways that we as parliamentarians could be helping them. We could be helping them by addressing issues like the transaction fees on credit cards. Every time a credit card is used in a store, the business has to pay a transaction fee that is incredibly high.

I was also surprised, but not really, that the much of the business community is supportive of the \$15 minimum wage that we have supported for the federal sector. What I have heard is that businesses are willing to pay that much because then at least people will stay in the job. They know that \$15 an hour is still not that great as a wage but it will allow people to buy their groceries. Businesses know that those people will spend the money in their communities.

● (1035)

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am so happy for the member's speech because it shows clearly what we are actually doing, which is reducing taxes for small, medium-sized and large businesses. Let me give an example that I hope she will tell the people in her riding about.

In my community, which is a proud manufacturing community historically, recently we helped a company do a \$63-million expansion with a \$10-million loan, creating some 500 well-paying jobs. This is heavy forging for the natural resource extraction industry.

We helped another company with a \$500,000 loan that is completely paid back now to the government. It went from 23 employees to 136 employees within two years of that injection.

I gave those examples because small, medium-sized and large businesses need lower taxation to keep them here and keep them from moving to other jurisdictions. Let me say that, from a community that had 30% unemployment in 1980 to a community that had 6.7% unemployment, our programs are working.

Business of Supply

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague across the way for his passion at representing what happens in his riding. However, when I talk to businesses in my community and in other parts of Canada where I have travelled in my critic role, I hear from small and medium-sized businesses that they are not getting the support they need. We have lowered the taxes for some of the largest oil companies and the international corporations that made billions in profit. We know that they have certain offshore bank accounts and they are not reinvesting in our country and they are not growing jobs. What the small business community really needs is some tangible support and some real ways of supporting job growth right here in our communities. It is when we invest in small businesses that any increase in employment and the wealth that is earned get reinvested in our communities because that is where people live and learn and it does not leave our country and go into offshore accounts.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, whether it was Jim Flaherty or the leader of the Liberal Party, we have been very clear on income splitting and a small percentage of Canadians benefiting at a substantial cost. The middle class is subsidizing hundreds of millions of dollars every year. Jim Flaherty, the leader of the Liberal Party and other members of the House are right that we should oppose that measure.

Infrastructure is needed in every corner of our country. This is something that generates job opportunities and improves the quality of living for all Canadians. By building on our infrastructure, we are creating additional wealth in the long term. I wonder if the member might comment on the importance of investing in infrastructure today, unlike what the Conservatives are not doing by cutting back 90% of infrastructure dollars actually being spent this year.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, I always find it interesting that, as my colleague made his question, he found it so difficult to include the leader of the official opposition who one of the first people to come out and speak against income splitting.

I absolutely believe that we need to be investing in infrastructure. In my riding alone, we have a dire need for public transit. Unless the federal government partners with the provinces and with the municipalities and delivers for infrastructure development, we are not going to be able to replace our bridges or improve our ferry services, or build light public transit in the Lower Mainland. There must absolutely be investment in infrastructure, but also let us give credit where it is due. It is only the NDP and its amazing leader who are speaking out for small and medium-sized businesses and not the party at that end.

● (1040)

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to speak on this NDP motion. It is good to see that the members opposite are, for once, taking a slight interest in speaking about job creation with today's motion. We welcome them to this debate. We have made this a priority since being first elected in 2006. However, they have taken a stance that I strongly disagree with.

The proposition that this government has done little to create jobs and growth is simply wrong. I welcome the opportunity to set the record straight and I would like to thank New Democrats for giving

us the opportunity to speak about our record on creating jobs, economic growth and long-term prosperity for all Canadians.

Today, I will emphasize some policy measures that we have taken to lower taxes and create jobs since forming government. Unlike the members opposite, our experience has been with lowering taxes. While they have not met a tax they have never liked, we have created 1.2 million net new jobs since the depths of the economic recession in July of 2009, 85% of which are full-time jobs and 80% of which are in the private sector. Nearly two-thirds of these jobs have been created in high-wage sectors. This is one of the best job-creation records in the G7.

This is in complete contrast to the Liberals and the NDP, who would saddle job creators and the workers they employ with high taxes and high debt. Under our low-tax plan, more Canadians are working today than at any other time in the history of our country. At 6.6%, Canada is now enjoying its lowest unemployment rate in six years.

How did we get here, coming from the largest economic recession since the Great Depression of the 1930s? We started with innovation. We encouraged innovation, which has been essential to economic growth. That is why our government remains committed to supporting innovation in Canada.

As previously stated by government members in the House, we have demonstrated this by providing millions of dollars in support every year to regional development agencies like the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, the Western Economic Diversification Canada, the Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, and the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency. These dollars have been provided so they can work with local businesses, universities and colleges to give them the tools they need to succeed and to help all Canadians grow our economy.

At the beginning of the recession, the government established the automotive innovation fund. This program initially was provided with \$250 million over five years to support the automotive firms' strategic, large-scale research and development projects to build innovative, greener and more fuel-efficient vehicles. The government has since renewed the fund for an additional five years and provided it with a total of \$1 billion to date, including \$500 million through economic action plan 2014. This money and investment in innovation for the automotive industry was thrown out by opposition members when they voted against that budget.

The member opposite has asked us in his motion to stimulate the economy by creating and protecting sustainable, full-time, middle-class jobs in high-paying industries in all regions of Canada. Since 2006, that is exactly what we have done.

Business of Supply

Maybe the member opposite needs another reminder of what our government has accomplished to promote job growth in high-paying industries. I am speaking, of course, about supports that we provided to apprentices since taking office. Since 2007, we have launched two apprenticeship grants: the apprenticeship incentive grant in 2007 and the apprenticeship completion grant in 2009. These grants so far have helped over 500,000 Canadians retool their skills for high-paying jobs, jobs that exist and need workers. We are supporting young people across this country to get the training they need to take these good, high-paying, available jobs throughout Canada.

For aspiring apprentices lacking the cash to fund their red seal studies, we now offer them new interest-free loans while they study. Since launching the Canada apprenticeship loan in January, over 2,000 promising students have already received Canadian apprenticeship loans this year. Our government is cutting taxes and increasing supports for plumbers, electricians, and carpenters to create jobs for apprentices from one end of the country to the other.

The member opposite may feel the need to toss around untested theories in today's motion about how to create good quality jobs and growth, but we in Canada's government have a proven record of success in doing so, even at a time of tremendous global economic adversity. This is because we understand what drives the job-creation process. We also understand how to support this process for the benefit of all Canadians.

• (1045)

Let us take a look, for example, at the role Canada's manufacturers and small businesses play in creating jobs and supporting a strong Canadian economy. Comprising 98% of all employer businesses in Canada, small businesses are a significant driver of economic growth and an important pillar supporting workers, families, and communities across Canada.

Our government appreciates the efforts and contributions these businesses make. As a result, we have implemented a range of policies and programs on the understanding that when our small businesses succeed, all Canadians succeed.

Since taking office, the government has put in place numerous measures that benefit Canadian small and medium-sized companies. For example, the accelerated capital cost allowance for investment in machinery and equipment has been of great benefit to Canada's manufacturers and processors, helping them make the investments they need to compete both at home and abroad. On top of that, various initiatives by the Canada Revenue Agency have helped improve the provision of information and services to small businesses while reducing their administrative burden and increasing taxpayer fairness for all businesses across the country.

These measures build on many others introduced by our Conservative government since 2006 that allow small businesses to make the investments they need to create good jobs and grow the Canadian economy. Since 2006, for example, our government has reduced the small business tax rate to 11%; increased the amount of income eligible for the lower small business tax rate from \$300,000 to \$500,000; enhanced the availability and accessibility of financial support for innovative small and medium-sized businesses under the scientific research and experimental development tax incentive program; and narrowed the definition of "taxable Canadian

property", eliminating the need for tax reporting under section 116 of the Income Tax Act for investments by, for example, non-resident venture capital funds in typical Canadian high technology firms.

We have also increased the lifetime capital gains exemption on qualified small business shares from \$500,000 to \$800,000 and indexed this limit to inflation. The exemption limit was increased to \$813,000 for 2015 on account of indexation.

We have reduced the paperwork burden on businesses by 20% through the paperwork burden reduction initiative. We also established the Red Tape Reduction Commission to review areas of federal regulation most in need of reform to reduce the cost of compliance for small businesses.

Cutting red tape supports small businesses. Cutting red tape reduces the administrative burden for small businesses, particularly the smallest of small businesses, those with a low number of employees, which do not have the resources available to deal with an increasing tax burden and an increasing administrative burden to deal with those taxes. Lowering taxes and lowering the amount of red tape they have to go through to complete their taxes allows small businesses to have the resources to do what we want them to do, which is hire more people, produce more products, and expand the Canadian economy.

In addition to these measures, we have eliminated close to 2,000 tariffs on manufacturing inputs, machinery, and equipment, providing about \$400 million in annual duty savings. New trade agreements with South Korea and the European Union will also bring significant benefits and savings to Canadian businesses and will open up new markets for Canadian exports.

Our government knows that while creating savings and opportunities for businesses to grow and succeed is critical, no business can succeed without high calibre employees. The strength of our country lies with our people. That is why our government has introduced numerous training and employment insurance measures to help businesses create good jobs for Canadians. For example, the new small business job credit will deliver significant EI savings to businesses and will help them defray the cost of hiring new workers.

In case the member opposite is still not satisfied, let us talk about students and how our low-tax plan is benefiting young people across the country. Since 2006, we have ended the Liberal practice of taxing scholarships. In fact, we brought in the textbook tax credit, lowering the amount of money in taxes students have to pay to purchase their textbooks.

Business of Supply

Since 2012, the proportion of university-age Canadians attending university or college has reached an all-time high. Around two million students are enrolled in post-secondary institutions right now.

We also established the Canada student grants program for low- and middle-income students, students with dependents, and students with permanent disabilities. Since our government introduced the Canada student grants program in 2009, student loan debt has declined by 10%.

• (1050)

The last thing indebted students need is a tax hike by the Liberals and the NDP, a tax hike that would leave youth with less money to pay off student debt.

While some members of the opposition are asking us to run a deficit in 2015, hoping apparently that the budget will somehow balance itself at a later time, I feel obligated to point out that the benefits of balancing the budget are important for Canadians. The benefits of balancing the budget and reducing debt are obvious to the average Canadian, except, perhaps, members of the opposition. These include ensuring that tax dollars can be used to support and implement important social services, like benefits and health care for seniors, rather than paying interest costs; instilling confidence in consumers and investors, whose dollars spur economic growth and job creation; and of course, strengthening Canada's ability to respond to longer-term international challenges, domestic challenges, and demographic challenges, such as aging populations, unexpected global economic shocks, and global security threats.

Balancing the budget now is our shield against the uncertain forces that may attack Canada in the future. After all, it provided the flexibility for Canada to weather the storm so well when the global economic and financial crisis struck just a few short years ago.

The measures I have detailed today translate into more success, more jobs, and stronger growth for all Canadians. This is what Canada's economic action plan is all about. We have a proven record in being strong stewards of the economy of this country, and Canadians are better off as a result.

I would encourage the members opposite and all Canadians to bear this in mind when considering the risky theories the opposition has to offer. Remember, under our government, the tax burden on Canadians is now at its lowest level in over 50 years, its lowest level since John Diefenbaker was prime minister of this nation. On average, Canadian families are paying \$3,400 less in federal taxes each year than they were under the Liberal Party before 2006.

In addition, every family with children in Canada stands to benefit from a range of tax breaks we are putting in place this year.

Contrary to the NDP motion, I strongly believe that the initiatives I have focused on today will significantly benefit all Canadians. We have announced the new family tax cut and the enhanced universal child care benefit, which will leave 100% of Canadian families with children better off, with almost \$2,000 back in their pockets.

The vast majority of these benefits will flow to low- and middle-income families. The tax cuts introduced by our government will not

only help ordinary Canadians improve their ability to save now but will give them an opportunity to plan and save in the future.

The Liberals and NDP would take these benefits away and would increase taxes on Canadians and hard-working Canadian families. Our plan will keep taxes low and will focus on job creation. I can assure the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley that economic action plan 2015 will continue to keep taxes low and help Canadians succeed in the growing global economy, creating jobs, growth, and long-term prosperity for all Canadians.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do not know what world members opposite live in. The hon. member made a reference to student debt being low today. I can tell him that never before in the history of Canada have more students graduated with higher student debt than in 2015 in Canada. We can visit any campus across this country and talk to young people, and they will tell us the same thing.

My question is about jobs. The Conservatives constantly stand in this House and talk about the jobs that are being created, but they do not talk a lot about the quality of the jobs. Benjamin Tal, the deputy chief economist of CIBC, said:

The number of low-paying full-time jobs has risen faster than the number of mid-paying jobs, which in turn has risen faster than the number of high-paying jobs. Over the year ending January 2015, the job creation gap between low and high-paying jobs has widened with the number of low-paying full-time paid positions rising twice as fast as the number of high-paying jobs.

The Economist has also said that the government's pledge to proceed with tax reductions in the face of being unable to balance the budget is imprudent and that “[t]he delay in presenting the budget adds to the impression of fiscal disarray”.

What can the member tell Canadians about the fact that the quality of jobs in this country being created are resulting in more low-paying jobs and not the mid- and high-paying jobs he professes them to be?

• (1055)

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Mr. Speaker, our government is focused on providing good, high-paying, full-time jobs. Since the pit of the economic recession in July of 2009, we have created 1.2 million net new jobs. The vast majority are full-time jobs. The vast majority of them are also in the private sector. These are good-paying jobs. When people applied for these jobs, 1.2 million answered the phone, and a boss at the other end said, “You are hired. We need you to help us grow the economy and grow the opportunities for all Canadians”.

Let us look at a couple of specific issues. The member opposite is from British Columbia. I am from Atlantic Canada. Our government put forward the largest shipbuilding procurement program in the history of our country to rebuild the Canadian navy for the future. That is thousands of good-paying jobs, supported by the Canadian government, in both Atlantic Canada and British Columbia. However, when we put that forward, the leader of the opposition at that time said that we should spread those jobs out, that we should not actually support the jobs on the east coast of Canada.

Business of Supply

We focused on creating jobs. We focused on rebuilding the Canadian navy. These are good, high-paying jobs, and the member opposite and his party voted against it.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member and his government are very much out of touch with the economic reality faced by Canadians and the challenges faced by Canadian families across the country and in his riding of Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley.

He said that 1.2 million new jobs have been created since 2008. He is ignoring the fact that the working age population in Canada, the number of people eligible to work in Canada, has increased by two million. We have had stagnant economic growth and flatlined job growth in terms of good-quality jobs.

Is the member aware that in his own riding, which is part of the north region of Nova Scotia, there have been 6,700 net jobs lost since 2008? Sixty-three hundred of those jobs were full-time jobs. If he is not aware of that, why does he not have a better idea of what is going on in terms of the challenges faced by families in his own riding? If he is aware of it, how can he stand and boast about his government's record, when people in his own riding are struggling because they have lost full-time work and are trying to pay their bills on part-time jobs?

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Mr. Speaker, when we look at what is happening in Atlantic Canada, we actually cut the GST, after coming into power in 2006, from 7% to 6% to 5%, lowering the tax burden on Canadians from one coast to the other.

The problem we had in Nova Scotia was that as soon as the federal government gave those Canadians in Nova Scotia, like the members of my riding, the constituents I support, a needed tax break, the current government, supported by the previous government, increased those taxes by 2%, stealing the tax cut the federal government gave to Nova Scotians and the constituents of Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley and put it back in its coffers.

That was put in place by the NDP government and is now supported by the Liberal government in Nova Scotia. Those governments do not support low taxes. They do not support balanced budgets. They do not support creating jobs in Atlantic Canada. We do. We stand up for Canadians. We are cutting taxes, and we are creating job growth. We need them to get on board and support us.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the motion the NDP has brought forward today refers, in its introduction, to a document by the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, which is hardly a validator, usually, for the official opposition. It refers to something called the employment quality index, which measures the distribution of part-time versus full-time jobs, self-employment versus paid employment, and compensation.

In that context, the deputy chief economist, Benjamin Tal, said the following:

The number of low-paying full-time jobs has risen faster than the number of mid-paying jobs, which in turn has risen faster than the number of high-paying jobs. Over the year..., the job creation gap between low and high-paying jobs has widened with the number of low-paying full-time paid positions rising twice as fast as the number of high-paying jobs.

I would ask the member to comment on whether the unemployment rate, which for youth is already almost 13%, at 12.8%, where people with engineering degrees are working at Starbucks, is not, it seems, confirmed by the CIBC. Could he comment on that situation?

• (1100)

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Mr. Speaker, as I said, we have invested in the youth employment strategy. We have invested \$300 million to support young people across the country to get the training and the jobs they need to obtain the experience required to apply for and get higher paying jobs in the future. We have put initiatives together such as the apprenticeship loan, the apprenticeship grants, support for the people engaged in Red Seal trades, investments in pipeline projects across the country, in the shipbuilding procurement project and in supporting a loan guarantee for the Labrador hydroelectric project. The NDP consistently votes against these proposals to help us train our young people and provide effective and good jobs for young people in the manufacturing and energy industries.

If the New Democrats really care about supporting jobs for young people across the country, they would support our initiatives to lower taxes and support our natural resource industries so we can sell these products internationally through free trade agreements, which they also consistently vote against.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Nova Scotia talks about the jobs created in the Nova Scotia shipbuilding industry. I would like to hear from him how many jobs were created in New Brunswick. In New Brunswick, out of ten members of Parliament, eight come from the Conservative Party. When David Alward was the premier of New Brunswick, he kept asking for help from the federal government, which he never received.

We only have to look at the unemployment rate in the north of New Brunswick, where no jobs have been created. We only have to look at the Conservative cuts to ACOA, a program that could help the small and medium-sized businesses that create 74% of the jobs.

What has the government done in New Brunswick to help with the creation of jobs? Our people have to buy airplane tickets to fly west to work because there are no jobs in New Brunswick.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Mr. Speaker, in terms of supporting job growth in New Brunswick, our party stands solidly behind the workers. In fact, we are totally supportive of the great opportunity coming up with respect to the west to east pipeline project, the Line 9 reversal. That will create thousands of jobs in New Brunswick. It will also create a whole new industry in crude oil exports. We will be able to export hundreds of thousands of barrels of oil to the international market once we get this pipeline set up and the refinery in Saint John producing a good, clean, value-added product, which we will sell internationally.

Business of Supply

When we put the measures in place to support that Line 9 reversal and to support this new industry in New Brunswick, then we will see if the NDP will support it. Crude oil exports will bring thousands of jobs to Atlantic Canada. It will allow us to bring the oil produced in Alberta to the Atlantic coast, refine it there and sell it on the international market for a higher price than we could possibly get by exporting to the United States at the current time. The NDP members have been silent on whether they will support that project. It is time for them to stand up for New Brunswickers. It is time for them to stand up for Atlantic Canadians and support the Line 9 reversal.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to today's motion on jobs and the economy. I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Markham—Unionville.

The Prime Minister and the Conservatives do not want to talk about the economy these days. In fact, they are so spooked by the topic that they are delaying the budget into the next fiscal year. We are told that we will not have a budget until April at the earliest. They do not want to talk about the economy, all because of plummeting oil prices.

The Conservatives are also telling us that all the challenges facing Canadians and the Canadian economy today are a result of plummeting oil prices. However, the reality is that we have faced real challenges in the Canadian economy, and Canadian families have faced real challenges, well before plummeting oil prices.

In fact, the May 3 issue of the *Economist* magazine had an article entitled, "Canada's economy: Maple, resting on laurels", Canada's "post-crisis glow is fading". In that article, the *Economist* said that the Conservative government's retelling of the 2008 crisis indicated that the Conservatives saved Canada from doom. It went on to say, "Yet luck played a large, unacknowledged part". The *Economist* points to three areas where the Conservative government was lucky.

First, the Conservatives were lucky that the previous Liberal government, Mr. Chrétien to Mr. Martin, refused to follow the global trend of bank deregulation, and we have a strong banking system as a result of that.

Second, there was a solid financial footing. The previous government paid down \$80 billion of our national debt, but the current government has added \$160 billion to the national debt.

Lucky in a third way was that oil and gas revenues helped pick up the slack when manufacturing faltered, and no federal politician can take credit for putting the oil and gas under the ground in Saskatchewan and Alberta. However, we all know it was Danny Williams who put it under the water off Newfoundland.

The *Economist* pointed to three reasons why we went through the global financial crisis in 2008 better than other countries. The three reasons are: a strong banking system, a good fiscal situation, and oil and gas. The one thing they have in common is that the Conservative government has had nothing to do with any of it.

The *Economist* also pointed out that since 2008, Canada's post-crisis glow was fading, and that in terms of growth and jobs, and growth in the GDP, Canada had actually fallen behind other countries. In fact, if we look at 2015 numbers, Canada is projected to be 14th, or middle of the pack of 34 OECD countries in growth. We will be behind the U.S. and the U.K. In 2016, Canada is projected to

be 21st of 34 OECD countries in economic growth. We will be behind the U.S., Australia and the U.K. There are real challenges.

It is important to also recognize that when the *Economist* published that article citing the challenges facing the Canadian economy, oil, WTI, at the time was at \$104 a barrel, which is in fact more than twice where it is today. Therefore, even before plummeting oil prices, our economy had flatlined in growth and job creation.

In terms of job creation, the CIBC report from last week said that Canadian job quality was at a record low. The growth of low-paying jobs compared to mid or high-paying jobs is significant. We are seeing fewer high-paying jobs created and more low-paying jobs.

The Conservatives talk about 1.2 million jobs being created since 2008. However, they are completely ignoring the fact that our working age population has grown by two million. Labour market participation remains lower than before 2008. People have given up looking for work. The number of people facing long-term unemployment, or people unemployed for over a year, today is twice that of 2008. There are 160,000 fewer jobs today for young Canadians than in 2008.

● (1105)

There are record levels of personal debt as middle-class parents and grandparents are forgoing retirement and retirement savings to financially support young Canadians who are unable to support themselves based on the low-quality jobs they are getting.

It is damning of our economic situation and of the government's negligence and ignorance of that situation which it seems to be blissfully unaware, or perhaps it does not care, that this is the first generation of Canadian parents who believe their children will be worse off than them.

The Conservative government does not get it. It is out of touch, and one can only assume because of it delaying the budget, that it is also out of ideas.

Business of Supply

We needed a plan for jobs and growth before plummeting oil prices, and we need a plan for jobs and growth even more today. Even in terms of how it manages the petrol economy, because the Conservative economic plan was threefold, which was oil, oil and oil, it has not done very well. Not one pipeline has been approved under the Conservative government, largely due to the fact that it either has no relations or toxic relations with the stakeholders and partners required to move these projects forward, whether it is with President Obama, aboriginal and first nations leaders, the provinces or the environmental community.

The government and the Prime Minister have not built the kinds of relationships required to defend Canadian economic interests. Former Progressive Conservative Prime Minister Brian Mulroney says that the top foreign policy priority of a Canadian prime minister is to have a personal relationship with the President of the United States.

Mr. Mulroney would have gotten Keystone XL approved with President Reagan. Mr. Chrétien would have gotten Keystone XL approved with President Clinton. In fact, they understood the importance of relationships.

However, the government cannot even meet with premiers to discuss moving forward on labour and training, and addressing the jobs-skills mismatch. It cannot meet and sit down respectfully with aboriginal and first nations Canadians. It calls the environmental communities eco-terrorists. These are the stakeholders and partners we need to have our projects moving forward. Even in the area where the government is focused, and that is on oil, it has not done a very good job.

The Bank of Canada has said that low oil prices are “unambiguously bad for growth”. It responded with a 25-basis point rate cut. What has been the response from the government, when we need action, when we need clarity, when we need certainty? It has delayed the budget until April, perhaps hoping oil prices will increase.

The reality is that wishful thinking is not a replacement for responsible budget making. Suncor and Encana cannot delay their public reporting or their annual reports because of low oil prices. They would have a regulatory challenge with the securities commission, but they would also create uncertainty with their investors.

The same could be said about a federal government delaying the budget, ostensibly because of falling oil prices. I can remember governments that introduced budgets when oil prices were less than \$40 per barrel. I can remember governments balancing budgets back then. The fact is that the government is out of touch and out of ideas.

The Liberal plan for jobs and growth will be to invest in infrastructure, to take the historic opportunity we have today to rebuild Canada's infrastructure; to create jobs and growth today, and the kind of economy that will create more jobs and growth in the future; to invest in people and skills to ensure young Canadians have the skills they need for the jobs of today and to prepare for the jobs of the future; to invest in innovation, science and data; and to invest in the kinds of trade relationships we need, both globally with the Obama administration, China, Mexico and our traditional partners,

but also within Canada, the kind of relationships required to build a strong economy.

A Liberal government will move this economy forward and will help Canadian middle-class families move ahead. The Conservative government is out of touch and totally out of ideas to benefit those families.

● (1110)

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member opposite about the fact that over 87% of the jobs created in Canada since the great recession have been full-time jobs, almost 85% of them in the private sector and nearly two-thirds in high-wage industries, and this in spite of the aging of the baby-boomer generation, which really makes people more inclined toward flexible work and part-time hours. We are glad that the economy responds to that.

The CIBC report that has been recently in the news goes all the way back to 1988. Most of the years since 1988 were with a Liberal government, and it seems to me that most of the declines referred to in the report since 1988 were under a Liberal government.

Can the member at least admit, as many Canadians do across this land, that the present Conservative government has done a fantastic job since the recession in creating 87% full-time jobs and 85% private-sector, two-thirds—

● (1115)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Again, I would ask all members to keep their questions to a minute.

The hon. member for Kings—Hants.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member again is demonstrating that the Conservatives are totally out of touch with the challenges faced by middle-class Canadian families, who are struggling. He does not seem to accept the fact that we have 160,000 fewer jobs for young Canadians than before the downturn. He does not understand or get the reality that while we may have 1.2 million new jobs, the labour market of people who are eligible to work has grown by 2 million. The member does not seem to understand that the growth in jobs has been in lower-paying jobs, and that is in that CIBC report.

For Canadian families, the bills still come in, whether they are for rent, car payments, or paying for hockey or education. The bills do not go down when someone loses a full-time job that is replaced by part-time work. The member exemplifies the arrogance of the current government, which is so focused on patting itself on the back that it does not have time to be in touch with the challenges faced by Canadian families.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, over the last 35 years in Canada, income inequality has grown. That means that the wealthiest Canadians in this country have gotten wealthier and the poorest Canadians have gotten poorer. The middle class has also shrunk in terms of its share of the wealth. More than 94% of that income inequality growth over the last 35 years occurred under a Liberal government.

Business of Supply

That was fuelled by policies like abandoning the federal minimum wage along with downloading billions of dollars of federal spending from the federal government to the provinces and also cutting services to Canadians.

I wonder if my hon. colleague in the Liberal Party will comment on whether the current Liberal Party would pursue the same policies that would make middle-class and working-class Canadians poorer, as happened so often under previous Liberal governments in this country.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, it was my motion that led to a study of the House of Commons finance committee of income inequality. During my speech on that motion, I actually said that this is not a partisan issue. Income inequality has grown in Canada under political parties and governments of all stripes. In fact, it has grown in provinces led by NDP governments in Manitoba and Saskatchewan and it has grown under sovereigntist governments in Quebec.

Now the New Democrats, when we have an opportunity to have a substantive discussion on the challenges faced by families, continue to play the same games that the Conservatives play and want to make this a partisan issue. We have no quarrel with saying that income inequality has grown in Canada under governments of all stripes, including New Democrats. It is time to stop the bickering and start dealing with the issue and focus on building equality of opportunity for Canadians. Canadians are tired of this type of partisanship when we are dealing with important issues.

• (1120)

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to talk on this topic. Just to amplify what my colleague said, which was that income inequality in Canada has grown under governments of all stripes, let me be clear: it has never grown under a federal NDP government, because there never has been one. We shall see if that continues in the next election.

I would like to reinforce what my colleague said about the statistics in a somewhat different way.

We have two parties here. On the one hand, we have the CIBC bank saying that the quality of jobs is the worst it has been in Canada for 25 years, the worst since 1989. It measures that quality by a mix of wage levels and by part-time versus full-time employment and self-employment. According to its studies, job quality is the worst since 1989, when the studies began.

On the other side there is the government, which puts out a flurry of its own statistics that suggest the opposite. I know my colleague talked about those statistics, and that is an important issue, but I would like to put the question differently: which has more credibility on this issue, a bank that has done studies saying it is the worst in 25 years or a government that says everything it has done is marvellous?

I would say the bank. I have a little credibility on this issue, because I used to work for a bank. Before I went into politics, I was chief economist for the Royal Bank. That is not the CIBC; it is another bank, but a bank is a bank, and I can say that if there is a bias within the banks, it is that they really do not want to annoy the government in power if there is an option. Therefore, all other things being equal, it is not that banks will lie, but if they have a choice,

they would rather not present statistics that embarrass the government of the day. That is because they want to please the government for various reasons, commercial and otherwise.

CIBC is not out to get the government. If anything, CIBC officials would prefer to please the government, yet the statistics are clear in their own minds. They cannot please the government on this issue because the facts say very clearly that the quality of jobs in Canada is indeed the worst in 25 years. That is what CIBC said in this study.

I would argue, then, that CIBC has credibility, not only because it has competent economists who did the study but also because its own interest is to please the government rather than displease the government. It is obvious from the debate today that by coming out with this fact, CIBC has displeased the government. I would argue that no amount of self-serving government statistics should counter the fact that the bank has come out with an opposite conclusion even though it is not particularly in the interests of the bank to do so.

[*Translation*]

The bank studies in this field are therefore credible. The bank does not want to embarrass the government, but it does want to tell Canadians the truth. According to the bank's analysis, the labour market situation is the worst it has been for 25 years.

[*English*]

I am not sure I will devote more of my limited time to arguing the statistics. I rest my case by saying what I have already said, which is that the bank has far more credibility than the government on this issue.

Given that the bank's facts are, broadly speaking, correct, the question then becomes what the federal government should do about it. What should the federal government do to address the fact that the job quality in this country has deteriorated to a point not seen for 25 years?

The first answer to what to do would be what not to do. What not to do is not present a budget.

The budget is the basic core plan of the government. Particularly when times are tough and oil prices have plummeted and times are uncertain is precisely when the Canadian public and Canadian investors want to know that their government indeed has a plan. By delaying the budget until some unknown, unspecified date, the government is clearly indicating that it has no plan, or has no plan B, shall we say; it does have its tired old economic action plan, but that plan fell apart when oil prices plummeted and it became clear that the tax measures it proposed would put us back into deficit.

Conservatives want to keep that from the public. They want to focus the discussion on terrorists and war rather than on the economy, which is now doing very badly under their watch.

• (1125)

The first thing to do is have a plan, but the Conservatives' plan is non-existent. To the extent that it exists in the form of income splitting, it is indeed a bad plan.

Business of Supply

The objective should be, first and foremost, to favour the creation of jobs, and not just any jobs, but high-quality jobs of the kind that we have not seen in recent years.

The second thing not to do is income splitting, because income splitting will do essentially nothing to help create growth and jobs, and it is a hugely biased program that benefits only 15% of Canadian households, leaving 85% totally out in the cold. It will benefit only a very narrow segment of Canadian households, and not, by the way, those generally in the greatest need.

It will not really do anything in terms of social justice by helping those most in need, nor will it do anything of any significance in terms of promoting jobs and growth or improving the dismal quality of jobs that we see around us today. The solution lies not in not having a budget or in this very poor income-splitting proposal, but rather in other measures, the kinds of measures that we in the Liberal Party have been focusing on.

First and foremost, I would say, would be infrastructure. We had a policy resolution some time ago at a policy convention calling for a very major increase in federal investment in infrastructure. The mayors of our cities are crying out for this measure. It has not escaped their notice that the federal government has cut infrastructure investment by 90% over the next two years, and it is now, not five years from now, that the cities are in desperate need of that expenditure.

Given our job situation, there is a double reason for infrastructure. One is that we desperately need it. We have an enormous infrastructure deficit. We need it for productivity, since it will enhance the transport network for our manufacturing sector and things of that nature, but we also need it for the jobs it will create. Economists' studies indicate that the multiplier effect or the job impact per \$1 of expenditure is higher for infrastructure than for, I would say, anything else. Therefore, a second reason to focus on infrastructure is that it is highly efficient in creating jobs, often high-quality jobs, which would go some way toward counteracting the dismal situation that CIBC has indicated we find ourselves in today.

That is one major measure that would address this issue. Others would include support for higher education, because, as has been pointed out, under federal Liberal and Conservative governments—not, thankfully, NDP governments—we have over time seen an increase in inequality. Equality of opportunity is essential, and part of that equality of opportunity concerns access to post-secondary education, whether that be university, college, or some other form of post-secondary training.

That is just a small sample of the kinds of measures that we in the Liberal Party would propose in order to deal with this dismal situation of the lowest-quality jobs we have seen in this country for a quarter of a century.

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite criticized our government's plan to support families by lowering taxes and increasing benefits in the universal child care benefit, expanding it so that it supports children aged 6 to 17 and putting literally hundreds of dollars in the pockets of Canadian families with children each and every year.

He also criticized our plan to split incomes. When incomes are split, it provides tax fairness for families. Two teachers in a family making a total of \$100,000 a year incur significantly less taxes than a person making \$100,000 a year with the other parent choosing to stay at home. We are bringing in tax fairness for all families with children with our income-splitting plan. We are increasing the benefits for the universal child care benefit for every Canadian family. We ask that the Liberals support these measures.

Does the member across the way support lower taxes and tax fairness for Canadian families?

• (1130)

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, I notice that at the macro level, the member is quite happy to talk in glowing terms about jobs created and the plans of the Conservative government. However, if we go to the micro level and his own riding, I note that they have lost 6,700 jobs since 2008. His glowing words at the macro level do not quite square with what is happening in his own backyard.

That having been said, I would also point out that he is wrong when he says that we do not support measures to assist families. We have not said in any way that we are opposed to the overall benefit that is being offered. We have said very clearly that we are opposed to income splitting, which is only one element, and the most regressive and unsatisfactory element, of the Conservative package. We would repeal it and use that money for purposes that would be of far greater benefit to Canadians in terms of job creation, and possibly also put money directly into the pockets of Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague from Markham—Unionville on his speech.

Of course, we have to agree that the Conservatives are dancing on the *Titanic*. They continue to say that everything is fine and they will stay the course, when really, we are stranded in a void. Not only has the Minister of Finance still not brought down a budget, but all the members across the aisle continue to recite the same talking points ad nauseam.

That being said, I have no doubt about your own competence, especially since you come from a region where the manufacturing sector is so—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I would remind the member to direct his comments through the Chair rather than to the member.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The region where the member for Markham—Unionville is from has been hard hit by difficulties in the manufacturing sector. While the NDP leader has made repeated announcements to support that sector, does the member not find it troubling to see his leader trivializing the situation by saying that the 1.7 million workers in his region will simply have to switch to another kind of work?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, I preferred the first part of my colleague's comments, regarding the need for our two parties to denounce the misinformation being spread by the government members.

Business of Supply

As for the second part of his comments, it is not at all true that the leader of the Liberal Party does not want to emphasize the importance of the manufacturing sector. It is true that we have not yet announced the details of our policy, but the election is still a few weeks or a few months away. Between now and then, the member will hear some very good news regarding an excellent plan from the Liberal Party to support the manufacturing sector and other important economic sectors.

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for St. John's East.

I am pleased to rise in the House to speak to the opposition motion on the CIBC report on job quality.

We often debate the issue of employment in the House. The government likes to boast about how many jobs have been created since the depths of the recession. We sincerely hope that jobs will be created after a recession as bad as the one we recently went through.

However, contrary to what the government and its members are saying, job quality plays a key role in people's quality of life. The results have not been as clear-cut and successful as the government likes to claim.

In its report, CIBC clearly shows that its employment quality index has dropped dramatically since the 1990s. It has gone down by 15%, which is a fairly big drop. It has dropped by 10% since the early 2000s, and last year, the latest year of the index, there was a significant drop of 1.8%, despite the fact that a rather large number of jobs were created.

The reason has to do with the effectiveness of the government and its policies. When we talk, for example, about full-time and part-time jobs, the government's efforts have greatly encouraged the creation of part-time and low-paying jobs, which has led many Canadians to choose self-employment over paid employment, often involuntarily.

Take for example the issue of high-paying jobs versus low-paying jobs. In my opinion, this is a key issue, and CIBC recognized that.

In fact, CIBC noted that low-paying jobs rose at twice the pace of high-paying jobs. An important example of the consequences of this reality and the government's misguided approach is Burger King's acquisition of Tim Hortons.

We can debate this acquisition. I think that it is having a negative effect and that it shows the impact of the corporate tax rate in Canada, which is well below that of the United States. This creates a phenomenon called tax inversion, which makes companies more attractive to American businesses.

I want to come back to the announcement made at the end of January by Burger King and Tim Hortons, when 350 well-paid corporate Tim Hortons workers were laid off.

When we raised this issue in the House and asked the Minister of Industry questions, he said, quite proudly, that following consultations with the newly merged company, he was promised that there would be 500 new franchises in Canada. When he says 500 new franchises, that is exactly what we are talking about. These are not steady jobs. They are often part time and not well paid. He was

comparing these poorly paid jobs and the jobs that will be created with the 350 high-quality, well-paid jobs that were lost as a result of the merger, and he put a positive spin on it to boot.

That is where I take issue with the government's idea that any job is a good job, that a part-time job is just as good as a full-time job, or that a poorly paid job is the same as a well-paid job.

The CIBC did a fine job of painting the overall picture of the employment situation in Canada, going beyond the anecdotes that the government likes to recite to us in the House.

One of the things the Conservatives often like to talk about during question period, but not during answer period, because the answer is totally inconsistent, is the article published in the *New York Times* last November, according to which the Canadian middle class is now richer than the American middle class.

However, the Conservatives neglect to say how this came to be or why this is currently the case. The *New York Times* article showed that three main reasons explain this situation, but the government never mentions those. The primary reason is the failure of the U.S. elementary school system, which is training a workforce that is less qualified or not as well qualified as the previous generation.

● (1135)

If we take the time to read the article, we find that Americans between the ages of 55 and 65 have above-average skills compared to their peers in other industrialized countries. As for the 16 to 24 year olds, their literacy, numeracy, and technology skills lag behind those of their peers in Canada, Australia, Japan, Scandinavia, among others. One of the main reasons for the gap between Americans and Canadians is the education system. The government has very little to do with it because education is a provincial jurisdiction.

I will quote the second reason given in the *New York Times* article to explain the reduction of the income gap between the American and Canadian middle classes.

[English]

A second factor is that companies in the United States economy distribute a smaller share of their bounty to the middle class and poor than similar companies elsewhere. Top executives make substantially more money in the United States than in other wealthy countries. The minimum wage is lower. Labor unions are weaker.

● (1140)

[Translation]

From the *New York Times* article we can infer that the relative strength of the union movement in Canada compared to that in the United States is one of the factors that has contributed to the positive wealth gap between the middle class in Canada and that in the United States. We will not bring Europe into the discussion.

Business of Supply

However, we have a government that is fighting to undermine union strength in Canada. The difference in wealth, therefore, is not the result of the government's policies. On the contrary, this is true because the Conservatives have not yet reached the high point in their policy to destroy a rather strong middle class.

Third, the *New York Times* article mentions the level of redistribution of wealth. In the United States, the redistribution of wealth is much less efficient than here in Canada. Once again, most of the policies introduced by the government since 2006 do not target more equitable redistribution, as shown by increased income inequality among other things.

The government prides itself on the fact that its economic policies have helped make the middle class stronger. However, according to that *New York Times* article, our middle class did not become richer than the American middle class because of the strength of our economy, but rather because of the weakness of American policies.

If I were the government I would be very careful about drawing any significant conclusions from one story that draws on a set of interesting data to give a snapshot of the quality of life of our middle class compared to that of the United States. As with any other economic situation, there is often much more to the snapshot than they would have us believe.

Economic experts urged us to be cautious when analyzing these documents and not to draw broad conclusions. William Robson, the president and CEO of the C.D. Howe Institute, said that the wealth of Canada's middle class was growing more slowly than that of the rest of the population, meaning Canadians who are either wealthier or poorer.

The government can boast all it wants and say that we are in a good position compared to the United States, but there is no evidence that the government's policies or actions contributed to the strength of the middle class. On the contrary, the middle class continues to get weaker compared to the rest of the population, which was one of the findings of the CIBC study. If jobs are less stable and the number of part-time jobs is increasing at a faster pace than the number of full-time jobs, the country will not be in a better place—quite the contrary.

These are measures we need to examine, which is why I am proud to say that the NDP is starting to unveil parts of our economic agenda, which will strengthen the middle class. In fact, this is something we have been doing for a quite some time.

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government claims that it is 100% behind Canadians and that it wants to do its best for the economy. However, not one single Conservative MP listened to my colleague's excellent speech, and nobody stood up to ask a question. This proves that the government is in way over its head on the economy.

My question for my colleague is about this quote:

[*English*]

Last month, Deputy Governor Carolyn Wilkins said in a speech that the economy was about 270,000 jobs short of its full capacity at the end of 2014.

[*Translation*]

She was comparing the situation to how things were before the recession. That was before Target, Tim Hortons and all of the closures announced in the past few months.

I would like my colleague to comment on the Conservatives' record with respect to the creation of those 1.2 million part-time, low-quality jobs when it says right here that there are no jobs for Canadians.

• (1145)

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, when we talk about job creation and the 1.2 million jobs the government keeps referring to, we have to remember that that was at the lowest point of the recession, when we reached an unenviable level. Of course things have gone up since then. We talk a lot about economic cycles. Once we hit the low point of a cycle, eventually, no matter which government is in power, we are going to come back up again. The question is whether we can come back up in a way that is good for the entire economy.

The Bank of Canada's Ms. Wilkins was referring to the fact that job creation was not keeping pace with demographic growth. Job creation did not keep up with the number of Canadians ready, willing and able to work. The fact is that there are far more unemployed Canadians now than there were in 2009 and 2006. It is fine to have an economic cycle that is on the upswing and makes job creation possible, but the government still needs to implement measures to promote even faster growth. I would like to tell the House that some of this government's policies have actually restricted and slowed economic growth and our ability to achieve our potential. That is really terrible.

Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his compelling speech. It is clear that he feels strongly about what he just said.

We in the NDP want to reduce the small business tax rate from 11% to 9%. I wonder if he could briefly explain how this measure would benefit small businesses.

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

We know that small and medium-size enterprises, or SMEs, are responsible for much of the job creation in Canada. However, a good portion of the jobs lost are also often lost in SMEs. Starting up a small business is risky. Many SMEs are started, but they never develop enough to become stable and maintain those jobs. There is always the hope that those SMEs will make it to the next level and become stable businesses that provide well-paying jobs.

Business of Supply

The government has ignored the NDP's longstanding requests. These requests were part of our 2011 platform, and even our 2008 platform, if I am not mistaken. We want to lower the tax rate to 9%. The government made an effort and lowered it from 12% to 11%, which is a step in the right direction. However, that is not enough to give small and medium-size businesses the stability and flexibility they need to grow and transform these jobs—which are admittedly somewhat precarious at first, since it is a risky endeavour—to into well-paying jobs that benefit society in economic terms.

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity today to join in this debate on the NDP motion, which calls upon the government to take seriously the needs of Canadians, for a proper level of stimulation and to deal with the very high, sustained unemployment we have in Canada.

The Conservatives keep talking about job creation, but what we hear is that the job situation in Canada is in fact getting worse. Their plans do not include a solution to the problem. Since the 2008 recession and a long-term downward trend in job quality, as described most eloquently by a recent CIBC report, job quality is going down.

What is job quality? Job quality is an index being used by the CIBC, the employment quality index, that deals with the distribution of full-time and part-time jobs. We are seeing fewer full-time jobs and more part-time jobs; not only part-time jobs, but jobs that have been described as precarious employment. These are short-term part-time jobs and term employment, where one works for a few weeks here and a few weeks there. There is an inability to even qualify for employment insurance, the jobs are so precarious. Therefore, less than 40% of those who are unemployed are even able to qualify for employment insurance, despite the fact that they may have been working quite a bit in the period leading up to their unemployment, because of the changes to the employment insurance regime that this government and the previous Liberal government have brought in.

The employment quality index also deals with self-employment versus paid employment and the compensation ranking of jobs in a hundred different industry groups. It looks at whether we are dealing with good-quality jobs that pay well, that provide some benefits, that allow people to take advantage of a middle-class income standard that gives a quality of life whereby they do not have to be concerned about where their next meal or their next rent cheque is coming from and they have a measure of security for themselves and their families.

That is something that Canadians really deserve to have. We have a very prosperous country. We have superior level of natural resources. The GDP in Canada is very high. However, we have growing inequality.

What do we do about it? We have a government that does not deal with that problem. It comes up with an income-sharing scheme that is extremely expensive and is going to benefit only 15% of the population, and unfortunately, it costs \$3 billion of taxpayers' money that could well be spent in providing for programs such as the ones we have put forward, like a high-quality child care program that would allow Canadian families to have quality child care at an affordable price to a maximum of \$15 a day. I have heard some of

the members opposite describe it today as being a big bureaucracy, somehow or other.

One thing about it is that it would actually require someone to sit down with the provinces, something the Prime Minister has not done since he has been in power. Why is that? It is because he does not really want to have good national programs that raise all boats by giving Canadian working families a real opportunity to have a decent job, to support their families, and to become a part of the middle class to which so many aspire if they are not already there.

That term “middle class” is kind of a funny term to me because, as New Democrats, we have always talked about the working class or people who have been left out, but most Canadians see themselves as either being in or aspiring to be part of the middle class. Therefore, when we talk about middle-class Canadians, we are talking about the bulk of Canadians who see themselves as, hopefully, participating in the economy, having an opportunity for some income security and hopefully retirement security, being able to educate their children, and giving them a good start in life.

• (1150)

Instead, what we have is fear and worry because of the precarious job situation of this generation. They are saying that their parents had a better way of life and that progress ended with their parents.

Do we want the next generation to say that progress in life and in this country ended with their parents? That is a legacy that I do not want to see us leave to the next generation.

That is the danger with the policies of the Conservative government. It is why we are calling for the first priority of the upcoming budget to be investment in measures that stimulate the economy, that create and protect sustainable, full-time, middle-class jobs in high-paying industries in all regions of Canada. It is why we are calling for the government to abandon its costly and unfair \$2 billion income-splitting proposal.

We talk about all regions of the country. Look at my province of Newfoundland and Labrador. We are suffering with an unemployment rate higher than 11%. The last number I saw was 11.4% unemployment. That is shocking. To talk about all of this so-called economic progress that has been made is unacceptable.

Instead of seeing job stimulation through investments in infrastructure and job creation, we are seeing what the Conservatives think will get votes from their base. They are rewarding their base because they promised four or five years ago that they would have income splitting, which has been shown to be costly, ineffective, and bad public policy, according to the late finance minister. It has contributed to growing inequality in this country. That is the kind of policy that the Conservative government is putting forward, instead of policies that would help to lower the amount of inequality we have.

Business of Supply

It is not only in Newfoundland and Labrador. We see it in other provinces as well, but I will talk about my home province since it is the one closest to my heart. In addition to the high unemployment rate, we have a staggering problem now as a result of the lowering of oil prices. The Newfoundland and Labrador government has announced that it will be facing a \$1 billion deficit for the first time in Newfoundland and Labrador history. It is going to have a very difficult job assisting people, providing the services it has been providing, and providing the kind of stimulus that would be needed to sustain the jobs and growth that are necessary in that economy.

In times like that, provinces like Newfoundland and Labrador do expect the Government of Canada to play a more positive role, to get in there and say it needs to solve some of these problems and help by stimulating the economy, jobs, and growth. It is not doing it.

We are looking for immediate action in the budget to boost job creation and to grow our economy. We are not the only ones who believe it is important that this happens. Concerns have been raised by others who recognize that issues such as a balanced budget are not the most important thing to have in the Canadian economy this year. What is really required is trying to make some progress in economic terms, and we are not doing that.

Kevin Page, for example, said that in the last 10 years, we have made virtually no progress on all of our big issues, such as longer term economic challenges, closing innovation gaps in the economy, dealing with aging demographics that will put pressure on health care, and dealing with environmental sustainability. We have not even had discussions or proposals from the government.

I see that my time is rapidly running out here. We really need to help small business owners. That is part of our proposal and our plan. Cuts to the small business tax rate from 11% to 9%, extending the accelerated cost allowances, and other ideas are part of our economic plan. We hope that the members opposite will see the light and support this motion.

• (1155)

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his speech this morning, highlighting the need for improved jobs, growth, economic development, and long-term prosperity, particularly on the east coast and Atlantic Canada, from which we both hail.

The Conservative government has strongly supported small businesses in Newfoundland and Labrador and Atlantic Canada. One way it did that was providing a loan guarantee for the Muskrat Falls project in Labrador, which will provide clean, green, perpetual energy throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. This will provide a stable price for energy in both Newfoundland and Labrador and all of Atlantic Canada.

I wonder if the member opposite can comment on the meaningful benefits that the project will have in providing clean, green energy and stable power rates so that small businesses can have certainty and dependability. This is a great initiative from our government. I hope that the member opposite supports it, and I wonder if he could comment on the good work that our government has done in support of that project.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for raising the issue of loan guarantees. It is something that I and my party have supported going back to 2004 and 2005. We were there supporting the notion of a federal loan guarantee for the Lower Churchill development long before the current government made any commitment in that regard.

Clearly, it is a positive thing that the federal government finally decided to support a loan guarantee for Newfoundland and Labrador hydro development. However, never before today have I heard it referred to as a small business measure. This is an \$8-billion project, and it will have a loan guarantee of \$6.2 billion. In our understanding, that is not a small business; that is a very large business.

While we recognize that it is an important role for the Government of Canada to play, what we have offered is a cut in the small business tax rate from 11% to 9% in recognition that 98% of all businesses in Canada are small businesses, and they do need help because they are the big job creators.

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I agree with my colleague. Canada's middle class is not doing so well, whether in his province or in my region of Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean. Yesterday, I asked the minister a question about this. I pointed out that 85 jobs were lost in my region last week. Those were good jobs that paid well.

I also agree with the report that was presented to us. It shows that the middle class is struggling in Canada. Good jobs are rare. The Conservative government chooses to put its eggs in the wrong basket.

I would like my colleague to elaborate on what could be done to help small and medium-sized enterprises create good jobs in communities. These enterprises create a lot of jobs in the country.

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, I know that many regions of the country, and the member talked about his, are suffering from job losses. However, one of the biggest job creators, certainly in the private sector, has been small businesses. In fact, 78% of all new private sector jobs between 2002 and 2012 have been created by small business. Yet, the Conservatives have really ignored the small business owners in favour of the wealthier corporations. They have cut the corporate tax rate for the wealthiest corporations by over 25%, but their support for small business has only been a cut of 1%. We know where their emphasis has been.

We also know where the job creation is in the private sector. It is in many regions of the country, particularly in rural areas, such as that represented by the hon. member, and in places like Newfoundland and Labrador where every job counts. When there is an unemployment rate of 11.4%, a persistently high unemployment rate, it needs the support of public measures such as those we are proposing in order to advance and provide those jobs that people need.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to address this House on the aspirations of working-class families and building an economy where people who are struggling move into the middle class, and the middle class gets ahead.

Members of the high-tax parties believe that governments must run the lives and spend the money of struggling families, that they can reduce poverty by taking money from working families and spending it for them. Conservatives believe that the best social safety net is a strong family and that the best anti-poverty plan is a good job. That is why our low-tax plan helps families and creates jobs.

Members of the high-tax parties here today will tell us that they are more generous. The truth is that they are more generous with other people's money. They like to spend it on themselves. However, wealthy union bosses, well-paid lobbyists and lawyers who charge hundreds of dollars an hour to do so-called advocacy litigation have nothing to do with social justice. Despite all the high-minded rhetoric of the high-tax parties, the evidence is in. It shows that two things have happened since our government has taken office: one, families are moving out of poverty and into the middle class; and two, the middle class is getting ahead. In fact, it is ahead of any other middle class in any other country in the world.

Here are the facts. Between 2005 and 2011, during which time our government has been in office, take-home pay among low-income families is up by 14% after tax and inflation. Even Andrew Coyne, who endorsed the Liberals, wrote:

In 2011, the latest year for which StatsCan has figures, the proportion of the population living on low income—that is, with incomes below the agency's Low Income Cut-off (LICO)—fell to its lowest level ... well, ever. At just 8.8%, it beat the previous record of 9.0%, set in 2010. As recently as 1996, it was at 15.2%.

We have gone from 15.2% of families living in poverty to 8.8%, a cut of almost half in just two decades from when the Liberals were in power until we took office. That is an extraordinary phenomenon and there are other statistics to support that it is a sweeping phenomenon and not an isolated statistic.

Let me go on. Throughout the world, while the global recession came about between 2008 and roughly 2011, one would expect that child poverty would go up. Millions lose their jobs and have lower incomes and as a result more children are living below the line, but not in Canada. In fact, in Canada child poverty actually dropped by 180,000 children between 2008 and 2011. Was this the result of some expensive new government program? No, the evidence is clear that we reduced poverty by putting money back in the pockets of families.

David Morley of UNICEF said, "If Canada is faring better than other western democracies, it is due to measures that are favourable

Business of Supply

to families, like tax credits, fiscal measures and benefits that have been maintained or put in place to counter the effects of the global crisis."

It is not hard to understand why. Let us look at the universal child-care benefit. Over 13 years, the Liberals spent billions of dollars trying to set up a government-run daycare program. Bureaucracies, government-funded lobbyists and researchers got all kinds of money, but in the end it did not create a single, solitary daycare space. The Liberals and the New Democrats, high in the ivory tower looking down, think modest families cannot be trusted to make their own decisions, that we need a bureaucracy to control every aspect of their lives and all of their money. I am proud to say we cancelled the Liberal bureaucracy. We divided up the savings and sent it to parents in cheques in the amount of \$1,200 per child under the age of six. We called it the universal child care benefit.

● (1205)

I asked my officials what the impact is of this benefit on poverty. Very methodically they gave me an answer. First, we use the low-income cut-off lines, which take after-tax incomes of all families with children to determine how many are low-income. Second, we did the very same comparison but based on what a family's after-tax income would have been without the universal child care benefit. The answer showed that there are 41,000 kids whose families would be beneath the poverty line without the universal child care benefit, but are above it because that benefit exists.

That was not all. We increased the amount of money that families can earn before they start paying taxes and removed one million Canadians from the tax rolls altogether. Let me quote the Parliamentary Budget Officer on our tax reductions, because there has been a lot of misinformation about who benefits from those tax reductions. Let me quote his report:

In total, cumulative changes have reduced federal tax revenue by \$30 billion, or 12 per cent. These changes have been progressive, overall. Low and middle income earners have benefited more, in relative terms, than higher income earners.

Business of Supply

The report also points out that the highest 10% of income earners benefited the least with after tax gains of just 1.4%. The \$30 billion in annual tax cuts sounds like an incomprehensibly large amount of money. It is; that is a lot of tax cuts. Let me say what it means for an average family. We have a country with 35 million people. Divide \$30 billion by 35 million, we get \$850 per person, per man, woman and child, in lower taxes. For a family of four that is \$3,400. That might not sound like a lot of money to wealthy limousine Liberals or champagne socialists, but the reality is to an average family working hard to make ends meet and get ahead, that \$3,400 can make the difference. That is why we are going to continue to reduce taxes for Canadian families.

I should emphasize that with regard to the \$850 per person in tax relief that happens every year under our government, the Parliamentary Budget Officer said specifically that the money went disproportionately to low- and middle-income earners.

The reality is that when we put money back in the pockets of everyday people, they do the right thing with it. They lift themselves up and they do the same for their children. They give their kids a better start in life. We have to believe in families and in workers and in small business owners to trust them to keep their own money. We on this side of the House believe in Canadians and we trust them to keep their earnings.

It is not just the Parliamentary Budget Officer's report or data from StatsCan that shows we are getting better off in Canada, in fact even the liberal-leaning *New York Times* wrote, "Life in Canada, Home of the World's Most Affluent Middle Class". It also compared the years when the Liberal Party was in power and found that after-tax middle-class incomes in Canada, substantially behind in 2000, now appear to be higher than in the United States.

Overall, since taking office, personal income taxes are down by 10% and take-home pay is up by 10%, on average across income levels. In fact, the lower quartile of income earners have actually benefited more than all others across the spectrum. The median net worth of Canadian families is up by 24% since 2005 when the Liberals were in power.

That brings me to the question before the House on the family tax cut and benefits that we recently instituted. I just finished talking about everything we have done in the past nine years. Now let us talk about the present.

• (1210)

In the fall, our Minister of Finance introduced the family tax cut and benefits for families, which did three things.

First, it allowed couples to split their income to save up \$2,000 on their taxes. Therefore, if one spouse earns more than the other, the higher income earning spouse can give enough to the lower spouse to equalize that, which will reduce their tax burden and allow them to keep more of their money. This allows families to make choices about how they raise their children.

Second, we increased the universal child care benefit from \$1,200 to \$1,900 per preschool child, that great poverty-fighting, middle-class supporting benefit that I discussed earlier. We also extended it for children under the age of 18. Any child who is over the age of 6 and under 18 will be eligible for up to \$720 per year.

Finally, we increased the daycare tax credit by \$1,000 so families that put their kids in a local community daycare could claim more of those costs on their taxes.

What does this mean for a family? Let me provide a few scenarios.

For families with incomes of \$95,000 and \$25,000 with two kids, one under 6 and one between 6 to 17, the net federal benefit for the 2015 tax year as a result of these new tax breaks is \$2,835.

Families where both mom and dad each earn \$60,000, with two kids, one under the age of six and the other in the adolescent years, would save \$875.

A single income couple making \$60,000 with one parent in the home and two kids would have a \$1,605 benefit.

The net benefit for a single parent with a modest income of \$45,000 and a child under the age of six the net benefit for the 2015 tax year as a result of these new breaks we have brought in for families will be \$402.

In fact, every family with kids is better off as a result of the family tax cut and benefits.

Through this motion today, the high-tax opposition parties have announced that if they ever get the chance to take office, they will take that money away. They will reach their hands into the pockets of hard-working families and take away these hard won gains. We will not let them.

As I said at the outset, the best social safety net is a strong family. That is why we are helping families with the family tax cut and benefits.

The best anti-poverty plan is a good job. That is why we have a low tax plan that creates jobs. It has created 1.2 million net new jobs, 85% of which are full time, 80% in the private sector, and two-thirds in high wage industries. That is the best relative job-creation record in the G7.

Let me quote the International Monetary Fund, which said:

Over the past several years, Canada has taken numerous steps to reduce the economy's vulnerabilities through policies designed to keep financial institutions and the financial system as a whole safer.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer said, "The current system of taxes and transfers serves to increasingly equalize income as inequality increases".

These improvements allow for a stable and strong economy that creates more jobs for Canadians.

Our job creation plan is widespread and sensible. It includes trade, tax cuts and training.

Business of Supply

Let me talk for a moment about training. As we were growing up, we were told that the only way we could be a success was to go to university. University is great. I had the honour to attend the University of Calgary. However, there are also honourable and prosperous lives to be had in the trades. We wanted to reorient our training program to fill the one million skilled job vacancies that we expect will appear in Canada over the next decade.

● (1215)

We need more plumbers, electricians, carpenters, stonemasons, and I could name many more. Our government created the apprenticeship grants, which help those families that want to give their children a chance to learn these great trades so they can go on to high salaries and incomes in high demand fields.

I am thinking now of those families with working class backgrounds that struggle to get by. People know the types I am speaking of, those who scrimp and save and set aside every penny they can so their 18 and 19 year olds can go to college and get a certificate to practise in the trades. Some of them just do not quite make it. That is why we brought in this grant, so these families with these young people could get their shot. They can get their opportunity to make a good life and have a better future, literally building our country.

This year we went beyond the apprenticeship grant and brought in the apprenticeship loan. For those young people who do not quite have enough money to retool their skills, we will now give them an interest-free loan while they study so they build those skills and ultimately build a better life for themselves.

Already it is working. Half a million young people have benefited from our apprenticeship grants. Even though we just announced the loan at the beginning of January, we already have 2,000 young people who are benefiting from those loans. This is just the beginning.

We are going to reorient our economy. We are going to give the proper esteem to these important trades jobs, because trades are just as good as professions, college is just as good as university, and a good blue collar job is just as beneficial to the Canadian economy as a white collar job. Working class Canadians deserve that respect, and they also deserve the same benefits and help as everyone else. We are going to ensure that they get it.

There is a difference between the high tax parties and our low tax government. The high tax parties are for union bosses; we are for workers. The high tax parties want to spend millions on a new office headed by a “children's commissioner”. We believe there are already eight million children's commissioners across country whose names are mom and dad.

The high tax parties want to turn workers against business owners; we want to turn workers into business owners. They want to make the rich poorer; we want to make the poor rich. They believe in a hand out; we believe in a hand up. They want a government that stands in the way; we want a government that stands by people's side.

We are going to continue to work to keep Canadians working. We have come so far. Working and middle-class families have made so

much progress over the last 10 years. However, our work is not done. There is still more to do.

We need to put yet more money in the pockets of middle-class families so they can spend in their communities, start small businesses and save for their futures. We need to create yet more jobs; 1.2 million jobs is a lot but it still is not enough. We need more.

We are going to ensure that people have the skills they need for the jobs of today, and we are going to continue with our agenda of trade, training and tax cuts to take our country forward so families can secure and build on the gains they have already won, and build the dreams they envision for themselves.

● (1220)

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is always entertaining to listen to my colleague across the aisle when he talks about all the Conservatives have done for working people in Canada, for students and for the middle class.

When I talk to Canadians from coast to coast to coast, what I hear is that we need sound policies from government. By the way, I am not referring to just union-loving, or an NDP-supporting group like the CIBC, or boards of trade and other people. People recognize the need to look at raising the minimum wage. The \$15 minimum wage has been welcomed in many parts of Canada. This is from the business community as well.

They also see the value of a national child care plan that is implemented provincially. They do not see that plan as taking their children away from them. They see that as providing real economic and educational opportunities for our young children.

How is the income splitting going to create more jobs and help working Canadians?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, I will tell the member how it is going to help. A family with a single income of \$60,000 will save \$1,600 from our family tax cut, which is income splitting and an increased universal child care benefit. That is how it is going to help. It is going to put \$1,600 back in that family's pockets. The NDP and the Liberals, the two high-tax parties, will take \$1,600 away from that family. That money is now already in the family's pockets. It applied for the 2014 tax year.

Business of Supply

Therefore, when the high-tax parties tell us that they are going to be cancelling a future benefit, they are misleading Canadians. In fact, they will be retroactively raising taxes on middle-class families if they get the chance to take office. I am talking here about a family that earns \$60,000 and the NDP wants to take \$1,600 out of that family's pockets. That is a pay cut for middle-class families and is the reason why Canadians will reject these high-tax parties and re-elect a low-tax government.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to contest a point made by my hon. colleague. He talked about tax cuts and \$800 per person. What Canadians need to know is that these tax savings are an illusion. The federal government debt has increased by about \$160 billion, which is something like \$4,000 per person. People might have received tax cuts, but they actually still owe that money to whomever invested in Canadian government bonds or to tax debts in the future. Their kids are going to have to pay that money back in something.

It is completely an illusion to claim that the government has put money back in people's pockets. It was their own money to begin with and they still owe it. I want Canadians to know that. If my hon. colleague would care to respond to that, that would be fine.

• (1225)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, it is good to see the member in the House in good form.

The reality is that Canada, under this government, has by far the lowest debt as a share of our economy of any country in the G7. In fact, our debt to our GDP is about 33%. The second place country is Germany, which is around 50%. In other words, we have by far the lowest debt of any of our competitors in our peer group.

The member is from a party whose leader says that the budget will balance itself. They held a convention recently where the Liberals argued that the debt was too small, that we needed more debt, according to the Liberals. On this side of the House, we balanced the government's budget. Now we are cutting taxes to help balance the budgets of families.

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed the minister's speech. He talked a lot about the benefits that we were providing to middle and low-income Canadians. He talked about the expansion of the universal child care benefit. He talked about the income splitting, which really targets families with one person working or maybe making a little more than his or her spouse, to provide tax fairness for those families.

Could the minister elaborate on exactly how the income splitting would work and how it would provide support for both medium and low-income Canadian families?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hard-working parliamentary secretary for his excellent work on behalf of Canadians.

Our tax code was fundamentally unfair until we fixed it. While farmers, small businesses, seniors and even divorced couples have been allowed to split their incomes for decades, salaried couples with a single income have not been allowed to do that until now. Let us say one spouse in a family earns \$60,000 and the other spouse stays

at home to look after the kids. The breadwinner will be able to give half of her income to the stay-at-home dad to reduce their tax bracket and, therefore, their tax bill. This will ensure that household is treated the same as the household next door, which earns \$60,000 through two incomes.

That is tax fairness. It will put money back in the pockets of middle-class families that make the sacrifice to care for their kids in the home, and it will ensure that children in families have more resources to get ahead. That is our agenda, a low-tax plan for families, versus the high-tax schemes of the other parties.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the speech by my Conservative colleague. He talked about the importance of creating good jobs in Canada. However, the reality is that a person who works 40 hours a week at minimum wage to support his family is living below the poverty line, even if he periodically gets help from the federal government. We cannot underestimate that. Obviously, the middle class is also suffering, but people living in poverty cannot make ends meet, even if they work 40 hours a week.

I would like to know if my Conservative colleague thinks it is normal for a person working 40 hours a week to support his family to still be living below the poverty line.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, the best way to improve families' income and quality of life is to reduce the taxes they are paying. That will give them more income. However, the New Democrats and the Liberals want to raise taxes. That will lower the income of middle-class families and families living below the poverty line.

What we are doing has a direct impact. The New Democrats do not even realize that 90% of workplaces fall under provincial jurisdiction. Our Parliament does not control minimum wage. However, what we can control is taxes. Our government is lowering taxes so that people who are working hard to improve their lives and their children's lives benefit. We will continue to do that.

• (1230)

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like the minister to explain to the House and to Canadians why his government continues to give tens of billions of dollars to large corporations when we all know that jobs are mainly created by SMEs.

Can he briefly explain this strategy? It is driving middle-class Canadians further into debt, when the government should be proposing other options, something that it has not done yet.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, that is not true. The Parliamentary Budget Officer has said that our tax cuts have helped all Canadians, particularly middle-class Canadians and Canadians living below the poverty line. Even proportionately, middle-class families and people living in poverty are the ones who have benefited from our tax cuts. Lowering taxes will give the average family approximately \$3,400.

Business of Supply

Let us talk about job creators: companies. We are lowering their employment insurance premiums. The New Democrats and the Liberals want to create a 45-day work year, where someone could receive employment insurance benefits for an entire year after working for 45 days. That would increase the cost of the program by over \$4 billion and raise taxes for small and medium-sized businesses.

This proposal would kill jobs, and that is why we are rejecting it.

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Saint-Lambert.

[*English*]

It is an honour for me to rise in this place on behalf of the good people of Davenport in the great city of Toronto to speak in support of the motion before us.

I will begin by saying that many of the people the CIBC report references and talks about live in my riding of Davenport. I am talking about cab drivers, web designers, office cleaners, bartenders, dishwashers, carpenters, consultants, and micro-entrepreneurs. As I go door to door in my riding, I hear a consistent refrain: Where are the stable jobs in the Canadian economy? Where is the promise of that middle-class stability the current government keeps talking about but never delivers? Not only do the Conservatives not deliver it, they willfully ignore the reality.

We did not need a CIBC report, although maybe the folks across the way needed a report from one of their trusted allies, to underline what many of us know if we go door to door in our ridings, which is that we have young people who are 24, 25, 26, or 27, with post graduate degrees, still living at home because they cannot find a job in their profession.

It is very hard to find a full-time job at some of Canada's very profitable companies, such as, for example, grocery store chains, where most employees are hired on a part-time basis. We have an issue here of serial part-time work, people working on contract, people working freelance, and people being self-employed. We also have people who on Monday were employed at a company only to wake up on Tuesday to find out that they have been deemed independent contractors. In other words, we have a significant issue of misclassification of workers.

Then, of course, as we speak about often in this place, we have many young people and newcomers to Canada who are actually working for free as unpaid interns, because they are desperate to find that experience to put on a resumé, which they hope will lead to a stable job. However, what we are finding, and this CIBC report underlines it, is that those stable jobs are not there at the end of all of that work. Those stable jobs are not there at end of a post graduate degree, on top of which there is \$50,000 in student debt. Those stable jobs are not there at the end of serial unpaid internships. Those stable jobs are not there at the end of a six-month, short-term contract.

Let us underline what links all of these kinds of workers. Some are urban workers by design. In other words, they are self-employed people who want to be self-employed. I was one of those people. I worked for 25 years in the arts and culture sector as a freelancer, and I can tell members that while that is the life I chose, for many people

in today's economy, there is no choice. We are seeing, as we see in the CIBC report, a staggering statistic, which is that self-employed employment grew four times faster than regular employment, and as the report also underlines, that self-employment pays significantly less than conventional employment.

These urban workers right across the country have no access to a workplace pension. They have no access to benefits, such as health benefits, extended benefits, sick leave, or compassionate leave. They also do not have access to any of our rapidly diminishing income security measures, like employment insurance.

● (1235)

In other words, our labour laws have been predicated on a workplace reality that no longer exists in this country. That reality was that one could leave school, even high school, and find a stable, full-time job. A person could imagine raising a family and buying a house, and in fact did, and after 35 years could retire with a pension that would ensure that one's senior years were lived out in a dignified fashion.

If you come to my town, Mr. Speaker, and I know you are dying to visit Toronto, you will see the effects of the Conservative government's disinterest in the realities of urban workers. Seniors are barely getting by. Young people are stuck in a cycle of short-term contract employment and free work.

As I look around this place today, I can imagine that many of the members in my caucus and also on the government side know these stories very well. Many of them likely have adult children who are struggling in today's economy. We are failing a generation of young people today by not addressing these realities.

I am not here today to promote a private member's bill. I am here today to speak in support of my colleague from Skeena—Bulkeley Valley's motion.

When we talk about precarious work, we also have to look at solutions. When we talk about precarious work, we have to ask ourselves whether the government has considered measures that would address these issues. It has come up with income splitting as a way of addressing precarious work. I cannot imagine where that fits in with this issue, because anyone who can access the government's income splitting scheme is not precariously employed.

I know that many of the members opposite have displayed a relative disinterest in the goings on in the economy of the greater Toronto area, even though it is the largest, most significant engine of the Canadian economy. It is important to note that today roughly 50% of all families in the GTA cannot find or access stable, full-time jobs. That should outrage every member in this place and anyone who cares about growing the Canadian economy.

Business of Supply

What we see in this CIBC report is, in many ways, a castigation of the economic plans and policies of the government, which have failed to address some of the most pressing issues for Canadians, including how to create an economy that builds more stable jobs. How do we create an economy in which our young people graduate from our colleges and universities, and even from our high schools, into stable employment?

We have never heard anything from the government about the quality of jobs it says it creates. We now know what the quality of those jobs is. They are low-paying. They are part-time. They are contract. They are freelance. They are self-employed. They do not come with a workplace pension. They do not come with benefits. There is no income security attached to these jobs.

We need to fix that. An NDP government will fix that.

● (1240)

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as with previous speakers, we welcome these comments because they highlight such a stark difference between the approach of the opposition and the approach of this government.

The member presents, in a rhetorical way, the same falsehoods about jobs being somewhat precarious, low-paying, and so on. If he takes the example of the area of the country where his riding is located, southwest Ontario, manufacturing suffered greatly there during the recession. What has happened in the time since the recession of 2010 to today is that job creation numbers in heavy manufacturing in my community have gone from 30% unemployment to 6.7%. These are high-paying jobs with benefits. There are thousands of them.

Therefore, how does the member square his comments with the fact that what is happening in southwestern Ontario right now is a resurgence of heavy manufacturing and all types of manufacturing, creating good-paying jobs? His numbers are completely incorrect. How does he respond to that?

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to report that I agree with the member on his opening comment. Indeed, we and the government are in stark contrast and hold starkly different views about how we deal with this issue.

Perhaps it is news to Canadians that the member for Brant considers the deputy chief economist of CIBC some kind of radical, or at least someone who is pushing nefarious statistics, but these are not our numbers. These are coming from the CIBC itself, which says that after each recession, it is clear that those stable jobs rarely come back.

That is what we are seeing here. Following the 2008 recession, we have not seen the resurgence and we have not seen the jobs that we lost being replaced with stable, full-time jobs. We see the numbers. The numbers are here.

If the member comes to Toronto, he can get a taste of what these numbers actually look like on the ground.

● (1245)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his very heartfelt speech. He

mentioned young people. It is true that we are currently failing our young people. We need to address the future of jobs in the manufacturing sector, not the resource sector.

We heard the member for Brant talk about the successes in his region. Every time he rises in the House, he tells us that everything is going well in his riding. That is odd, because we do not often hear that kind of speech.

I would like to ask my colleague why he thinks the government continues to give us the same old story about the economic action plan it has implemented, which is obviously not working, and in passing insults the CIBC economists.

[English]

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for the question, because it is something that frustrates many Canadians. Certainly when I am in my riding in Davenport, I hear this story all the time. We have an unemployment rate for young people that is twice the national average, and that is the official unemployment rate. The real unemployment rate for young people is a lot higher than that. If we are not building an economy that includes the next generation of workers, then what are we doing?

They can obfuscate or start up a fog machine of rhetoric around job creation, but we need only ask the parents of adult young people whether they think the middle class that they raised their children in is strong, healthy, and thriving in the way the government seems to think it is.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government and its majority remind me more and more of the orchestra on the *Titanic*: the ship is sinking, but do not panic, let us continue to play the same music. While the Canadian economy is springing leaks everywhere, middle-class families are drowning.

The Conservatives tell us over and over that their policy of unconditional support for western oil companies has allowed them to create 1.2 million jobs since 2008, while lowering taxes. Evidently, this government is completely blind to the toxic effects of its policy and refuses to listen to the common sense measures we are proposing to kick-start our economy and create good jobs for the middle class.

Let us take a few minutes to examine the facts. On March 6, CIBC published its Canadian employment quality index. The picture is alarming. This index takes into account the distribution of full-time and part-time jobs, the distribution of paid employment and self-employment, and compensation. The CIBC report supports everything we have said.

We said that most of the jobs being created were part-time jobs. CIBC proved it. We said that the jobs being created were for lower and lower wages. The CIBC report is damning. In 2014, the number of low-paying jobs increased twice as fast as the number of high-paying jobs. This is a trend that began in the 1990s.

As a result, CIBC's Canadian employment quality index for 2015 is at a record low. Nicely done, Conservatives.

Business of Supply

We said that the Conservatives' economic policy was bad for our economy and the strength of its investments. Once again, we were right. CIBC predicts that unless there is a major shift in economic policy, which must include strong support for investment and innovation, this decline will be part of a long-term trend that could last decades.

Like most of the policies the Conservatives have implemented, the economic record that they are trumpeting as they seek re-election is a sham.

Their economic policy is based primarily on the idea that tax cuts for big businesses are good for economic growth. This notion was crushed by the January 27 report by the Institut de recherche et d'informations socio-économiques, or IRIS, entitled "Portrait de la surépargne des entreprises au Québec et au Canada", about oversaving by businesses in Quebec and Canada.

This was a damning report for the government and the Conservatives. It ripped the economic policy they have been advocating for the past 10 years to shreds. It pointed out that major non-financial corporations have seen their tax rate drop from 22% to 15% since 2008.

Did these major corporations create jobs as a result of these tax cuts? No. Did they invest money in production or innovation? Definitely not. The tax gifts the Conservatives gave them did nothing. The major corporations hoard this money and just sit on it.

IRIS was unequivocal: \$575 billion has been hoarded in the past seven years. The findings of the IRIS report are definitive. In three sentences, they obliterate the foundation of the Conservatives' economic policy:

Here is an excerpt from these findings:

...the policy whereby we must lower taxes for corporations to give them room to manoeuvre and encourage them to invest is no longer valid...

That is an inescapable finding that calls for a rethinking of all public action on the economy.

That is what the NDP has done with workers and the middle class these past few years. The economic plan announced by our leader is the result of those efforts, and this motion presents what we will do to create good jobs for the middle class.

As we do with everything, we start with the facts. The economic fabric that generates employment depends on SMEs. Between 2002 and 2012, they created 78% of the new jobs in the private sector. The manufacturing sector and SMEs drive our wealth and innovation.

In 2014, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce determined that Canada's inadequate support for innovation in its manufacturing sector was one of the top 10 obstacles to making our economy competitive.

That is why the NDP has already proposed three key measures that will help spark economic activity and create jobs. These measures are part of a clear, coherent plan that will support a transition to a new era for the Canadian manufacturing sector.

First of all, the NDP will reduce the small business tax rate to 10%, and then to 9%. This translates into \$1.2 billion for our SMEs, which will stimulate activity at a time when growth is stagnating.

• (1250)

In terms of the manufacturing sector, we will also extend the accelerated capital cost allowance for manufacturing and processing machinery and equipment, which is set to expire this year.

Lastly, we will introduce an innovation tax credit for the manufacturing sector for businesses that invest in machines, equipment and goods used for research and development that stimulate innovation and competitiveness. This measure will allow Canadian manufacturers that make crucial investments in research and development to put \$40 million a year back into that activity. This measure will also undo the damage done by the Conservative cuts to the scientific research and experimental development tax credits and will encourage innovation in Canada.

The main stakeholders in this field have welcomed our announcements. Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters pointed out the basis of our economic policy when it stated that "the NDP has made the manufacturing sector the cornerstone of its economic plan today in Ottawa".

We will help the manufacturing sector and our SMEs create good jobs for the middle class by implementing targeted and coherent measures. SMEs are the ones that are innovating and creating good jobs, not the western oil companies, which are destroying our environment and sitting on their billions.

New Democrats understand that in order to get Canada back on track and help middle-class families succeed, we need to take concrete action in order to diversify the Canadian economy. This motion lays the groundwork for rebalancing our economy, which will stimulate growth and job creation.

For all of these reasons, I ask all MPs who say they want to encourage job creation and help the middle class to support this motion.

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

This debate really highlights the difference between the NDP vision to support small and medium-sized businesses that create more than 70% of new jobs in Canada, and that of the Conservatives, who prefer to stay out of the economy and not stimulate job creation in Canada. It is too bad. That is why the unemployment rate is so high in Canada, especially in resource regions like mine, Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean. It is not easy.

I would like my NDP colleague to say a few words about the NDP plan to support small and medium-sized enterprises so that people in the middle class who fill many of these jobs in the SMEs, can earn a good living and raise their family with decent salaries. They especially need to have jobs because the issue of employment is crucial in 2015, especially for our young people.

• (1255)

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Business of Supply

I said in my speech that the quality of jobs for hard-working Canadians has never been as bad as it is right now. This is the result of a decade of successive Liberal and Conservative governments. What makes the NDP so different is that our plan and the action we want to take will truly return the economy to the service of Canadians and not the other way around. It is by giving SMEs the power to invest in innovation and be more competitive that we will enable them to create real jobs, full-time jobs, and not unsteady jobs that unfortunately only push the middle class further into poverty.

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to thank my colleague for her very articulate and detailed speech, which really highlighted the NDP position on this situation and the turmoil in the Canadian economy, which the government is not addressing.

The government is not commenting, nor is it bringing down its new budget or coming up with new solutions. We hear over and over again the same old song about the plan to date, which does not take into account what is happening today. I really liked the image she conjured up of the orchestra that kept playing on the *Titanic*.

I would like to know how she can continue to hope that the government will hear the NDP's common sense message.

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

With respect to his question about the hope we hold out that the Conservatives will change their tune, I firmly believe that the only way to give hope to Canadians today is to replace this government. That is what the NDP must do next October.

It is vital to discern and understand where the middle class stands today and what it really means. The Conservatives have not yet understood what it means to be a member of the middle class. Thus, they cannot really provide the resources required by the Canadians who need them the most.

Mr. Dany Morin: Mr. Speaker, I completely agree with the last comment that my NDP colleague made because we see that the Conservatives do not understand the reality of the middle class. The same goes for the leader of the Liberal Party.

The question I have for my colleague is about income inequality in Canada. That is what truly defines the reality of the middle class in 2015. Their salaries are stagnating and even decreasing over time, while the very rich grow significantly richer. The Conservatives are helping that to happen.

What does my colleague think about this income inequality?

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question. Income inequality is growing. By way of evidence, CIBC issued its report this month and other economic stakeholders have taken this government to task. However, the government continues to move forward with a policy that misses the mark, particularly since we are well aware that the tax cuts will not help the middle class at all.

I believe that it is time for a real economic plan, the NDP plan, to be implemented in place of the Conservative plan.

[English]

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am indeed pleased to rise today to respond to the motion by the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley. This debate is really about how our government is responding to the needs and aspirations of Canadian families. The impression put before the House is that this government is not doing enough. That is simply dead wrong, and I welcome the opportunity today to set the record straight.

The Government of Canada believes that the most important way to raise the incomes of Canadians and improve their standard of living is to grow the economy as a whole. That is why, since 2006, our top priorities have been creating jobs, fostering economic growth, and building for long-term prosperity. To achieve these goals, our government is taking a wide-ranging and comprehensive approach. We are cutting taxes, increasing support for hard-working Canadian families, promoting trade and investment, supporting key economic sectors, making education accessible and affordable, reducing barriers to labour market participation, and being responsible fiscal managers. Our policies are working.

Canada's economy is making a good recovery from the most recent worldwide recession. For example, Canada is among the G7 leaders in job creation, with over 1.2 million net new jobs created since the recovery. Canadians enjoy one of the highest standards of living in the world. The low income rate in Canada has been declining and it now sits at an all-time low.

Canadian families in all income groups have seen increases of about 10% or more in their take-home incomes since 2006. The federal tax burden is at the lowest it has been in 50 years. Our government has cut taxes 180 times, saving close to \$3,400 a year for an average Canadian family of four. These tax reductions give parents greater flexibility to make the choices that are right for them and help build a solid foundation for future economic growth, more jobs, and a higher standard of living for themselves and their children.

Canadians at all income levels are benefiting from tax relief, with low- and middle-income Canadians receiving proportionately greater benefit. More than one million low-income Canadians have been removed from the federal tax rolls altogether. And since 2006, our government has also steadily lowered taxes on businesses.

Business of Supply

Today, Canada's total business tax costs are the lowest in the G7 and more than 40% lower than those in the United States. Thanks to our low taxes, more businesses will want to invest and set up shop in Canada, and that will generate more jobs. It is important to note that we have cut taxes without reducing transfers to Canadians and other levels of government. In fact, we have increased our cash transfers to the provinces and territories in support of health and social services to all-time record highs. This fiscal year, the provinces and territories will receive almost \$65 billion through the major transfers, an increase of \$3 billion over 2013-14.

It is clear to me that supporting strong families and preparing Canadians for jobs go hand in hand. Keeping taxes low for families means that parents have more to invest in their children's futures.

• (1300)

Because it is important to ensure that all children get the best possible start and have the opportunity to reach their full potential, we have also provided over \$6.5 billion in 2013-14 to support early childhood development and child care, through transfers to the provinces and territories, direct spending, and tax measures for families. This is the largest investment in early childhood development and early learning and child care in the history of Canada.

We are also making work pay. We often hear about the dilemma of the working poor, who cannot make ends meet, even when they have full-time jobs. To make work pay, in 2007 we introduced the working income tax benefit, or WITB. This is a refundable tax credit that supplements the earnings of low-income workers to ensure they are financially better off when they are employed. Up to 1.5 million working individuals and their families receive assistance through the WITB.

More people working means more people who can support themselves and their families. Of course, more people working in better-paid jobs means more equality in our society. One of the best ways to reduce inequality, of course, is through education first, and we are funding programs like Pathways to Education Canada that encourage secondary school students in low-income communities to stay in school.

Our government also makes significant investments to ensure that students and their families can afford post-secondary education. We offer incentives to help families save for their children's educations; subsidized loans and grants to help students cover both education and living expenses; and tax credits for tuition and books.

We have also taken significant action to make post-secondary education more accessible and affordable and to help students make informed career decisions in line with labour market needs. Young people, however, often feel that they are not getting a fair chance in the labour market. It is true that their unemployment rate is higher than the national average, and that is certainly a cause of inequality. Our government invests, however, more than \$330 million a year in the youth employment strategy to help young people between the ages of 15 and 30 gain the skills and work experience they need to make a successful transition to the labour market.

We are also encouraging Canadians to go into the skilled trades, where they can make excellent wages. We now offer both grants and

loans to help apprentices complete their training in Red Seal trades. For example, in January, we officially launched the Canada apprentice loan. The loan will provide apprentices with interest-free loans of up to \$4,000 to complete their technical training in a Red Seal trade. Anyone pursuing one of the 57 categories of designated Red Seal trades, from electrician to sheet metal worker, can apply. This initiative will assist more apprentices in completing their training and encourage more Canadians to consider a career in the skilled trades, and we expect that 26,000 apprentices per year will benefit from \$100 million in loans.

The Government of Canada offers several other existing supports for apprentices. The apprenticeship incentive grant provides \$1,000 to apprentices who have completed their first and/or second year or level, up to \$2,000. The apprenticeship completion grant provides an additional \$2,000 to apprentices who have completed their training and obtained their journeyman certification. In total, an apprentice can receive \$4,000 from our government with these two grants. To date, our government has already provided over 500,000 apprenticeship grants.

• (1305)

There is no doubt, though, that too many people in our society are still out of a job and left on the sidelines. That is why our government offers a number of targeted training and employment programs for vulnerable and under-represented groups, such as aboriginal people, youth, people with disabilities and newcomers.

Canada's economy has demonstrated the capacity to create jobs, setting the conditions for Canadians and their families to be successful. A recent Statistics Canada study found that the median net worth of Canadian families was up by 44.5% from 2005. Our government's economic strategy has a direct and positive impact on Canadian families and children each and every day, at the dinner table, paying the rent or the mortgage, shopping for winter clothes and in so many other areas.

We believe that families are the building block of our society and are critical to Canada's long-term prosperity. That is why the government takes a direct role in supporting a number of initiatives that offer help to millions of families across this country.

The universal child care plan respects the role of parents in determining how to best care for their children, and recognizes the responsibility of the provincial and territorial governments for the delivery of child care services.

Business of Supply

In addition, there are existing measures in place as part of the employment insurance program that support low-income families and individuals. For example, the family supplement allows low-income families with children to receive up to 80% of their insured earnings, higher than the normal rate of 55%.

In 2011-12, low-income families received \$112.6 million in additional benefits through the family supplement. The program also offers a premium refund to low-income workers. Individuals with less than \$2,000 of insured earnings are eligible to have their EI premiums refunded after having completed their personal income tax forms.

Our government also recognizes the emotional and financial challenges faced by parents when a child has a life-threatening illness or injury and the important role parents play in that child's recovery. As part of the Helping Families in Need Act, the parents of critically ill children EI special benefit provides income support for up to 35 weeks to parents or legal guardians of children under 18 years of age with a life-threatening illness or injury.

As all members know, young children need stability in the home, but they also need better access to education as they move into their teen years and eventually into the workforce. Through the Canada education savings program, the government encourages families to start saving early for their children's education.

Modest-income families benefit from the Canada learning bond. The Canada learning bond is \$500 that the federal government deposits into a registered education savings plan, or RESP. A child may be eligible for another \$100 per year, up to a maximum of \$2,000.

Most important, parents or primary caregivers do not have to contribute any of their own money to receive the Canada learning bond. When we open an RESP, we can also receive the Canada education savings grant. The federal government adds between 20% and 40% of contributions to the RESP, depending on income, with a lifetime maximum of \$7,200 per child.

We truly believe the most effective approach to raising the incomes of Canadians and their families is to keep growing this economy and help ensure that Canadians are well equipped with the skills required to obtain and keep the well-paying jobs available today and in the future. That is why our government's top priorities remain creating jobs, economic growth and long-term prosperity.

We on this side of the House are very proud of the progress we have made over the past few years in improving the lives of families and children. We will continue to support these initiatives and look for even better ways to meet our future challenges.

• (1310)

[Translation]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was flabbergasted when I heard my Conservative colleague say that he was proud of what his Conservative government has done in recent years.

I want to quote Benjamin Tal, the deputy chief economist at CIBC:

...the job creation gap between low and high-paying jobs has widened with the number of low-paying...positions rising twice as fast as the number of high-paying jobs...Those trajectories are largely behind the softening in our measure of employment quality over the past two decades.

How can my Conservative colleague be so proud of job creation in Canada when last year the government created mainly unstable, low-paying jobs?

• (1315)

[English]

Mr. Brad Butt: Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that the vast majority of the 1.2 million net new jobs that have been created in our Canadian economy since the recovery have been full-time, high paying and private sector jobs. These are exactly the kinds of jobs that our economy needs to create.

I often hear the opposition criticizing any type of job. All jobs are good jobs. I started as a checkroom attendant in the local pool in Mississauga when I got my first job at 15 years old. I was proud to do that job. It was minimum wage, but I learned a lot and I moved up the ladder. Eventually, I became the pool supervisor when I was 18 years old. I worked along.

All jobs are good jobs. We know that we have more work to do. The government is focused on doing that. It has brought in a number of initiatives that help people retrain to get better jobs, to go back to school, and to learn a trade through apprenticeship grants and loans that are helping people to get better jobs in the country, that reflect the labour needs of the businesses that I meet with. They tell me what kinds of people they need to work in their places of business right away. They are good jobs. They are high-paying jobs and they support families.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are a number of points in the member's statements that I would call into question, but I will look at the bottom line. In the province of Ontario, particularly, in the last half of a dozen years, and in other regions of Canada, we have lost literally hundreds of thousands of jobs, not tens of thousands. We have lost several hundred thousand manufacturing, industry-type jobs. They were good, solid, valuable jobs.

The member is right. All jobs are important and play a role. I was pumping gas when I was 11 years old. We all contribute. All jobs are great. However, Canadians are concerned that the quality of jobs has diminished in terms of the overall number of well-paying jobs, and the government has not responded well to that issue.

A good example of government policy is income splitting. The government is taxing the middle class to support the very few in Canadian society, when that money could have been spent in a much better and more creative way, such as generating jobs through infrastructure programming and so forth. Would the member not agree with that?

Business of Supply

Mr. Brad Butt: Mr. Speaker, I am particularly pleased that my Liberal colleague got up and talked about the loss of manufacturing jobs. I can tell the House as a member of Parliament from the province of Ontario that when I talk to manufacturers and business people about their number one cost and concern, why they cannot grow their business and, in some cases, why they move their businesses out of Ontario, they say it is because of the Ontario Liberal provincial government's policy of high hydro prices. That is the number one reason that manufacturers give me for not wanting to do business in the province of Ontario.

Maybe my friend from Winnipeg North can have a chat with the Premier of Ontario and help us all bring those jobs back to the province of Ontario.

[Translation]

Mr. Dany Morin: Mr. Speaker, in response to the answer my Conservative colleague gave earlier, I agree that a low-paying job is better than no job.

However, what is most disgraceful about the member's pride in the Conservative government's record over the past nine years is that nearly 1.3 million Canadians are still unemployed.

How can the Conservative member be so proud of the Conservative government's economic policy over the past nine years when the government has not even been able to help these 1.3 million Canadians find jobs?

• (1320)

[English]

Mr. Brad Butt: Mr. Speaker, even one Canadian without a job is one too many. All of us in this House want to work to ensure that every single Canadian who wants to work has an opportunity to do so.

The facts are quite different from how the NDP spins them. The fact of the matter is there are 1.2 million more net new jobs today than there were at the end of the worldwide economic recession. There are more Canadians working today than at any other time in the history of the country. However, there are still too many people who cannot find adequate jobs in this country. I appreciate this and I know it in my own community.

We have more work to do. Great work has absolutely been done at the federal level through a number of initiatives that I talked about in my speech today, and many more are coming down the pipe. Our partners in the provinces and municipalities have to play their role as well. When the provinces bring in policies that are anti-job creation, that make businesses not want to stay in Canada or not start up in Canada, that is a huge problem in our ability to create good jobs for all Canadians.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I want the member to recognize that he needs to focus his attention on the federal responsibility, and give us very specific examples.

Let us take a look at the EI premium reduction that the Liberal Party has put forward, which would have created tens of thousands of jobs in every region of our country. That is a federal policy. The Conservatives have said no to that. That policy would have generated jobs, valuable jobs that the member is arguing for.

On the other hand, the government is bringing forward an income split that is going to cost hundreds of millions of dollars every year. It is going to go to the wealthiest of Canadians. That is a federal government policy.

Does the member not understand or not see that if we want to create jobs, then we have to adopt federal policies like the one the leader of the Liberal Party has put forward on the EI premium benefit and maybe throw out some of the Conservative policy announcements such as the income splitting? That is how to generate jobs, if the government really wants to do that.

Mr. Brad Butt: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Winnipeg North talks about the EI system, and I am certainly happy to talk to him about that.

It was actually our Minister of Finance who announced the three-year rate freeze for EI premiums for businesses, long before the Liberals came up with whatever scheme they believe will actually create jobs. We have been listening to groups like the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters, Canadian Chamber of Commerce and the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, which have all been very complimentary of our government's track record in this regard.

The Liberals talk about their EI plan, which is that one only has to work 45 days in a year in this country to be able to claim EI benefits. That is going to kill jobs, kill small businesses, and drive premium costs through the roof because there is no other way to pay for a 45-day work year.

[Translation]

Mr. Dany Morin: Mr. Speaker, my Conservative colleague spoke about the EI system and the Conservatives' reform of that system.

My constituents consistently ask me why the Conservative government insists on enforcing a two-week waiting period before someone who loses their job can receive EI. The government could quickly eliminate that waiting period, which would make a huge difference to the families of people who have lost their job.

[English]

Mr. Brad Butt: Mr. Speaker, the employment insurance system is an insurance policy.

It is an insurance policy that employers and employees pay into for individuals to be eligible to receive benefits if they have lost their jobs due to no fault of their own. Like any insurance scheme, any policy of that nature, there are some restrictions and some caveats in the program. One of them is the two-week waiting period.

What I am particularly proud of is that for a vast majority of the claims that are made under the EI system, those individuals receive those benefits. They receive those benefits within the timeframe the department has prescribed for those benefits to be received. We have heard testimony to that effect at the human resources committee, of which I am a member. I am particularly pleased that we continue to have a strong income support system to support Canadians who have unfortunately lost their job due to no fault of their own.

Business of Supply

•(1325)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the fine member for Surrey North.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to debate this excellent motion put forward by my colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley, because it is not only insightful, but also very representative of the current employment situation in Canada from coast to coast.

When we look at it carefully, we first see that the unemployment rate has remained high since the 2008 recession, and the quality of jobs has been declining since 1989. Whether under Liberal or Conservative governments, it makes no difference. There has been a decline.

Furthermore, we would very much like to see the House call on the government to ensure that budget 2015 first and foremost invests in measures that stimulate the economy in order to create and protect sustainable full-time jobs for the middle class in high-paying sectors across Canada.

In addition, the government must abandon its expensive and unfair income splitting scheme, which would cost \$2 billion. When we look at unemployment during the second decade of the 21st century, after the Liberals and the Conservatives successively stole over \$57 billion from the fund—which still belongs to the workers who have paid into it all their lives in many cases—the troubling part is that it is increasingly difficult to access the EI system. It is especially difficult because of the reform introduced by the minister at the time, a disgraceful reform for the workers who have consistently paid into it.

The result is that more and more people are opting out of the system, which brings me to my point about the unemployment rate. This actually means that those people are no longer accounted for in the number of people looking for work, which ultimately brings the rate down. It is basically all make-believe. It is an abominable sham in a modern society that says and thinks it is flourishing.

So much for prosperity. Absolutely everything has been done to discourage people and keep hope alive because hope is so important when we are talking about men and women looking for stable work in Canada that is not in the oil industry. I have nothing against those jobs—that is not what I am saying. However, there are other fields, and people are qualified to do other kinds of jobs that, unfortunately, have not been available since the crisis and were not available even well before that.

Before, Canada was a shining example of diversity in its economic sectors. The manufacturing industry was the cornerstone and made growth over the years and well-paid full-time jobs possible. Unfortunately, there were back-to-back crises in 1980 and 1981—which was a long time ago—and 1992 and 1993. Then the focus was on “hyperglobalization” in the 1990s, with Asia leading the pack, especially China with growth rates around 15% in the 1990s. All of these irritants should have raised red flags for quite a few alert governments around the world, but they did not. Both the Liberals and the Conservatives focused on one sector. They let themselves be blinded by IMF and World Bank recommendations. That is unfortunate.

Over the past few decades, our economy, which grew thanks to the manufacturing sector, quietly morphed into an economy that relied primarily on the tertiary sector, which is retail sales and customer service. It simply cannot grow at the rates that the manufacturing sector made possible. It cannot perpetuate, create and maintain stable, full-time jobs for both men and women.

Today, Canada does have niches where research and innovation can support investment and provide hope for a good future. These include the aerospace industry, where the dream is still alive, the video game industry, which has been flourishing for some time around Montreal, new energy sources such as biomass, wind and solar, and of course, electric cars. That is right: small companies are developing electric cars right here in Canada.

•(1330)

All of that is possible if we improve the socioeconomic conditions in which these businesses evolve, be they small and medium-size businesses or large corporations. Sometimes self-employed workers are even the ones to come up with an idea and develop a small business. We need a safe, prosperous environment

Furthermore, the gap between the upper middle class and lower middle class has widened dangerously in recent decades, because the end of the “glorious thirty” for the manufacturing sector in the west has increased that gap. We need to address this trend once and for all, because society as a whole suffers as a result. The middle class, which is now deeply in debt, is mortgaging future generations. We must not forget that it has always been the middle class that has supported the high consumption levels we have right now, and therefore economic growth. However, there is no longer any certainty, except for the debt we are passing on to our children, and not just an economic and environmental debt, but also a social debt, which will have an impact on our society.

One out of every two workers is uncertain about his or her job. It is unfortunate. That is why education and training still lead to better opportunities on the job market, regardless of the level completed. The \$2 billion that the government will try to recover because of income splitting would be better spent in the know-how of Canadians across the country, which is an important component. It would be far more useful to invest in ongoing training and research and development than any other partisan action, which would one day have to come to an end, anyway.

What do we want to pass on to our future generations? I will not talk about the environment since everyone knows my opinion on that subject: we are destroying the planet. Nevertheless, with regard to the environment and the economy, the Stern report, which was released in the fall of 2006, was clear: our inaction will cost more than a massive and immediate intervention. Naomi Klein said the same thing in her book, which was published recently.

These two economists, who have changed their opinions about the impact of air pollution, ocean overfishing and the well-known plastic islands that are now floating in our oceans, have shown that things can change if we take action soon.

Business of Supply

It would be easy to work together in an inclusive way, as brothers and sisters, to make this planet and this country a place of wealth, development and even friendship. Everyone benefits from economic wealth, development and prosperity. We are not going to help each other and give everyone a chance by tearing the fabric of our society, as the government is doing right now with employment insurance and social housing.

I would like to close with a message of hope for the people in my riding. Regardless of our sexual orientation, religion or beliefs, we should all have the right to live in a region, province, territory, nation and country where all people are considered equal and have an equal opportunity to follow their dreams and enjoy their rights and freedoms, which include access to a job that allows everyone to achieve their full potential in a free, fair and just world.

To counter the words of the famous and rational Mr. Spock, who said that the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few, Captain Kirk, who was more sensible, told him that the individual must be saved because without him the group no longer had value. In economics, it is the decisions of that individual, the *Homo economicus*, that create demand and wealth.

It is not by letting things go, by being complacent about our social fabric and job creation across the country or by forgetting the first nations, women, single-parent families and self-employed workers that we are going to create wealth and harmony and finally live in a prosperous Canada.

• (1335)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the member's comments and in the body of the resolution that we are asked to vote on today, there is reference to the Liberal Party, and I have often heard members make comments today in regard to the Liberal Party while it was in government.

It is important for us to recognize that when the Liberal Party took the reins of power in 1993, we were experiencing double-digit-plus unemployment rates. It was through Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin that we were able to get that number into the single digits, down to 6% and 7%. It worked quite well.

Many members would say that we need to generate opportunities for employment. My question for the member is related to how he feels that opportunities for employment would best be generated. Is there one specific policy that he believes would have an impact on increasing the number of jobs in the different regions of Canada? Is there one policy that the member himself would be advocating?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rousseau: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent question.

I am not going to applaud what the Liberals did in recent decades. They stole \$50 billion from the employment insurance fund. They used that money to create jobs and invest. They invested on the backs of workers.

Clearly, SMEs drive our economy because that is where we have the most potential to create jobs. With the reduction of the tax burden and red tape, or what we call bureaucracy, many small businesses

could truly continue to be prosperous and, more importantly, create jobs. Whether in agriculture or in new energies, the potential to create jobs is tremendous, especially if we stimulate the economy by investing in SMEs.

This is a question of creating a healthy and fair environment for all. Whether SMEs have 5 employees or 50, they all need a bit of support, not just for creating jobs, but also for continuous training. In other words, people working in businesses need ongoing training in order to be more effective and more productive.

[*English*]

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we often hear in this House that small businesses are the backbone of our economy and create eight out of every ten jobs, yet we have seen nothing over the last years from the current government that will help these very businesses make investments that will enhance their businesses and thus create more jobs.

I know elections are coming up later this year. I would like to ask my hon. colleague what the NDP would do after forming the next government to help small businesses.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rousseau: Mr. Speaker, one of the first measures we will adopt will be to gradually reduce the tax rate from 11% to 9% for SMEs so that they can reinvest in job creation and make their environment safe. We are also talking about continuous training for employees and increasing investments in innovation.

If we focus on all the SMEs in a number of economic sectors across Canada, this could create thousands of jobs. This could ensure that in every region of Canada, in my riding in the Eastern Townships or in British Columbia, businesses can not only survive, but earn good money.

[*English*]

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as always, it is an honour to speak in the House on behalf of my constituents in Surrey North.

The motion in front of us is basically calling on the government to acknowledge the long-term decline in good-paying jobs in Canada, especially over the last 25 years, under both the Conservative government and the Liberal government. We need to take some concrete action. We in the NDP have a number of ideas, which I will be discussing. We would like the Conservatives to actually steal them from us and incorporate them in budget 2015, which hopefully will be coming very shortly from the government.

There was a report last week from one of the major banks. It talked about declining job quality in Canada. Canadians do not have to see a report from a bank to realize that quality, good-paying jobs have been declining over the last eight or nine years, especially under the Conservative government.

Business of Supply

We have seen 400,000 manufacturing jobs disappear under this government. Those manufacturing jobs were the value-added jobs. When we talk about good-paying jobs, those are value-added jobs. If we take the trees out of the forest and just ship the logs, it is not going to create value-added jobs. Value added is something we do with that tree. We make it into lumber or other products. Value-added jobs are the ones that pay higher wages to workers. However, under this government, we have seen those jobs disappearing from coast to coast.

There are 1.3 million Canadians out of work. It is a great opportunity for the government to actually do something for these unemployed Canadians to generate good-paying jobs to help them and their families. The jobs that have been created over the last eight or nine years, according to the study published last week, are not good-paying jobs. I know that Canadians know this. I know people in my constituency know this, because they come and talk to me and I go to talk to them.

Here is an opportunity to invest in our small businesses and invest in our communities to ensure that the future jobs that are created are good-paying jobs.

As I said, 400,000 manufacturing jobs have disappeared, and 1.3 million Canadians are unemployed. A lot of the jobs that are being created now are part-time, low-paying jobs. That is not a good record. That is not how we would like to see Canada grow. We need to ensure that no one is left behind.

I have people in my constituency who work 40 hours a week, yet they are living below the poverty line. Minimum wage is very low in all the provinces. One of the things we would like to see is an increase in the minimum wage in federally regulated industries. We would like to see it raised to \$15. Minimum wage in real terms has not increased since 1972. What the minimum wage was in 1972 is what it is today. There has been no real gain in the minimum wage.

On the other hand, tens of billions of dollars has been handed to wealthy corporations by the government, whether it is the oil companies or the big banks, yet there has not been that investment in our communities and our small businesses.

I am going to offer some real solutions that we will be providing to the government, if it would like to borrow them. Otherwise, later this year, we will have an election, and we are going to offer a clear alternative to this government for Canadians. We will form the government later in 2015 and will implement these very ideas that will help middle-class, hard-working families.

I know that they are laughing. I would like to see if they are still laughing after the election.

● (1340)

The Conservatives come up with great ideas, but the problem is that those great ideas only help the wealthiest. They came up with an income splitting plan. They say that they have a great family tax reduction scheme and will put money back into the pockets of everyday families. The problem is that those everyday families are the richest 15%. They are not giving the billions of dollars to the very people who need it. They are giving it to the top echelon, the 15%, the wealthiest people in this country.

Conservatives are coming up with some other schemes. They say that they are going to give \$60 more for children aged six to 18. It is good to put some money in the pockets of parents and families. The problem is that real families actually want affordable child care. I have talked to hundreds of people, not only in my constituency but around the Lower Mainland and the greater Vancouver area. There are families that cannot afford child care. Some of the child care spaces, if they are available in the Lower Mainland, cost anywhere from \$1,000 to \$1,500 per month, per child, for some sort of daycare or child care. According to my math, \$60 would keep a child in daycare for two days. What are parents supposed to do the rest of the 28 days?

If we have affordable child care, women are able to get into the workforce and contribute to the workforce. It brings in additional revenue for the government when they are able to participate. That is another idea: an affordable child care program available to all families across this country to give families the flexibility to work and earn additional income.

To help our economic engine, small businesses, we would offer to decrease their corporate tax rate from 11% to 9%. Another idea is to create a tax credit to make it more affordable for business owners to invest in innovation, machinery, and equipment. I talked about the minimum wage.

● (1345)

Another opportunity for the government is to strengthen the pension plan, and the Conservatives have failed to do that.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer said that we did not need to increase the retirement age from 65 to 67, yet the government is increasing the retirement age. Again, when we form government after the next election, we will bring that back to age 65. I want Canadians to know that. Conservatives are not on their side. They are not only increasing the retirement age, but under the government's watch, the debt has gone up by \$176 billion. Who is going to pay for that? It is our children. It is not responsible for parliamentarians to burden future generations with extra tax. That is not the way we should be doing things.

I hope the Conservatives will borrow some of the ideas we have offered throughout the day and start working for Canadian families.

● (1350)

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask my colleague from the NDP a question I am sure he has heard before, but I have not heard a good enough answer yet. Maybe he can do a better job.

The question is about the member's statement concerning the tax rate for small businesses. As he knows, large businesses are taxed at a higher rate. Therefore, as one grows from a small business to a large business, the marginal tax on the extra profits is very high, because the tax rate goes up. The business increases a little bit, and all of a sudden, the whole business is taxed at this higher rate. It is kind of a distortion and a perverse incentive.

Business of Supply

If they want to decrease the small business tax rate, how do they compensate for this disincentive to grow past this boundary between small and large businesses?

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, I know the answer to this question, and I also know the answer to some of the other questions posed earlier.

It was a Liberal government that actually raided the \$50-billion unemployment insurance fund we had. That is one answer for the member from the third party.

Second, we have heard over and over in this House that the backbone of our economy is small businesses. They are the ones that generate eight out of 10 jobs. If there is anyone we need to help grow this economy to help Canadians, it is small businesses, whether it is by cutting tax rates or by clamping down on the merchant fees, which are exorbitant, charged by the friends of the current Conservative government.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Surrey North for his excellent speech. Like me, he represents an urban riding. I wonder if he shares my concern, and that of many of my constituents, not only about the number of unemployed people but about the quality of work, particularly for the young. I am told that the rate of unemployment for youth continues to be double the national average. However, it is also the quality of the jobs and the fact that people in my riding are living with their parents, because they simply cannot find jobs, even in a place as blessed as British Columbia. I wonder if he finds in his constituency the same level of concern. If so, what can we do about it?

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, I thank the very hard-working member for Victoria.

The member is absolutely right. The unemployment rate for youth is particularly high, yet we have seen nothing in the last three or four budgets from the current government that would stimulate the economy to help employ young people who are graduating from our universities and colleges.

I know for a fact, from a number of students I have been in touch with over the last few months in my constituency, and in fact from my own nephew, who is in the process of graduating, that the job prospects for youth are not very good right now. Yet the government has failed to take any concrete steps to help the bright future of our country.

I urge the government to include concrete steps in the next budget to ensure that there is something for our young people.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague was sort of pooh-poohing the idea of the \$60-a-month benefit for families with children between six and 17. He implied that it would not make any difference. However, what he failed to take into account, or what he failed to inform Canadians about, is the fact that under this government, the average Canadian family is now paying \$3,400 less in taxes and is \$3,400 better off.

I have three adult children. Each of them has three children. I know what a difference it makes in their lives. I know what a difference it makes to the average Canadian family.

I wonder if my colleague would be honest with this House and tell us that if and when he goes to the polls, he will be honest with Canadians and tell them that in order to pay for the NDP's extravagant schemes, he and his party will remove that \$3,400 benefit from all Canadian families that have children.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, the member is talking about numbers. He is talking about giving \$3,400 to families. That is great, but what he is not telling Canadians is that the Conservatives have so many fees. They have reduced transfer payments for our health care. Not only that, and I talked about this in my speech, they have left Canadians with \$176 billion in debt. How much is that per family? That turns into tens of thousands of dollars. This is their economic record.

To sum it up, in the last 100 years, Conservatives have balanced one budget. This is their record. Since the year the *Titanic* sank, the Conservatives have balanced one budget. That is their record.

• (1355)

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for offering me the opportunity to tell the House about our government's successful action to create jobs, growth and long-term prosperity for all Canadians. However, my thanks end there.

When I read the motion, the words of two great thinkers come to mind.

It was Voltaire who said, "I have only ever made one prayer... 'O Lord, make my enemies ridiculous.' And God granted it".

It was Abraham Lincoln who said, "How many legs does a dog have if you call the tail a leg? Four. Calling a tail a leg doesn't make it a leg".

Why do these words come to mind? Only the NDP could look at Canada today, with more Canadians working than at any other time in our history, with 1.2 million net new jobs created since the great recession, with the lowest overall federal tax burden in half a century, with the IMF and the OECD expecting Canada to be growing faster than most economies in the G7 over this year and next, only the NDP and its left-wing ideology, immune to facts, immune to evidence, immune to the self-evident reality around it, would look at the lowest unemployment rate in six years and call it sustained high unemployment.

Were Abraham Lincoln here with us today, he would no doubt say that the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley, blinded by ideology, is seeing five legs on the dog. However, a tail is not a leg, and the member opposite could not be more wrong about the Canadian economy.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

The member is ignoring everything that Canadians have accomplished since the depths of the recession. How does the member propose to address the crisis he imagines? He wants to increase taxes, increase spending and increase the debt. He wants to roll back recent measures to put money back in the pockets of Canadians who work hard, the tax cuts that help every Canadian family with children, the tax cuts that put an average of \$1,140 in every family's pockets, the tax cuts that benefit mainly low- and middle-income families.

The NDP wants to eliminate these measures and replace them with a new carbon tax on everything. This carbon tax will increase the cost of living for all Canadians. It will result in higher prices for everything from groceries to gas to public transit, higher mortgages and rents and a higher cost of living.

[English]

The member opposite thinks that what the economy needs, what Canada needs, is spending money that we do not have at a time when the crisis of the recession has passed, instead of spending within our means at a time when the Canadian economy is the envy of the world.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. minister will have 16 minutes remaining in his time when the House next resumes debate on the question.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[Translation]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, FD): Mr. Speaker, the study of Bill C-51 is being derailed.

The Conservatives have turned a legitimate study into a toxic debate. The Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness is fearmongering rather than fulfilling his duties. He even referred to the Holocaust to justify the bill. This shocking comparison is worrisome because it indicates that the Conservatives are prepared to twist all the facts to achieve their ends.

It is not surprising that they are refusing to listen to experts such as the Privacy Commissioner, who is worried about the impact Bill C-51 will have on freedom of expression, surveillance of civil society groups and the integrity of personal information that will be shared by the agencies and departments.

Every day, it becomes clearer that the Conservatives do not intend to let the truth and the adverse consequences of Bill C-51 extinguish the flame of terror that they are fanning. They are hanging on to Bill C-51 like a lifeline in order get re-elected, even if it means sacrificing some of the rights and freedoms of millions of Canadians.

[English]

KRAFT HOCKEYVILLE 2015

Mr. Greg Kerr (West Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to support the nomination of the town of Middleton, in the Annapolis Valley, to compete for the name Kraft Hockeyville 2015.

The community has been working hard to ensure Middleton has a strong campaign. In the past month it has received thousands of testimonials in support from those who have had wonderful experiences at the Middleton arena. The arena has hosted minor hockey, high school hockey, the men's hockey league, the CanSkate program, and weekly public skating sessions. It also hosts numerous events in the off season, including a craft show, floor hockey and an annual dance in support of the Middleton minor hockey association.

I encourage everyone to follow along at the Kraft Hockeyville website and vote often for Middleton. I join the community in voicing my support for Middleton to become Kraft Hockeyville 2015.

* * *

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Burnaby general hospital is in such bad repair that the Christmas tree cannot be plugged in because it could overload the electrical system. This is no joke. It is sad but it is true. The hospital does not have enough beds, or staff or washrooms. The aging buildings spread infection.

The hospital staff is excellent, but the building is crumbling around them and their patients. This is not right. It is not right because this is the same city where Tommy Douglas, the founder of medicare, won his first federal seat. It is also home to one of Canada's most decrepit hospitals.

The crisis at Burnaby Hospital is why I call on the Conservatives to reverse their decision to slash \$36 billion from health transfers to the provinces. It is also why I am joining NDP MLA Kathy Corrigan and B.C. NDP leader John Horgan in calling for a new Burnaby hospital to be built.

I will be working hard to help our leader secure the first NDP government in Canadian history so we can reverse these Conservative cuts and get Canadians the health care they need and the health care they deserve.

* * *

BEN AND EMMA'S BENEFIT CONCERT

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last Saturday, March 7, I was truly honoured to be a part of a very special event in my riding—Ben and Emma's benefit concert. These two young people are both courageously battling serious illnesses. Ben, a young boy of four, has cerebral palsy, Emma, an eleven-year old girl, was recently diagnosed with leukemia. Proceeds from this concert are going to the families of these two precious children to help with the costs related to dealing with these difficult situations.

Statements by Members

I am excited to say that over \$13,000 was raised.

I wish to extend my appreciation to the organizers of this event, along with the local artists who offered their talents and performed, and of course to the attendees and supporters of the Ben and Emma benefit concert. Their support and dedication to the nurturing and goodwill of others in times of need not only helped to raise much needed funds, but also raised the spirits for all in our community.

* * *

HOUSING

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Trinity—Spadina, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on February 20, I met with over 25 stakeholders and municipal politicians in Montreal to discuss the housing situation in Quebec.

At a round table on homelessness, housing providers and shelter workers all agreed on one thing: the Conservative government's one-size-fits-all approach to housing and homelessness is not working. In particular, the government is failing seniors. As Canada's population ages, so too is the country's homeless population.

For Canadians being diagnosed with Alzheimer's, not only is their health in jeopardy, their housing is now put at risk too. If they do not remember to pay rent, if they are easily confused while looking for housing, if they end up in a shelter and are agitated, their disease can literally put them out on the street. With Alzheimer's, isolation can move from chronic to catastrophic, even with the best of care, and on the street it all gets worse.

We need a new housing policy that includes practical and targeted support for Canada's aging population. Our seniors deserve to age with dignity, in housing with care. The government's policies leave low-income Alzheimer's patients in particular out in the cold, which is unacceptable.

* * *

● (1405)

GERRIE ELECTRIC

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this year's theme for International Women's Day was "Make It Happen" One of the tenets of the theme was making it happen in business ownership for women.

I would like to congratulate the co-CEOs of Gerrie Electric, Elaine and Heather Gerrie, for their successes in business. With over \$150 million annual sales, Gerrie Electric is one of Canada's largest independent electrical and automation distributors.

Elaine and Heather are true role models for women in business. Not only have they succeeded in business leadership and ownership, they have "Made It Happen" in a male dominated industry.

I want to thank Elaine and Heather Gerrie for breaking down barriers and realizing opportunity. Their vision, drive and determination are making a difference in the lives of their employees, our community of Burlington and our country.

I thank Elaine and Heather Gerrie for "Making It Happen", and congratulate them on being recognized as one of the best managed companies in Canada.

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF LA FRANCOPHONIE

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on March 20 I will celebrate the International Day of La Francophonie with my constituents. We can expect a full week of activities celebrating the language of Molière.

I invite everyone in Terrebonne to mark the International Day of La Francophonie by participating in one of the many events of the Le Mot festival in Vieux-Terrebonne, which will be held all next week. They can participate by way of song, historic storytelling or writing competitions. The Le Mot festival will give everyone an opportunity to celebrate La Francophonie.

I want to congratulate the organizers of this festival, as well as all of the organizations, businesses and artists in the Les Moulins area, who are always promoting the French language and francophone culture. I specifically want to congratulate Maison des Mots, ABC des Manoirs, the Maison-Théâtre Côte à Côte, SODECT, the Théâtre des Ventrebleus, "Un café, une chanson" L'Atelier, the Théâtre du Vieux-Terrebonne, Éclipse, Music-O-Choeur, the Orchestre symphonique de Terrebonne, the Quatuor des Moulins, as well as all of the other wonderful artists and authors in the region whom I am not able to list in this short statement.

Next week, let us show our pride in our language and our culture. I wish everyone a wonderful Semaine de la Francophonie.

* * *

[English]

BORIS NEMTSOV

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, upon hearing of the assassination of Boris Nemtsov, my thoughts immediately turned to his family. How difficult this must be for them. He was so young, so vibrant, so full of life, but what of his extended family, all those people who shared in his yearning for hope, democracy, opportunity, equality and justice? How difficult this is for all those who share in this grief.

For all those throughout history who have been cut down and taken from us far too early, we must continue to carry the torch. As it says in scripture, "Say not in grief 'he is no more' but live in thankfulness that he was".

A few months after my election to the House of Commons in 2011, I hosted Boris Nemtsov in Ottawa for meetings with my fellow parliamentarians. In my riding of York Centre, we organized a community event to a packed room at the Bernard Betel Centre. His message was a simple one, centred on hope and optimism.

Let me be clear. Those cherished values did not die in the streets of Moscow with Boris Nemstov. Yes, the world cries, tears are shed over his grave for the words left unsaid and deeds left undone, but Boris pushed the door open. Now it is up to all of us to carry his memory across the threshold.

Statements by Members

Rest in peace, my friend.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a member of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, I look forward to our study of the new anti-terrorism bill.

We must prevent threats to the safety of Canadians, while respecting the privacy of ordinary citizens. Naturally, we will hear a range of opinions about the proper balance. The goal is critical: to protect our country's freedoms and values. That is why the courts and the Security Intelligence Review Committee will carefully monitor the new tools under Bill C-51.

We will cautiously weigh the measures needed for Canada to remain a safe country, while also ensuring that innocent citizens are able to go about their lives without unwarranted intrusion.

Canada, like other democracies, is the target of jihadi terrorists. That is why our government will continue to take prudent measures to safeguard the nation's peace and security.

* * *

[*Translation*]

JULIETTE COLLIN

Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to an exemplary woman. I want to talk about a resident of my riding who has devoted her entire life to volunteering. This extraordinary little lady and bundle of energy is Juliette Collin.

She was the oldest of 17 children and had to quit school to help her mother raise her brothers and sisters. Her community spirit developed at a very young age in her family home. In 1945, she started volunteering for the Heart and Stroke Foundation. Subsequently, she gave her time to the Red Cross in the city of Anjou and to a women's shelter at the same time.

She was the president of the Association Marie Reine for 26 years. Until recently, she was the president of Bel Âge d'Anjou, a position that she held for 20 years. To stay in shape at the age of 85, she volunteers at a bowling centre.

She says that volunteering has greatly contributed to her happiness. She says that it is wonderful to be alive and that she has seen a great deal of suffering. Volunteering so much of her time has benefited her and taught her to appreciate life. At the age of 85, Ms. Collin still drives.

Thank you, Juliette Collin. What an amazing life.

* * *

● (1410)

[*English*]

TAXATION

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, moms and dads should be able to make important decisions that affect their own children. That is why our new family tax cut and enhanced universal child care benefit will give 100% of families with kids an

average of nearly \$2,000 per child per year. That is nearly \$12,000 over the child's first six years.

What do we hear from the other side of the House? We hear about new taxes, high debt, and the removal of all of these benefits that we brought forward for Canadian families.

Canadians do not want their money funnelled into bureaucratic black holes. They do not need higher taxes. They need tax relief and support, and they need to be able to use it as they see fit. That is exactly what we are delivering.

* * *

TIBET

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today, outside of this place, there are hundreds of Tibetans marking the occasion when, on March 10, 1959, tens of thousands of Tibetans took to the streets of Tibet's capital, rising up against China's illegal invasion and occupation of their homeland. Tibetans formed a human chain around the Potala Palace, the home of the Dalai Lama, to protect him from Chinese soldiers.

Fast forward 56 years. A few days ago, March 6 to be exact, a 47-year-old woman burned herself to death in protest against Chinese policies in Tibetan areas. She becomes the 137th known case of self-immolation by Tibetans since the practice started in 2009.

The Prime Minister must know that it is time for action from Canada. We must take the lead in initiating a multilateral forum on Tibet. There is a role for the ambassador of the Office of Religious Freedom in investigating the reasons behind the rise in self-immolations in Tibet. Canada should urge the Chinese government to allow independent monitors to assess Tibet's situation—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Mississauga—Erindale.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Bob Dechert (Mississauga—Erindale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, people from my city of Mississauga are happy with our government's low-tax plan for Canadians and their families. We cut the GST, introduced pension income splitting, created the tax-free savings account, and implemented the family tax cut, which will provide 100% of families with children with more money to spend on their priorities.

Meanwhile, the Liberal leader would reverse our tax cuts and implement a job-killing carbon tax. This is what Liberals consistently do. They raise taxes and take money out of the pockets of Canadian families.

We reject the high-tax, high-debt Liberal plan. Only one thing is absolutely certain, which is that our Conservative government is the only one that stands for and with hard-working Canadians.

HALIFAX JOINT RESCUE COORDINATION CENTRE

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Major Rhonda Stevens, originally from North Harbour in my riding of Random—Burin—St. George's.

Rhonda has been appointed Officer-in-Chief of the Joint Rescue Coordination Centre in Halifax. Rhonda's interest in search and rescue was piqued at a young age. Her father spent 25 years with the Canadian Coast Guard. His team responded to many distress calls, including the Ocean Ranger tragedy, which occurred on February 15, 1982, and saw 84 lives lost.

After spending time as an air cadet in Clarenville, Rhonda left home at age 17 to attend the Royal Military College, where she honed her skills as a flight navigator. She has logged more than 3,000 hours of flying time, both as a pilot and a navigator.

Her 21 years in the Canadian Armed Forces, 15 of them with search and rescue, have ensured that Rhonda is well prepared to take on this new challenge.

Rhonda's parents, Art and Una Eddy, are understandably proud of her accomplishments. I ask all members of the House to join me in congratulating Major Rhonda Stevens and wishing her all the best in this new position.

* * *

• (1415)

TAXATION

Mrs. Susan Truppe (London North Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, tax season is approaching, and the tax-free savings account is another example of our Conservative government fulfilling its promise to keep taxes low. It is a way for Canadians to save for retirement, their kids' education, or a down payment on a house.

We are proud that 11 million Canadians of all ages and income levels have opened an account allowing them to save tax free.

According to CARP, TFSAs have particular value for retirees who can no longer contribute to RRSPs, and for lower income earners who do not benefit as much from tax-deductible RRSP contributions.

However, the NDP voted against the tax-free savings account, and the Liberal leader wants Canadians to pay more taxes. Perhaps he does not understand that ordinary Canadians cannot rely on a big trust fund.

The facts are clear. Only our Conservative government can be trusted to keep taxes low.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, spring is in the air, and the real Conservatives are waking up from their winter hibernation.

The member for New Brunswick Southwest says that the real problem with the temporary foreign worker program is that it is bringing in too many brown-skinned people to Canada, while Canadians do not want to work and “whities” are languishing on EI.

Oral Questions

It is the 21st century, and the real colours of the Conservative Party are showing through. These kinds of disgusting comments have no place in our politics today, but the member probably felt he had to say something dramatic to compete for the title of biggest dinosaur in a caucus where one member is tweeting that he does not believe in evolution, another is claiming that teaching sex education is basically grooming kids for pedophiles, and the defence minister misrepresents photos of Muslim women on Twitter.

Canadians are not impressed, and they are ready to give these dinosaurs the boot when they elect Canada's first NDP government.

* * *

ANDREW DOIRON

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to a brother, son, and soldier, Sergeant Andrew Doiron, who tragically lost his life this past Friday.

Sergeant Doiron was known for his intellect, his precision, and his love of being a soldier. He was meticulous in thought and in action. He dedicated a considerable amount of time teaching and mentoring young soldiers out of his passion for the Canadian Armed Forces.

This is the man we all remember today. We remember the soldier who completed three deployments in Afghanistan. We remember the brother and son who adored skiing, fitness training, motorcycles, and dogs. We remember Sergeant Andrew Doiron for his sacrifice made to Canada.

From a grateful nation, may he rest in peace and his life never be forgotten.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, four days ago Sergeant Andrew Doiron of the Canadian Special Operations Regiment was tragically killed in Iraq. Canadians are grieving the first death of a Canadian soldier in combat in this war. Why were Kurdish forces not aware of the presence of Canadian troops on the front lines?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as members know, this was not combat. This was a friendly fire incident when in fact Sergeant Doiron and his colleagues did not expect to come under fire. These are obviously tragic circumstances. The details are being investigated. I received a call yesterday from Prime Minister al-Abadi of Iraq to give his condolences and apologies to the Canadian people. I also had an opportunity to speak to Sergeant Doiron's family and express our gratitude for his service and our deep regret at his loss.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, four Canadian soldiers who were killed by friendly fire while training and accompanying Afghan troops in 2002 were deemed killed in combat. The Department of National Defence even states on its website that, "The dead soldiers were universally described as the country's first combat fatalities since the Korean War". Nobody insulted them by denying that they were killed in combat.

Can the Prime Minister please explain what is the difference between those deaths in Afghanistan and the death of Sergeant Doiron?

• (1420)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, these particular soldiers were not, at the time of the incident, expecting to come under fire from anybody, and particularly not from their partners. Unfortunately, that is what happened. It does not change the fact that this is a dangerous mission. As we said from the outset, there are risks. Thank God that we have men and women who are willing to go to places like this to confront the risks that exist there, so they do not come here.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is no difference. They are all combat deaths.

[*Translation*]

The White House has been very clear on this. American soldiers who are training Iraqis are not allowed on the front line. It has said that sending them to the front would constitute a major change in their mission and would require Congress's approval.

Why are our soldiers on the front line without Parliament's approval?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, our soldiers are acting in Iraq in accordance with the mandate given by this Parliament, and that is very clear.

[*English*]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when soldiers are so close to the front line that they are being shot at by their allies, it is because they are being mistaken for the enemy; it is because they are on the front line; it is because they are in combat. That is the simple reality.

Why are Canadian soldiers on the front line? That is not what this Parliament voted on. Why is the Prime Minister allowing it?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the truth is, of course, that the NDP voted against this military mission. The truth is that Parliament voted for it. Parliament voted for it because we want to give all the help we can to the brave Kurdish people who are resisting the advance of ISIL and are willing

to take on the fighting themselves. We are giving them advice and assistance. Yes, we are doing that in a robust way, but we are absolutely following what we said we would do in this Parliament, and we will continue to do that.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us look, word for word, at what the Prime Minister actually told Canadians and, word for word, what this Parliament voted on.

[*Translation*]

On September 30, he stated, "It is quite precise. It is to advise and to assist. It is not to accompany." I am quoting word for word what the Prime Minister said on September 30.

This House adopted a motion that states, word for word, "that the Government of Canada will not deploy troops in ground combat operations".

Why is it that our soldiers are not just accompanying, but are dying in combat on the front line?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are several false statements in the NDP leader's remarks. The reality is that the mandate is very clear and our soldiers are carrying it out exactly as they should. That was the case during this incident.

[*English*]

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this weekend the Minister of National Defence posted images of special forces in Iraq, risking their safety. He also described the Muslim Ashura ceremony as ISIL enslavement. We were also reminded last week that this same minister had announced on social media that Corporal Cirillo had tragically died before his family and comrades even knew.

Has the Prime Minister reprimanded his minister for any of this behaviour?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence, who of course is new in the portfolio, is taking over one of the most important missions the government has at any time, which is the safety of our country and of the brave men and women who serve our country through various missions.

I have full confidence in the Minister of National Defence.

* * *

• (1425)

[*Translation*]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, the Minister of National Defence, and the hon. member for New Brunswick Southwest showed through their actions and words over the past few days that this government is going after minorities in an irresponsible way.

Instead of attacking and being divisive, this government should put its energy into an economic plan for this country. That is the priority.

Oral Questions

Can the government tell us when it will table its budget?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, given the speech he delivered last night, it is clear that it is the leader of the Liberal Party who is taking an irresponsible position on minorities in this country.

As far as the economic plan is concerned, the government's record reflects the progress we have made. A total of 1.2 million net new jobs have been created since the depths of the recession. That is one of the best records in the world.

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration said that the hijab was an indefensible perversion of Canadian values. The hon. member for New Brunswick Southwest said disgraceful things about foreign workers.

Instead of dividing Canadians, this Prime Minister should get his priorities straight and present his economic plan to Canadians.

Again, when will he table his budget?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just answered that question about the economy.

[*English*]

However, the leader of the Liberal Party continues to bring up his position on the niqab, not seeming to understand why almost all Canadians oppose the wearing of face coverings during citizenship ceremonies.

It is very easy to understand why we do not allow people to cover their faces during citizenship ceremonies. Why would Canadians, contrary to our own values, embrace a practice at that time that is not transparent, that is not open, and frankly is rooted in a culture that is anti-women? That is unacceptable to Canadians and unacceptable to Canadian women, and that is why this government—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

* * *

[*Translation*]

ETHICS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when we questioned the Prime Minister about Pamela Wallin two years ago, he denied that she was using taxpayers' money to travel to Conservative Party fundraisers. He said that he categorically rejected such suggestions.

Does the Prime Minister still maintain that Pamela Wallin did not use taxpayers' money to attend Conservative Party fundraising activities?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at the time, I indicated that all the senator's expenses would be reviewed to discover the facts. We did that, and the senator must be held accountable for her actions.

[*English*]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, actually here is what the Prime Minister said, and the first person singular here is himself. He personally vouched for Senator Wallin's travel claims, saying "In terms of Senator Wallin, I have looked at the numbers."

That is what he told the House. He went on to say that according to him, everything was just fine.

Does the Prime Minister still believe that Ms. Wallin's expenses were perfectly legal and appropriate? He hired her to do the fundraising for the Conservative Party. Is that the reason that he saw no problems with it at the time?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if one reads the record, one will see that I observed that her expenses were similar to other western MPs, but I also said that all would be examined, that all the expenses would be audited to make sure they were correct. Upon discovering that they were not proper and correct, this party has taken the appropriate action. Ms. Wallin has not been a member of this caucus for two years and is going to face full accountability for her actions.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wonder when the Conservative Party is going to make a full accounting of all the money it took, thanks to Pamela Wallin.

[*Translation*]

The Minister of Public Works is the Prime Minister's closest and most faithful minister—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

● (1430)

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Leader of the Opposition has the floor.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Public Works is the Prime Minister's closest and most faithful minister, and she has just been found guilty of conflict of interest by facilitating a multi-million dollar project for a close Conservative supporter. How will the Prime Minister respond to the ethic commissioner's report, which severely criticizes his Minister of Public Works?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, to clarify the other matter, the Conservative Party has not been charged with taking public money from Pamela Wallin. On the contrary, it is the NDP that took taxpayers' money from parliamentary funds.

[*English*]

Let us be very clear about that. It is the NDP that is accused of taking money from the public purse.

The Minister of Public Works, while Minister of Human Resources, made a decision that was within her discretionary authority as minister. I believe she acted in good faith. She certainly had no personal interests whatsoever in the decision and she supported accessibility for disabled people in the riding, but we will obviously act upon the findings of the report to make sure the process treats everyone equitably and fairly.

Oral Questions

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are willing and ready to go before a judge. Is he?

There were senior officials under the minister, a political staffer in her office, two other cabinet members, and, wait for it, Nigel Wright. Remember him? We remember that the Prime Minister fired him after he quit. In this case, Nigel Wright said that the Prime Minister himself knew that this was “an issue”.

What exactly did the Prime Minister know about this dirty insider deal involving his office, three Conservative ministers, and a dear friend of the Conservative Party?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad the member observes that he is willing to go before a judge and I do not, because I do not have to and he will have to.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. There are several people talking at the same time. The Right Hon. Prime Minister has the floor, and I will ask members to come to order.

The Right Hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: Mr. Speaker, as the report makes clear, I had no specific knowledge of these applications nor any preference in what was chosen. The fact of the matter is that the then Minister of Human Resources made a decision to support accessibility for disabled people to a community centre in the Markham area. She believed that was in the public interest, and I believe she was acting in good faith.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the ethics commissioner has deemed that the former human resources minister gave preferential treatment to the centre in Markham.

In response to pressure from her colleagues and interference from the Prime Minister's Office, she disregarded the Treasury Board's guidelines, changed the rules in the middle of the game, and used her discretionary power with no regard for the expertise of her department in order to support a poorly put together project.

How can the Prime Minister condone this disregard for the rules and this favouritism?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I always believed that this project, which was designed to make the Markham Centre for Skills and Independence more accessible for people with disabilities, was worthwhile and in the public interest.

I accept the advice of the commissioner to ensure that these subsidy programs are administered in a fair, accessible and effective way for all involved.

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, according to the ethics commissioner, the Prime Minister's Office was heavily involved in the deal.

Many senior officials in the Prime Minister's Office, including Nigel Wright and Ray Novak, were very interested in this file. According to Nigel Wright, the orders came from the top, since the Prime Minister asked him to take care of it.

When the Prime Minister asks his chief of staff to handle a file, does that necessarily mean breaking all the rules, as we have seen again today in this matter?

• (1435)

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I always believed that this project was going to make the centre more accessible for people with disabilities.

The commissioner found that neither I nor any of my family members or friends had a personal interest in the decision to subsidize this project.

What is more, she found that I was never friends with Rabbi Mendelsohn and that, in fact, we had never even met.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the question is about the credibility of this minister dealing with public funds. Ethics commissioner Mary Dawson has found that she broke the rules on conflict of interest. The report is disturbing because it shows how friends of the Prime Minister are able to fast-track projects that should have been rejected.

This project failed because it was not in the public interest, yet a number of cabinet ministers and the Prime Minister's right hand, Nigel Wright, picked up the phone and got involved.

Therefore, if it was against the law for the minister to interfere with this project, was it somehow okay for the Prime Minister's Office to interfere? Who gave the direction? Why were they not following the rules?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this project is to make the centre more accessible for people with disabilities in the Markham area.

I always believed that this project was worthwhile and in the public interest.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, all manner of hard-working community groups apply for projects, and they succeed or fail based on their merits. That is how the system is supposed to work. Ordinary Canadians play by the rules because they do not have the speed-dial into the Prime Minister's Office, yet in this case, we saw interference by a number of ministers and the Prime Minister's personal chief of staff, the infamous Nigel Wright.

Will the Prime Minister tell us if Nigel Wright was once again somehow going rogue, or was he acting on the direct instructions of the Prime Minister? What do Conservatives mean by “sort it out”? Why was the Prime Minister getting his fingers into this file?

Oral Questions

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the commissioner was very clear that there was no involvement by the Prime Minister in the selection of this project. I always believed that this was a worthwhile project to help improve accessibility for people at the Markham Centre and that it was in the best public interest to fund this program.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I did not even hear a “sorry”. She broke the rules and she misused public funds. We expect that when a minister breaks the rules, there is a “sorry”, but no. It is as though if Nigel Wright makes the call, it is okay. This is the question here. All manner of projects apply, but not all manner of projects get moved up after they have been rejected because they are not in the public interest.

I would like to ask the Prime Minister once again about his interference in this project. When Nigel Wright was told to “sort it out”, what does that mean? Is “sort it out” the new “good to go” for breaking the rules in the PMO?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the program was destined to help improve accessibility for the disabled at the Markham Centre. It was evaluated on the basis that it did provide value for money and was in the public interest.

It was clearly found that neither I nor any of my relatives or family had any personal interest in this matter. The commissioner further found that I was not friends with Rabbi Mendelsohn. In fact, she acknowledged that we had never even met.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the IMF shows that the Canadian housing market is over-valued by up to 20%. In Montreal, middle-class homeowners would lose \$70,000 on the sale of their houses. The Conservatives inflated the housing bubble with their 40-year mortgages. Then they cancelled the census. As a result, experts do not have the data to assess and adjust the market.

Why are the Conservatives jeopardizing the largest investment made by middle-class families that are now more indebted than ever?

• (1440)

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over the past few years, the government has taken measures to ensure the long-term stability of the housing market and to reduce taxpayer exposure. It specifically limited the government guarantee on insured mortgages for homes priced under \$1 million. The government also reduced the maximum mortgage amortization period to 25 years and the maximum amount that lenders can provide when refinancing mortgage loans to 80%.

Our long-term objectives are—

[English]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Toronto Centre.

Ms. Chrystia Freeland (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the IMF has issued a warning about the inflated Canadian housing market, cautioning that home prices have jumped more than 60%

over the past 15 years. Canadian families with a personal debt burden that the IMF warns is among the highest in the OECD are at risk of \$100,000 losses they can ill afford. The IMF says that Canada needs better data, something the Conservative government is bizarrely opposed to, and more coordinated financial oversight.

When will the government quit electioneering and fearmongering and table a budget that addresses Canada's cooling economy and overheated housing market?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think it is worthwhile to quote the IMF directly. It said:

In the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, Canada's financial system held up remarkably well—making it the envy of its Group of Seven peers. This relative resilience was particularly impressive considering its most important trading and financial partner, the United States, was the epicenter of the crisis.

It further said that:

Over the past several years, Canada has taken numerous steps to reduce the economy's vulnerabilities through policies designed to keep financial institutions and the financial system as a whole safer.

That is including housing.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Trinity—Spadina, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, numerous steps and none of them are working.

Nowhere in the country is the Canadian dream of owning a home more at risk than the Prime Minister's home of Calgary.

Calgary is predicted to be the epicentre of a housing collapse if the current government does not start dealing with housing issues now. The IMF report is crystal clear: regulation is fractured, more oversight of the market is needed, and it is needed now. Instead, the government attacks CMHC, it cuts staff, cuts research and does this to fund tax cuts for well-housed Canadians. It is not right.

Why will the Prime Minister not protect his constituents in Calgary Southwest?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said many times, there is no housing bubble. CMHC agrees, the Bank of Canada agrees and the OECD agrees.

We have taken a number of measures, which I have just discussed, and we continue to monitor the market very closely.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the report of the Military Police Complaints Commission into the death of Corporal Stuart Langridge is scathing. It found incompetence and negligence on the part of the military police.

The current government has consistently failed to right the wrongs in its handlings of the Langridge case. The Department of National Defence has rejected most of the recommendations and had even tried to hide its rejection.

Does the minister agree with his department or will he move to reverse this position and implement the recommendations of the commission released today?

Oral Questions

Mr. James Bezan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we thank the Military Police Complaints Commission for its work and its report. We agree that what happened to Corporal Langridge is completely unacceptable.

The Department of National Defence has just received the final report and is reviewing the recommendations on an expedited basis.

Our thoughts remain with the family of Corporal Stuart Langridge during this very difficult time.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Fynes family has been waiting for over six years to find out the truth about the circumstances of Corporal Langridge's suicide.

Today, the report of the complaints commission revealed unacceptable mistakes on the part of the military police. The commission finds that the government demonstrated incompetence and negligence in dealing with the grieving family.

In view of such findings, why is the government refusing to implement the recommendations?

[*English*]

Mr. James Bezan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just want to remind that member that we received the final report only an hour ago.

We thank the Military Police Complaints Commission for this final report and the work. We agree that the outcome of this is completely unacceptable. That is why we are seriously looking at the report and its recommendations on an expedited basis.

We offer our condolences again to the Langridge family.

* * *

●(1445)

[*Translation*]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in December, the Prime Minister said that Canada offered veterans the best services and programs in the world. However, according to an analysis by *The Globe and Mail*—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: Why are they applauding this nonsense, Mr. Speaker? According to an analysis by *The Globe and Mail*, Canadian soldiers injured in the line of duty receive significantly less financial compensation than British, Australian and American veterans.

When will the government take action to back up its promises and provide tangible assistance to our veterans?

[*English*]

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when looking at the total impact of programming at veterans affairs and benefits directly to veterans and their families, Canadian veterans have among the best comprehensive suite of veterans' benefits and programs in the world.

I would like to remind this member that we added to that yesterday with the new proposed retirement income security benefit to address a gap that existed at 65 that the ombudsman has asked for and that the House has asked for.

I hope the member can put politics aside and put that to a vote in this House shortly.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first of all I want to thank the government for actually moving the other day on one of the recommendations of our report. However, the committee had asked that all recommendations be implemented immediately, not just one or two at a time.

The fact is that many veterans out there are questioning the age 65 limitation. Will they still be losing money under this system when they turn 65?

According to their own chart yesterday, when a veteran who is disabled turns 65, even under this new system, there is a possibility that that person would end up losing money when they turn 65.

Can the minister guarantee that no disabled veteran, when they turn 65, will lose any income whatsoever?

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if a moderately or seriously injured veteran is receiving financial benefits at 64, they are eligible for the retirement income security benefit at 65, until the end of their life.

I would also like to add that they will get permanent impairment allowance, the permanent impairment allowance supplement. What I want to see is all of these benefits streamlined together in one pension for our most seriously injured members.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was pleased yesterday to vote in favour of Bill C-2, the respect for communities act.

This would give law enforcement, municipal leaders and local residents a voice when injection sites want to open in their communities, and yet the Liberal leader could not resist furthering his ideological agenda for more injection sites to be built across Canada by voting against communities having their voices heard.

Can the Minister of Health please update the House on the latest developments regarding this legislation?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a former RCMP officer, the member knows very well that dangerous and addictive drugs tear families apart, and they destroy lives.

Our government, and I as health minister, will continue to support treatment and recovery programs that get addicts off drugs and help them recover drug-free lives.

*Oral Questions***RAIL TRANSPORTATION**

The Liberal leader's recent comments in support of opening heroin injection sites across Canada are shameful. We strongly disagree with his blind support for opening more heroin injection sites without public consultation.

As health minister, I will follow the Supreme Court ruling and make sure that communities have a voice.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women took the unusual step of launching an inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women in Canada. It found that Canada has committed a grave violation of the rights of indigenous women, and it recommended a national inquiry and a national action plan.

The Conservative government has rejected both. Why do the Conservatives continue to reject a national inquiry and a national action plan that would help end the violence that indigenous women face in our country?

Mrs. Susan Truppe (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has already taken significant action in this area. It is important to remember that many of these recommendations are outside federal jurisdiction.

Since coming to office, we have passed more than 30 criminal justice and public safety initiatives, including tougher sentences for murder, sexual assault, kidnapping and mandatory prison sentences for the most heinous crimes. The opposition voted against these bills.

We also closed a 30-year legislative gap by ensuring hundreds of thousands of first nations people living on reserves get the same human rights protections as other Canadians for the first time by including them under the Canadian Human Rights Act. That member voted against it.

• (1450)

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, another example of this government's shameful behaviour toward first nations is its failure to fulfill its commitment to resolve specific land claims.

This was detailed in a report released yesterday by first nations, tribal councils and organizations. It denounced the bad faith shown by the department in negotiations.

Our leader and our caucus have endorsed this report. Will the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development listen to the recommendations laid out in this report and answer for his department's failure?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to achieving fair and timely resolution for first nations specific claims since the announcement of the "justice at last" initiative.

We have cleared a backlog of some 516 claims in assessment, and we have settled 120 specific claims. Our government has made unprecedented progress on this topic and we will continue in that vein.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have seen three train wrecks in less than a month, tank cars exploding, oil spilling, damaging our environment and endangering lives.

The minister's response in the House yesterday was, "We need to wait and see". Surely the minister has seen these, the main estimates, showing cuts of 43% from the strategic infrastructure fund and \$40 million from Transport Canada.

Is this what the minister calls working diligently to protect the safety of Canadians, slashing funds from transportation infrastructure?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course, we are very grateful that there are no injuries with respect to this latest derailment.

As well, I would like to take the opportunity to thank the first responders in the community for working so well with CN and making sure that they were able to put the fire out, which they were able to do this morning.

I am very proud of our record. The things that we have done since the tragic incident at Lac-Mégantic are very fulsome and very complete. We have included new tank car standards, new operation requirements for trains and reduced train speed. New compensation liability requirements have been proposed.

We keep working on the file and we will continue to do so.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there have been three derailments in northern Ontario in less than a month. Burning rail cars and oil spills pollute the water and the air and put Canadians at risk.

Despite the Lac-Mégantic tragedy and despite the fact that the Transportation Safety Board of Canada has called for safer rail cars, the Conservatives are dragging their feet. The minister even found a new excuse to avoid taking action right now. She said that she would wait for the Americans. How many more tragedies will it take before the minister takes action?

[*English*]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last April we made announcements with respect to a very vigorous outrunning of these cars. We said that the 5,000 at most risk would be phased out immediately. We did that within 30 days. We also gave a timeline of three years for the next most at-risk cars to be retrofitted to a new standard, and we made that very clear.

Oral Questions

The U.S. has not done any of these things. Indeed, we work with them, and the fundamental reason we work with them on this is that the trains cannot stop at the border and change their cars out and then continue to the other country. We have to do this together with the United States.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Corporal Stuart Langridge died by suicide in his barracks.

Today's report confirmed the fears of the family that the investigation was botched from the beginning.

The Military Police Complaints Commissioner found, "aspects that were shocking and beyond comprehension". Contrary to the recent answer by the parliamentary secretary saying that they just got their recommendations, the recommendations were tabled last May.

The Department of Defence has not accepted a single major recommendation to prevent similar tragic incidents from happening in the future, so I want to know why the minister is deliberately brushing off this report about an important incident and why—

The Speaker: The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. James Bezan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is referring to the interim report. The department will be looking at the recommendations on an expedited basis, and we will respond to those recommendations on the final report.

We agree with the Military Police Complaints Commission that what happened is unacceptable, and the Department of National Defence will respond in due course.

* * *

● (1455)

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have learned from a Conservative document that the government thinks it is risky to promote immigration because of its own political base. Clearly it sees that base as dominated by the old anti-immigration Reform Party.

Is that why we hear bigoted attacks by the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration on innocent Muslim women wearing hijabs or headscarves, when he never utters a word against nuns and their habits?

Is that not because the Conservatives are shamefully trying to appease their anti-immigration Reform Party base? That is the reason.

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, committee members, as always, are masters of their own proceedings, and we look forward to hearing testimony from all witnesses appearing before the committee.

Canada is proud to be one of the fairest and most generous countries in the world. This year alone, we are planning to welcome about 280,000 newcomers to our country. We welcome one-tenth of

the world's refugees worldwide. We look forward to welcoming newcomers who can contribute to our economy.

It is a little rich hearing that question from the member over there. He has voted against every initiative that would provide assistance to newcomers to help them integrate into our country.

* * *

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the ferry MV *Apollo* has been stranded for over a week in St. Barbe, Newfoundland's great northern peninsula. Passengers are forced to sleep in cars. Some have run out of medications and perishable foods are spoiling in trucks, while everyone waits for help. It is inexcusable that a vital link should be out of commission for so long with no end in sight.

When will the government stop ignoring the urgent situation and send in a heavy icebreaker to free the *Apollo*?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, passenger ferries are the first priority for icebreaking after distress calls and emergencies. Due to the extreme ice conditions across the east coast, some ferries are experiencing delays.

The Canadian Coast Guard is sending another icebreaker in the area to assist. Ice conditions are constantly being assessed, and a ferry transit will take place once it is safe to do so.

* * *

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it has been two weeks since the storm, yet CN Rail is still blaming weather for delays at the port of Halifax.

On Tuesday, the shipper Autoport suspended normal operations. Not only do hundreds of longshoremen rely on Autoport for their livelihoods, but millions worth of new vehicles are stranded, possibly for as long as three weeks.

This is not an isolated incident. An earlier delay by CN caused a huge backlog of cargo at Halifax's two main container terminals.

What is the government doing to fix these problems at the port of Halifax?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this year this government announced that the Hon. David Emerson would be leading the transportation review of the Canada Transportation Act to look at our logistics chain across the country to ensure we are meeting the needs of services today and that we are ready for the future as well.

I look forward to all of the recommendations from Mr. Emerson. I also encourage people who are at the port of Halifax, or any other stakeholder who is interested, to ensure they give their advice and presentations to this committee.

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, our government stands with the people of Ukraine. Last week, members of 3rd Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment left for eastern Europe. Our government is also providing satellite images to the Ukrainian military so it can monitor Russian troop movements and see if they are respecting the conditions of the Minsk agreement.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence update the House on the activities of the HMCS *Fredericton*?

Mr. James Bezan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona for his strong support for Ukraine.

The HMCS *Fredericton* is participating in a joint NATO training exercise with warships from several allied and partner nations in the Black Sea. This strengthens not only our operational readiness, but also our ability to work with NATO allies and security partners in the region.

Since arriving in the Black Sea, Royal Canadian Navy sailors have been confronted by Russian warships and buzzed by Russian fighter jets. Indeed, the HMCS *Toronto* entered the Black Sea last September, to be circled by Russian military aircraft as well.

We are there as part of Canada and NATO's steadfast commitment to our allies and security partners in the region in the face of Russia's continued aggression toward Ukraine.

* * *

• (1500)

ETHICS

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Public Works and Government Services. Earlier in this question period, she said that there was some degree of innocence that was given to her by the report.

However, I would like to quote from the report by Mary Dawson. She refers to the Prime Minister's guideline, "Accountable Government: A Guide for Ministers and Ministers of State". She says, referring to the minister, "It appears that some of these guiding principles were not top of mind in the handling of the Markham proposal". She also says, "I therefore concluded that [the minister] contravened subsection 6(1) of the Act". She finally says, "The funding decision may have been influenced by political considerations, but the reasons why this proposal was given preferential treatment remain unclear".

Why is Mary Dawson so wrong?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the commissioner clearly found that neither I nor any member of my family or friends had any personal interest in the decision to provide this funding to improve accessibility at the Markham centre. Moreover, she found that not only was I not friends with Rabbi Mendelsohn, but in fact we had never met.

Oral Questions

I accept the guidance provided by the commissioner to ensure that these grant programs are handled in a manner that is fair, accessible and effective for all.

* * *

PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think you are aware that we are spending millions of dollars removing all the asbestos from the Parliament buildings because, God forbid, a single MP should ever be exposed to a single fibre of asbestos. Yet virtually all of our government buildings are riddled with the stuff, putting both private and public sector workers at risk.

Therefore, in the absence of a comprehensive removal program would the Minister of Public Works at least concede to creating and publishing a national registry of all government buildings that are contaminated with asbestos so the workers in these buildings have at least a fighting chance when they go to work to protect themselves from this class A carcinogen?

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is committed to ensuring that all workers have access to safe, fair and productive workplaces. Our government ensures that workers have the right to refuse any work they believe may be dangerous.

Dedicated health and safety officers work diligently on a daily basis to ensure the safety of Canada's federally regulated workers.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Bryan Hayes (Sault Ste. Marie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, tax season is approaching and the tax-free savings account is another example of our Conservative government fulfilling on promises to keep taxes low. It is a way for Canadians to save for retirement, their children's education or a down payment on a house. The TFSA is helping Canadians, but the opposition wants to take it away.

Could the Minister of Finance tell the House how the TFSA is helping Canadians provide for their future?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud that over 11 million Canadians of all ages and income brackets have opened an account. The average income is \$42,000 and the majority of the accounts go to low and middle-income Canadians.

The Canadian Association of Retired Persons feels this is an extremely important policy for seniors. This government will protect the interests of seniors, middle-class families and all Canadians.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, rather than reward consumers who take action to reduce GHG emissions, Ottawa chose to help the auto industry even though the industry has put off bringing more economical cars to market.

The Bloc Québécois believes that an ecoauto program is essential to any serious plan to fight oil dependency. Norway has implemented such incentives, and they are working.

In its next budget, will the government follow Norway's example by reinstating the ecoauto rebate program and enhancing it to account for new developments, such as electric cars?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague should know, we are constantly working with auto companies on investments and approaches to enhance their ability to produce new cars that will definitely hit the market.

If he has a specific proposal that makes sense, we will certainly take a look at it.

* * *

SENIORS

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, according to a study by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, pension income splitting benefits the wealthiest seniors disproportionately.

Of the families that benefit from this tax break, only 10% of the wealthiest benefit fully, at a cost of \$1.2 billion per year, while 70% of seniors enjoy no benefit at all from this measure. It is clear that the government has no plan whatsoever for seniors living below the poverty line in Canada.

When will the Minister of State for Seniors do something for seniors who really need help?

● (1505)

[English]

Hon. Alice Wong (Minister of State (Seniors), CPC): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to seniors' poverty, our government has a record of which we can be proud. Canada has one of the lowest seniors' poverty rates in the world thanks in part to our actions, which include removing thousands of seniors from the tax rolls completely, making significant investment in affordable housing for low-income seniors and introducing the largest GIS increase in a quarter century.

The other parties would take away the pension splitting for our seniors. That is something we will never allow to happen.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of His Excellency Valeriu Stefan Zgonea, President of the Chamber of Deputies of Romania.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—GOVERNMENT INVESTMENTS

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. Minister of Finance has 16 minutes remaining in his time.

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I talked about the fact that the Canadian economy is the envy of the world. However, the NDP wants to sink us back into red ink so it can waste money on its pet projects, while taxing away our prosperity. That makes no sense, particularly when the Fraser Institute released a report on the state of the Canadian economy just this morning, a report which stated that the adult unemployment rate was at the historic low level, and:

—we have seen a marked increase in high-wage factory jobs in Canada in recent years...There are few reasons to think the recent crisis has damaged the key ingredients propelling long-term growth in most of the world...More policy stimulus is not needed in North America at this time

Even worse, the member opposite wants to put all of this wasteful new spending on Canada's credit card, raising our debt, forcing our children and grandchildren to pony up for the bill of his party's big spending dreams. The promise of tax hikes for coming generations to pay for the NDP's irresponsible and reckless plans is not responsible leadership.

[Translation]

The NDP's so-called economic plan could jeopardize all of the hard work that Canadians have done to achieve the prosperity we have today. We reject this plan, as do Canadians.

[English]

There is a better way for Canada, a Conservative way, a low-tax, balanced budget plan for jobs and growth that is working. It is the plan our Conservative government is following, and it is a plan that works.

I would now like to remind the House about the key planks at the cornerstone of that plan: first, the solid fundamentals that come with fiscal responsibility; second, keeping taxes low for families and job-creating businesses; and third, expanding opportunity by cutting red tape and opening new markets.

Let me begin with fiscal responsibility.

Solid fiscal fundamentals start with a principle; that we have a responsibility to spend within our means. Families have to do that every day, and as a government, we must also respect that tried and true principle.

Business of Supply

• (1510)

[*Translation*]

When our government came to power in 2006, the world was a very different place. The markets were flourishing and economic growth was strong. We reduced the federal debt. We lowered taxes for Canadians and for job-creating businesses, and we took on an ambitious plan to renew Canada's aging infrastructure. Then the storm hit, coming from outside our borders.

[*English*]

We all remember the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008. The subsequent financial crash erased \$10 trillion in global market value, destroying the savings of families around the world.

That was how the great recession began, the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression, a downturn that cost 62 million jobs globally. It did not start in Canada, but it hit us none the less.

Historic action was required so we took historic action. Our economic action plan made unprecedented investments in thousands of infrastructure projects, investments in roads and bridges and in knowledge infrastructure, like research labs, universities, colleges and broadband Internet access for rural Canadians. These investments created the jobs we needed right when we needed them most. They created jobs at a time when jobs were being destroyed everywhere.

Fast forward to today and the evidence is clear. Our plan worked. We have accomplished so much, as Canadians, together. We have created over 1.2 million net new jobs since the depths of the recession. The overwhelming majority of those jobs are full time, in the private sector and in high-wage industries.

According to the International Labour Organization's global wage report, Canada has the second best pay gains in the G20. The Center for American Progress states that Canada has experienced continuing middle-class growth, while for many countries it has halted. A recent analysis done by *The New York Times* found that after-tax middle class incomes in Canada now appear to be higher than in the United States. In fact, the Canadian middle class is among the richest in the developed world.

Indeed, the very CIBC report that the NDP cites in this motion pointed out that for the past year the number of full-time jobs in Canada rose twice as fast as part-time jobs. This is the reality, a reality supported by objective evidence and real facts.

[*Translation*]

This reality did not prevent the NDP from voting against all of the job-creation measures taken by this government, such as freezing EI premiums, lowering taxes for the manufacturing sector and investing \$70 billion in infrastructure to create stable, predictable jobs.

[*English*]

In contrast, when the time for stimulus was over, we did the responsible thing: we set out on a course to balance budgets. This took hard work and a plan. Canadians know that budgets do not balance themselves, though I hear having a trust fund is a big help. However, for those of us without that advantage, we have to plan

ahead. Therefore, we made a plan. Then we followed our plan and it worked. We will balance the budget this year just as we promised Canadians we would, and we will not fall into the tax-and-spend ways of our Liberal and NDP opponents, which brings me to the low-tax part of our low-tax plan. We know that the Liberals and NDP are contemptuous of low taxes. To them, a dollar back in the pockets of families is a wasted dollar, a dollar lost for their big government pet projects.

It was the Liberal finance critic who said that the Liberals believe Canadians will not be bothered by being taxed more and more. It was the NDP author of this motion who called our Conservative government's universal child care benefit a "slap in the face". The real slap in the face is every vote the Liberals and NDP cast against more money for moms and dads.

We have all heard about the inevitability of death and taxes. Will Rogers once joked that the only difference between death and taxes is that death does not get worse every time Congress meets. That is the kind of Parliament a Liberal or NDP government would deliver. However, that is not the Conservative way. We trust parents to raise their kids better than any social engineer would. We trust Canadians with their hard-earned money, more than the NDP or Liberals ever could. The Prime Minister has the best tax record of any prime minister in decades. Under his leadership, we have provided tax relief over 180 times since taking office. We brought the GST down to 5%. We created the popular tax free-savings accounts. We cut corporate taxes and small business taxes. We made Canada the first tariff-free zone for manufacturers in the G20. Last year we cut taxes for every family with children. Today the overall federal tax burden is at its lowest level in over half a century.

Not since John Diefenbaker was the prime minister have Canadians paid so little tax to Ottawa. Canada's economic competitiveness has hugely improved, creating new jobs for Canadians from coast to coast to coast. KPMG says Canada's total business tax costs are the lowest in the G7, 46% lower than in the United States. Canada has the lowest overall tax rate on new business investment in the G7. Bloomberg ranks us the second most attractive place in the world to do business. By lowering taxes, we are building a stronger economy for all Canadians.

Business of Supply

• (1515)

[Translation]

To that end, we are cutting red tape and opening new markets. We established the one-for-one rule.

Every time the government imposes a new regulation, it must eliminate a regulation.

Businesses now spend 290,000 hours less a year on paperwork, which kills jobs.

By cutting red tape, the government is helping businesses save around \$75 million a year, which helps more than 5,000 small businesses.

We know that our approach works. According to a study of 189 countries carried out by Public Works Canada, preparing, filing and paying taxes each year takes 25% less time for a business in Canada than for a business in the United States.

[English]

Canada is the only G7 country to rank among the top 10 based on the overall ease of paying taxes. Conservatives know that for Canada to create well-paying jobs, we need job creators spending their time growing their businesses, not choking on red tape and high taxes, but we also know that we have an obligation to open new markets to those job creators. We need to expand their opportunities so they can reach their full potential. Under Conservative leadership, Canada's free trade network now touches every corner of the globe. I cannot overstate the importance of this to the Canadian economy.

When our government took office in 2006, Canada had free trade agreements with five countries. That was not good enough for a country where 60% of GDP and one in five jobs are tied to trade. We now have free trade deals with 43 countries. In 2012, Canada joined the ambitious trans-Pacific partnership negotiations, and in March, the Prime Minister concluded negotiations for a bilateral free trade agreement with the Republic of Korea, Canada's first in Asia.

The *National Post* called Canada a free trade empire that now covers the two largest markets in the world, the United States and Europe. This latter deal is a game changer. The European Union is the world's largest economy. This trade agreement is the most comprehensive free trade agreement in the history of our nation, more ambitious than NAFTA itself. The EU agreement will provide more open access to 28 countries, a market of 500 million people, and annual economic activity of \$17 trillion.

• (1520)

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, I will conclude today by reminding Canadians of what is at stake in the upcoming election. The policies I mentioned today work. These are policies that helped our country out of the worst of the recession and that have made Canada one of the most economically resilient countries in the world.

[English]

However, with the NDP and the Liberals, we have an opposition that wilfully ignores this success. Our jobs would be at risk, our economy would be at risk, our pocketbooks would be at risk, but

with this Conservative government, under our Conservative Prime Minister, Canadians are in safe hands. Under our Prime Minister, we can all look forward to the serious and experienced leadership that Canada needs for these all-too-chaotic times in the world economy.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is nice to see the finance minister back. We have not heard him talk about the economy in the House for almost six weeks now.

I am not sure that he actually read the same report as New Democrats did, and I will quote from the report to help him out. It states:

...the number of low-paying [full-time] jobs has risen faster than the number of mid-paying jobs, which in turn, has risen faster than the number of high-paying jobs.

It further states:

The damage caused to full-time employment during each recession was, in many ways, permanent.

We have seen a 0.7% job-growth rate in Canada during 2014, which was supposed to be a good year. We have seen youth unemployment at twice the national average and 200,000 more Canadians out of work than before the recession, and all Conservatives want to do is pull a muscle patting themselves on the back for a job well done. We know that the Canadian economy needs some help. The government's answer to falling oil prices was to delay the budget by a few months, just hoping things would get better. There is no plan B coming from the government, other than more tax breaks for the wealthiest Canadians.

My simple question is this. The CIBC report shows that job quality in Canada is at its lowest level in a generation. Let me repeat that. The quality of jobs in Canada is at its lowest level in a generation. Does that not preoccupy him at all, the fact that we are moving from full-time, well-paying jobs to more precarious part-time work in this country, as was evidenced in last month's report by his own department? Is he not at all concerned with that, and would he just get on with the work of presenting a budget that would actually meet the needs of the Canadian economy?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that the member opposite would like me to get on with the work of developing a budget, which is why I have not been able to attend the House as often as I had before. However, there is a different view about the CIBC report. Let me quote Philip Cross, who is a former chief economic analyst at Statistics Canada. It is a little harsh, but let us get it in the record.

The number one issue facing this country is not income inequality, as CIBC claims, but the proliferation of pseudo-knowledge and sham data—nonsense free floating in our public discourse, but treated seriously by both mainstream and fringe media and commentators. It is the most important issue because it has ramifications for all the issues society faces and what needs to be done about it.

The point is that there are different views on these statistics, but it is clear that our government is focused on what matters most, jobs and economic growth. The fact is that almost 1.2 million net new jobs have been created since the recession. Both the IMF and the OECD forecast that Canada will have one of the strongest growth records among the G7 in the years ahead.

Business of Supply

According to the International Labour Organization, something that might resonate with my NDP colleagues, according to its global wage report, Canada has the second best pay gains in the G20. With a fragile global economy, we must stay the course with our low-tax plan for jobs and growth. Our economy grew at an annualized rate of 2.8% in the third quarter of 2014 and it was higher than market expectations.

It is rich for the NDP members to criticize our record on job creation. They voted against every job creation measure our government has put forward.

• (1525)

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance just referred to the report of CIBC economics as sham statistics. A bank economist would have absolutely no incentive to directly attack the Canadian government. It is doing it because the facts are backing up what it says, that the quality of jobs in Canada has declined, that full-time jobs are being replaced by part-time work, and that low-paying jobs are replacing high-paying jobs.

The minister just said that the reason he has not been in the House lately is that he has been busy because he has to do a budget. Being a member of Parliament is part of being the Minister of Finance. I remember when ministers of finance actually showed up in the House to respond and, at the same time, wrote budgets that were balanced when oil was less than \$50 a barrel.

How does it actually contribute to certainty in the Canadian economy to have the Minister of Finance delaying a budget? Suncor is not saying it cannot produce its quarterly reports because of this uncertainty with fluctuating oil prices. Why is the minister creating uncertainty through his abdication of responsibility to do his job to present a budget?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Speaker, since the member opposite is interested in the CIBC report, let me quote what it said. It said that "...for the past year, the number of full-time jobs rose twice as fast as the number of part-time jobs...".

Philip Cross, who I quoted earlier, said, "In fact, the net worth held by the middle income quintiles rose faster than the top income quintile in Canada...".

Here is what the Center for American Progress said in a report that the member for Toronto Centre contributed to: Canada has "experienced continuing middle-income growth, while for many [countries] it has halted". The report also notes that Canada has maintained a close link between productivity and job growth despite low wage competition.

As I said, it is rich for the NDP and Liberals to be criticizing our record on job creation. They voted against every job creation measure our government has put forward, including freezing EI rates, tax cuts for manufacturers, \$70 billion in stable and predictable job-creating infrastructure, and more. We are focused on creating jobs and growth. The Liberal leader is pushing a high-tax, high-debt agenda that would threaten jobs and set working families back.

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the minister could share with us what our government is doing to help Canadian families

make ends meet. We all know that the cost of raising a family these days is at a record high, and it is important that Canadian families have assistance in this regard. Also, what are we doing to help seniors make ends meet? It is also difficult for many seniors.

Perhaps the minister can share with us what we are doing to help Canadian families and seniors make ends meet.

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Speaker, as members know, the Prime Minister announced a very important family tax package that will advantage every one of four million Canadian families. The average benefit will be \$1,100. The majority of the benefits will go to low- and middle-income families, with 25% going to families earning less than \$30,000 a year. Of course, this follows income splitting for seniors. It also includes the universal child care benefit, which will increase from \$100 to \$160 for families with children under six, and a new \$60 a month for every family with children between six and 17. All four million families will benefit, and we are very proud of this progressive measure.

• (1530)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the speech given by the Minister of Finance, who seems to be in denial about the successive reports showing that the economic situation is getting worse, particularly when it comes to employment.

CIBC's latest report comes after a recent OECD report indicating that the gap between the rich and poor in Canada keeps growing increasingly fast. That is a concern raised by the OECD.

Also, recently on International Women's Day, it was noted that the wage gaps between men and women are still growing.

Does the minister realize that the measures put forward by the Conservatives are only widening the wage gaps between the rich and poor and between men and women?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government has provided unprecedented support to low-income Canadians.

We have removed over one million low-income Canadians, including 380 seniors, from the tax rolls. We have increased the amount that Canadians can earn tax free. We created the working income tax benefit, and we increased the guaranteed income supplement for the most vulnerable Canadian seniors.

However, every time, the Liberals and New Democrats have voted against these measures and against low-income Canadians.

Under our government, the share of Canadians living in low-income families is the lowest it has been in 30 years. Low-income families have seen a 14% increase in their real after-tax income since 2006.

Business of Supply

Over 40% of all taxpayers pay no net tax. It is no wonder the federal tax burden is at its lowest level in 50 years.

[English]

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand to speak to this issue.

I would also like to take a moment to say that I will be splitting my time with the member for Parkdale—High Park.

The formulating of a budget is a matter of making choices. We choose to invest and to divest in certain areas. These choices need to be based on what communities need and what will serve our communities. This is why it is imperative that when formulating the budget in 2015, we choose with the aim of creating and developing sustainable, full-time jobs.

One of the most important areas is support for small and medium-sized businesses and support for entrepreneurship to enable these entrepreneurs to become well-paying, long-term employers.

I would like to take a moment to underline that small and medium-sized businesses are responsible for as much as 80% of employment in the private sector. This number was taken between 2002 and 2012. As well, small and medium-sized businesses are largely responsible for local employment in their communities. Generally, when Jane and Jack look for a job in their community, they go knocking on the doors of the small businesses, the mom and pop stores and restaurants in their communities. They are the ones that hire those individuals.

Small businesses employ nearly eight million Canadians, and 98% of all businesses in Canada are small businesses. A small business is one that employs fewer than 100 employees.

This is an area of the economy that needs to be supported and strengthened. This is an area where the policies the NDP is advocating and setting forth, and that our leader very strongly supports, will help turn the economy around in this country and will see the economy working for Canadians.

There are currently 1.3 million unemployed Canadians. This is something we need to recognize. We hear members on the other side talking about net new jobs. Their numbers are put in such a way that these jobs are full-time jobs. However, we all know that more than 80% of these jobs are part-time jobs and short-term jobs. What we are looking for is long-term employment, permanent employment, and full-time employment.

Another aspect of a strong Canadian economy is diversification. We have seen the Conservative government put a whole lot of energy into the resource extraction sector, to the detriment of the manufacturing sector.

• (1535)

[Translation]

Saint-Henri and Griffintown are two neighbourhoods in my riding of Jeanne-Le Ber with a history in manufacturing. One of the biggest heroes of the time, Charles McKiernan, also known as Joe Beef, fought alongside workers in the southwest borough for wage equality and the rights of female workers.

[English]

Again, this is something we need to address in the 2015 budget: income inequality.

Manufacturing has accounted for 11% of Canada's GDP. It employs over 1.7 million Canadians. However, it has been hard hit. We have seen over 400,000 jobs lost in the manufacturing area, and this has led to an even greater disparity in income. We have seen income inequality spiralling out of control. The top 1% now see their incomes increasing, while 99%, which are middle-class families, have seen their incomes decrease over the last 35 years.

We need to act on concrete measures that will help the economy turn around. The NDP has some of those concrete measures: cutting small-business tax rates from 11% to 9%; supporting innovation; and making sure that small businesses and medium-sized businesses have the means to continue to employ, grow, and contribute to their communities. We need to create a tax credit to make sure that it is affordable for small and medium-sized businesses to upgrade equipment so that they become more competitive and more able to keep up with what is going on in their industries. We need to make sure that Canada takes its place as an innovator and as a creator of new jobs in small business and in entrepreneurship.

• (1540)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to emphasize an area in which I think the government has really messed up. That is the area of infrastructure building. Building Canada by investing in infrastructure is something that has been very important not only to me but to many members of my caucus. The Liberal Party recognizes that the government has had a substantial decrease, some 90%, in the actual amount of money being spent on infrastructure, at a time when we should be having money. Investing in infrastructure generates the types of valuable jobs Canadians want government to be pursuing and encouraging and developing as government policy.

I wonder if the member might want to provide some comment on how important investing in infrastructure is, which means building our country and providing the improvements and jobs that are so needed today.

Mr. Tyrone Benskin: Mr. Speaker, the points I made in my remarks are some of the aspects of what we need to regain strength in our economy and to regain stability. Infrastructure investment is something that is important. Again, these things help enable small businesses do the work they need to do. Having bridges and infrastructure in place that allow goods to get from one place to another is truly important. Yes, one cannot deny the importance of the work opportunities from infrastructure investment in the economy.

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague made a very good point, which was that 98% of our businesses in Canada would be regarded as small and medium-sized enterprises with fewer than 500 employees. In New Brunswick, where I am, probably 90% of businesses have fewer than 10 employees, and a lot of them are export driven.

Business of Supply

The government is focused on a clear trade agenda, including a global markets action plan. In our trade committee, we have heard that 1,000 companies have participated in the Go Global workshops. This is one way to diversify our exports so that our businesses can grow and bring money into our economy to make ourselves richer. I would like to ask the member opposite this: Given that it is very important for growing businesses and even small businesses, why is it that the NDP does not support the majority of our trade agreements?

Mr. Tyrone Benskin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the opportunity to respond to this question.

Although the Conservatives like to paint the NDP as anti-trade, the NDP is by no means anti-trade. The NDP does, however, think that it is the responsibility of any responsible government to make sure that its trade agreements are made with countries that have good, strong human rights records so that the manufacturing and work being done in those countries do not come at the cost of the people who live there.

Ours is not an anti-trade agenda but a human rights agenda.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley for introducing this opposition day motion. This motion is pertinent and important to the vast majority of Canadians because it relates to our quality of life and standard of living here in Canada.

I want to read the motion. It states:

That, in light of sustained high unemployment since the 2008 recession and the long term downward trend in job quality since 1989 under successive Liberal and Conservative governments, as documented by CIBC, the House call on the government to make the first priority of Budget 2015 investment in measures that stimulate the economy by creating and protecting sustainable, full-time, middle-class jobs in high-paying industries in all regions of Canada and abandoning its costly and unfair \$2 billion income-splitting proposal.

It is an excellent motion.

In raising this motion, we are calling for a number of changes that we want to see take place.

The Minister of Finance quite surprisingly called the CIBC statistics sham statistics. He is saying that the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, that radical socialist organization, has produced sham statistics. However, no one can deny the long-term decline in employment quality in Canada over the last 25 years or that we need to take immediate action in budget 2015 to turn this trend around. We need to create good-quality jobs, we need to protect and improve existing jobs, and we need to address some of the key challenges of the middle class more broadly.

When I speak to people in my riding in Parkdale—High Park, I find that although they may have what have traditionally been secure middle-class jobs, a growing number of them are feeling insecure. Young people are going into these formerly good middle-class jobs on term contracts, on short-term hirings. They may be receiving no benefits and can be in that precarious situation for years. That makes it difficult for them to get on with their lives, because they never know if they will be able to keep their job. The CIBC has done us a real favour by presenting this report highlighting the growing precariousness of jobs across Canada, but we have some practical solutions to propose, and I want to get into those in a few minutes.

However, let me first speak more about my community in Toronto in Parkdale—High Park.

Toronto is now the inequality capital of Canada. We see greater and faster-growing inequality in our city than anywhere else in the country. As I said, we see a growing insecurity even in traditional middle-class jobs, but the number of very precarious jobs, minimum wage jobs, is vast and growing. People are on very unpredictable, precarious schedules and do not get enough hours to make a living, or they work full-time hours but do not make enough money to live because they are at the bottom of the pay scale.

Thanks to the work of a constituent, University of Toronto Professor David Hulchanski, we are now aware of a great disparity in inequality between neighbourhoods. Increasingly, those at the bottom of the income scale are newcomers, new immigrants, people of colour, visible minorities, and women. Different neighbourhoods around our city demonstrate great and huge differences with respect to equality. In fact, over the last decades inequality has widened in our city at twice the national average, so it is ballooning.

• (1545)

The OECD has confirmed what we know from studies about inequality: growing inequality hinders GDP growth. It hinders the broader economy and is invariably negative. We also see other social problems that result from inequality. Increased violence, increased imprisonment, addiction, obesity, greater ill health, and increased child mortality are all social outcomes of rising inequality. They should certainly should trouble all of us.

In my city of Toronto, 165,000 people are on the waiting list for affordable social housing. I see people who are badly housed and living in very poor conditions. They live with mould. Elevators frequently do not work in their buildings. Appliances do not work. We see families that are subject to a great deal of overcrowding because they can afford only a bachelor or a one-bedroom apartment, even though they have kids who should have their own room, their own space, because it is impossible for them to study otherwise.

As well, because of the lack of investment in infrastructure, people cannot get around the city. To get to their minimum-wage jobs, they have to stand an hour or an hour and a half on a bus and then on the subway to get to the other side of the city.

We are seeing growing stress on people at the growing bottom of the economic scale and we are seeing greater stress even on those in the middle. The all-time high personal debt that Canadians are experiencing means that people are taking on more and more personal debt. They are swimming faster and are running faster just to stay in the very same place. They are taking on more debt just to maintain their current standard of living.

Business of Supply

I want to thank CIBC for its study on employment quality, which is entitled *Employment Quality—Trending Down*. The Minister of Finance said, shockingly, that it is based on shoddy statistics. I would argue that the bank has no vested interest in embarrassing the government, but in fact is doing the country a favour and helping us all by pointing out this very dangerous and destructive trend.

The bank's report is very clear. Our measure of employment quality is now at a record low. Employment quality is at a record low. That is a pretty shocking statement. As well, the report says the trend is clear: since the 1980s, the number of part-time jobs has risen much faster than the number of full-time jobs. The damage caused to full-time employment during each recession was in many ways permanent, and full-time job creation was unable to accelerate fast enough during the recovery to recover the lost ground.

The report also argues that the decline in employment quality in Canada is more structural than cyclical. In other words, just coming out of a recession is not doing the job. We have structural problems in our society and our economy that need to be dealt with by serious measures. What we have seen over 2014 is a 0.7% increase in employment. Employment is essentially stagnant.

Here are some of the things we should be doing. Rather than giving the wealthiest 15% a tax cut with an income-splitting proposal, which is a *Leave It to Beaver* mentality that will keep the good little lady at home, we should be creating jobs, helping families, helping young people, and investing in a national child care program.

What we should be doing immediately is raising the minimum wage. Let us give Canadians a raise and help them pay their bills. New Democrats want to see a \$15 minimum wage.

We should be investing in infrastructure and building good-quality housing. Let us also help small businesses, which are big job creators. Let us help them invest in innovation and hiring and let us extend the accelerated capital cost allowance so businesses can create good middle-class jobs by investing in new technology.

• (1550)

New Democrats know what works. We have a plan for reviving the economy. Why do the Conservatives not get on board, accept our ideas, and include them in budget 2015? Then we can get the job done for all Canadians.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am going to again focus my attention on the government's inability to present the budget in a timely fashion.

The Minister of Finance is sending out a very confusing message to Canadians from coast to coast to coast when the government itself cannot present a federal budget in a timely fashion. Many people, including me, would argue that does more to add insecurity to the Canadian economy than anything else. It could ultimately work to the detriment of potential job creation and against the creation of more confidence within the small business community, which, I must say, is the backbone of job creation not only for today but into the future. It is highly irresponsible for the Minister of Finance not to be presenting the federal budget in a timely fashion.

The member made reference to it in the motion that we are debating today. I am wondering if she might want to pick up on the importance of the federal government presenting a national budget.

• (1555)

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, business does not like insecurity. If a company is going to make an investment, it wants to be able to see, at least into the near term, whether that investment is going to be able to drive growth and earn a profit. Canadian businesses are sitting on hundreds of billions of dollars that could be invested if the government showed leadership and created greater stability. However, business is not investing, and it is not investing because of insecurity. When the finance minister does not bring forward a budget, does not lay out for Canadians how he sees the next year rolling out, does not outline his priorities and explain to Canadians how he is going to steer the economy for the good of all Canadians, it makes it much more difficult for businesses to make their own investments.

The government should be making investments in things like transit and good child care to help workers do better. Then we would see more private sector investment. That would be good for the economy.

[Translation]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my NDP colleague for her fine speech.

She said that Canadians deserve a wage increase, because wages have stagnated across the country, and in some regions, they have even diminished.

I would like to know what she thinks of the situation facing people who work 40 hours a week in minimum-wage jobs and are raising a family and who, unfortunately, are still living below the poverty line.

Does she think the federal government should lead by example and introduce a \$15 minimum wage for jobs under federal jurisdiction?

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

He is quite right. Anyone who earns minimum wage is having a really hard time making ends meet. It is extremely difficult, especially for families, to pay the rent, to buy the groceries they need and to pay all of their living expenses.

Raising the minimum wage to \$15, as the NDP is proposing, would immediately put more money in the pockets of the poorest people, in the pockets of people who really need it to help them pay the bills. This would help most people who are living in precarious situations and need more money. These people often work for large corporations like McDonald's and Walmart, which pay minimum wage, and that really is not enough to live on in Canada today. The New Democrats plan to solve that problem.

Business of Supply

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before we resume debate, 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 Saanich—Gulf Islands regarding public safety and the hon. member for Parkdale—High Park regarding taxation.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Toronto Centre.

• (1600)

[Translation]

Ms. Chrystia Freeland (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for York West.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to join this important debate. Over the past 30 years, the Canadian economy has doubled in size. However, median household income has only increased by 15%. A report released last week by the CIBC shows that this trend has only gotten worse since the 2008-09 recession. I would like to quote a few passages from the report.

“The Bank of Canada continues to warn us that the headline unemployment rate is not as rosy as perceived and, in fact, according to the Bank’s new and improved measure of labour market activity, labour slack is still significant,” says Benjamin Tal, deputy chief economist and author of CIBC’s employment quality index.

He continues:

In many ways, the Bank has a point. Our measure of employment quality is now at a record low—suggesting that the composition of employment is sub-optimal. But a closer examination of the trajectories of our index’s sub-components suggests that the Bank’s prescribed remedy of low and lower interest rates might not cure what ails the labour market.

“While full-time paid-employment jobs are on average of higher quality than part-time and self-employment jobs, not all full-time paid-employment jobs were created equal,” says Mr. Tal. “The number of low-paying full-time jobs has risen faster than the number of mid-paying jobs, which in turn, has risen faster than the number of high-paying jobs.

“Over the year ending January 2015, the job creation gap between low and high-paying jobs has widened with the number of low-paying full-time paid positions rising twice as fast as the number of high-paying jobs. Those trajectories are largely behind the softening in our measure of employment quality over the past two decades.”

Faced with stagnating incomes, an increasing cost of living and mounting debt, middle-class Canadian families are struggling to make ends meet. Today, there are 159,000 fewer jobs for young people than before the recession. The Conservatives’ action plan consists of income splitting and a \$2 billion tax break that will mostly benefit the richest of Canadians while 85% of Canadian households will not see a cent.

• (1605)

The Liberal Party would invest those funds in areas that would really benefit the middle class, such as community infrastructure, post-secondary education and professional training, as well as research and innovation.

The Liberals feel that this country needs a new economic plan and, with each passing day, that feeling grows stronger. The economy of our largest trading partner, the United States, is on fire, but Canadian exports have dropped by almost 3%.

The Prime Minister wants to talk about anything but the economy. His priority is to give a \$2 billion tax break to the richest members of

our society, and he is more interested in fearmongering than in proposing economic solutions.

[English]

As we have heard from the CIBC, from a recent study by York University, from the IMF, whose concerns about the overheated Canadian housing market we cited earlier today in question period, there are some deep structural problems in the Canadian economy right now, particularly when it comes to the hollowing out of the middle class. We are becoming a low-wage, part-time economy for more and more Canadians.

The York University study I just mentioned has found that over the past 10 years there has been a 50% increase in the percentage of jobs in Ontario, which are part of this low-wage, part-time economy from 22% to 33% of jobs.

According to the OECD, in that organization of the world’s leading economies, Canada has the third highest percentage of low-paying jobs as part of the composition of our employment.

The Bank of Canada is worried. In the monetary policy report for January, the bank said, “the proportion of involuntary part-time workers continues to be elevated”. As the CIBC has said, we are becoming a nation of part-timers.

As the Liberal Party has been arguing, what we need is an economic plan for the middle class to shore up Canada’s hollowed-out middle class. We need a plan. A lot of what is going on is because of some of the new forces at work in the 21st century. A lot of what is happening is because of globalization, technological change, the rise of the sharing economy, or what some people are calling the “Uberization” of jobs, the “Taskrabbitization” of jobs.

However, the government can do something about it. The government is obligated to do something about that to adjust, to adapt our social and political institutions so that the Canadian middle class, rather than being the victim of globalization and the technology revolution, can actually thrive in these circumstances.

What we are seeing, I am very sad to say, from the government is the opposite. We are seeing that rather than trying to soften these forces, the government is leaning into them, particularly with its income splitting policy. Instead, what we would like to see from the government is an economic plan for growth, particularly growth of middle-class jobs.

Infrastructure is a big part of the solution. Those infrastructure jobs cannot be “Uberized” and they cannot be exported outside the country. Infrastructure investment has another great advantage. Big infrastructure programs help the economy to run hot. In those circumstances, the middle class has much more bargaining power, and we can see a reversal of these very terrible trends we have been discussing today.

Business of Supply

•(1610)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Toronto Centre for her speech, much of which was delivered in French. I like hearing people speak French.

For the past twenty years or so, government after government has put forward austerity budgets. We all have to tighten our belts. Since 1995, these austerity budgets have been eroding our economy. The gap between rich and poor has been getting bigger and bigger, as has the wage gap between men and women. These budgets do nothing to stimulate the Canadian economy. They just make it weaker and weaker.

I would like to hear the member's views on all of these austerity budgets from various governments and their impact on our economy.

Ms. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her question. I also want to apologize because I will answer in English. I am not ready to answer in French, but I will try to do so eventually.

[*English*]

I strongly believe that we are facing a couple of related economic problems right now. One is this hollowing out of the middle class, which we have been discussing at great length today, and to which I do think there are government solutions. There are actions that the government can take to improve the situation. On the contrary, there are actions governments can take, like the income splitting policy of the current government, which will actually make the situation worse.

A related problem, I believe, is the problem that some economists are calling “secular stagnation”. The economies of the western industrialized countries are not rebounding from the financial crisis, from the recession, with the sort of strength that a lot of people expected. We seem to be stuck in this low-growth economic space. We see it particularly in Europe with some interest rates now negative, which is shocking.

Therefore, I strongly agree with the direction of the hon. member's question. I think now is a time when we need government action to focus on economic stimulus, and that is why I concluded by talking about infrastructure investment, which I think can have a powerful impact on both economic growth and middle-class jobs.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the term “just on time” can be associated with the amount of inventory a tertiary or secondary manufacturer might hold and send to an assembly company or industry of some sort, just on time. Now we hear that term applied to jobs: just-on-time jobs. This is a direct result of Conservative economic policy, which is what my colleague has been saying about this economy and jobs.

What I see as an outcome of just-on-time jobs is income insecurity, housing insecurity and any number of other ill effects, including a lack of loyalty, frankly, of an employee towards their employer.

Could my colleague speculate and discuss with us other impacts of just-on-time jobs and the terrible impact that Conservative policy has had on jobs?

Ms. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Speaker, I think the member points to a real problem. The reality is that technology and advances in technology started off by allowing us to have just-in-time manufacturing where we did not need to keep great inventories of goods. We could get the goods to the factories just at the moment they needed them.

What has more recently been happening is that we have discovered that those same technologies have allowed employers to treat employees as a just-in-time input into the economic process. As my hon. colleague has pointed out, this has devastating effects on human lives. It means that people are unable to plan their family budgets. It means that people who have children, as I do, have a hard time organizing child care. Imagine if we knew we were going to work 40 hours a week but had no idea when those 40 hours would be.

I absolutely think it needs to be a priority for government policy to find ways to make sure that people have reliable incomes and reliable hours. I think this is something we can do in collaboration with employers.

•(1615)

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to speak to this issue today. It is certainly an issue about which all of us very much care.

I will read the text of the motion. It is not always easy to follow the tickertape across the bottom of the screen for anybody who may be watching and it is worth listening to the discussion today. The motion states:

That, in light of sustained high unemployment since the 2008 recession and the long term downward trend in job quality since 1989 under successive Liberal and Conservative governments, as documented by CIBC, the House call on the government to make the first priority of Budget 2015 investment in measures that stimulate the economy by creating and protecting sustainable, full-time, middle-class jobs in high-paying industries in all regions of Canada and abandoning its costly and unfair \$2 billion income-splitting proposal.

Let me tell the House a bit about a young woman who lives in my riding of York West. For the sake of the discussion, I will call her Emily. Emily is in elementary school. She recently came to my office because, in her words, she was concerned about how her family was doing financially. Like thousands of young people in every region of Canada, Emily lives in a home with a middle-class family that is struggling to survive. Despite being headed up by two working parents, they are still having difficulty.

What Emily understands easily from her everyday life has again been quantified in the CIBC report that we are discussing today. That report, along with dozens before it, paints a picture of an economy in trouble at its root, around the kitchen tables of the middle-class homes like Emily's, but this crisis did not happen overnight and it did not happen by accident. In fact, it has been made much worse by an out-of-touch Prime Minister with the worst economic growth record since the dismal days of R.B. Bennett.

Business of Supply

In 2006, the Prime Minister was handed a steadily growing economy from the Liberals, which had generated 3.5 million net new jobs, real jobs, declining debt and taxes, a decade of balanced budgets—clearly Liberals know how to do it—annual surpluses at about \$13 billion and fiscal flexibility projected ahead for the following five years totalling \$100 billion. It was all blown away in less than three years.

To be fair, it is true that the Canadian economy has continued to create jobs, but this report raises serious questions about the quality of those jobs. In fact, there have been several reports, including this one, warning that Canada's job market is not as sure-footed as it seems. This is over and above York University, the IMF, and now the CIBC, and I am sure there are countless other ones that we will hear about in the next short while.

Rather than accepting this warning, the Prime Minister blindly plunged forward. The government has only one prescription for everything. It does not matter what it is. It is austerity, austerity, and more austerity. To fix or at least camouflage his structural deficit, the Prime Minister hacked away at future federal funding for health care and old age pensions, and left nothing for quality job creation.

As a result, this report verifies that job quality has fallen to its lowest level in more than two decades. Worse yet, a CIBC index, which measures 25 years worth of data on part-time versus full-time work, paid versus self-employment and compensation trends, shows that it has fallen to its lowest level on record. The Bank of Canada's new labour market indicators call this slack, but Emily and her family understand that this is why moms and dads in middle-class households in the neighbourhood now work two jobs just to pay the bills. She also understands the serious social cost of latchkey kids, which she and her brother are.

The problem highlighted by this report is not just a labour market challenge, such as a low participation rate among core-aged Canadians. The problems with the economy run far deeper, as we heard from my colleague. In fact, this trend has serious implications for each and every one of us. A lack of hours, the loss of benefits and stagnating or declining wages emphasize why many middle-class households are already struggling to shore up savings and why consumer spending is on the cusp of crashing.

• (1620)

In its report, the bank said that this was partially caused by the fact that low-paying, full-time job creation had risen faster than the creation of mid-paying jobs over the last 20 years. The report calls this a widening job creation gap between low and high-paying jobs, with low-wage, full-time paid jobs rising at twice the pace of higher-paying jobs. This may sound very cynical, but at the most basic level, it means that good jobs are much harder to find than ever before, and when jobs are scarce, clearly, so is money.

As household finances get squeezed, the risk is that personal debt, already at record levels, will grow. As middle-class household debt goes up, the ability of those families, like Emily's, to cope with current and future economic turmoil goes down and that puts the households and the entire economy at risk.

Experts agree that middle-class families have not had a raise in more than a generation and that imbalance is putting the Canadian

economy at risk. Why will the government not help with a solution? When presented with data outlining that Canadian job quality has fallen to its lowest level in more than two decades, the Prime Minister proposed measures to increase the TFSA limit. He is clearly out of touch, clearly not understanding the world in which Emily lives. He also foolishly promised an income splitting regime that would give the wealthiest people the largest tax break. Imagine a prime minister who is so out of touch that he thinks families struggling to buy groceries, pay the mortgage and hold down two jobs could benefit from the ability to save more. They do not have the money to keep putting milk and bread on the table.

In my 30 years of public service, I have never seen someone so out of touch with the working families of our country, and it is a very sad thing to see. However, the Prime Minister says that Canada is doing better than Spain. He forgets that Canada is not doing better than Australia, New Zealand, Norway or even our partner, the United States. Even if we were, Canadians are rightly tired of the grinding mediocrity that characterizes the government. Since when did Canada just strive to be in the middle?

We are constantly told to lower our expectations, to settle for less and to tighten our belts. The big part of that burden falls on Canada's middle class, on Emily and to her family. The Prime Minister may see an economic downturn as a great buying opportunity, but seniors, students and working-class families across the country know better. The Prime Minister can demand that Canadians tighten their belts, but for so many families there are simply no more notches in their belts. Middle-class incomes have been flat for years, but living costs and household debt have ballooned. On a weekly basis we hear about the amount of debt Canadians are carrying.

Seventy per cent of private sector employees cannot even count on a company pension. Sixty per cent of middle-class parents, like Emily and her brother's parents, worry about how they are going to afford education for their children. More than 40% of the empty nester parents have had their adult children move back into the house because they cannot afford to live on their own. They cannot afford to buy a house or a condominium so they move back with their parents and work at part-time jobs. Most discouraging of all, for the first time ever, over 50% of middle-class Canadians fear that their children will not do as well as they did.

Business of Supply

All of this has happened under the Prime Minister's watch. The Conservatives are oblivious to these realities, but middle-class Canadians live them every day. I know the government cannot do everything for everyone, and we all understand that, but surely the Prime Minister's cronies have their pockets full by now. It is time for the government to step up and get serious about helping families like Emily's.

We cannot blindly hack and slash our way to prosperity. We cannot ignore the foundation of our house either. We have to make the Canadian economy grow at a strong, sustained pace. We need smart policies that promote the growth and development of sound jobs with good wages and reliable benefits for Canada's middle class.

• (1625)

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the CIBC report states that for the past few decades, economic growth has been slowing, and the gap between rich and poor has kept growing. The situation is getting worse and worse, and the same goes for the wage gap between men and women. As several people have mentioned today, it is getting harder and harder for many families to make ends meet, and all the while, the government's austerity regimes keep coming.

Does my Liberal colleague support the NDP's ideas about investing in the manufacturing sector and small businesses? We know that the manufacturing sector has shrunk by 25% over the past several years. We need measures like those proposed by the NDP to reduce the small business tax rate from 11% to 9%. What does my colleague think of that?

[English]

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, we need to ensure we invest where there are opportunities for businesses to grow. I was recently in the Kitchener-Waterloo area and visited several incubators. In the incubators, there must have been 100 students out of university all working on a variety of projects. Many of them said that their projects had potential, but without investments and encouragement from the government, there was very little space for them to go, other than taking these ideas to the United States, which is much faster to respond. We have always had to deal with these issues.

When we talk about job creation, the manufacturing sector is important. The auto sector is another where we have always had to find money to invest. Job creation is important.

If people have a good, solid job, they can buy houses, even though they are expensive. They have stability in their family to move forward so people like Emily know that their moms and dads have good jobs and can afford to put food on the table and a roof over their heads without having to worry about it.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I must commend the member for York West for the manner in which she articulated the importance of job creation and Canada's economy. She has a very caring heart in dealing with senior issues. She has been an advocate of the OAS and the fact that the retirement age should not increase from 65 to 67.

She talked about some policies. Could she add some of her thoughts regarding the importance of keeping the age of retirement at 65, as opposed to 67?

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, I continually deal with seniors who come to my office and tell me that they cannot work until to 65. They or their husbands have worked in construction. They have worked in jobs that have kept them on their feet all day. They are asking for help because they cannot work until the age of 65.

The idea of telling many of those people who have worked in challenging industries that they will have to wait to 67 will clearly put more emphasis on the provinces to bring in some other kind of welfare program. Many of the people I see cannot make it to 67. They cannot make it to 65 and they are asking that we change the rules to give them more assistance.

We know we can afford to change them. All the appropriate people from the economy have said that the money is there. It is the fact that the government wants to choose, take that old age security money and spend it elsewhere.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by saying that I will be sharing my time with the wonderful member for Churchill.

I want to reference what the last speaker from the Liberal Party was saying about changing the retirement age from 67 back to 65. I was thrilled when our leader, in one of his first speeches in the House four years ago, was talking about reversing the mistake made by the Conservatives. I am glad to see the Liberals have finally caught up.

I have a couple of quotes here. One is from *The Economist*, January 31, 2015. It says the minister of finance:

....promised a balanced budget as recently as January 26th, despite the expected drop in revenues from the energy industry. The government had pledged a raft of tax reductions once that was achieved, but imprudently enacted them late last year. The delay in presenting the budget adds to the impression of fiscal disarray.

The former parliamentary budget officer put in place by the government, Kevin Page, said, "In the last 10 years, we have virtually made no progress on all of our big issues, long-term economic challenges. We have not closed innovation gaps in our country, dealt with an aging demographic that will put pressure on health care, nor dealt with environmental sustainability. We have not even had the discussions or proposals from this government".

Business of Supply

Let us think about the significance of that, in terms of where Canada finds itself today. Prior to coming to this place 9 years ago, I had spent 28 years in the labour movement in the Hamilton area. In Hamilton, I saw hundreds upon hundreds of businesses close. The first wave was following 1988, when we had the first free trade agreement. In Ontario alone, 500,000-plus manufacturing jobs were lost. That was in 1988 to 1990.

Then we had NAFTA and more jobs were lost. We have had decades of Conservative and Liberal leadership during which the quality of employment for hard-working Canadians has also dropped. It is not just that many of the jobs are not there anymore.

If we talk to young people today, who are 30 years of age, who are trying to raise a family, and who have maybe had the good fortune of having gone to university, we learn that they have come out \$30,000 in debt, which means they cannot contribute that to the economy. They are working in what we refer to as McJobs. Some of them are working two and three jobs.

I sit in our local Tim Hortons regularly, hearing from people who are literally working three jobs. They are not even working at Tim Hortons; they are sitting and having a coffee in between jobs.

In the last while, since just before we had a change of finance ministers, we have heard about this income-splitting plan. Some call it a scheme, but I will refer to it as a plan, to be somewhat respectful. The past finance minister was a man with whom I was pleased to work, an honourable man. I sat on the finance committee for two years with him.

He cautioned this government very directly about the fallacy in this income-splitting plan that favours the top 14% or 15% of Canadians over the hard-working Canadians, the middle-class and lower-class Canadians. By lower class, I mean the people who are disadvantaged in our society. My community of Hamilton has a 20% rate of people living below the poverty line. What does income splitting do for them?

New Democrats understand that to put Canada on track, and for the middle class, we need to have concrete steps to diversify our economy. It seems to me, watching the last number of years, that all I have seen is the rip and strip of our resources off to other countries. Where is the value-added manufacturing? Hamilton was the core of value-added manufacturing in this country. We are known as Steel Town. The steel production there was supporting other industries.

Today there are still about 65 industries attached to steel in Hamilton, a mere shadow of what it once was.

• (1630)

We took resources and developed them. Value-added manufacturing put us in a place where we have one of the vibrant middle classes of the world. We have had that for several generations, primarily after the Second World War.

The homes in Hamilton that are 40, 50, and 60 years old were built and purchased by hard-working people who had a fair and decent income because of that value-added manufacturing in our community.

I recall, 20 years ago, a report came out for the City of Hamilton called "Vision 2000". When I read it I was in shock, as a labour activist, because it talked about the decline of value-added manufacturing. That decline was under the Liberals. The report said that decline was going to continue. The value-added manufacturing jobs were going to be replaced by service sector jobs.

There is an obvious question. If we are now moving from a manufacturing base to service sector jobs, who is going to buy the services of the people who no longer have the other well-paying jobs? Is it only that 15% at the top that is going to get all this extra money from income splitting? It makes one wonder.

I can recall our leader, Jack Layton, two elections ago in our caucus meetings talking about small business and the importance of taking care of small business. We hear that from the government side, in fairness to it. However, Jack said there was nothing being done for them. He talked to our caucus and I remember him saying that these are the real job creators. These are the backbone of our country. We have to do something for them. We have to do something to spur innovation, to give them that entrepreneurial spirit and to turn some of it toward manufacturing.

The NDP currently has a plan. More of it will roll out over the next number of months before the election, but it is to do exactly that: to spur the next generation of middle class.

After a decade of Conservative economic mismanagement, middle-class families are working harder and longer, and yet they feel they are falling further and further behind.

We hear the talk about the 1.2 million net new jobs, to use the Conservatives' own language. It leaves out the 400,000 people who no longer have the jobs that went under during their time.

In the city of Hamilton, where the failed manufacturing is, the government has failed them. It has failed them on research and development funding. It has failed them in several areas. It has failed them in long-term planning. As I said earlier in my remarks, the rip and strip of our resources became the focus of the government and nothing else. As an end result of that, we have Canadians unemployed today at levels we have not seen in decades.

I was sadly visiting a food bank in my home lately. I walked into it and took a step back. I am of an age where I could be retired, and a friend of mine who had a plant job was at the food bank. One stops and considers: we were on a similar path at one point in the work we were doing, and his company went under.

The government has done nothing to protect these jobs. We allowed the Chinese to buy \$15 billion into Canada and we allowed for future investments on their part. That company, CNOOC, has a horrendous reputation around the world. What are we doing for our own investment, for our own remanufacturing?

I am kind of losing words. I guess it is appropriate. I am at the end of my time, but it is so very frustrating.

Business of Supply

• (1635)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to provide some comments in regard to income splitting and the alternatives. Jim Flaherty, the former Conservative minister of finance, pointed out quite correctly that income splitting was not the best way to develop government policy, that at the end of the day very few would actually benefit from it, yet there is a substantial cost. We are talking about hundreds of millions of dollars every year and close to \$10 billion over a 10-year period of time, or something like that.

If we look at the costs to the middle class in regard to that specific and go to a question that I just finished posing to one of my colleagues in regard to seniors and increasing the age from 65 to 67 and the costs that would have, yet it would put a lot more people into poverty, there are always policy options, including infrastructure, another issue I have talked a great deal about today. Could the member provide comment on options the government has in policy?

• (1640)

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, we are actually on two different tracks. Income splitting will affect working Canadians in an inequitable way. It is going to take about \$3 billion a year out of the fiscal capacity to do things for other Canadians. In other words, the top 15% has \$3 billion and the bottom, who need something, is getting nothing.

As far as the age of retirement is concerned, a cynical person would say this is simple dollars and cents. If people lived in Ontario and were on Ontario Works and welfare, at age 65 they would have gone to OAS and GIS and would have had a modest increase. Now they have to wait two years. If people were on sick benefits in the province of Ontario, at age 65 they got more benefits because they went on these other pensions. Again, they have to wait. In the meantime, the provinces are now going to pick up \$6,000 per person, and that is money the government does not spend. The Conservatives are saving money on the backs of the people who are in the worst situation in our country and the seniors.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we know that income inequality in our country is spiralling out of control, that incomes in the top 1% have been surging for decades while the typical Canadian, the middle-class Canadian family, has seen income fall over the last 35 years.

I want to talk about the minimum wage because it is a mechanism that is used to lift people out of poverty. We know that, in real terms, the average minimum wage in Canada has actually increased by only 1% over the last 40 years. I want to know if my colleague thinks that is acceptable. I know that we proposed solutions, and I wonder if he can talk about some real, meaningful, tangible solutions.

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, the minimum wage in Switzerland is \$24 an hour. In New Zealand it was just rolled back; it was headed for \$27 an hour. Let us think about that for a moment and think of the vast resources we have in this country. Conservatives want to put income splitting in, but why are they not paying a more reasonable wage? I am thrilled with our proposal of \$15 an hour, but that is not enough. That is a beginning, not an end.

In the House we have the opportunity to provide leadership to the provinces, because this would only apply to federal employees such as the rail, airlines, and communications sector employees. There are not many people who would actually receive this—somewhere around one million workers, which is wonderful—but we have to ensure that the cleaners at the airport and the contract workers are paid well. It would set an example. Today the federal rate is set by looking at the provinces and using their numbers. It should be the reverse. The national government should be the leader in making sure that people receive an equitable wage.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek for his comprehensive speech, his analysis of what exactly is happening to our country under the leadership of the current Conservative government, as well as the foundations that were weakened or even taken away by the previous Liberal government.

I am very proud to stand in this House to speak to our opposition day motion. I want to make sure that it is clearly known what we are putting on the table. We propose, as the motion says:

That, in light of sustained high unemployment since the 2008 recession and the long term downward trend in job quality since 1989 under successive Liberal and Conservative governments, as documented by CIBC, the House call on the government to make the first priority of Budget 2015 investment in measures that stimulate the economy by creating and protecting sustainable, full-time, middle-class jobs in high-paying industries in all regions of Canada and abandoning its costly and unfair \$2 billion income-splitting proposal.

This is all about priorities. We know that we are entering a time that is crucial when it comes to acting on priorities: budget time.

We have been very clear from the beginning that our priority in the NDP is one where we seek to invest in the economy. We seek to stimulate the economy through investment and through the protection of sustainable, full-time jobs in high-paying regions across the country, and investing in initiatives in housing, transit, broader infrastructure, education, and health care.

Then we look at what the Conservatives are proposing. Despite the rhetoric about a strong economy and supporting job creation, they are choosing to spend \$2 billion on an income splitting proposal. This is at a time when Canadians have been told to keep their purse strings tight and not to expect to see any spending. In fact, those who are working for the federal government have seen record job losses. Canadians across the country may have seen their jobs leave the country. Some continue to be in poverty, and chronic poverty continues to go unaddressed by the current federal government. On the other hand, we see a commitment to income splitting.

Business of Supply

I had the opportunity to speak across my constituency on what is happening to our country, and I feel that is very much what we are talking about today. We are talking about the vision of Canada that we have seen the current government hold steadfastly to, and the kind of direction the Conservatives have taken us in.

I come from a part of the country that is very diverse, particularly in terms of indigenous communities. There are also people who have settled there from across the country and from around the world. However, we need look no further than northern Manitoba and a lot of our northern regions in terms of the kinds of inequality that people across our country face.

Many of us were horrified just a few weeks ago by a report indicating that first nations in Manitoba face some of the greatest challenges in terms of quality of life. We know that across the country, first nations children face the highest rates of poverty, at about 25%, and if we look at Manitoba, that number jumps as high as 62%.

In this case, we are not talking about job creation only, or a strong economy as the government talks about. We are talking about chronic, sustained, deep-rooted poverty.

I wish that the federal government would spend some time talking about a vision when it comes to poverty on first nations. However, sadly, any time we hear Conservatives talk about indigenous issues, it is often to disparage indigenous leaders or peoples, or in the case of legislation like Bill C-51, to create barriers and threaten indigenous communities that are pushing for their rights to be recognized and for better opportunities in their communities and across the country.

• (1645)

Instead of spending \$2 billion on income splitting, we would like to see the government place a priority on eliminating poverty, understanding that it has a different face in parts of the country, understanding that there needs to be investment in first nations education, that there needs to be investment in health care on reserve and that there needs to be investment in housing.

By making those investments we create economic opportunities. For example, in Manitoba, with the growing indigenous population, if more and more young people leave the north or in the inner city have a better chance at an education in terms of primary education, but also secondary and post-secondary, that they will be better able to contribute to their local economies, to our national economy, whether it is by accessing existing jobs or creating and innovating new jobs.

I also have the honour of representing people who depend on the resource extractive industry. I have no doubt that every single one of them would say that \$2 billion can be better spent on the priorities many of them see as imminent, rather than spending it on income splitting.

Many of the folks I represent have seen their jobs exported outside the country because the government has not stood up for them, whether it is because of the softwood lumber deal or whether it is because of the way in which the agreements for foreign companies to buy out Canadian companies have become largely rubber stamps under the leadership of the government.

In the case of Thompson, my home community, a Brazilian multinational bought out a Canadian company, Inco, and soon after threatened to export all of our value-added jobs, jobs that we know are fundamental in our community and fundamental to our province.

Thankfully, as a result of public pressure and regional engagement, the company came to the table to try to find a solution. It was little thanks to a federal government that continues to allow foreign companies to buy out Canadian corporations, and either quickly or over a range of years, export value-added jobs, jobs that sustain our communities and our entire country in many cases.

I would also say that when we are talking about where we could spend \$2 billion, it is pretty clear that when we look at the needs of newcomers to Canada, we need to see investments in education and training, in credential recognition, which arguably does not have a monetary cost but would allow people who come with tremendous expertise from around the world to contribute to our communities and our economy in a much greater way. Instead of that, the federal government chooses once again to spend \$2 billion on income splitting.

I want to spend just one moment on what income splitting is really all about. Not only is it a ghastly waste of money in terms of \$2 billion, but it is a proposal that has everything to do with reinforcing inequality in our country, and particularly marginalizing women in our country, because income splitting encourages women, who often earn less than their male partners, to stay at home and focus on what I am sure many in the government would consider the more “traditional” caring duties that women are supposed to do.

I want to say that I was taken aback with the Prime Minister's reference today to others being anti-women in their agenda when in fact many have argued, and I have certainly argued in this House, that income splitting is anti-women's equality. When it comes to things that we can really do to improve the equality of women, improve the equality of all Canadians, in means taking away that \$2 billion, that waste of money on income splitting and moving it to the real priorities that we in the NDP are putting forward, and we know that many Canadians are putting forward as well.

• (1650)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in her speech, my colleague talked about income splitting, which will benefit only the wealthiest 14% or 15% of the population.

I would like her to talk specifically about the people in her riding, because in Quebec, for example, the average annual salary of a single person is \$35,000. The Minister of Employment said that this measure was geared to couples who earned \$60,000. We are not really sure whom this might benefit in Quebec.

Can my colleague talk about what substantive impact this measure will have on the people in her riding and in northern Manitoba?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. It is clear that this is not going to do much.

Business of Supply

The priorities my constituents share with me have more to do with the need to invest in child care, housing, education and economic partnerships that affect our communities. This \$2 billion could be used for so many other things.

This program is a gift from the Conservatives to a number of Canadians who are already rich. The Conservatives keep neglecting the rest of Canadians, who are living in increasingly tougher situations because of the growing inequality in our country. They want an alternative vision. What the government is doing is extremely disappointing. Even Mr. Flaherty himself was opposed to this measure.

The Conservatives are saying that this measure will improve things for thousands of Canadians, but that is not so. If the government respected the intelligence of Canadians, which it does not, then it would see that this money could be spent on other priorities.

• (1655)

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Churchill for her speech. She is always so passionate about the issues and injustices that unfortunately still exist in our country.

We are facing some significant challenges, both in northern and remote communities as well as in big cities. Our economy is in turmoil. We can see it in the poor quality of the jobs we are creating. How could we turn these challenges into opportunities to improve our society overall? I was in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and social entrepreneurship is very innovative there. Since my colleague mentioned it, could she elaborate on that aspect?

In the House, should we not be innovative and think about progressive policies rather than regressive ones?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

Since she mentioned her visit to Manitoba, I think she would agree that the solution is to elect an NDP government. That is a partisan comment, but it is the truth.

The Government of Manitoba recognizes that social entrepreneurship is a source of revenue and innovation. Our province has a diversified economy, since we recognize that we must not rely on just one resource or one industry.

In that province, the NDP government has made incredible investments in education, and particularly in post-secondary education, without the support of the Conservative government.

As I said, we still have considerable challenges to overcome, especially when it comes to first nations. That is where we are really seeing the lack of leadership on the part of the federal government, be it the current Conservative government or the Liberal government of the past. Not only have they refused to find solutions, but they have also contributed to the problem. They are part of the poverty problem facing Aboriginal people in our province.

The answer is simple: we need an NDP vision, and I know that we can make that happen in a few months.

[English]

Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise in the House today to address the question from the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley. In fact, I am glad this question has been raised.

Our government is keenly focused on creating jobs, economic growth, and long-term prosperity for Canadians. In fact, since the depth of the global recession in 2009, the Canadian economy has posted one of the strongest job-creation records in the G7 over the recovery, with nearly 1.2 million net new jobs created. These are overwhelmingly full-time, private sector jobs in high-wage industries.

However, the recent report released by CIBC highlights a problem our government has been feverishly working to solve over the past few years. The report clearly states that workers need the right skills to meet the demands of the labour force. The problem is not the decline in well-paying jobs; the problem is that there are not enough Canadians with the right skills to fill the jobs that are available. In other words, we have too many people without jobs and too many jobs without people.

How do we deal with this challenge? First, we must take action now to help Canadians get the skills and training they need for the jobs of today and tomorrow. That brings me to one of our government's top priorities: helping Canadians get the skills they need for the available jobs.

We understand the need for accurate and robust labour market information to help Canadians make the best possible decisions when it comes to training and education. We are also collaborating with the provinces to share labour market information. Better labour market information is a good start, but we also need to change some attitudes.

While Canada has the highest proportion of post-secondary graduates of people aged 25 to 64 among OECD countries and the G7, 53% to be exact, a degree does not guarantee a job. Where are the jobs, one might ask? Many of them are in the trades.

Let me give hon. members of the House an idea of the demand for trade workers. BuildForce Canada says we will need more than 250,000 construction workers in the next 10 years. The mining industry says we will need more than 125,000 workers by 2020, and the petroleum industry says we will need more than 125,000 workers by the year 2022.

The Conference Board of Canada, last summer, found that Ontario is losing out on over \$24 billion in economic activity and \$3.7 billion in provincial tax revenues annually because employers cannot find people with the skills they need. Why is it so difficult to find people to fill these jobs? The answer is simple. Not enough young people are choosing to enter the skilled trades.

Business of Supply

In a study completed by the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum in 2013, fewer than half of high school students said they would consider a career in the skilled trades. That is a big problem. Right now, in some Red Seal trades, nearly half the workforce is over the age of 45. We need to work together to inform young people about the opportunities in the skilled trades, opportunities to do fulfilling work and to earn a good living.

Our government is also working to support apprentices. For example, we have introduced apprenticeship grants. To date we have issued over 500,000 grants. There are two types of grants available to apprentices in a Red Seal trade. The apprenticeship incentive grant provides \$1,000 to apprentices who complete their first and/or second year or level, up to \$2,000. The apprenticeship completion grant provides \$2,000 to apprentices who have completed their training and have obtained their journeyman certification. In total, an apprentice can get \$4,000 from our government with these two grants.

Additionally, we have introduced the apprenticeship job creation tax credit, the tradesperson's tools deduction credit, flexibility and innovation in apprenticeship technical training, and the new Canada apprentice loan. This new measure provides apprentices in designated Red Seal trades with up to \$4,000 in interest-free loans per period of technical training. These interest-free loans will help apprentices with the cost of training, which can be particularly difficult while they are supporting their families. These loans remain interest free until apprentices leave or complete their training programs, for up to a maximum of six years. They will also encourage more Canadians to consider careers in the skilled trades.

• (1700)

We need to work with other stakeholders in both the private and public sectors to find a long-lasting solution to our labour issues. By working more closely with employers we can ensure that training is better aligned with the job opportunities in different regions in different sectors.

At the same time, businesses also need to have a stake in the outcome. If employers want their concerns about skills shortages to be taken seriously, they have to show that they are contributing to a solution. One way this can be done is through the Canada job grant. Through this grant, the government provides up to \$10,000 per person toward the direct cost of training, with the employer contributing, on average, an additional one-third of these costs.

The Canada job grant is part of the new Canada job fund, an agreement through which the government provides \$500 million annually to the provinces and territories for investments in skills training. We are working very hard to give Canadians the support they need to prepare for the job market.

Another way to help fix the problem is to start by acknowledging that our education and training systems urgently need reform. Provincial governments need to realize that the choices they made in the 1970s and 1980s, and in my home province in the 1990s, to gradually downgrade vocational education were very shortsighted. Forty years ago, most high schools offered vocational training, but now the number of technology courses taken by secondary school students has dropped dramatically. We need to change this. That is why today I want to call on all families, and society's leaders in

general, to lend their voices by telling younger Canadians that choosing a career in the trades is not about settling for second best. These are well-paying, honourable, and rewarding careers. They help build self-worth, pride, and ultimately, strong and healthy families.

Our government believes strongly in the need to change hearts and minds when it comes to jobs in the trades. When it comes to the skills-gap issue, we cannot address it in isolation. We have to attack it from all angles. I want to assure members that we are definitely doing that.

We also cannot forget about a key segment of our population, a very educated segment: new immigrants. In fact, they hold a disproportionate number of graduate degrees. They account for nearly half of all Ph.D. holders and 40% of master's recipients. Unfortunately, despite their qualifications, skilled immigrants are chronically underemployed. According to the 2014 labour force survey, the unemployment rate for recent immigrants last year was 12.9%. That is nearly double the unemployment rate of the general population.

Over 70% of economic immigrants to Canada are unable to work in the fields for which they are trained, and that is really unfortunate. Why should foreign-trained doctors and other professionals be driving taxis and waiting tables because of the lengthy and expensive processes they have to go through to have their credentials recognized in Canada? Not only is this a terrible waste of human potential, it is also a serious loss to our own economy.

Our government is committed to improving the foreign-credential process in Canada, and we have taken important action in this regard. We have invested \$50 million to develop a national framework to streamline foreign-credential recognition for key occupations. We have been meeting with regulatory authorities representing engineers, nurses, dentists, physicians, engineering technicians, and other occupations to learn the best ways to streamline their credential recognition.

Our government's work on foreign-credential recognition began years ago. In 2011, we made a commitment to provide loans for recent immigrants to help pay for skills training and accreditation. In 2012, we kept that promise when we introduced the foreign credential recognition loans pilot project. For many new immigrants, getting traditional loans can be very difficult. This partnership between the federal government, financial institutions, and community organizations gives internationally trained workers modest loans to help cover the costs of having their credentials recognized so that they can find jobs in their fields more quickly.

Business of Supply

Just recently, our government also launched a new panel on the employment challenges for new Canadians as part of the action plan to improve foreign-credential recognition for internationally trained professionals. We are also continuing to provide financial support to improve credential recognition in 24 target occupations that represent over 80% of newcomers.

Our government recognizes the financial challenges many Canadians are facing today. That is why we are keeping taxes low for families. For parents, this means that they will have more to invest in their children's futures. This in turn will help the next generation of Canadians who will grow up to participate in the workforce and the economy.

• (1705)

It is clear to me that supporting strong families and preparing Canadians for jobs go hand in hand. Canadians enjoy one of the highest standards of living in the world. The low-income rate has been declining and now sits at an all-time low, using the most recent comparable data.

Canadian families in all income groups have seen increases of about 10% or more in their real after-tax and after-transfer incomes since 2006. We want to keep this momentum going, and investing in the well-being of all families is the best way to do it. That is why our government is proposing new measures to help make life more affordable for families.

Let me explain to the hon. members of the House how we are keeping taxes low for families.

I am proud to say that we have proposed enhancing the universal child care benefit by providing almost \$2,000 per year for each child under the age of six and by introducing a new benefit of up to \$720 per year for each child aged six through 17. More than two million new families will now benefit from the universal child care benefit, for a total of about four million families nationwide.

This direct financial support provided by the Government of Canada helps parents while allowing them to choose the child care option that best suits their family's needs. Whether people work in the paid labour force or stay at home with their children and live in a small town, rural community, or large urban centre, these benefits are having a real and measurable impact.

That is not all we are doing. Our government is also introducing a new family tax cut. The family tax cut is a federal non-refundable tax credit that would allow a spouse to transfer up to \$50,000 of taxable income to a spouse in a lower-income tax bracket. More than 1.7 million families in Canada would have more money in their pockets, something our government is very proud of.

Furthermore, we are introducing a \$1,000 increase in the maximum dollar amount that can be claimed for the child care expense deduction, effective in the 2015 taxation year. The government also proposes to double the children's fitness tax credit from its current limit to \$1,000 for the 2014 and subsequent tax years and to make the credit refundable for 2015 and subsequent tax years.

As children grow up, families need better access to post-secondary education. That is why, through the Canada education savings program, the government encourages families to start saving early

for their children's education. Modest-income families benefit from the Canada learning bond. The Canada learning bond is \$500 the federal government deposits into a registered education savings plan, better known as an RESP. A child may be eligible for another \$100 per year, up to a maximum of \$2,000. Most importantly, parents or primary caregivers do not have to contribute any of their own money to receive the Canada learning bond.

When they open an RESP, parents can also receive the Canada education savings grant. The federal government adds between 20% and 40% of contributions to the RESP, depending on income, with a lifetime maximum of \$7,200 per child.

On this side of the House, we are proud of the range of support we provide for Canadians throughout their entire lives. From education and training to immigration and lowering the tax burden, we are helping Canadians create a better economic future for themselves and for our country as a whole.

• (1710)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, given the importance of a national budget, which the Minister of Finance has failed to deliver to Canadians in a time of need, which does not speak well for the Prime Minister and the government, when does the member believe that the budget will be presented? Does he not agree that the Minister of Finance is not doing anything to provide confidence in the economy by delaying a budget, using the excuse of oil prices?

Mr. Rodney Weston: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his question, because I, too, share his excitement about the coming federal budget. With some of the new measures I talked about in my speech, I see why he is excited and anxious to see the Minister of Finance bring that budget into the House so Canadians can start benefiting from some of the tax benefits and measures we are planning to introduce.

I can only ask my hon. colleague across the floor to please be patient. He will get to realize the benefits, the same as the rest of Canada.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): It being 5:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

Private Members' Business

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

And five or more members having risen:

Mr. Philip Toone: Mr. Speaker, we ask that the vote be deferred until tomorrow, Wednesday, March 11, at the expiry of the time provided for government orders.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Accordingly, the recorded division stands deferred until tomorrow, just before the time provided for private members' business.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Mr. Speaker, I believe if you were to seek it, you would find unanimous consent of the House to see the clock at 5:30 p.m.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

[*Translation*]

POINTS OF ORDER

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I had informed the clerks that I would be making a brief presentation on a point of order, so I would like to do so now, although we are seeing the clock as 5:30 p.m.

I want to revisit the remarks made yesterday by the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons. He raised a few points about the point of order I had raised regarding the study by the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security and decisions made by the committee with respect to the witnesses and Bill C-51.

The Leader of the Government in the House of Commons said two things in his intervention earlier this week. First of all, he said that the minutes of the meeting showed that the member for Northumberland—Quinte West had not requested that the question be put on the subamendment. He quoted from the actual minutes of the proceedings. The minutes clearly state, however, that the member for Northumberland—Quinte West requested that the Chair decide “to put the question on the subamendment, the amendment, and the main motion”.

It is therefore very clear that the question was raised. There can be no doubt about it. The chair then stated that the question would not be put until they had gone through the entire list of speakers. Indeed, the number of interventions and the length of speeches are unlimited in a standing committee meeting. That is when the member for Northumberland—Quinte West asked the chair to decide.

The record is very clear and there is no difference: what was requested is prohibited by the Standing Orders, House procedure and the traditions we have had here for the past 150 years. There is no doubt that the member for Northumberland—Quinte West requested that the Chair decide to put the question on the subamendment. There is no doubt that that is what happened.

The Leader of the Government in the House of Commons also tried to use a point of order that I myself raised in the spring of 2010

regarding a decision of the Standing Committee on International Trade. The Leader of the Government in the House of Commons was pleased to remind members that in his ruling, the Speaker said that:

All members who have intervened in this matter have acknowledged that the Speaker does not sit as a court of appeal to adjudicate procedural issues that arise in the course of committee proceedings.

However, had he read the sentence that came just before that, he would have realized that he missed a key point that he did not bring up yesterday during his point of order. That sentence reads:

The member for Calgary Centre, the chair of the standing committee...stated that the committee had conducted its meeting fairly and in keeping with the rules of procedure.

The Speaker later said something in his decision that I, too, said, namely that “the chair had the support of the majority of the members of the committee”.

It is very clear: the rules were broken. Obviously the concern is that a majority committee can now make any decision, even if the chair follows the rules that have existed for 150 years. That is the point of order that we raised and that we asked the Speaker of the House to rule on. It is very clear that democratic rights have been violated by the Conservative majority. Of course, none of the three interventions by the government denied the fact that the rules and procedures by which we are governed and that we are required to observe were violated.

● (1720)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I thank the member for Burnaby—New Westminster for his supplementary intervention concerning the point of order. The Speaker will address this matter in the House in the coming days.

[*English*]

The House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC) moved that Bill C-637, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (firearms storage and transportation), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, today it is my great pleasure to stand in the House to speak to my private member's Bill C-637.

I am not here only in my capacity as the member of Parliament for Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette. I have the honour of being the chair of the Conservative hunting and angling caucus, a group of parliamentarians dedicated to a way of life that millions of Canadians cherish, and that same dedication extends to conservation programs and projects.

Private Members' Business

Bill C-637 is important legislation that responds to the needs of the owners of BB guns and air rifles from coast to coast to coast. The bill would help provide much-needed clarity with respect to how Canadian law treats this type of property when it is being transported or stored.

Before I talk about the bill itself, it is helpful to first look at air guns and how they differ from regular firearms.

Air guns are also commonly called BB guns, pellet guns, spring guns, or airsoft guns. Essentially they are a pneumatic device that propels projectiles by means of compressed air, a spring, or other gas. Most air guns use small metal balls called BBs or pellets as ammunition. This differentiates them from regular bullet-firing firearms, which use a propellant charge.

Air guns are commonly used for small game hunting, pest control, recreational shooting, and competitive sports. For example, the Olympics include 10-metre air rifle and 10-metre air pistol events. BB guns also form part of our cultural heritage. For example, members of a certain age—and I include myself in that age bracket—will remember ads for Daisy brand BB guns in their childhood comic books.

Beyond this, they remain popular with thousands of Canadians because they are quieter and more affordable and are not regulated nearly as stringently as firearms.

In Canada, air guns are generally divided into the categories that follow.

First, we have air guns in which the shot or projectile will not cause serious injury or death. These guns fall outside the scope of the Firearms Act and offences under the Criminal Code. An example is the harmless air gun made out of clear plastic or a device that is clearly a child's toy.

The next category includes those air guns that have the potential to cause serious bodily injury or death to a person and whose muzzle velocity exceeds 152.4 metres per second, or 500 feet per second. Air guns that meet these criteria are considered to be firearms for the purposes of the Firearms Act and the Criminal Code. For example, these types of air guns are subject to the same licensing requirements as conventional firearms. Additionally, owners and users must store, transport, and handle them in accordance with the Firearms Act and its regulations.

Finally, and this is the category that is the focus of the bill, there is a class of air guns that falls between these two extremes. Specifically, these air guns are exempt from licensing and registration requirements. Importantly, they are also exempt from specific storage, transportation, and handling regulatory requirements made pursuant to the act. These types of firearms are also excluded from corresponding penalties set out in the Criminal Code for possessing a firearm without a valid licence or registration certificate.

That said, as per the code, it is currently legally required that the owner of this type of air gun take reasonable precautions when using, handling, transporting, and storing their air gun. The reason I introduced the bill is that there is confusion about the legal responsibilities of air gun owners with regard to storage and

transportation. "Reasonable precaution" is not defined, so we have a situation in which an owner is exempt from the prescribed requirements under the Firearms Act but is in fact required to follow a shadowy, unclear system of storage requirements.

This follows from debate about a recent Supreme Court decision finding that certain air guns that can cause serious bodily injury or death to a person but are not regulated under the Firearms Act are nonetheless subject to an obligation under the Criminal Code in relation to careless storage and transportation. The state of the law is confusing and flies in the face of common sense.

Let me remind all members that BB guns are sold in hardware stores across Canada, and there is no need to apply for a firearms licence and no test to pass. It is my view that it is nonsensical for an air gun that does not require a licence to own or use to be subject to the same offences for careless storage and transportation as more powerful firearms. If we break down the word "firearm" into its two basic components, we are left with "fire" and "arm". By definition, there must be fire in order for the device to be labelled a firearm. This is clearly not the case for the paintball guns, airsoft guns, and BB guns that we are discussing today.

• (1725)

Let me be clear. Safe storage and transportation of real firearms is the critical element of Canada's firearm laws. Our Conservative government has always maintained the need for responsible firearm owners to obey the strict storage, transportation and handling regulations set out in the Firearms Act.

For instance, all conventional firearms must be stored in an unloaded state and locked with ammunition stored separately or locked up. Further, to transport firearms, they must also be unloaded while in transport. All proper measures must be taken to guard against loss or theft of a firearm in homes, vehicles and businesses.

These measures make sense for conventional firearms. While the current laws exempt certain air guns for transportation and storage regulations under the Firearms Act, the Supreme Court decision leaves owners of these air guns somewhat confused about whether they will be subject to the careless use offence in the Criminal Code in terms of transport and storage requirements.

Private Members' Business

This bill would clarify that certain air guns, like BB guns, would not be subject to the same storage and transportation requirements as real firearms. It would do this in two ways. It would add a new provision under the Criminal Code to make it clear that certain air guns would not be regulated under the Firearms Act for the purposes of storage and transportation. The bill would also exempt owners of these air guns from prosecutions for offences under the Criminal Code related to careless storage and transport of a firearm.

I would like to emphasize here that amending the Criminal Code to confirm that storage and transport requirements are exempt under the Firearms Act is in no way intended to narrow the exclusions from the act. The amendment is simply, as I said earlier, meant to make it clear that storage and transport requirements do not apply. Amending the Criminal Code in this way will ensure that we do not overburden the owners of certain air guns. This is what the firearms community wants.

I ask all members to support the bill and ensure that we continue to move forward toward safe and sensible firearms policies in our country.

In terms of support for Bill C-637, I received a communication from the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters. It said: On behalf of the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, our 100,000 members, supporters and subscribers, and our 725 member clubs across Ontario, we are pleased to support Bill C-637.

Bill C-637 addresses a regressive decision by the courts, that left unchanged, would effectively force everyone in the country who possesses an air gun, that has previously never been considered to be a firearm, to suddenly abide by regulations that were never intended to apply to them in the first place. By amending the Criminal Code and provisions in the Firearms Act, the bill would restore what previously existed without problems for decades.

The Northwestern Ontario Sportsmen's Alliance writes:

NOSA fully supports your private members bill. We agree that the court decision to define air rifles as "firearms" sets a precedent that threatens the freedom of millions of Canadians who simply wish to purchase air guns over the counter at Canadian Tire for the purpose of "plinking" at targets or knocking over pop cans.

Again, the bill, although fairly small, is still important to those millions of Canadians who own air guns and BB guns. It is another manifestation of this government's deep concern and support for a way of life that millions of Canadian cherish.

I had the honour of being on both the fisheries committee and the environment and sustainable development committee. Both of these committees are initiating very important studies. The environment committee is starting very important work looking at the contribution that licensed hunting and trapping makes to the Canadian economy and the Canadian environment. I am very pleased to say that the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans is initiating a major study of the recreational fishery in Canada.

Both of these studies will allow groups and individuals who represent these very important communities to make representations to the government and provide us with some very important advice on how we can move forward to protect and preserve not only the environment but a way of life that millions of Canadians cherish.

• (1730)

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my hon. colleague's explanation

of his bill. He said something that concerned me at the end of his speech, which I will ask him about in one of my questions.

Who did the member talk to before he prepared this bill? Did he consult police organizations before presenting his bill? I found great concern in the police community when I talked to them about the bill.

The member said that the bill represented the government's support for a way of life. This is, of course, a private member's bill. Is he implying that in fact this is in essence a government bill in the guise of a private member's bill?

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Speaker, the point I have made is that I am pleased to be part of a government that strongly supports a way of life that millions of Canadians embrace. Obviously, this is a private member's bill.

In terms of the concerns from police, it is still a criminal offence to point an air gun or to act as if it is a firearm. Therefore, those provisions will remain intact.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have somewhat the same concerns as raised by my colleague the critic for the NDP. Who has the member talked to with respect to the police? I am getting an entirely different story from the police organizations to which I have talked.

My question relates to the facts and why this bill is here. Has the member researched how many charges have already been laid against individuals under this section for BB guns and pellet guns? Is the member talking about a huge concern?

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Speaker, prevention is the best offence. We did have a court decision that labelled these devices as firearms. I am acting quickly to have a private member's bill that would deal with the decision by the courts, which we think is problematic at best. Nothing is being changed here. Basically, apart from the decisions made by the courts, the bill represents support for the status quo.

I want to again make the point that it is a criminal offence to point an air gun at any individual or to act as if it is a firearm. If a store is robbed by an individual with an air gun for criminal law purposes, it is treated the same as a firearm, and that should mollify the police.

• (1735)

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is hard to follow the distinguished steps of the former solicitor general who does not understand how courts work.

However, I will ask this question of my hon. colleague from Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette. As a young lad growing up on a farm on the prairies of Alberta and western Canada, I remember—

Hon. Wayne Easter: You certainly wouldn't know.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, he is chirping away. That is okay. He does not get it.

Private Members' Business

The very first time I held a gun in my hand it was a pellet gun. It was my grandfather's, it was my uncle's and my father's before that. It was a little Crosman air rifle that I used to take out into the field to hunt gophers. It was a great experience. It led to a whole life of me owning firearms, going hunting with my dad and with my sons now and all my friends, and contributing to an absolutely fantastic way of life.

I would like to ask the member about any experiences that he has had with his family with respect to just how valuable starting off with something like a pellet gun or a BB gun is in teaching people how to properly handle firearms in the first place.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend from Wetaskiwin's upbringing very much parallels mine.

The use of BB guns and air rifles teaches young people firearms safety and marksmanship. To properly teach a youngster in the use of air guns and BB guns, one uses the same principles as with a firearm. We ensure that it is never pointed at anyone else. That is how a child is taught to respect and use firearms in a safe and proper manner.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, like some of the members opposite, I fondly remember my best Christmas ever, and that was the Christmas I got a BB gun. I had the BB gun for some time before I moved on to harder weapons.

Some might describe a BB gun as a gateway gun, and I am quite serious about that. It is important, as the member on the other side said, because I learned the most basic lessons about the safe handling of firearms with a BB gun. I was taught how to do that.

It seems to me that ought to include things like safe storage and transport. The bill will actually interfere with that training and learning process. What we have here, in some ways with all due respect, is a solution in search of a problem.

Apparently there have been no charges laid under these sections, so I wonder what this is really about. As usual with private members' bills, I think this is about politics and appealing to the base of the Conservatives in a time heading up to an election. It is not about a real problem that we face every day which affects a lot of Canadians.

I have not seen the evidence that changing the rules around the classification of air guns is necessary. When I talked to the police, the local chief and police organizations, they all said the very same thing. If we allow other rules for transportation and storage of air guns, BB guns and pellet guns, it becomes very difficult for police officers to do their job in enforcement of existing gun regulations, especially with the new high velocity air guns. It is impossible to distinguish them from other weapons at a glance.

We face the fact that if the bill were passed, it might lead to people transporting these guns in their vehicles. This is not my example, but police agencies raised the fact that they would be faced with a very difficult decision of trying to decide in a moment's time they type of gun in a vehicle.

Instead, getting people to learn what the safe storage and transport looks like by applying those similar rules, which are not onerous rules, certainly by anybody's stretch of the imagination, will teach better gun behaviour in the long run.

I am no expert in firearms but having had a BB gun, having seen air guns and learning to shoot a shotgun, I know it is not easy to distinguish some of the new guns from other air guns. The new guns have very high velocity and can do real bodily harm and damage. Police officers are quite rightly expressing a concern about how they will do their job and keep the public safe.

Over the years, the Conservatives and the Liberals have done everything they can to polarize issues around firearms for political purposes. I am worried that what we have before us is a private member's bill that does the very same thing.

Every time we talk about anything to do with gun regulations, the other side stands. Therefore, I will do the "prevention is the best part of cure", and say clearly that the NDP has absolutely no plan to bring back the failed Liberal firearms registry, full stop.

The fact that we will oppose the bill at second reading and we think that the bill is dangerous does not say anything that the Conservatives will try to make it say later on, such as we do not support hunting and fishing, or we do not support rural communities. There is simply no truth in any of that.

We are looking at a bill that seems to result from one court decision in one case, but it does not really have a large public impact. Therefore, why would we adopt a bill in the House of Commons that creates potential threats to public safety on the basis of one court case in Ontario?

As the member said, these guns are not deemed to be weapons in all cases, but, again, it seems quite reasonable that secure storage and transportation requirements should apply to these weapons as much as any others. I simply do not see the downside. It is a very interesting argument about learning gun safety. It is a very good way to teach people how to treat guns safety, those people who may eventually go on to larger or harder weapons.

● (1740)

We are talking about air guns with a maximum velocity of 152.4 metres per second or a maximum muzzle energy of 5.7 joules, which are already deemed not to be firearms, and so are exempt from penalties set out in the Criminal Code for possessing a firearm without a licence. They are considered firearms under the Criminal Code if they are used to commit a crime, and the other side has pointed that out.

We already have a mixed system here with these guns. The only things this bill is really attacking are storage and transportation, not possession or acquisition.

Private Members' Business

We on this side want to put public safety first. We want to take an approach that brings Canadians together. Instead of having this bill before us, I would rather have seen some consultation, and not just with those the member always cites when it comes this—the hunters and anglers of Ontario seem to make frequent appearances in the speeches—and not to make a regulation that, in either case, applies to just rural or just urban areas. We have to get something that works for all Canadians.

Instead of making what I think are potentially dangerous amendments to private members' bills, we should have the government consulting with all interested groups and coming up with a solution that puts public safety first.

I did ask the member whether this was really a government bill masquerading as a private member's bill. I will take his word that this is his initiative. However, it fits a pattern we have seen dozens and dozens of times in this House, where private members' bills are really stalking horses for the government. It gives the government plausible deniability if there is too much public outcry, and it can say that it was just a private member's bill and we will blame the private member. If not, the bill goes through the House and the government takes credit for it. This is another bill that seems to fit that very same strategy.

Another related piece of this is that we just had estimates that have been tabled. What we are looking at is a government that, since 2012, has been cutting the budgets of the RCMP and making fewer resources available to law enforcement. Again, even though it is a minor bill, I cannot see why we would create something that would add an enforcement burden to the RCMP at a time when the government is cutting its budget.

In 2014, there was a cut of \$32.5 million for police services. Now, from the estimates, we see that the RCMP is going to be asked to cut back 500 members. This is at a time when we just had the Commissioner of the RCMP before the public safety committee, just last Friday, talking about the fact that he had to transfer 600 personnel from other duties within the RCMP over to national security because he lacked adequate resources.

He talked about the fact that, while he is doing an adequate job now, it is not sustainable to keep those resources transferred over. Again, I would be very concerned about anything we are doing that adds a burden to an already stretched RCMP in terms of enforcement.

Every time we come to issues around guns, it is somehow made to be a very divisive issue. Once the registry was gone, as a member who represents a riding that is both urban and rural, I had the hope that we might be able to come together and find ways to keep guns out of the hands of people who do not need them, while finding ways to reduce the burden on legitimate gun owners. I do not happen to think this is one of those measures.

Reasonable people from various parts of the country could easily work together and come up with solutions. However, we know the government prefers to play wedge politics with the issue of guns. Rather than sitting down with urban communities and talking about the problems of guns on their streets, and rather than sitting down with people and talking about the problems of the flow of illegal

guns into the country from the United States, we have a bill before us that is really quite small instead of tackling those larger questions.

Again we come back to the CBSA, which is responsible for trying to control gun smuggling into the country. We have found the same thing since 2012, that the government has cut the budget of the CBSA. It has cut it so far that it had to lay off 100 intelligence officers, the very people who work on issues like preventing gun smuggling.

• (1745)

In conclusion, the bill is a problem in search of a solution. We have not had a big set of charges or problems for those who have BB guns and airguns, but by introducing the bill we would create a new problem for the police in terms of enforcement of gun safety in our communities. For that reason, I am opposing the bill.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-637, an act to amend the Criminal Code with respect to firearms storage and transportation, which is a private member's bill put forward by the member for Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette.

As is typical of the government, it is not part of a public safety package that brings together a number of areas for public safety from the government itself. We constantly believe, on this side of the House, that even though bills are coming forward as private members' bills, they are one-offs, often not well thought out, and often on small issues. In fact the member could not even give us the information whether any charges had ever been laid under this particular bill. They are coming forward as private members' bills and often they really complicate the criminal justice system and do not make for good public safety policies. Many of them come forward just to try to create some political discourse for internal objectives of the Conservative Party of Canada and to try to drive wedges between Canadians on different sides of the issues.

I am concerned, and we will oppose this legislation because any weakening of the provisions to store and transport these weapons—it is a strong word—is against the interest of public safety. Simply put, the legislation would take away the criminal liability for unsafe storage and transport of these weapons, which can and do inflict injury. This raises serious concerns related to public safety, particularly related mostly to children but to youth as well.

As others have said in the House, I expect there are many who have used BB guns and pellet guns as kids in their own life experience. I certainly have. They do cause harm. It is possible to lose an eye. I had a neighbour who in fact had that happen many years ago. That was not safe use.

The member for Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette mentioned himself that the use of BB guns and pellet guns is good training for later in life in the safe use, transport, and storage of these weapons. Having these restrictions there makes good sense for long-term lifetime use of other guns that may be used in hunting and experiences later in life. Therefore, it is important to keep these restrictions in place to ensure that happens, because it is a training ground for young people. They recognize then that the law is there.

Private Members' Business

The legislation seeks to ensure that BB guns, airguns, and most likely pellet guns are not deemed firearms for the purpose of their transportation and storage. Therefore, the Criminal Code provisions related to the transportation and storage of firearms would not apply to these weapons. That is basically what the bill does. We maintain though that, simply put, the legislation would take away the criminal liability for the unsafe storage and transportation of these weapons, which can and do inflict injuries. This raises serious concerns about public safety, especially as it relates to youth.

• (1750)

There appears to be no dispute of the fact that BB guns, pellet guns, and air guns are weapons and are fully capable of discharging a projectile, which can cause serious injury, if not death. Therefore, we believe it is against the interest of public safety to weaken provisions on weapons that are often used by children. The Liberal Party of Canada believes in a balanced gun control approach that prioritizes public safety while ensuring that law-abiding firearms owners do not face unfair treatment under the law. We do not believe the current situation is creating that unfair treatment.

It is important to note that in Justice Rosenberg's Ontario Court of Appeal decision of September 4, 2013, the following was stated, which raises serious public safety concerns:

If an airgun that otherwise meets the definition of "firearm" in s. 2 because of its dangerous nature and its capability for causing injury, is not found to be a firearm because it does not also meet the use and intended use requirements in the definition of "weapon", it escapes regulation under s. 86. It would be lawful to leave such a dangerous object in an area where children might have access to it, or to shoot it in a dangerous manner. Liability would attach only if someone actually was injured or killed. Such an interpretation would not be consistent with the public safety objective of the legislation.

He makes the point that we on this side of the House believe is necessary to be made, and that is that these can cause harm. Transportation and storage is part of the regulatory requirements to ensure that they are done in a safe manner and consistent with the law. As I said earlier, that is good training ground for guns that may be used later.

An analysis by the Library of Parliament of Bill C-637 indicated the following with respect to the consequences of this legislation:

Bill C-637 adds s. 84(3.2) to the *Criminal Code*, which would extend the deeming provision to section 86 and the provisions of the *Firearms Act* as they relate to the transportation and storage of firearms. This means that air guns or BB guns with low muzzle velocities would not have to be treated like firearms and need not be stored and transported in the way firearms are required to be. Since air guns or BB guns do not fit within any of the other categories of weapons listed in section 86, it follows that these types of weapons would not be required, by this section of the *Criminal Code* at least, to be transported, stored, etc. with "reasonable precautions for the safety of other persons."

That is a very important point.

The Library of Parliament goes on to say:

This does not mean, however, that more general provisions concerning criminal negligence could not be applied. Section 219 of the *Criminal Code* defines "criminal negligence" as showing "wanton or reckless disregard for the lives or safety of other persons."

If they are used in that fashion, the other charges would apply.

I have no problem and, in fact, believe the use of BB guns and pellet guns is good training, but I do believe the current law should

apply. Therefore, it does not need to be changed as this private member's bill would do.

I do not have time to quote the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, but it is very concerned about BB guns and pellet guns being used as weapons. They can be replica firearms and, therefore, used in criminal activity.

• (1755)

There is concern on the part of police associations. Basically, the bottom line for us is we do not believe this bill is necessary.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before we resume debate, I see the hon. government House leader is rising on a point of order.

* * *

YUKON AND NUNAVUT REGULATORY IMPROVEMENT ACT

BILL S-6—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to advise that agreements could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Orders 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to the second reading stage of Bill S-6, an act to amend the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act and the Nunavut Waters and Nunavut Surface Rights Tribunal Act.

Under the provisions of Standing Order 78(3), I give notice that a minister of the Crown will propose at the next sitting a motion to allot a specific number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of proceedings at the said stage.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I am sure the House appreciates the notice by the hon. government House leader.

Now we will resume debate and go to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence.

* * *

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-637, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (firearms storage and transportation), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. James Bezan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise and discuss a bill that would help ensure that our firearms policies are safe and sensible. Sitting here and listening to the opposition, including the member for Malpeque and the NDP members, talking about this bill, it shows just how out of touch they have become with rural Canadians and Canadians who love sport shooting.

Private Members' Business

Our government has worked tirelessly to ensure that we target criminals with tough sentences, not law-abiding Canadians with needless red tape. We have long spoken out against the impracticality and unnecessary practice of burdening law-abiding farmers and sport shooters with administrative requirements that do little or nothing to contribute to public safety. We have worked diligently to address these issues.

We know that law-abiding firearms owners find these requirements intrusive and offensive. Certainly, ending the long-gun registry was an important achievement for our government to move toward safe and sensible firearms policies. Most recently, as members know, we introduced Bill C-42, the common sense firearms licensing act. Among other things, this legislation would streamline the licensing system and further ease unnecessary administrative red tape for law-abiding farmers, hunters and sports shooters.

Our government believes in a balanced approach to firearms control. For instance, we believe it makes sense to simplify the regime and have only one type of license. That is why we have proposed, under the common sense firearms licensing act, to merge the possession-only license with the possession and acquisition license.

We also believe that it is in the interest of public safety that individuals should be properly instructed in the safe use of firearms. That is why our government has also proposed under the legislation to make sure that course participation in firearm safety training is mandatory.

With the bill before us, we can go one step further toward ensuring that Canadians from coast to coast to coast benefit from safe and sensible firearms policies. In that spirit, I would like to commend my friend, the member for Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, who introduced Bill C-637, an act to amend the Criminal Code in firearms storage and transportation. It is a proposal that our Conservative government is proud to support.

It is important to hone in specifically on what items we are talking about today. They are BB guns, pellet guns and paintball guns. These excluded firearms that do not discharge a shot, bullet or other projectile at a muzzle velocity exceeding 152.4 metres per second, or 500 feet per second. Given their low muzzle velocity and energy, our government is of the view that these items should be excluded from all storage and transportation requirements and offences. Therefore, the proposal in this bill falls squarely within the safe and sensible realm.

Let us look at the design of the bill, specifically. The bill proposes to amend the Criminal Code to exclude these items from the storage and transportation requirements under the Firearms Act and the offences in the Criminal Code that relate to storage and transportation. In effect, Bill C-637 would exempt individuals from prosecution for offences related to the careless storage and transport of these items, which have previously been erroneously lumped in with ordinary firearms.

By way of example, let us say that a young woman wants to go with her friends to an open field, park, or farmyard, far from other people, and they are taking their air pistols. They shoot some pop

cans off a tree stump or a fence post with that pistol. Currently, if she throws the pistol and some of the pellets into her backpack, she is liable to charges under the Criminal Code for the unsafe transport of a firearm.

This is ridiculous and unacceptable. I have taken part in similar activities. I grew up on the farm, and when I was growing up, the first gun I had was a pellet gun. It was a lot of fun, but it taught me about safe handling and how to use a firearm carefully.

We must not let the government run amok and ban these types of Canadian heritage activities. Again, most rural Canadians and a lot of people within urban centres use these air guns, whether they are pellet guns, BB guns or paintball guns, if they go out and have some fun at the paintball course.

Some members on the other side of the House are claiming that this would create a spike in the use of air guns and criminal activity. This is simply not the case. What this bill would do is codify what Canadians from coast to coast have always assumed to be the case, which is that air guns are not firearms. They should not be treated like firearms, and they should not have the consequences associated with firearms.

● (1800)

The Liberal and NDP logic on this issue is similar to that of the long gun registry. They loved the long gun registry. They believe that government intervention will solve all the world's problems but let us look at the statistics. When we ended the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry, gun crime in Toronto went down by over 80%. This is not to say that these two items are linked. It is simply to say that those who commit crimes with guns do not obey the various laws prohibiting murder, armed robbery and so on. It is simply foolish to believe that they will stop committing crimes because their guns must be registered.

The bill before us today is very important. What the bill would do is clarify some confusion around the legal obligation of air gun owners that has arisen because of the November 2014 Supreme Court ruling. The effect of the decision upheld the current law that certain air gun owners are subject to prosecution if they carelessly store or transport an air gun. The bill will address the confusion and help provide clarity for owners of these types of firearms.

Before my time comes to an end, I would like to specifically thank the Canadian Shooting Sports Association for working with our government and the member for Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette for analyzing the Supreme Court decision impacting air guns. I believe that the legislation introduced by the member is an important milestone in addressing the needlessly burdensome paperwork that exists in our firearms regime.

In conclusion, this is a balanced approach that will contribute to our ultimate goal of ensuring our firearm policies are safe and sensible. I hope that all members will support it.

Private Members' Business

• (1805)

[Translation]

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

First I would like to provide some general information about firearms legislation. Generally, certain acts and regulations have been put in place to prevent someone who obviously should not possess weapons from having one. For example, these would include individuals with mental health issues, a criminal record or a lack of understanding of basic firearms safety. These acts and regulations were also created for other reasons. This has reduced the number of thefts. When firearms could be stored any old way or hung on the wall at a hunting camp, there were more thefts. Now that there are storage rules, for example those requiring individuals to lock up firearms, the number of thefts has been reduced.

Generally, other reasons for making firearms regulations included reducing accidents, accidental discharges and injuries. These were sometimes caused by individuals without any firearms knowledge. They just felt like looking at it, inspecting it or handling it. Unfortunately, this could cause accidents. Thirty years ago, it was not rare to see loaded firearms hanging on the wall, ready to be used. Now, with the regulations in place, this is no longer allowed.

My colleague introduced a bill that would exclude certain firearms, such as air guns or paintball guns that I admit pose lower risks, from transportation and storage rules. The problem with my colleague's bill is that it does not replace them with anything. So it removes the transportation and storage rules but does not propose to replace them with other transportation and storage rules that he believes would be more appropriate for these types of firearms. He is replacing them with nothing. As far as I am concerned, I obviously cannot accept that.

If my colleague intended to present specific rules for firearms of this kind that would seem more appropriate to him, I could consider the bill. However, replacing these rules with nothing at all makes the bill unacceptable, in my view. If my colleague is listening, and is prepared to look at what transportation and storage rules would seem appropriate to him, I might be interested in reconsidering my position on the bill. However, as long as there is nothing at all to replace them, I cannot support this bill.

I talked about the accident risk. While I admit that the injuries are less serious than what a traditional firearm could cause, the fact remains that serious injuries are still possible. We are talking about weapons that launch projectiles at an initial velocity of over 152.4 metres per second. With my colleague's permission, I will convert that to imperial: 500 feet per second. The initial energy exceeds 5.7 joules. The problem is that for children, that can represent a risk of injury that is still quite significant.

I have here the risks of injury presented by Dr. Danielle Laraque, from the American Academy of Pediatrics. Starting at 331 feet per second, with a calibre of 0.77, penetration of the skin is possible, and the same is true for a muzzle velocity of 245 feet per second with a calibre of 0.22. With respect to eye penetration, the entry of a projectile into the eye, the velocity falls to 130 feet per second. I should point out that in the United States, in 2000, the number of hospital visits caused by air guns was estimated at about 22,000.

Over 50% of these cases involved children under 14 who were hit in the following areas: 12% in the eyes, 24% in the head and neck, and 63% in the extremities.

It is obvious, therefore, that we should take this information into consideration. We cannot allow the absence of storage requirements. They could be different from those for ordinary firearms, but we cannot allow a total lack of rules.

• (1810)

We must protect the children who might have access to such weapons. That is why we have to abide by certain basic principles with respect to the safe storage and transportation of weapons in order to ensure safety in the home.

With regard to the prevention of theft, storage regulations have made it possible to reduce easy access to guns, and therefore the theft of firearms. Looking at a catalogue of pellet guns and air rifles, which I enjoy doing because I find it interesting, I learned that some weapons could cost \$400. Therefore, if someone has one or two very valuable guns, the total could easily reach \$1,000. Considering the value of such weapons, it is entirely reasonable to request that people comply with certain basic storage principles and avoid leaving them about in plain sight. That makes perfect sense.

With regard to civil liability and the risk of theft, insurance companies certainly appreciate these basic storage rules. These are two important factors to keep in mind when discussing this bill.

The existing legislation governing the storage of firearms works. It is not unreasonable to expect that air guns be locked up and that ammunition not be stored in the same place. That absolutely makes sense. Every year one person dies as a result of this type of weapon. The risk of injury associated with these weapons is lower, but people can still become victims when the bullet hits them in the wrong spot.

There are some risks, even though they may be lower than the risks associated with conventional firearms. That is why I told my colleague that if he was prepared to include rules on firearms transportation and storage that he deemed more appropriate in his bill, I would be prepared to review his bill and change my mind. However, in the absence of such rules or an alternative, I cannot accept this bill.

Most firearm incidents are accidents. In 90% of fatalities, we are talking about young people under the age of 16, unfortunately, because children and teenagers are more likely to die as a result of those injuries. As I said a number of times, it is important to have some basic rules.

Recently, there have been several cases where children injured or even killed other people in the United States with firearms. Perhaps these weapons are not as accessible here, but most people are sensitive to the issue. For instance, if they hear that a woman had a loaded gun in her purse, they will say: "What was she thinking? What was she doing with that in her bag?"

Routine Proceedings

Perhaps I am not saying it right, but that is the response I most often hear. Most people agree that basic safety and storage rules have to be followed when dealing with firearms. Most people who make those types of comments are hunters themselves or people who use firearms.

I would like to say, perhaps for the benefit of the House, that I personally have several firearms at home. Right now, I have seven as well as a bow and arrow. However, I followed some basic storage rules. I think that is only natural since I have a five-year old girl living with me at home. These rules make perfect sense. We are talking about basic safety to avoid accidents.

●(1815)

I do not think that these rules on the transportation and storage of firearms are over the top. My colleague should seriously think about my proposal to implement more appropriate rules for these specific types of weapons instead of proposing no rules for their storage and transportation.

That is my comment and it was a pleasure to speak to that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before I recognize the hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, I must inform her that she has five minutes left for her speech today. Of course she will have more time when the House resumes debate.

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once again, the Conservatives are using and abusing our legislative system to achieve their political ends.

The bill they introduced caters to their electoral base and the gun lobby. This bill provides that low-velocity rifles such as BB guns and air guns are deemed not to be firearms.

The member for Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette says that these weapons—and they are certainly weapons—these air guns are just as dangerous as firearms.

According to this bill, these weapons are not as dangerous as other firearms. The bill would even make them easier to access and use. Storage regulations require firearms to be stored unloaded and locked in a cabinet or a specific part of the house. This bill would remove those requirements.

Air guns would no longer be subject to this rule and could be left out in the open. They would be accessible at all times regardless of the circumstances.

Imagine seeing people carrying such a weapon attached to their belt as an everyday occurrence. If there are no regulations on transporting and carrying such weapons, that is what could happen.

This is not the wild west. We need to regulate the possession, acquisition and use of weapons, not deregulate them.

I would remind the House that the Canadian Police Association has expressed some reservations about the bill. It said that the number of convictions for transporting air rifles and BB guns is currently under 10, which is very low. Since the number is so low, the association believes that the changes proposed in Bill C-637 are unjustified, but I doubt the member opposite listened to the association.

Making it easier to transport these weapons will make the job of police officers that much harder. Such a freedom, which I would call reckless, would make their working conditions more dangerous, because it is hard to distinguish ordinary weapons from air guns just by looking at them.

To refresh the memories of members across the aisle, think about the tragic, fatal incident that happened last November in Cleveland. A 12-year-old child who was handling a pellet gun was shot and killed by a police officer, because even from less than three metres away, the police officer could not visually distinguish the pellet gun from a real weapon.

Bill C-637 could cause confusion and dangerous situations for police forces and for anyone carrying an air gun. Any way you look at it, nothing good can come of this bill.

We are giving people who are psychologically or emotionally unstable, or both, as well as criminals, another weapon to use against the police.

If this bill did not serve the interests of the Conservative Party and the Liberals, if this bill was not designed to help them prepare for the next election and if this bill truly was about promoting public safety, then the Conservatives would devote their time and energy to helping law enforcement and supporting them in their mission to keep the peace and protect the public.

It is not right to arm people against one another, or arm them against the police. Instead, we must encourage the best options and alternatives. This bill will breed mistrust and fear in our society.

●(1820)

The Conservatives only take care of themselves. The only party capable of forming a government that will take care of Canadians and their safety is our party, the NDP.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert will have five minutes to complete her comments when the House resumes debate on this motion.

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

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The House resumed from February 19 consideration of the motion.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as members know, the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development held a number of hearings on the issue of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict and other crises. The report we are debating today is the fruit of that study. This report aims to cast light on the causes and consequences of this troubling phenomenon through a case study of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Although we would not know it from the amount of media coverage and international attention it receives, the barbaric civil war of the DRC is the most lethal conflict since World War II. It has claimed an estimated 2.7 million to 5.4 million deaths. Though the war was formally ended in July 2003, the carnage has continued, including the Kivu and Ituri conflicts, which were driven by, among other things, the trade in conflict minerals.

In addition to the lives claimed by violence, many more are lost to easily preventable cases of malnutrition and disease.

As I mentioned, though, the object of this study was one specific aspect of this violence, namely rape and sexual violence. In recent years there has been an increasing emphasis at the national and international levels around the need to prevent and address widespread sexual violence in situations of conflict and crisis. However, despite these efforts, acts of sexual violence in situations of conflict and crisis continue to be perpetrated on a significant scale around the world, shattering lives, fracturing communities, and aggravating the destruction wrought by war, disaster, and civil strife.

Over the course of its hearings, the subcommittee was told that misconceptions of conflict-related sexual violence have led to gaps in policy responses, contributing to the persistent and pervasive nature of the problem. Witnesses stressed that rather than being an actual collateral effect of armed conflict, sexual violence may be used deliberately in armed conflict to destroy communities and achieve political, economic, and military objectives.

The subcommittee also heard testimony regarding sexual violence perpetrated in post-conflict situations following natural disasters and in other situations of crisis and political repression. Witnesses noted that several underlying factors contribute to shaping an environment in which sexual violence can occur, including entrenched discriminatory practices and attitudes, weak rule of law, poverty and lack of economic opportunity, and a climate of impunity for perpetrators.

As part of its broader study of these issues, the subcommittee focused a considerable number of its hearings on the DRC, the eastern regions of which have been labelled the “rape capital of the world”. Indeed, the DRC has become a focal point of international concern because of the extremely high incidence of acts of sexual violence that have been committed against women and girls, especially in the eastern part of the country, where armed conflict has been a constant feature of life for decades.

The subcommittee's report highlights the magnitude of the crimes being committed in the DRC and the extremely negative effect they are having on the human rights of women and girls as well as those of men and boys.

The evidence received by the subcommittee identified a number of key factors contributing to the prevalence of sexual violence in the DRC, particularly in the eastern provinces. These factors include widespread discrimination against women in Congolese law and society; weak rule of law and a critically under-resourced justice sector that lacks capacity, independence, and impartiality, leading to pervasive impunity; an ineffective, ill-disciplined security sector that is not subject to effective civilian control; and competition between armed groups and individuals for control of natural resource revenues in a region affected by widespread poverty and a lack of economic opportunity.

In light of the breadth of factors that contribute to the prevalence of sexual violence in the DRC and in other situations of conflict and crisis, witnesses argued that international efforts to address the problem must take a holistic, multi-sectoral approach and commit to implementation over the long term.

• (1825)

Based on the evidence it heard, the subcommittee put forward the following recommendations to the Government of Canada:

Recommendation 1: That the Government of Canada continue to make the promotion and protection of women's human rights a foreign policy priority, and that it work to strengthen women's participation in securing, maintaining and consolidating international peace and security.

Recommendation 2: That the Government of Canada continue to take a leadership role in international efforts to foster the effective implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security in the context of United Nations operations and in United Nations Member States.

Recommendation 3: That the Government of Canada continue to speak out clearly and strongly, on a consistent basis, in support of survivors of sexual violence and against their stigmatization and marginalization in society.

Recommendation 4: That the Government of Canada continue its important efforts to combat forced and early marriage around the world, and that, in connection with this work, Canada consider ways to generate international action to improve the situation of conflict-affected girls forced into marriage or sexual slavery by armed groups.

Recommendation 5: That the Government of Canada continue to express its expectation to the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo that the latter take concrete action to halt the systematic use of sexual violence as a weapon of war.

Recommendation 6: That the Government of Canada convey to the parties to the armed conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, through appropriate channels, the important role that survivors of sexual violence play in ensuring long-term security and justice; and that the Government of Canada continue to call for all parties to the conflict to ensure the active and equal participation of women in the resolution of the conflict.

Recommendation 7: That the Government of Canada encourage the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to undertake a review of national law with a view to repealing or abolishing any legislation, regulation or other law that continues to discriminate against women or girls.

Recommendation 8: That, in its international assistance programming in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Government of Canada consider continuing to support initiatives aimed at providing medical and other forms of assistance to survivors of sexual violence; that the apportionment of Canadian assistance be reviewed with a view to considering the possibility of funding smaller, grass-roots programs — potentially in partnership with larger non-governmental organizations; and that the Government of Canada also consider continuing its support for security and justice sector reform initiatives, prosecutions of alleged perpetrators of sexual violence, and extractive resources governance and tracing regimes.

Routine Proceedings

Recommendation 9: That, in its international assistance programming in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Government of Canada consider the possibility of supporting initiatives that provide training in fundraising, governance and accounting techniques to local non-governmental organizations in order to properly equip them to effectively lead local advocacy efforts.

Recommendation 10: That, in its international assistance programming, the Government of Canada consider ways to work with United Nations agencies and likeminded donor countries to strengthen partnerships with local organizations involved in addressing the problem of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in other situations of conflict and crisis.

Recommendation 11: That the Government of Canada continue to take appropriate steps to protect and support those who work with survivors of sexual violence in particular, and human rights defenders more generally, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in other situations of conflict and crisis.

● (1830)

Recommendation 12: That the Government of Canada continue working to ensure that Canada's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security is implemented in all relevant policies and programming; that, in order to provide timely and robust public progress reports, the Government of Canada continue to make efforts to address challenges associated with collecting data and reporting across government departments, which undertake their activities under diverse mandates, policies and processes; and that the Government of Canada consult with civil society organizations during evaluations and reviews of the National Action Plan.

These are all good recommendations and ones that I and my party are happy to support. I note, as well, that the Subcommittee on International Human Rights has continued to study the issue of rape and sexual violence as a weapon of war in other conflict zones, including in Syria. I thank the members of the subcommittee for their hard work.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am vice-chair of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights, and I have to say that this topic was one of the most troubling we have undertaken studies on in quite a long time.

I want to ask the member a couple of questions. Is he aware of the fact that in the year 2004, UN peacekeepers in the DRC were actually accused of rape themselves and that following that there has been an emphasis on sexual and gender-based violence, which can be found in the latest UN Security Council resolution on the DRC?

Has the member had any indication of any positive impact that might have had on the ground?

Mr. Marc Garneau: Mr. Speaker, to be very blunt, I would have to consult the situation at the moment to be able to properly answer the member's question.

One would assume, obviously, that the United Nations workers, of whatever stripe, would know and fully respect a code when they are working in places like the DRC. It is very troubling to find out that they themselves may have also been involved in acts of sexual violence.

I will have to inform myself to find out whether the changes that have been brought up at the United Nations have had the desired effect.

● (1835)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. He raised the issue of governance.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, this is obviously an issue of crucial importance. We really have to find deterrents that will prevent women from becoming victims of rape as a weapon of war.

I would like to know what he believes are the levers that Canada can use to enable the government in power to implement solutions that will truly prevent these rapes from being committed.

Mr. Marc Garneau: Mr. Speaker, once again, I would like to thank my colleague for her question.

In the recommendations that I mentioned, there is the aspect of governance in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the need to interact actively, as well as recommendations that Canada actively propose recommendations to try to eliminate sexual violence and rape.

With respect to the levers, diplomacy is an important one. There is also a need to create institutions that recognize that, in today's world, this violence is just not acceptable and that attitudes and the way of life must absolutely change.

The Democratic Republic of Congo went through a very long period of war. Thus, this is a considerable challenge. As far as a lever is concerned, I would simply say that Canada must be persuasive in its relations with the Democratic Republic of Congo. We can also offer assistance to try to change attitudes and create institutions that will eliminate this type of behaviour.

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, many reports deal with the greater systemic problem of impunity in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

In most of the cases that go before the courts, the people who have been arrested unfortunately go unpunished. If we look at the trial process, some of these criminals are unfortunately not brought to justice and are not punished.

I would like to read a finding from the Humans Rights Watch report, which states:

[*English*]

Widespread sexual violence in eastern Congo will not end until the perpetrators, including leaders bearing command responsibility, are brought to justice.

[*Translation*]

It goes on to say that a new judicial mechanism is needed in the Democratic Republic of Congo to end the impunity.

How does my hon. colleague think that Canada can play a meaningful role with respect to this important change that must be made in the Democratic Republic of Congo?

Mr. Marc Garneau: Mr. Speaker, once again, I would like to thank my colleague for her question.

When I listed the recommendations, the seventh one that I mentioned spoke about the justice system in the Democratic Republic of Congo. It asked Canada to encourage the Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo to undertake a review of its national law with a view to repealing or abolishing, in certain cases, any legislation, regulation or other law that continues to discriminate against women or girls. That is a big job, but it has to be done.

Routine Proceedings

In the past, Canada has certainly contributed to implementing changes and establishing institutions that brought about changes in a number of countries. It is a long-term undertaking.

However, Canada can send public servants or people who work in the justice system to those countries, for example. They can work with their counterparts in the Democratic Republic of Congo to try to implement a system that will not discriminate against women and that clearly recognizes that sexual violence and rape are crimes in times of war as in times of peace.

In time, this type of change can be made. However, Canada must play an active role and must put in the effort over the long term.

● (1840)

Mrs. Sadia Groghé: Mr. Speaker, could my colleague tell us how members of civil society can also get involved in this issue?

When we talk about support for rape victims, how can we also get the community involved in finding solutions?

Mr. Marc Garneau: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

Recommendation 8 calls on Canada to provide international assistance, which can help fund organizations working on the ground.

It is not just a matter of sending government officials or workers. We also need to send experts to work with the Congolese people on the ground to help victims and educate people. That is the kind of role that Canada can play, and that was in recommendation 8 in the report.

Canada simply needs to be willing to send the resources needed for this type of work.

[*English*]

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington.

On July 16, 2014, the government tabled “Government Response to the Fourth Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, ‘A Weapon of War: Rape and Sexual Violence Against Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo — Canada’s Role in Taking Action and Ending Impunity’”.

This report contained 12 recommendations that notably called on the Government of Canada to continue championing the role of women in international peace and security and working toward greater respect for the human rights of women in countries of concern, particularly the Democratic Republic of Congo. The government response to the standing committee's report welcomed the committee's findings, agreed with most of its recommendations, and addressed all of them comprehensively.

Promoting the role of women in international peace and security and enhancing respect for women's rights and their well-being are key priorities of the Government of Canada. That is why Canada not only champions the end of sexual violence against women and girls but also demonstrates leadership in international efforts to promote the role of women in bringing about peace, rebuilding societies after

conflicts, improving maternal, child, and newborn health, and eliminating child, early, and forced marriage.

Allow me to speak of our multi-pronged approach in these areas. The government is continuing to advocate for the empowerment of women in decision-making processes, including in peace processes. We have and will continue to encourage the full and equal participation of women in international peace and security and to encourage new governments in fragile states and in countries in transition to democracy to increase the number of women in key leadership and decision-making positions.

We have taken a leadership role in international efforts to foster the effective implementation of the United Nations Security Council resolutions on women, peace, and security, including by continuing our leadership advocacy and coordination role as chair of the group Friends of Women, Peace and Security at the UN in New York.

Canada is deeply concerned about the plight of sexual violence survivors in the Democratic Republic of Congo, especially in the context of conflict in the east. Canada has regular exchanges with the government of the DRC on a range of human rights issues, including sexual and gender-based violence. Canada also makes its positions and concerns known to the DRC through multilateral fora.

Canada is encouraging the government of the DRC to review its national legislation in order to eliminate discrimination against women and to foster greater respect for women's human rights. As part of the UN universal periodic review of the DRC in 2009, Canada recommended that the government of the DRC arrest and bring to justice those who perpetrate sexual violence.

In 2014, Canada also recommended expediting the reform of the judiciary and the security system to improve access to justice and the protection of the population as part of a national strategy to fight violence against women and girls. Canada collaborates and engages with the UN, donors, and other members of the international community to support projects and initiatives that benefit the DRC and involve its government, notably through field presence in the country and the Great Lakes region.

In the past eight years, Canada's Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force, also known as START, has contributed more than \$19 million for projects specifically related to sexual and gender-based violence in the DRC and other countries, including Colombia, Afghanistan, and South Sudan. In 2013, the former minister of foreign affairs announced a further \$5 million for projects to prevent sexual violence in conflict by supporting, for example, the documentation and prosecution of sexual violence crimes. Furthermore, in October 2014, the former minister of foreign affairs pledged a \$10-million contribution to address sexual and gender-based violence in ISIL-affected areas.

Routine Proceedings

• (1845)

Canada's efforts to fight sexual violence have been producing results in the Democratic Republic of Congo since 2006. Over 60,000 survivors have accessed health and psychological support and care. Over 15,000 survivors have acquired new skills and can sustain income-generating activities. Over 800 perpetrators have been convicted.

Canada's contributions strengthen coordination and partnerships among all stakeholders involved in preventing and fighting sexual violence, notably provincial authorities, local administrations, the judicial system, police forces, civil society organizations and communities. By building capacity and a responsibility for fighting sexual violence locally, Canada is helping to ensure that the Congolese authorities and Congolese society in general have the means to sustain the above mentioned gains made.

In 2014, Canada also provided \$24.7 million to respond to humanitarian needs in the DRC. This includes assistance for projects with humanitarian partners whose activities include support to the survivors of sexual violence. These partners include Doctors Without Borders, which provides health care for conflict-affected populations, including survivors of sexual violence; and the International Committee of the Red Cross, which works to address the health and psychological needs of sexually and gender-based violence survivors. This assistance to the DRC is complemented by funding to improve the humanitarian systems' overall response to sexual and gender-based violence.

Canada has provided \$1 million in support to the International Organization for Migration to strengthen protection in refugee camps, especially as it concerns the prevention of gender-based violence. The \$3 million in support provided to the United Nations population fund is also building the capacity of the humanitarian system to prevent sexual and gender-based violence, and to improve the quality and accessibility of gender-based violence-related services during humanitarian crises.

In 2013, the Government of Canada contributed \$4.5 million to six Canadian organizations working with local partners in DRC, including on issues related to victims of sexual violence in those areas affected by conflict.

Canada takes a regional approach in the Great Lakes Region by working with 11 African women's organizations in Burundi, Rwanda and Congo to address women's rights and promote peace. An additional \$5 million has been provided to the ICRC in 2014, especially to improve its capacity to prevent and reduce sexual violence in five countries, including the DRC.

Canada recognizes that the resource rich developing countries must harness their resources to achieve economic growth and poverty reduction. However, extractive operations often take place in complex operating environments, including in countries with weak governance capacity and where corruption and conflict are prevalent. This is why the government has worked with the private sector and civil society organizations to enhance responsible resource development and transparent governance in the extractive sector globally.

Canada strongly supports international efforts to sever the link between natural resources and conflict and to advance initiatives that help extractive sector companies respect human rights.

As a founding member of the Kimberley Process, Canada remains fully supportive of its objectives to increase accountability, transparency and effective governance of the trade in rough diamonds. Given the relevance of our diamond sector as well as the sustainability of the industry as a whole to reputational risks, Canada is a strong advocate for improved collaboration on enforcement of the certification scheme among member countries, including the DRC, as well as the broader reform efforts to ensure the continued relevance and credibility of the Kimberley Process as a whole.

Promoting the role of women in international peace and security, enhancing respect for women's rights and providing protection against sexual violence are key priorities for our government. We have and we will continue to address them vigorously and comprehensively.

• (1850)

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to touch on a subject that we have debated before in the House. It relates to rape as a weapon of war in the DRC. It was not that long ago that I had a bill in front of Parliament on conflict minerals and how to stop the trade of those minerals. As members probably know, the BlackBerry's they are looking at have conflict minerals in them. We were trying to end that.

One of the propositions to government was to ensure we did what we could, like the Kimberley Process, to stop revenues going to these militias. Sadly, my PMB did not go forward. That is not news. It lost by 16 votes. However, during the debate, I listened carefully to the government's point of view on the bill as it related to this and to the Kimberley Process. It said that it would take on the issue of conflict minerals and deal with the sources of revenues that the militias used.

Could the member update the House as to what steps the government is taking vis-à-vis the revenues that the militias are using from conflict minerals? These militias are using rape as a weapon of war to clear people off and intimidate, and are continuing to use this as sources of revenue. Could she update us on the progress with respect to conflict minerals?

Ms. Lois Brown: Mr. Speaker, we recognize that many of these countries, particularly in Africa, are blessed with an enormous amount of natural resources they need to get to market. Finding those countries' comparative advantage and helping them get that to market will be so important to the health of the overall economy of each country and to seeing that economy grow and be sustainable.

Routine Proceedings

When I was in Mozambique just 15 months ago, Canada made a contribution of \$15 million to the African Minerals Development Centre. The event in Mozambique was attended by every minister of mines from all 54 countries in Africa. They are all intent on seeing legislation go through in their individual countries.

At the same time we made the contribution, we were working together with our partners in the U.K. and in Australia. They were the second largest donors to that project after Canada. We have set up an institute in Canada at École Polytechnique and at Simon Fraser University in B.C. That institute is there to assist and advise countries like the DRC on getting its minerals successfully out of the ground, getting them to market and getting that money into their economies as real revenue and real jobs for the people in those countries.

• (1855)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

The member spoke about the importance of preventing sexual violence, and this is clearly an extremely important step in eliminating rape and rape used as a weapon of war. She also mentioned psychological support for women who are raped. However, we know how important it is and how important it would be for these women to get support and to have access to all the programs that exist in our country with respect to terminating pregnancies. Unwanted pregnancies, especially those resulting from a rape, are tragic. They have a lifelong effect on these women, and we all know the negative repercussions for the children.

Could my colleague tell us what the government plans to do with respect to support, and specifically the termination of pregnancies?

[*English*]

Ms. Lois Brown: Mr. Speaker, in 2010, our Prime Minister took on the initiative of maternal, newborn and child health as the flagship development project for Canada. Millennium development goals 4 and 5 related to maternal, newborn and child health. In 2010, when no one else was addressing the issues, we took a bold initiative and committed \$2.85 billion to that to ensure the number of women who were dying in pregnancy or childbirth would be reduced, and that the number of children who were not making it to their fifth birthday would receive assistance to survive and thrive.

I am thrilled to tell the House that we have saved the lives of millions of moms and babies in countries where they never would have survived. I have visited many of these countries and I have seen the results of the success of our program.

Knowing that these things had not been done fully and that the issue was still in front of us, we held a conference in Toronto last year where the Prime Minister committed another \$3.5 billion for the 2015 to 2020 timetable. We hope to see that complemented with money from our donor partners, from the private sector, from—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, it is an honour to address the House on this subject today. I am here because I was the chair of the Subcommittee

on International Human Rights, a subcommittee of the foreign affairs committee. Our group studied this issue and produced the report that was subsequently endorsed by the foreign affairs committee and has now made its way to the House for us to consider its acceptance in this concurrence debate.

In my remarks I will deal with three themes. The first of these is a bit of background on the nature of the hearings. The second is a discussion of the importance of the issue and its implications. The third is to discuss the title of the report, which we called “A Weapon of War: Rape and Sexual Violence Against Women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Canada’s Role in Taking Action and Ending Impunity”. Members will see why that is important as I get to it.

Let us start with a bit of the background.

The Subcommittee on International Human Rights operates by consensus. We are the only subcommittee on Parliament Hill that does so on a consistent basis. We have been doing so since I became the chair of the committee, back in 2007, and, indeed, before that, the practice had already been established. This has been enormously important for the success of the subcommittee. We are able to pick our topics. Unfortunately, we can do this because there is a vast and endless smorgasbord of human rights abuses in this world. We pick topics where we are fundamentally in agreement, where the issues do not represent proxies for some sort of other issue, whether members are for or against some foreign policy initiative. We try to find issues that can be dealt with in a timely fashion, allowing us to return to the House so members can act in a manner that will potentially achieve some benefit.

The subcommittee held 13 hearings and listened to 32 witnesses between November, 2010 and June, 2013. Anybody who knows their electoral history will realize that there was an intervening election. As a result, the subcommittee did not succeed in wrapping up its hearings within a single Parliament. In part, that occurred because of a non-confidence vote in the government. It also occurred because of the extent of the problem.

We started out with a motion from one member. I honestly cannot remember which member it was, but it does not matter, because all members of all committees agreed to the motion. We agreed to look at rape as a weapon of war. “Control” might be a better way of putting it, but we said “of war” at the time. It looked at three areas, Haiti, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Afghanistan. We brought in witnesses to talk about all of these countries. However, it soon became apparent that the Democratic Republic of the Congo stood out among all of these countries for a variety of reasons. Some of the reasons were the geographical extent, the number of victims and the very long period in which the problem had been occurring and continually recurring, which now goes back more than a generation by the most modest estimate.

Routine Proceedings

The report produced 12 recommendations. All were agreed upon by all members of all parties. It was then taken by myself, as the subcommittee chair, to the foreign affairs committee, which approved all 12 recommendations, again with all-party support, and it has come here in that form.

I am mentioning this and stressing it at great length to make the point that everybody on all sides of the House is genuinely concerned with this issue. I have no doubt that my colleagues on the other side are deeply committed to the subject, including those who participated in the hearings and those who did not.

The 12 recommendations asked for a government response, and the government has provided a response to these recommendations, which is available to all members. This is one of only several studies in which we have engaged and have looked at the use of rape as a weapon.

I was talking earlier about three themes, one of them would be discussing the importance of the implications of this issue. I do not think the general public is aware of just how widespread a problem this is, how widespread in the world the use of rape and sexual violence is as a weapon of war and a means of social control.

● (1900)

Certainly when the issue first arose and I heard about it as an inexperienced chair of the subcommittee, my initial response was to ask why one would use rape as a weapon. Surely if the goal is to intimidate and control others, just having a gun accomplishes that goal, so why does one need more than this in order to oppress a population? If individuals dig through the public records, they will find where I said this. I have since learned that there are a number of different ways in which rape, sexual violence, and the threat of sexual violence are very powerful weapons of control.

Let me give some examples and go through a little geographical tour of the planet as I do this. Historically we are all familiar with the famous story from the Second World War of Korean women forced into sexual slavery, so-called comfort women, who were systematically sexually exploited, raped, and generally abused by their Japanese captors. They were one of many populations abused by not merely the Japanese, although the Japanese certainly were terrible abusers in this regard, but by other military forces in that conflict. That was not a unique conflict in this regard.

In our subcommittee we heard testimony about sexual abuse in Sri Lanka used as a mechanism of extortion by the occupying military in Tamil areas of the north of the country, and this is happening contemporaneously right now. This is not an official government-sanctioned activity, but it is an activity the government tolerates in which members of the military will capture the wives and daughters of prominent and relatively prosperous Tamils and effectively threaten that they will be sexually abused if a ransom is not paid. Of course, it is one thing to hold someone as a hostage, but it is that much more effective to threaten abuse if the goal is to force someone to pay a ransom, as well as to have a credible record of having followed through on threats. This is a form of sexual terrorism.

Now I am starting on the third theme I mentioned I would be dealing with, which is the different kinds of sexual abuse and why

we chose to refer to this as a report on rape and sexual violence as opposed to our initial title, which was simply rape.

That is Sri Lanka. Just today in the subcommittee before question period we heard witnesses from Burma who reported on sexual violence. It is hard to get exact numbers, but there appears to be a rising number of incidences of rape being used by members of the military with impunity in the outlying ethnic regions of that country.

In Rwanda we have dealt with the issue of sexual violence 20 years after the fact of that massive genocide, which was characterized not only by many murders but by literally thousands of rapes and huge numbers of pregnancies, huge numbers of HIV infections, which resulted in full-blown AIDS. Almost all the women who were raped at that time who developed HIV and AIDS have now passed away. There is a whole generation, and we have had a number of hearings of young people, now 20 years old, who are the children of rape, and the social ostracism they can face makes them essentially an entire lost generation.

To come back to the DRC, I would make this observation. There have been different kinds of sexual abuse, sexual violence, sexual terrorism. More than one kind has occurred in the Congo. There has been rape for intimidation. There has been rape where the military, the terrorizing forces, or the militias would force people to engage in sexual activities that break social prohibitions, force them to have sex with members of their own family. They do not kill either of them, but they are essentially social outcasts, and social disintegration results. The spread of disease is an issue. The forcing of women into sexual services against their will is also an issue. Unfortunately, almost all of the different forms of sexual abuse that have occurred elsewhere are encapsulated in this particular area, and this indicates why this is so important.

● (1905)

This is the prototype, the paradigm of this kind of abuse worldwide, in the Democratic Republic of Congo. It is the epicentre. It is the area where we most need to correct this problem.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one of the issues often raised by non-governmental organizations on the ground is the legal impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators of these crimes. Often, the senior officials and the commanders responsible are basically untouchable. Most of the cases brought to court are never tried. These crimes actually remain unpunished.

Where does my hon. colleague see Canada in terms of our contribution to reforming the justice system and putting an end to this impunity?

● (1910)

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, I am just looking to see where we dealt with this in the recommendations.

Recommendation number 5 was:

That the Government of Canada continue to express its expectation to the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo that the latter take concrete action to halt the systematic use of sexual violence as a weapon of war.

Routine Proceedings

Then a series of recommendations were made from that. One of these was, “strengthening the justice system to hold perpetrators of sexual violence to account and to remove barriers to access to justice”.

I will be honest. That was a very vague suggestion, and part of the reason is that it is actually difficult to design a practical and thorough method to place into a location that is essentially as lawless, fluid, and shifting as the eastern DRC. Engaging in any kind of forensic activity is very difficult.

I take the member's point that we should look at those who are more highly placed when dealing with this, but we should be aware of the fact that sometimes in a place like the DRC there may have been some kind centralized coordination. There certainly was an element of that in Rwanda in the rapes that took place there back in 1994.

Often these militias are essentially without a true centre, and there is a lot of vigilantism, so trying to find a way of designing one system that would resolve this would be very difficult. I do note, however, that in its response to the recommendations, the government did deal with what it has done.

I will just take a moment to find this. Perhaps I could sit down, find the answer, and in responding to the next question, I will have found my answer to this one as well in terms of what the government said it was doing.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

He mentioned the recommendations in response to my colleague's previous question. In that context, I wonder if he has given any thought at all to a timeline for the implementation of those recommendations. If so, could he share that timeline with us? The situation has basically been going on for nearly 20 years and it is urgent that we be able to act.

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, I found this on page 7 of the government's response to the recommendations of the subcommittee. This is, of course, past tense. I was asked a question about future tense, but let me answer what the government has done.

In addition, Canada also funded other projects with sexual and gender-based violence as a cross cutting theme. Through the *Cellules d'appui à la poursuite judiciaire et militaire* project, nearly \$3M over two years was provided for the creation of support cells for judicial and military prosecutions....

That is not the only example, but it is the one I could find on short notice. That is certainly one thing.

With regard to the second question that was asked, what really has to happen in the DRC is the production of some form of lasting peace. In the absence of a lasting peace, the underlying problems will continue to recur, unfortunately, and we can simply try to remediate, but we will not be able to resolve these problems.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the member for La Pointe-de-l'Île.

I rise today to speak to one of the most important issues to be focused on in the House. For me, and for many members, as we have heard, that is the horrific use of rape as a weapon of war. I can say this personally, having been to the DRC a couple of years ago and having talked to people on the ground there as well as to people here who are involved internationally on the issue.

We have had forums here. A couple of years ago we had a very important forum with the All-Party Group for the Prevention of Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity, of which I am now the chair. We organized an event a couple of years back with Eve Ensler, the famous playwright, that included testimony from victims who suffered from rape as a weapon of war.

I do not want to sensationalize, but I do want to lend some stories to the debate and some facts about what has been going on.

It has been noted many times in the debate around rape as a weapon of war that the epicentre is Congo. Congo is the rape capital of the world. That is what it was called for many years. It remains a problem. Since 1998, over 5.4 million people have been killed in this ongoing conflict in which rape is used as a weapon of war.

People have used the term “femicide”, because in this war it is not soldiers who are on the front line. One former colonel in command of a UN peacekeeping mission in Congo said that in this conflict, it is women who are on the front lines. It is not soldiers. What he was referring to is the horrific use of rape as a weapon of war.

In the past, yes, rape was evident in conflict. Sadly, rape has been a by-product of war in the past. However, what we are seeing in the case of the Congo and in an increasing number of conflicts is its use as an actual strategy of war. Soldiers and rebel groups use rape to mark territory and to intimidate people.

There are people who are dealing with this on the ground, but it is really hard to conceptualize that 5.4 million people have died in a war that seems to pass us by. How does that happen? How is it that women who are on the front lines are repeatedly gang-raped by soldiers and militias and no one seemingly does anything?

There are people on the front lines, and I will talk about them in a minute. We had a UN peacekeeping mission as well, but most people either had no idea of this conflict in the DRC or chose not to look. Perhaps it was too disturbing. My theory is that most people just did not know.

I mentioned that the financing for these conflicts and these militias is coming directly from the supply chain that puts minerals into our technologies. Coltan is used in our BlackBerrys, our iPads, and our computers. It is actually a good thing to have in technology. It allows our devices to work by making sure they do not get too hot. It is really important. However, 80% of that mineral comes from the region. Most of it has been controlled and is still controlled by the militias that are using rape as a weapon of war.

It is frustrating, because when we come to understand the connection between supply chain mineral revenues and the conflict, we begin to think we should be doing something about that.

Routine Proceedings

I know that the Dodd Frank initiative was brought forward in the United States, so the U.S. actually has a law now that forces companies to say where their supply chain is coming from. I want to give credit to some of those who have taken this on. We have seen good outcomes under this law in the United States. The supply chain for Intel, the company that makes the little chip, is now 100% conflict-free. The U.S. is doing what we did with blood diamonds.

We have to break the chain of revenue that goes to these militias, because that is what they are after. They are using child soldiers and they are using rape as a weapon of war. It is something that we have to stop, and we know how to stop it because we did it with blood diamonds back in the 1990s.

● (1915)

Who are the people on the front lines who are taking this on? I want to cite someone who has been extraordinary in taking on and dealing with the victims, and that is Dr. Mukwege who works in the Congo. His Panzi Hospital, which has been noted around the world, is in Bukavu, in the eastern part of the Congo.

As a gynecologist, he set up a clinic to help women. He was there to help women and women's health. What he ended up having to do, though, is deal with the outcomes of rape as a weapon of war. This is very disturbing. Instead of just doing basic health care for women and children, he ended up having to do surgery on women, rebuilding women's bodies because they had been so deformed from rape. Fistula, a medical term, occurs when a woman's body has been so abused that her body comes apart. It ruptures. That is what he was dealing with, not doing women's health. It is horrific.

Over the years, he has operated on over 50,000 women and girls due to rape, in just his clinic. These are girls, kids, and women who are older. This is what we are talking about.

When we debate this in the House, I think it is important to understand that this has been going on for a while. It continues to go on. Dr. Mukwege has said:

This will be the destruction of the Congolese people. If you destroy enough wombs, there will be no children. Then you come right in and take the minerals.

He is saying that because this is exactly what has happened. It is intimidation. It is a way, as we heard from one of my colleagues, to shame people, to take away their dignity. After this violence has occurred, they are left without support, sadly. It disrupts the whole society. That is what this is intended to do.

It is also heinous on the other side of the equation. This is socialized; these soldiers are socialized to do this. They start them off very young, as boys, to initiate them with rape. There is the whole social circle here. These young boys become soldiers. They are initiated in rape and then go in and continue the cycle. There are women who are raped multiple times, whose whole bodies become deformed and broken. It takes a very hard hit on a whole society. We have to consider that when we look at how we should respond.

This report is good. It is important. I challenge the government to implement it. I challenge the government to go back to the 1325 action plan on women, peace and security. However, I want us all to remember that there are things we can do as citizens. We should ask all of our providers and the people we buy technologies from what they are doing to make sure that all of our products are conflict free,

so that we end the incentives for this horrific crime against humanity that has led to femicide in places like the DRC, and that we support the victims and those who, like the good doctor, are doing work on the ground.

Then we could say that when we found out there was a war against women going on, we did not just sit by, we acted and we acted with our values, obviously, as the cornerstone of our democracy, and that we actually reached out to those who did not have a voice and whose voices were too often extinguished.

This report is important because it gives us a chance to talk about an issue that is not talked about enough. It is something we should talk about more and, more importantly, something we should act on.

● (1920)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on this very important debate today. The subject matter is of course appalling and emotionally draining. It focuses on the use of rape as a weapon of war.

I want to thank my colleague from Ottawa Centre and ask him a specific question about what more Canada could have done. I am deeply troubled by the fact that the United Nations has two, perhaps three, times asked Canada if we were willing to send peacekeepers to assist in that area.

They were specific. They did not ask for hundreds of men or even dozens of our armed forces members, male or female. They asked for two or three people, particularly at the general level, who could help with the pan-African force that is part of the UN peacekeeping mission.

We declined. We did not send anyone to assist in the effort in the Congo even though millions of people have died there.

Does my friend have any comments on that?

● (1925)

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, there was a very important period in our Parliament just at the time we were looking at extending our mission in Afghanistan. I do not know this, and history eventually will disclose this, but there was a period of a couple of weeks when our government was seized with what the next steps would be after Afghanistan. It was at the time we were being asked by the UN to supply officers for a UN peacekeeping mission. They were pleading. When I was in the Congo, they were asking me this personally. They wanted our professionalism, because obviously our history as peacekeepers is well known, to help with the peacekeeping mission in the Congo, the largest peacekeeping mission we had at the time, and which continues. They asked us more than three times over a couple of years. It was right around the time we were looking at whether to extend our mission in Afghanistan. It was at a time when we could have deployed some of our professional men and women, but not thousands.

Routine Proceedings

I wish we had. It would have been helpful because of the professionalism we carry. We speak the language, French. We also have the authority, the history, and the integrity in peacekeeping. That is what was lacking and still is lacking. We could have done that. We could have implemented some of the ideas I had on conflict minerals. We still can do that. We still need to invigorate our action plan on peace and security. These are all things that can and should be done.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

He readily brought up the matter of blood diamonds. I specifically recall that, with blood diamonds, the responsibility of the mining companies came up with respect to extracting the stones and perpetuating conflicts.

My colleague has taken the lead in moving his motion. Could he tell us what he thinks is the degree of responsibility of the mining companies and how, in the future, he would prevent these blood diamonds from continuing to cause and perpetuate these conflicts?

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, it is the Kimberley process that was referenced. It is to make sure that it is still functioning to follow the supply chain. There are some issues there. However, the member brings up a very important point.

I was just at an event a week ago on the issue of certifying and following the supply chain for gold as well as for conflict minerals. There is a role for Canadian mining companies. It has happened in the past that mining companies hire security firms to essentially keep people off the land and sometimes to push people off the land. Some very unsavoury methods have been used to do that, not directly by the mining companies but by subcontractors.

What Canada needs to do, following the transparency initiatives we have seen at the G8 and G7 and the OECD, is ensure that all companies understand that they have a role to play in compliance and in ensuring, from taking minerals or gold out of the ground all the way through to production, that if any human rights abuses happen in connection to that, they have to bear the responsibility. There has been some good work done on this. Obviously government has to play a role, and I think we need to strengthen oversight. We have had debates in this House on how we can do that.

When we talk about big mining sites, there are cases when subcontracting has happened and human rights abuses have happened. It is not typical and is certainly not in conflict minerals, which is all about illegal mining. However, we need to understand that the responsibility lies with those companies to ensure that nothing like that happens. That is something we can do a bit more of.

● (1930)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to rise in this House to talk about a subject as important as the use of rape as a weapon of war in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The victims of armed conflict these days are civilians, much more often than soldiers. Unfortunately, they are mainly women and children. Atrocities of this kind are committed for a number of reasons, such as to terrorize a population, break up families and destroy communities. It is extremely difficult for me to talk about this subject, because nothing can justify the actions being committed at this time in many countries and many conflict zones, but more particularly in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Rape can be used as a weapon of war to transmit HIV to women in a community. These direct attacks on the fundamental rights of women are being used systematically for military or political purposes.

I would like to quote a few figures taken from a United Nations report on the prevention of genocide. In Rwanda in 1994, for example, from 100,000 to 250,000 women were raped during the three months of the genocide. Moreover, United Nations agencies estimate that over 60,000 women were raped during the civil war in Sierra Leone from 1991 to 2002; over 40,000 in Liberia from 1989 to 2003; up to 60,000 in the former Yugoslavia from 1992 to 1995; and at least 200,000 in the Democratic Republic of Congo since 1998. That shows us the scale and extent of the problem since 1990.

Rape is now recognized as a crime against humanity under international law. In 1992, because of the numerous rapes of women in the former Yugoslavia, the matter came to the attention of the United Nations Security Council. On December 18, 1992, the council declared that the organized and systematic mass detention and rape of women, particularly Muslim women in Bosnia-Herzegovina, constituted an international crime that could not be ignored.

The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia subsequently included rape among crimes against humanity, on the same basis as other crimes such as torture and extermination. The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda also declared that rape constituted a war crime and a crime against humanity. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, in force since July 2002, includes rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity among crimes against humanity, when committed in a broad or systematic way.

The United Nations Security Council has addressed the question of sexual violence a number of times, specifically in ten or so of its resolutions. For example, Resolution 1325 of 2000 calls upon all parties to armed conflict to fully respect international law applicable to the rights and protection of women and girls, as civilians, and to incorporate in their legislation policies and procedures to protect women from gender-based crimes, such as rape and sexual assault. Other resolutions include Resolution 1820, adopted in 2008; resolutions 1888 and 1889 of 2009; Resolution 1960 of 2010; and resolutions 2106 and 2122 of 2013. The Security Council has ruled on the use of rape as a weapon of war on many occasions, and prohibits this kind of crime.

More recently, for example, the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network provided a horrifying picture of the situation in Syria and the use of rape as a weapon of war in its report entitled "Violence against Women, Bleeding Wound in the Syrian Conflict":

Routine Proceedings

• (1935)

[English]

In 2013, the SNHR estimates that the number of rapes of women approximately reaches 6000...

[Translation]

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, over 200,000 women and children have been raped since 1998. The actual number is probably much higher because many of these women do not return to their communities for fear of being marginalized or excluded.

Many of these rapes and crimes against women and children are never reported because the victims are socially excluded.

In November and December of 2012, during their occupation of Goma, M23 fighters raped at least 36 women and children. All of these numbers represent only the cases that were reported to the authorities.

For example, during the most recent attack on the village of Karete on the night of July 2 to 3, 2013, fighters raped at least 25 women. The attacks continue, and the number of women who have been raped grows every time.

The DRC is still plagued by grievous problems, such as impunity. I asked my colleagues a number of questions about this. In a June 2014 report, Human Rights Watch said that despite the number of arrests and trials, the vast majority of the people who commit these crimes are never punished. Impunity is rampant. It is a systematic problem in the justice system because the fact is that senior officers are untouchable in military tribunals, where most of these cases are tried.

The same report states:

[English]

Widespread sexual violence in eastern Congo will not end until the perpetrators, including leaders bearing command responsibility, are brought to justice.

[Translation]

It goes on to say:

[English]

The justice system in Congo is beset by corruption, limited capacity, and political interference. Magistrates often lack proper training and basic equipment to conduct thorough investigations.

[Translation]

Human Rights Watch says that the Democratic Republic of Congo needs a new justice system to put an end to impunity.

I would like to emphasize recommendation 5 in the report, which deals with the importance of this aspect. It says that Canada must play a strong role in the reform of the justice system that is needed in the Democratic Republic of Congo and that training should be an integral part of the help provided by Canada.

The consequences of rape and sexual violence against women are another problem. The consequences are countless because each victim reacts differently. These women are in need of not only drugs, but also psychological, medical and legal help.

These four aspects have to be the main pillars of the help that Canada provides to women in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The government keeps refusing to fund initiatives to help women make a reproductive choice. I do not believe that the government has ever indicated that it would go back on this position when it comes to medical and psychological services.

The Conservatives voted against the bill introduced by my colleague, the international development critic, which sought to help developing countries access drugs as quickly as possible to treat HIV, another problem I raised at the beginning of my speech.

Unfortunately, they also voted against the bill on conflict minerals introduced by my colleague from Ottawa Centre. He explained the situation quite well: those who commit these systematic rapes are funded directly by natural resource development.

A number of major, glaring problems remain, and they should be the focus of Canada's measures, if Canada truly wants to put an end to sexual violence against women not only in the Democratic Republic of Congo, but also in all conflict zones.

• (1940)

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

She spoke about crimes against humanity, which is what this is. She also talked about the need for justice for these women and the need for appropriate assistance for survivors.

These women obviously need to heal physically and psychologically, but we also need to really focus on the link between healing and justice.

How does my colleague suggest we help ensure that the perpetrators are prosecuted?

Ms. Ève Pécelet: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. I know she cares a great deal about this serious problem.

I talked about that briefly in my speech. Unfortunately, I had only 10 minutes to talk about a very serious global problem. I would therefore simply like to say that in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the courts do not have the resources they need, and those involved in the justice system do not have proper training. Furthermore, people from civil society and soldiers are judged by military tribunals. Thus, there is a serious problem with impunity.

We are talking about financial resources, but also about training and action in terms of general reform. In fact, at this time, senior officers cannot be brought to justice by a lower ranking officer, for example. Thus, there are a lot of problems with the justice system.

This is very important, not only to put an end to the violence, but also to allow women and communities that have been broken by this sexual violence to begin to find closure and heal from these atrocities. Giving these individuals access to justice and doing them justice is a very important form of support to help them heal.

Routine Proceedings

[English]

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know my colleague has been on the foreign affairs committee and on the human rights committee, and one of the things we have to try to figure out when we hear testimony on troubling issues like this is where to put our resources. I would like to hear her advice in terms of providing direct help to women in the DRC.

We know that we need to help the victims. We know they need justice. Impunity is a huge issue, and I know the member has some interest in law, so I would be interested to hear some of the things we can do to help the victims seek justice and to help them become whole again, if possible.

As was stated before, this is a rampant issue, and we have to find ways to confront it. The trials in Bosnia were a great example, but how do we help women directly and invest to help them directly? What can we do as a country to help with that?

[Translation]

Ms. Ève Pécelet: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for that very pertinent question.

I mentioned four very important factors for victims of rape. There is more than just medical assistance. My colleague from Ottawa Centre spoke about Dr. Mukwege, who is doing excellent work on the ground. In fact, these women are often victims of atrocities that I cannot even repeat in the House because they are so horrible. There are also drugs. I often speak about the diseases that are transmitted, such as HIV. It is very important that these women, these victims of rape, have access to drugs.

Legal aid is also quite important because these women are often left to fend for themselves in a justice system that is very repressive and refuses outright to listen to them. Legal aid is thus very important.

However, the most important thing we can provide these women is psychological support so they can heal and become members of their community once again.

• (1945)

[English]

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and for La Francophonie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to speak to the recommendations of the report on Canada's role in taking action to end sexual violence and impunity, which go beyond the specific context of the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The first four recommendations in the committee's report, as well as recommendation 12, urged the government to take concerted action to strengthen the participation of women and girls, promote respect for their human rights, and prevent all forms of sexual violence against them, including through the implementation of Canada's national action plan for women, peace and security. The government really concurs with these recommendations. Equality between women and men, the empowerment of women and girls, the respect for and promotion of their dignity and human rights, and the prevention and response to sexual violence against them are fundamental Canadian values.

What is self-evident to Canadians is not so clear within other societies, where human rights may not be respected. Countries that are in conflict, such as the DRC, Central African Republic, Syria and Iraq, or those in post-conflict recovery and transition to democracy, such as Afghanistan and Sierra Leone, have many challenges and need to do more to empower women and protect them from sexual violence.

In too many countries, legal, economic, cultural and social frameworks and practices impede the freedom, human rights and dignity of women and girls. They create barriers to women's participation in their communities and countries, and impede the search for sustainable peace, prosperity and development. That is why the government is so committed to the promotion of maternal, newborn and child health; the ending of child, early and forced marriage; and the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls, including their trafficking.

It is my honour to describe some of the government's actions and policies aimed at promoting the empowerment, human rights, and well-being of women and girls in countries of concern.

First is maternal, newborn and child health. All mothers, newborns and children should be healthy and safe. That is why maternal, newborn and child health is Canada's top international development priority. At the 2010 G8 summit, Canada drew the world's attention to the issue by championing the Muskoka initiative for maternal, newborn and child health, MNCH. Thanks to the Muskoka initiative and the UN Secretary-General's "every woman, every child", EWEC, initiative, maternal mortality rates are declining, and millions more children are celebrating their fifth birthday.

However, more needs to be done. That is why, in May 2014, Canada once again championed MNCH by hosting the "saving every woman, every child" summit in Toronto. At that event, the Prime Minister of Canada announced a recommitment to improving the health of mothers and children for the years 2015 to 2020.

The second topic is child, early and forced marriage. As members know, child, early and forced marriage is a widespread, harmful practice that threatens the lives and futures of girls and young women around the world. The statistics are staggering. Approximately 15 million girls are married every year. Over 700 million women alive today were married as children.

This is a violation of human rights. It denies girls their childhood. It disrupts or ends their education, jeopardizes their health, makes them more vulnerable to violence, including sexual violence, and limits their participation in economic and social spheres. When girls are not able to reach their full potential, everyone suffers, including girls, their families, communities and countries.

Routine Proceedings

Canada has been instrumental in bringing the world's attention and action to this issue. For example, in 2011, Canada led the initiative to establish the annual international day of the girl child, which focused on child, early and forced marriage in its first year. In 2013, Canada played a leadership role in the development of the first resolutions focused on child, early and forced marriage at the United Nations Human Rights Council and General Assembly, putting this issue firmly on the international agenda for the first time.

Building on the success of these resolutions, in the fall of 2014, Canada and Zambia co-led the most substantive international resolution to date on child, early and forced marriage. The resolution showed the detrimental impact of child, early and forced marriage on international development goals, including on six of the eight millennium development goals, building consensus to meaningfully include the issue in the post-2015 development agenda. We are proud that this resolution was adopted unanimously by the General Assembly, with the overwhelming support of 116 co-sponsors from all regions of the world.

● (1950)

Canada has also committed to intensifying our programming efforts to end child, early, and forced marriage globally. Since 2013, Canada has contributed over \$36 million to targeted programs aimed at ending child, early, and forced marriage globally. Our partners include UNICEF, Girls Not Brides, and civil society organizations around the world. Our programming focuses on empowering women and girls; preventing child, early, and forced marriage; supporting those who have already been married; engaging stakeholders at all levels; mobilizing communities; and strengthening legal frameworks.

Third is the elimination of violence against women and girls. The unequal treatment of women and girls is one of the main reasons why they are unable to realize their basic human rights and is a contributing factor to violence against women and girls. Canada leads the annual resolution at the United Nations Human Rights Council on accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women. The 2014 resolution at the Human Rights Council focused on violence against women as a barrier to women's political and economic empowerment, was co-sponsored by 81 member states from all regions, and passed without a vote. Canada also uses the opportunity afforded by the Universal Periodic Review at the Human Rights Council to voice our concerns and make our recommendations when it comes to preventing violence against women and girls and promoting their human rights.

As well, Canada is a strong supporter of the resolution on the "intensification of efforts to eliminate...violence against women" at the United Nations General Assembly.

Fourth is children and armed conflict. Canada is a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its first two optional protocols on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography. However, more needs to be done. Canada is recognized as a leading advocate for children in situations of armed conflict. We established and chair the Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict, an informal New York-based network of more than 38 member states. Members of the group have formed a united front to press for more

robust action by the Security Council, including sanctions to hold perpetrators accountable for committing grave violations and abuses, such as the killing and raping of girls and boys and attacks on schools and hospitals. Canadian development investments in fragile states support child protection mechanisms. Our humanitarian assistance responds to the immediate needs of the most vulnerable, including the needs of children affected by conflict and natural disaster situations.

Fifth is trafficking in women and children. The Government of Canada recognizes the serious nature of human trafficking, which disproportionately impacts the most vulnerable members of societies, predominantly women and children. Human trafficking knows no boundaries and affects all countries, including Canada. Canada supports programs in countries that enhance the capacity to prevent and respond to threats posed by transnational criminal activity.

In June 2012, the Government of Canada announced Canada's national action plan to combat human trafficking, a comprehensive blueprint to guide the government's fight against this serious crime. In addition to taking concrete steps to address this scourge at home, Canada supports programs in countries that enhance the capacity to prevent and respond to threats posed by transnational criminal activity.

Sixth is women in international peace and security. Canada also addresses the rights of women and girls in conflict-affected countries and fragile states, as well as in situations of humanitarian crisis. Conflict and crisis can be both a cause of increased suffering for women and girls and a result of their subjugation within their communities and countries.

The empowerment of women and girls and their freedom from discrimination and violence are prerequisites to sustainable peace, development, and prosperity. This is why the government announced Canada's national action plan on women, peace, and security in 2010 and has tabled in Parliament the first two annual progress reports. The government continues to implement the action plan in close cooperation with Canadian civil society organizations and will be submitting the 2013-14 progress report soon. The government welcomes the report of the committee and agrees with the recommendations for the government to take a broad approach to promoting the empowerment, human rights, and well-being of women and girls.

Canada will continue this important work.

● (1955)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the lack of education and training is definitely a factor that perpetuates the violence. In that regard, we really have to promote access to training and education for these people.

I would like my colleague to talk about that.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Bernard Trottier: Mr. Speaker, I completely agree with my colleague. Education is the basis of an informed society and a society where women and girls have a high quality of life.

However, countries like the DRC and other countries in conflict zones need security. We know that soldiers can completely destroy schools and prevent girls from receiving a basic education. Thus, the prerequisite for any type of education is a country and an environment that are safe, where teachers and students can come together to teach and to learn.

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Saint-Lambert for being here because I think she and I are the only ones asking questions. I would therefore like to thank her. I find it unfortunate that the government did not want to rise this evening to speak about an issue that I feel is very important.

With that, the question that I want to ask my colleague is the same one I have asked all of the members. One of the major problems in the Democratic Republic of Congo is safety, of course; however, there is also the problem of impunity for the perpetrators of these crimes.

What role does the member see Canada playing in putting an end to this impunity in the Democratic Republic of Congo and finally bringing justice to rape victims?

Mr. Bernard Trottier: Mr. Speaker, I was in the DRC in 2012 and I met with many members of civil society, including soldiers and members of the MONUSCO mission, who were based in Kinshasa. They spoke about the problem and how they do not have much of a presence in the eastern part of the country or North Kivu and also about the lack of infrastructure.

There are major challenges when it comes to prosecuting criminals in the eastern Congo. There is already a UN mission, which in reality does very little to prosecute criminals and gangs. For example, the M23 can do whatever it wants in some villages, particularly in the eastern part of the country.

Really addressing the problem of impunity will require a local DRC police force with support from the international community, of course. However, for the time being, chaos is reigning in eastern Congo. A sustained effort by many countries in the world will be required. Canada is there in its own way, and other countries, such as Belgium and France, are participating in this mission to set up this legal infrastructure in the DRC.

As our colleague explained, this impunity is basically preventing all development in this country.

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Mr. Speaker, during this debate, we have talked about the importance of having and taking a holistic approach. At the core of such a holistic approach, a number of parameters were mentioned, such as the justice system, educating communities, psychological support and healing, as well as the impunity that is prevalent within many of these conflicts.

I wonder whether my colleague could talk about how important it is to address the issue of assistance to the communities themselves, to ensure that communities can get organized and become involved in providing suitable support and treatment for these women.

● (2000)

[English]

Mr. Bernard Trottier: Mr. Speaker, on the question of development, there is more than one approach. Of course there is food security, education, health and various dimensions of development where Canada plays a very important presence in Africa and in many countries around the world. However, the other important aspect is economic development so these countries can really develop themselves. This is where I am very proud of Canada's record when it comes to the direct foreign investment that Canadian companies have had, including the sometimes maligned mining industry.

However, what I have heard from Africans is that they really admire Canadian investments, that Canadian mining companies, oil and gas companies and, in many cases, infrastructure companies building the new Africa are some of the finest corporate citizens in those countries, certainly when compared to other countries that make investments. These are the things that lead to longer-term jobs and prosperity.

Because of their human rights and human resources practices, when we talk about these direct foreign investments, it is very expensive to have Canadians working in these companies on expatriate packages. What the companies like to do is hire as many local people as possible and they have practices that reinforce the equality of women and men.

That is very important. Canadians have a lot to be proud of in how they are developing prosperity in the Africa of today and of tomorrow.

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

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Pursuant to Standing Order 66, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, March 11, 2015, at the expiry of the time provided for government orders.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight to pursue an answer to a question I have asked repeatedly. The first time I asked it was February 2. I will review the question and the response I received from the hon. Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

The question relates to Bill C-51, and it was this. I rose and stated:

...I want to make it very clear that I completely agree with every word in today's *Globe and Mail* editorial. I think every MP should read it.

This Parliament must not allow the Conservatives to turn CSIS into a secret police force. The words that are found in the definition of activities that affect the security of Canadians are so overly broad that I believe they could apply to almost anything.

Despite the inclusion of saying that it does not apply to lawful protest, would the minister tell us if this will apply to non-violent civil disobedience, such as that against pipelines?

The response from the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness was as follows:

Mr. Speaker, we live in a society of right. Any violence is going against the Criminal Code. Terrorism is a criminal act and those who go against the Criminal Code will meet the full force of the law. That is the country I live in and I love.

Perhaps I can go back to review what *The Globe and Mail* had actually said that day, since that was the premise of the question and I thought everyone would have it fresh in their minds. The editorial in *The Globe and Mail* of February 2, 2015, was headlined thus: "Parliament must reject [the Prime minister's] secret policeman bill". I will excerpt one line from the first paragraph, which states:

Under the cloud of fear produced by his repeated hyperbole about the scope and nature of the threat, he now wants to turn our domestic spy agency into something that looks disturbingly like a secret police force.

Just to focus on the point of the question that day, there is a great deal to discuss about Bill C-51. It is in five different acts and is therefore an omnibus bill. It focuses loosely on the concept of terrorism but is far broader and has implications, I believe, for all forms of all privacy for all Canadians, and those views are echoed by those of our Privacy Commissioner, Mr. Therrien.

It also extends the powers of CSIS to act not just as an intelligence-gathering operation but as an active operation. Law professors are referring to these actions as the "kinetic activities" of CSIS. Bill C-51 also has implications for the use of torture and obtaining security certificates, which is in part 5.

However, I was asking about the carve-out, so to speak, under part 1 of the act, which deals with the exchange of information throughout the Government of Canada. It has a definition of "security threats" that is extremely over-broad and could amount to almost anything, but says it does not apply to lawful protests, et cetera.

Earlier today in committee, the Minister of Justice was asked by the parliamentary secretary if there was any reason to be worried about the use of the word "lawful", and he feigned complete

Adjournment Proceedings

ambivalence toward it. It was a complete surprise. Why would anyone be concerned?

I direct members of the House to the debates that took place in 2001 on changes to the Criminal Code when the anti-terrorism bill was first brought forward. In that instance, there was a specific debate around the use of the word "lawful" for the very reasons I raise: that it could catch non-violent civil disobedience and protest, particularly in a case like this, in a political climate in which opposition to pipelines has been conflated with opposition to Canada and has been treated as a potential security threat. We have RCMP reports on this sort of thing.

Back in 2001, the Minister of Justice, Anne McLellan, took out the word "lawful" so that it would cover all protests, but now nonviolent civil disobedience is clearly included in this bill, and the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness have refused an amendment to take it out.

• (2005)

Ms. Roxanne James (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before I answer some of the categorically false assertions made by the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, I would like to remind this House of what might seem to be a very obvious statement.

The international jihadist movement has declared war on Canada and its allies; countries that believe in openness and tolerance. These terrorists hate our society and the values that it represents. We only need to look at recent events in France, Australia, Denmark and right here in Canada to know that there is no country that is immune to terrorism. That is why our Conservative government brought forward the anti-terrorism act, 2015. This legislation includes concrete measures that would protect Canadians against jihadi terrorists who seek to destroy the very principles that make Canada the best country in the world in which to live.

The member has raised concerns regarding information sharing, which is part 1 of the bill. Information sharing is absolutely essential. We think Canadians would expect that, if one branch of government has information pertaining to national security, this branch of government should be able to relay that information to another branch of government.

I think that most Canadians think that is actually already taking place. In fact, to be honest, before I was elected, I thought it was also taking place. However, that is simply not the case. We heard it again today in committee from our two ministers, from the RCMP and from CSIS, that this is absolutely not the case today. There are legislative gaps, and this bill is meant to fill those gaps from some of the concerns that our security agencies have indicated.

In fact, this legislation has adequate safeguards built in to protect the privacy of Canadians. We are not going to privilege the rights of terrorists over the rights of law-abiding Canadians.

I would remind members that the CSIS Act expressly forbids the investigation of lawful advocacy, protests, or dissent, which is a prohibition from which CSIS has never deviated. In fact, CSIS has a 30-year history of compliance with the law.

Adjournment Proceedings

I would also remind members that it is the jihadist terrorists who seek to take away our freedoms and not the security agencies that are here to protect us.

Canadians understand that personal freedoms and security go hand in hand. Canadians expect the government to do both, to protect both, and that is precisely what we are doing in this legislation.

I would like to conclude my remarks tonight by quoting Dr. Barry Cooper, a research fellow at the Canada Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute, who said recently that:

So let us state the obvious: Bill C-51 is aimed at violent Islamic jihadi terrorists, and those are the persons against whom its provisions are to be enforced. The reasons are clear enough provided one makes reference to facts and events of the real world, today.... Unlike their critics, the authors of Bill C-51 are sensible enough to have recognized the danger.

● (2010)

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I wish I had more than a minute to respond to that effort of blaming the jihadist terrorist movement being at war with Canada. I agree with the leader of the Liberal Party on this, and I think that kind of language is unhelpful. We need to focus on terrorism, yes, and respond to it, but to state that Canada is at war, when we clearly are not at war, is unhelpful.

This bill does not aim at terrorists exclusively. It casts a very wide net. That is why four former prime ministers and former chief justices of the Supreme Court of Canada are very concerned about this bill. People who have looked at it and read it can see very clearly that the bill is not well drafted, it is confusing and it will not make us safer. Security experts can recognize that when we set up a secret police under CSIS that has no responsibility to report to the RCMP or share information with the RCMP, we make our society less safe.

I would point out in finishing that the member has ignored the question I asked once again by repeating again the words “lawful protest” and refusing to answer the question about non-violent civil disobedience.

Ms. Roxanne James: Mr. Speaker, the comments from the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands are very concerning. In fact, just today she indicated and said that we are engaging in torture. She also said that we are engaging in extraordinary rendition. In fact, earlier, she even tabled a petition in this place disputing a tragedy that took place in the United States on 9/11.

I will say this as clearly as possible, as the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness did earlier today: protesters are not the target of this legislation, but terrorists are.

Thirty years ago when the CSIS Act was first enacted, those opposed to security measures made precisely the same arguments, the same claims that the member opposite is making today. The advent of CSIS did not end democracy in Canada, as some had predicted. In fact, I would argue it made Canadians demonstrably safer. The same is going to be true of the legislation that we are discussing here today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Parkdale—High Park is not present to raise the matter for which adjournment notice has been given. Accordingly, the notice is deemed withdrawn.

The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 8:13 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Tuesday, March 10, 2015

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Canadian Human Rights Commission

The Speaker 11889

Committees of the House

Health

Mr. Lobb 11889

Criminal Code

Mr. Casey 11889

Bill C-656. Introduction and first reading 11889

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed) 11889

Questions on the Order Paper

Mr. Lukiwski 11889

Points of Order

Procedure During Votes — Speaker's Ruling

The Speaker 11890

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Business of Supply

Opposition Motion—Government Investments

Mr. Cullen 11891

Motion 11891

Mr. Armstrong 11892

Mr. Lamoureux 11893

Ms. Sims 11893

Mr. McColeman 11894

Mr. Lamoureux 11895

Mr. Armstrong 11895

Mr. Davies (Vancouver Kingsway) 11897

Mr. Brison 11898

Mr. Rankin 11898

Mr. Godin 11898

Mr. Brison 11899

Mr. Woodworth 11900

Mr. Davies (Vancouver Kingsway) 11900

Mr. McCallum 11901

Mr. Armstrong 11902

Mr. Nantel 11902

Mr. Caron 11903

Ms. Péclet 11904

Ms. Raynault 11904

Mr. Harris (St. John's East) 11905

Mr. Armstrong 11906

Mr. Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord) 11906

Mr. Poilievre 11907

Ms. Sims 11909

Mr. Hsu 11910

Mr. Armstrong 11910

Mr. Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord) 11910

Mrs. Groguhé 11910

Mr. Cash 11911

Mr. McColeman 11912

Mr. Nantel 11912

Mrs. Groguhé 11912

Mr. Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord) 11913

Mr. Nantel 11914

Mr. Butt 11914

Mr. Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord) 11916

Mr. Lamoureux 11916

Mr. Rousseau 11918

Mr. Lamoureux 11919

Mr. Sandhu 11919

Mr. Sandhu 11919

Mr. Hsu 11920

Mr. Rankin 11921

Mr. Albrecht 11921

Mr. Oliver 11921

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Public Safety

Mr. Fortin 11922

Kraft Hockeyville 2015

Mr. Kerr 11922

Health Care

Mr. Stewart 11922

Ben and Emma's Benefit Concert

Mr. Lizon 11922

Housing

Mr. Vaughan 11923

Gerrie Electric

Mr. Wallace 11923

International Day of La Francophonie

Ms. Borg 11923

Boris Nemtsov

Mr. Adler 11923

Public Safety

Mrs. Ablonczy 11924

Juliette Collin

Ms. Ayala 11924

Taxation

Mr. Warkentin 11924

Tibet

Mr. Marston 11924

Taxation

Mr. Dechert 11924

Halifax Joint Rescue Coordination Centre

Ms. Foote 11925

| | |
|----------------------|-------|
| Taxation | |
| Mrs. Truppe | 11925 |
| Employment | |
| Ms. Sims | 11925 |
| Andrew Doiron | |
| Mr. Norlock | 11925 |

ORAL QUESTIONS

| | |
|------------------------------------|-------|
| National Defence | |
| Mr. Mulcair | 11925 |
| Mr. Harper | 11926 |
| Mr. Mulcair | 11926 |
| Mr. Harper | 11926 |
| Mr. Mulcair | 11926 |
| Mr. Harper | 11926 |
| Mr. Mulcair | 11926 |
| Mr. Harper | 11926 |
| Mr. Mulcair | 11926 |
| Mr. Harper | 11926 |
| Mr. Mulcair | 11926 |
| Mr. Harper | 11926 |
| Mr. Trudeau | 11926 |
| Mr. Harper | 11926 |
| The Economy | |
| Mr. Trudeau | 11926 |
| Mr. Harper | 11927 |
| Mr. Trudeau | 11927 |
| Mr. Harper | 11927 |
| Ethics | |
| Mr. Mulcair | 11927 |
| Mr. Harper | 11927 |
| Mr. Mulcair | 11927 |
| Mr. Harper | 11927 |
| Mr. Mulcair | 11927 |
| Mr. Harper | 11927 |
| Mr. Mulcair | 11928 |
| Mr. Harper | 11928 |
| Ms. Péclet | 11928 |
| Ms. Finley | 11928 |
| Ms. Péclet | 11928 |
| Ms. Finley | 11928 |
| Mr. Angus | 11928 |
| Ms. Finley | 11928 |
| Mr. Angus | 11928 |
| Ms. Finley | 11929 |
| Mr. Angus | 11929 |
| Ms. Finley | 11929 |
| The Economy | |
| Mr. Dubourg | 11929 |
| Mr. Oliver | 11929 |
| Ms. Freeland | 11929 |
| Mr. Oliver | 11929 |
| Mr. Vaughan | 11929 |
| Mr. Oliver | 11929 |
| National Defence | |
| Mr. Harris (St. John's East) | 11929 |
| Mr. Bezan | 11930 |

| | |
|--|-------|
| Ms. Michaud | 11930 |
| Mr. Bezan | 11930 |
| Veterans Affairs | |
| Mr. Chicoine | 11930 |
| Mr. O'Toole | 11930 |
| Mr. Stoffer | 11930 |
| Mr. O'Toole | 11930 |
| Health | |
| Mr. Clarke | 11930 |
| Ms. Ambrose | 11930 |
| Aboriginal Affairs | |
| Ms. Ashton | 11931 |
| Mrs. Truppe | 11931 |
| Ms. Ashton | 11931 |
| Mr. Valcourt | 11931 |
| Rail Transportation | |
| Mr. Kellway | 11931 |
| Ms. Raitt | 11931 |
| Mr. Mai | 11931 |
| Ms. Raitt | 11931 |
| National Defence | |
| Ms. Murray | 11932 |
| Mr. Bezan | 11932 |
| Citizenship and Immigration | |
| Mr. McCallum | 11932 |
| Mr. Menegakis | 11932 |
| Fisheries and Oceans | |
| Mr. Cleary | 11932 |
| Mrs. Shea | 11932 |
| Rail Transportation | |
| Ms. Leslie | 11932 |
| Ms. Raitt | 11932 |
| National Defence | |
| Mr. Toet | 11933 |
| Mr. Bezan | 11933 |
| Ethics | |
| Mr. Simms | 11933 |
| Ms. Finley | 11933 |
| Public Works and Government Services | |
| Mr. Martin | 11933 |
| Mr. Armstrong | 11933 |
| Taxation | |
| Mr. Hayes | 11933 |
| Mr. Oliver | 11933 |
| The Environment | |
| Mr. Plamondon | 11934 |
| Mr. Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam) | 11934 |
| Seniors | |
| Mr. Pacetti | 11934 |
| Mrs. Wong | 11934 |
| Presence in Gallery | |
| The Speaker | 11934 |

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Business of Supply

Opposition Motion—Government Investments

| | |
|---------------------------------------|-------|
| Motion | 11934 |
| Mr. Oliver | 11934 |
| Mr. Cullen | 11936 |
| Mr. Brison | 11937 |
| Mr. Saxton | 11937 |
| Ms. LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard) | 11937 |
| Mr. Benskin | 11938 |
| Mr. Lamoureux | 11938 |
| Mr. Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac) | 11938 |
| Ms. Nash | 11939 |
| Mr. Lamoureux | 11940 |
| Mr. Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord) | 11940 |
| Ms. Freeland | 11941 |
| Ms. LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard) | 11942 |
| Mr. Valeriot | 11942 |
| Ms. Sgro | 11942 |
| Ms. Quach | 11944 |
| Mr. Lamoureux | 11944 |
| Mr. Marston | 11944 |
| Mr. Lamoureux | 11946 |
| Ms. Sitsabaiesan | 11946 |
| Ms. Ashton | 11946 |
| Ms. Péclet | 11947 |
| Ms. LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard) | 11948 |
| Mr. Weston (Saint John) | 11948 |
| Mr. Lamoureux | 11950 |
| Division on motion deferred | 11951 |

Points of Order

Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

| | |
|------------------|-------|
| Mr. Julian | 11951 |
|------------------|-------|

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Criminal Code

| | |
|----------------------------------|-------|
| Mr. Sopuck | 11951 |
| Bill C-637. Second reading | 11951 |
| Mr. Garrison | 11953 |
| Mr. Easter | 11953 |
| Mr. Calkins | 11953 |

| | |
|--------------------|-------|
| Mr. Garrison | 11954 |
| Mr. Easter | 11955 |

Yukon and Nunavut Regulatory Improvement Act

Bill S-6—Notice of time allocation motion

| | |
|--------------------|-------|
| Mr. Van Loan | 11956 |
|--------------------|-------|

Criminal Code

| | |
|---|-------|
| Bill C-637. Second reading | 11956 |
| Mr. Bezan | 11956 |
| Ms. Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue) | 11958 |
| Mrs. Sellah | 11959 |

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Committees of the House

Foreign Affairs and International Development

| | |
|------------------------------------|-------|
| Motion for concurrence | 11959 |
| Mr. Garneau | 11960 |
| Mr. Marston | 11961 |
| Mrs. Groguhé | 11961 |
| Ms. Péclet | 11961 |
| Ms. Brown (Newmarket—Aurora) | 11962 |
| Mr. Dewar | 11963 |
| Mrs. Groguhé | 11964 |
| Mr. Reid | 11964 |
| Ms. Péclet | 11965 |
| Mrs. Groguhé | 11966 |
| Mr. Dewar | 11966 |
| Ms. May | 11967 |
| Mrs. Groguhé | 11968 |
| Ms. Péclet | 11968 |
| Mrs. Groguhé | 11969 |
| Mr. Dewar | 11970 |
| Mr. Trottier | 11970 |
| Mrs. Groguhé | 11971 |
| Ms. Péclet | 11972 |
| Division on motion deferred | 11972 |

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

Public Safety

| | |
|-----------------|-------|
| Ms. May | 11973 |
| Ms. James | 11973 |

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