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(HANSARD)

Monday, April 27, 2015

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, April 27, 2015

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

● (1105)

[*English*]

NATIONAL ANTHEM ACT

The House resumed from February 23 consideration of the motion that Bill C-624, An Act to amend the National Anthem Act (gender), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise to support private member's Bill C-624. This bill would change one verse only in the English lyrics of our national anthem. It would replace the words, “True patriot love in all thy sons command” with “True patriot love in all of us command”. That is with the intent of ensuring gender inclusiveness. The French version is not affected.

The New Democrats strongly support gender equality. The proposed legislation introduced by the member for Ottawa—Vanier reflects a long-standing goal which has been firmly supported over the years by initiatives by NDP MPs, including Judy Wasylycia-Leis, Svend Robinson, and most recently the member for Vancouver East. Since 1980, no less than nine bills have been tabled proposing this very change.

Tradition is certainly important, but Canadian values of gender equality and inclusiveness have moved beyond mere sentiments and are now principles firmly entrenched in Canadian law.

We join in singing our anthem to express a common love of our nation, its values, principles and accomplishments. When the English lyrics of our national anthem were written in 1908, women had not yet been granted the vote. Much has changed since with women finally recognized as legal persons granted the right to vote, the right to run for elected office, and with a majorly expanded military role.

I am proud to be a member of the caucus with the largest percentage of women. I am equally delighted that over 50% of the New Democrat candidates in the current Alberta election are women inspired to run by a strong and eloquent female leader.

While this symbolic change is important, we recognize that gender equality will only truly be actualized when governments address the gender gap in accessing education and employment opportunities through universally accessible child care, pay equity and a national strategy to end violence against women.

While the French lyrics of our anthem remain as written in 1880, the English version has changed many times. In 1913, the original neutral and inclusive version was altered from “dost in us command” to “in all thy sons command”. As our anthem was made official by statute, changes must now be made by Parliament.

In 2010, the Prime Minister committed in the throne speech that the anthem would be rewritten to make the language more inclusive, and then he reneged on this undertaking. Many calls have been made since to recognize the modern role of women in our anthem, including notably by Sally Goddard, the mother of the first female military member killed in Afghanistan.

Canada claims to be a world leader in terms of the proportion of women in its military and the areas in which they can serve. According to the Department of National Defence website, the Canadian Armed Forces are highly regarded as being at the forefront of military gender integration. According to the department, women can now enrol in any CAF occupation and professes that all career opportunities are based solely on rank, qualifications and merit, not gender.

Women have been involved in Canada's military service and have contributed to Canada's rich military history and heritage for more than 100 years, which of course makes it additionally reprehensible that we would have reverted to this discriminatory language. It may be a surprise to many Canadians that the largest number of women served during the Second World War and many performed non-traditional duties.

Since 1971, in response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada, the department has expanded employment opportunities for women in the military. With the passage of the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, women's military roles were again majorly expanded. Presently, women serve on a number of global operations ranging across the spectrum from peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance operations, presumably in Nepal today where our deeply heartfelt feelings are with the people there, through to stability, security, and peace enforcement operations.

According to the Department of National Defence website:

> Although the CAF do not keep track of the gender of deployed personnel, it is safe to assume that eligible women are likely to be serving on the majority of our missions.
>
> The history of Canadian service women is an important part of our national military heritage and their achievements contribute to the full and equal inclusion of women in our society and national institutions.
>
> Be they men or women, regardless of race, religion or culture, CAF members share a common goal—protecting the country, its interests, and values while also contributing to international peace and security.
>
> Canada is a world leader in terms of the proportion of women in its military, and the areas in which they can serve. Among their allies, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) are highly regarded as being at the forefront of military gender integration.

The Conservative member for Richmond Hill, in speaking to this bill, said that the government backed off on its announced change because its 2013 poll showed major opposition, yet a 2015 poll found 40% strongly supportive of the amendment and 18% somewhat supportive of making our anthem gender neutral. Only 13% expressed strong disapproval, a significant shift in opinion from two years back.

It is time that our national anthem reflected the true role served by Canadian women in building and protecting our nation.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to speak to this bill which is an act to amend the National Anthem Act with respect to gender. The bill proposes a simple change in the English lyrics only. It proposes that “True patriot love in all thy sons command” become “True patriot love in all of us command”, therefore replacing only two words, “thy sons” with “of us”.

There are all kinds of reasons that we would want to sing “in all of us command”. We love our country and all of its people. Our anthem is important to us, and we want to clearly include every Canadian. All of us are proud to sing O Canada, and O Canada should embrace all of us.

These two words that we want to reintroduce in O Canada are small, yet meaningful. We would ensure that more than 18 million Canadian women are included in our national anthem. After 1908, Judge Robert Stanley Weir amended his poem in 1913, 1914, and 1916. By 1913, he changed the second line of the poem to “True patriot love in all thy sons command”. Many believed the change was in response to the events leading up to the First World War, in which men and women from Canada proudly took part. We do honour the Canadian men who fought for liberty on those battlegrounds. We honour them and all who died. We honour them in our anthem. However, Canadian women also served in the First World War, not as soldiers, but in other functions, especially as nurses, and many died. We have commemorated them in Parliament's Hall of Honour; however, we have not commemorated them in our anthem.

In 1927, the 60th anniversary of Confederation, the government authorized Judge Weir's song for singing in schools and at public functions, but kept the second line from the 1913 version, not the original 1908 gender neutral version. Incidentally, other words were changed in 1927 and again in 1980, when it was enacted by Parliament. The National Anthem Act was introduced, passed and given royal assent on June 27, 1980. The speed with which this was done did not allow sufficient time to deal with the outstanding concerns, such as the lack of inclusiveness of the English version.

A lot has changed since we began commanding true patriot love from our native sons in 1913. Women were first granted the federal right to vote in 1918 by the government of Sir Robert Borden. Canada held its first federal election in which women were allowed to vote and run for office in 1921. It was the year that Agnes Macphail was elected to the House of Commons, making her Canada's first female member of Parliament.

There was the 1929 Persons Case, where the Famous Five succeeded in having women recognized as persons and thereby eligible for appointment to the Senate. A few months later, in 1930, Canada's first female senator, Cairine Wilson, was sworn in. Less than a minute into 1947, once the Canadian Citizenship Act came into effect, the first born Canadian citizen, Nicole Cyr Mazerolle, a woman, joined us.

The Royal Military College of Canada in Kingston started admitting women as students in 1980. Now, women serve as soldiers and just recently a woman, Ms. Christine Whitecross, was promoted to the rank of major-general.

The adoption of our Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982 has led to the gradual and rigorous implementation of equality between men and women, which the charter guarantees. We would be taking a very important symbolic step by ensuring that our anthem respected our charter.

Let us remember and celebrate the fact that our Canadian women won more medals than our men during the 2010 Vancouver Olympic Winter Games.

In 2013, the Restore Our Anthem campaign was launched to change the English words from "thy sons" to "of us". The list of the campaign's endorsers is impressive. Former prime minister Kim Campbell, internationally renowned author Margaret Atwood, Senator Nancy Ruth, and former senator Vivienne Poy have lent their support to this campaign. Hon. Belinda Stronach and Jacquelin Holzman, a former mayor of Ottawa, sing "all of us" already, as do I and a number of members of the House.

● (1110)

Even CFRA talk show host, Lowell Green, told the member for Ottawa—Vanier that he supports the change. Maureen McTeer, Canadian lawyer and author, wife of the Right Hon. Joe Clark, has sent the member a note supporting the initiative. Former MP and leader of the NDP, Ed Broadbent, also confirmed his support, and former Conservative Senator Hugh Segal is onside.

We have come a long way. The strides made by women in our society have been significant and should be fully recognized. Our anthem should not ignore the increasingly important contribution of 52% of our population. There are Canadians everywhere in this country in support of the change being advocated with this bill.

We know this because we have the numbers. The results from the survey of Mainstreet Technologies are very different from the numbers cited by the government's poll of October 2013, because accurate language is used. The questions and answers provided by more than 5,000 Canadians show solid support for a change in the lyrics from "in all thy sons command" to "in all of us command": 58% of Canadians approve or strongly approve this change, and only 19% disapprove or strongly disapprove; the margin of error is 1.35%, 19 times out of 20. The poll questions and results can be seen on www.singallofus.ca.

Last week, my hon. colleague from Ottawa—Vanier asked the government how it justified basing its position on the results of a question that misrepresented the current lyrics of O Canada. As usual, we were treated to a disrespectful non-answer.

The often-cited poll from Forum Research, in 2013, is the point of contention. When asking Canadians if they supported a departure from the existing lyrics, Forum got the original lyrics wrong. Even the *Toronto Star*, in reporting these numbers, did not catch the fact that the existing lyrics are "all thy sons command", and not as was stated in the poll, "all her sons command", as both organizations would have us believe. Wrongly, the Forum poll asked the sample of Canadians its view on changing the anthem from "all her sons command" to "all of us command".

Today as we engage in the second hour of debate, and on the Wednesday April 29 vote on the bill, let us hope that a majority of MPs will vote to amend O Canada to include "all of us". It is the right thing to do.

● (1115)

Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to address Bill C-624, an act to amend the National Anthem Act (gender).

The official lyrics are based on a poem written in 1908 by Justice Robert Stanley Weir. Although changes to the original poem were made prior to the adoption of the national anthem, it must be mentioned that no changes have been made to the English version since its adoption. Bill C-624 proposes to change the anthem by removing the words "thy sons" and inserting the words "of us" in the English version of the national anthem. This line was inserted in 1914 by Robert Stanley Weir, the original author, and has remained unchanged for a hundred years.

The lyrics to O Canada are symbolic. The anthem in its current form is important to Canadians. O Canada is not only a source of pride and a reflection of our nation, it is loved by Canadians as it is. It is part of our historical legacy.

As studies have shown, the anthem continues to be a sense of pride and belonging. A 2012 survey found that 78% of Canadians believe our national anthem is a great source of pride. Another poll conducted in the same year found that 74% of Canadians believe that our national anthem best reflects what Canada really is. The anthem is a very important Canadian symbol.

As more recent surveys have revealed, the majority of Canadians oppose changing the anthem to make it gender neutral. A 2013 study found that 65% of Canadians oppose the change, including 61% of women. Only 25% supported the change to gender neutrality.

The sponsor of the bill correctly mentioned that this poll used the phrase "her sons" instead of "thy sons". While this is correct, his reasoning is that Canadians who were asked the question over the telephone instantly thought this was a reference to our queen and opposed the change. Considering that there was an oft-cited 2002 poll that showed only 5% of Canadians actually knew that our head of state was the queen, this line of reasoning shows the member is stretching this issue a little. The core question in the 2013 poll still asked Canadians if they wanted a gender neutral anthem, and 65% of Canadians said they did not. In fact, 61% of women in that survey said they did not want a gender neutral anthem.

Supporting the bill could send a message to Canadians that their opinions do not matter and that Parliament does not want to listen to them. O Canada is an anthem, and Parliament should not swap out its phrases without the support of all Canadians.

I strongly disagree with the NDP member for Vancouver East, who in our previous hour of debate said that O Canada was "offensive". That is the word that she used. I would point out that the person who sits next to her, the Leader of the Opposition, has been quoted as saying:

> I think that when you start tinkering with an institution like a national anthem that you're looking for problems [...] We seem to have agreed on the English and French versions as they are and I think that's probably a good thing.

I did not think I would stand up in the House and say that I agree with the Leader of the Opposition on too many things, but on this issue he has it right. He should share his concerns with the member for Vancouver East, who said in February that opposition to this anthem was "a no-brainer".

It is outrageous, regardless of one's position as to whether it should be changed, that someone would be calling our Canadian national anthem "offensive". It is a source of pride for Canadians across the country. In fact, her own leader called the anthem "wonderful". He stated that the anthem should not be changed and that it is important to Canadians.

While the position of the member for Vancouver East on the anthem is hers to hold, she should apologize to the House and withdraw the remarks she made about our Canadian national anthem.

● (1120)

I cannot think of another country, in any type of parliament or house of representatives, that would have heard any member stand up to say that about their national anthem.

Our government is committed to recognizing women who have individually and collectively helped to build the strong, proud, and free Canada that we have today. Every year, commemorative events, such as the International Women's Day, Women's History Month, and important events such as the Governor General Awards in Commemoration of the Persons Case, represent important occasions when all Canadians recognize the tremendous contributions that women make to all aspects of Canadian life. As an example, initiatives for the commemoration of World War I and World War II include recognizing the invaluable role that Canadian women played in our country's military efforts.

Canada recognizes and celebrates the instrumental role that Canadian women have played to build our great country during Women's History Month. During this month, we recognize the contribution of Canadian women and highlight their achievements in all areas of life: politics, sports, medicine, business, education, and it goes on. That is not to mention the vital accomplishments of the Famous Five: Emily Murphy, Nellie McClung, Henrietta Muir Edwards, Louise McKinney, and Irene Parlby, women whose leadership in the fight for equality paved the way for future generations and whose statues stand just to the east of this building on Parliament Hill.

Our government has done much to help ensure that the many contributions and achievements of women are recognized and that their remarkable role in society is highlighted.

I do believe in gender equality, and so does everyone on both sides of the House. We recognize and highlight the incredible and numerous contributions that women have made to the building of our beloved country. However, I do not believe that changing our national anthem is the way to accomplish this, and neither do the majority of Canadians, including the majority of Canadian women.

Supporting the bill would also open the door to further proposals to changing the national anthem. It would open Pandora's box and weaken the anthem as a symbol. Given that Canadians have already spoken loudly and clearly on this issue, I will not support the bill.

I understand why the sponsor put the bill forward, and our government proposed a similar change in the 2010 Speech from the Throne. The reaction from Canadians was overwhelming. While some members of the opposition may claim from time to time that the government does not listen to what Canadians are saying, on this issue, immediately after learning of the reaction to the change in national anthem, we did react. Do not forget that this was shortly after our huge successes at the Olympics in Vancouver. There was sense of pride. The national anthem was sung many times across this country. There was reaction to the moderate change we had put forward, not unlike the one made by the member. It was a reaction that led us to understand that this is a sacred anthem that is enjoyed by Canadians and should not be subjected to any form of change.

The lyrics to O Canada are symbolic and deeply rooted in tradition. It is a great source of pride to Canadians. We have a responsibility to maintain and protect our national symbols. Our anthem is one of those symbols. Any form of change to an anthem that is memorized, known, and sung literally hundreds of times a day in our country, and it does not matter the geography, should not occur. All Canadian citizens understand, know, and love what our national anthem stands for. They understand the importance, significance, and the symbolism of not changing the anthem.

There are very few countries that delve into changing the symbol that is their national anthem. When we open the door to change, there are going to be those who line up, whether it be on this issue with respect to the anthem or another issue. I believe that the best way to maintain the symbolism and importance of the anthem is to keep it exactly the way it is. Everyone understands it. Everyone knows what it stands for, and everyone loves singing O Canada.

● (1125)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier will now have his five minutes of reply.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to what was said by the parliamentary secretary, and there are some errors in what he said.

He said that the anthem had not been changed in 100 years, which is correct, but it was changed from 1908 to 1914. The original version included "us". Therefore, to say that the anthem has not changed in 100 years is not exactly accurate because it has been changed a number of times in those 100 years, the English version, that is. Therefore, he is not correct in saying that.

When we talk about our symbols, our symbols tend to evolve just as our society does, and I will provide two examples.

In 1921, King George V included the maple leaf in our coat of arms, which was not there before, because the maple leaf had become a symbol that Canadians respected. As well, in 1965 we changed our flag. There are two absolutely important symbols in our country and both have evolved to reflect the evolution in our society.

What the member fails to understand is that in the last 100 years there has been a significant evolution in the equality of genders in our society, including the 1982 charter, so on and so forth. Therefore, for him to say what he just did is not accurate, and to base it on a poll that has misrepresented the anthem is rather strange. The poll referred to in 2013 quoted "True patriot love in all her sons command". The actual words are "thy sons", not "her sons". The polling firm that did it should live up to its mistake and if it was not a mistake, acknowledge its intent to misrepresent our anthem in a question put to Canadians.

The numbers that the government speaks of are faulty, and I hope my colleagues know now that if they actually follow the opinions of Canadians, they need to get it right. I too have commissioned a poll, which has been sent to most of my colleagues, and the results of this survey conducted by Mainstreet Technologies are very different because accurate language is used. The questions and answers provided by more than 5,000 Canadians show solid support for a change in the lyrics from "all thy sons command" to "in all of us command". The poll shows that 58% approve or strongly approve and only 19% disapprove or strongly disapprove.

The other thing we need to know is that in 1980 the anthem was approved in one single day in both the House and the Senate, and there was a commitment made by the government of the day, a Liberal government—so I am rising beyond partisanship here because this is important—to review the anthem in the following session. The Hon. Ed Broadbent at the time and the late Walter Baker, who represented both parties, agreed with that and wanted it to include "all of us". The Hon. Florence Bird in the Senate made the same comment and it was confirmed that the government would do that. It never happened.

Yes, we have had nine bills presented, but this is the first one upon which we will have a vote. I hope the members represent the true spirit of Canadians and the evolution of our society and vote in favour of this.

I will provide an example. Our parliamentary sensibilities are well ingrained about what happened on October 22, but the words that parliamentarians used the next day reflected the evolution of our society. Thirteen members stood in this place, including the Speaker, to congratulate the both men and women who so bravely came to our defence the day before. They were the hon. members for Papineau, Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, Ahuntsic, Edmonton Centre, Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, Brandon—Souris, Durham, Surrey North, Northumberland—Quinte West, Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, Yukon, the Speaker, and Burnaby—New Westminster.

I want to congratulate those members for so effectively transmitting our thanks to both the men and women of our security service. It is important to be inclusive. Let us not forget that in 1914 only men served as soldiers. That is no longer the case. Let us not also forget that it was only in 1980 that the House and the Senate started hiring women in our security forces. Let us be fair and include them in our anthem. Let us sing "all of us".

I would like to conclude by thanking the members for their consideration of an inclusive national anthem and I look forward to obtaining their support for this much-overdue initiative.

● (1130)

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 93 the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, April 29, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

The Deputy Speaker: It being 11:34 a.m., the House will stand suspended until noon. We will pick up government orders at that time.

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 11:34 a.m.)

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 11:59 a.m.)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1200)

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.) moved:

That the House: (a) recognize that (i) since 2006, the government has spent nearly $750 million dollars on advertising, (ii) a great deal of this has been partisan advertising that serves no public interest, (iii) this is an affront to taxpayers who work hard and expect that the government will treat their money with respect; and therefore (b) call on the government to submit all advertising to a third-party review process before it is approved, to ensure that it is an appropriate, proportional, and prudent expenditure of public funds.

He said: I appreciate being allowed to proceed this morning with this important Liberal Party of Canada opposition day motion. I am very pleased to lead off this debate today. It is a very important moment for us as parliamentarians from all political stripes in the House. The theme I will come back to in a few moments is that it is an opportunity for us to do right by Canadians and to improve in an area where there is a need to improve, an area where I believe all parliamentarians can come together to improve a particular expenditure system in the federal government.

I want to begin by thanking my leader, the member for Papineau, for his probity, his support, his commitment to transparency and his commitment to doing something better going forward. Despite the performance and practice of any previous government, we have before us an opportunity to improve the situation when it comes to this notion of government advertising and communication.

I want to take a moment to reread this motion so Canadians get the fullness of its embrace. It reads:

> That the House: (a) recognize that (i) since 2006, the government has spent nearly $750 million dollars on advertising, (ii) a great deal of this has been partisan advertising that serves no public interest, (iii) this is an affront to taxpayers who work hard and expect that the government will treat their money with respect; and therefore (b) call on the government to submit all advertising to a third-party review process before it is approved, to ensure that it is an appropriate, proportional, and prudent expenditure of public funds.

I have always believed that all parliamentarians have an obligation to do everything they can to enhance trust and confidence in our democratic institutions and processes. The motion tabled here today would build on that simple yet powerful notion, and is predicated on a simple and powerful idea: respect for Canadians' tax dollars and, arguably, respect for Canadians' intelligence.

We learned just this month that the "Strong Proud Free" slogan that is currently bombarding Canadian television viewers is considered a cabinet confidence, and will be sealed from public scrutiny for 20 years. This tells us that cabinet is seized with communications, with outreach, with messaging, with its alignment with its own political priorities. If we ever needed confirmation that the government is seized with sloganeering, there is no better evidence available. Now we have an insane situation where not only is the sloganeering overt and public, but we are being told it is being overt, public and secret.

It is time to bring Canada's federal government advertising rules into the 21st century, and there is a solution. In addition to this motion, on October 24, 2013, I tabled my private member's bill, Bill C-544, the elimination of partisan government advertising act.

● (1205)

[*Translation*]

My bill amends the Auditor General Act to provide for the appointment of an advertising commissioner to oversee the use of public funds for advertisement. Just like in Ontario, public interest messaging and other essential government advertising will not be targeted. Appointing an advertising commissioner will enhance accountability toward all Canadians. My bill will be up for debate on June 2, and I hope that all parties will support it.

[*English*]

Over the last several years, in a spirit of non-partisanship, I have written to two consecutive finance ministers and offered them my bill to adopt as government policy as a low- or no-cost budget suggestion. Sadly, they have not taken up this constructive suggestion that would save the taxpayers millions of dollars while costing almost nothing to implement.

There is a crescendo of voices now calling for action.

I would like to quote the *Toronto Star* from earlier this month, April 5, 2015:

> Using taxpayer money to lure Canadians to vote Conservative in the next federal election is a bit rich.... In Ontario, the Auditor-General's office must approve all government advertising to ensure that it doesn't promote a particular political party. The same should be done in Ottawa. The...government should follow Ontario's lead —and rein in some of its advertising spending while it's at it.... [The member for Ottawa South] who is sponsoring a private member's bill that would establish independent oversight of federal advertising, argues the...government ads—with their Conservative blue colours and imagery—amount to "propaganda." He's right.... The...government needs independent oversight of its advertising spending. And it needs to cut it, just as rigorously as it has cut so many more worthy initiatives.... Now documents obtained by CTV News indicate [the Prime Minister] plans to spend $7.5 million in May alone to promote its so-called Economic Action Plan. The new ad campaign is timed to air just after the release of the April 21 budget, and the government isn't apologizing for it.

The ads continue to waste "money that could be better spent on important services and programs. Money spent publicizing the economic action this year, for example, would have been better spent promoting rail safety, based upon the lessons learned from the Lac-Mégantic disaster."

The final numbers in 2013-14 illustrate this all too well. In that fiscal year, the current government spent $42 million on economic action plan advertising versus $34 million on rail safety, and this at a time when the government is in full knowledge of the human resources constraints, the lack of inspectors, the challenges with the transportation of oil by rail, the safety risks going through our urban settings, and on and on. This is the kind of choice it has been making, using taxpayer dollars.

The government could have kept the federally funded national round table on the environment and the economy operating.

The government could have ensured that our local Veterans Affairs offices stayed open to ensure that our veterans were properly supported and served after their service.

I am not suggesting there is not a place for federal advertising, to inform Canadians of new government policies or for public service announcements. There is a role, a legitimate role, for that. For example, governments need to recruit staff; governments need to hold competitions for contractors who are bidding on procurement opportunities to retrofit a building, to maintain roadways, to provide support for temporary staff or furniture fit-ups; or, for example, most important, to inform Canadians about important health issues or crises, such as the SARS crisis that hit Canada some years ago or the H1N1 viral outbreak. These are legitimate uses of taxpayer dollars for advertising.

● (1210)

However, what we are seeing, what we have concluded, and what, most importantly, Canadians have concluded is that most of the ads being propagated by the government are designed to promote the Conservative Party of Canada, simply, in its crudest form, to buy votes.

The common look and feel, the colours, of the Conservative Party of Canada's political ads and government advertising is indisputable. Advertising executives know it, and they tell us that these are aligned with the Conservative Party's political ad buys. At its core, this kind of advertising undermines the rules of fair play in our democratic system.

We spend a lot of our time in this country assisting governments elsewhere, perhaps less than we should. I would certainly like to see more of it as an investment made by Canada. However, we do spend time supporting fledgling democracies and political parties around the world to show the way. Canada is the beacon. If one is looking to a model of democratic fair play, one should look to Canada.

The problem is that the use of public resources in the advertising sector is an attempt to condition the Canadian public. How? It is done by propagating overt and subliminal messages. Why? That is simple. It is to drive up the government's chances of electoral success. It knows it. It is shameless about it. It does not deny it.

Here is another voice in support of that very assertion. Errol Mendes, professor of constitutional and international law at the University of Ottawa and editor-in-chief of the *National Journal of Constitutional Law*, wrote in *The Globe and Mail* recently:

> Now in government—and outside the electoral period— [the Prime Minister] has found a way for his government to flood the media with partisan propaganda to the tune of hundreds of millions of our dollars. If such democratic subterfuge has the same effect of unfairness before an election, then the [Conservative] government is clearly undermining the spirit of a rule of law critical to fair elections. He has, in effect, made the government a third party that is allowed to spend potentially millions of dollars, making the actual limits in the election period illusory to some extent. This deserves a profound rebuke by Canadians.

Professor Mendes does not go as far as reminding Canadians about the litigation undertaken by the Prime Minister, before he was prime minister, before the Supreme Court of Canada arguing that there should be no limits on third-party advertising during Canadian electoral cycles. He lost that case, but we can see now what is happening is by subterfuge, using Professor Mendes' words. By subterfuge, he is using public resources to do precisely what he tried to do with private resources before he became Prime Minister.

[*Translation*]

According to Public Works and Government Services Canada, federal spending is still out of control. The government spent more than $75 million on advertising in 2013-14.

The departments that spend the most are Employment and Social Development Canada, which spent $11.7 million to promote its training programs; Natural Resources Canada, which spent $11 million on a campaign to promote responsible resource development; and the Department of Finance, which spent $10.5 million advertising the economic action plan. That $72.5 million is 9% higher than the amount spent in the previous fiscal year.

With such dire needs across the country, with seniors who have to choose between buying medicine and buying groceries, not a single government member can look his or her voters in the eye and defend this reckless spending on propaganda.

● (1215)

[*English*]

Let me expand on this.

With so many needs in this country, with seniors deciding whether to fill their prescriptions or buy groceries, with wait times for surgeries lengthening, with kids with type 1 diabetes unable to afford insulin pumps, with exhausted front-line nurses and crumbling infrastructure, no member in this House of Commons in any party can look their constituents in the eyes and defend this continued wasteful spending on propaganda, not a single one.

The Ontario Liberal government gets it. It continues to lead the way on this important issue. In fact, on Thursday, Ontario budget 2015 was presented to the legislative assembly of Ontario, and it included the following. The Government of Ontario:

> will propose amendments to the Government Advertising Act, 2004, that would modernize and broaden the scope of the Act to ensure greater transparency about how the government communicates through advertisements and improve the process by which government advertisements are reviewed.

Therefore, it can be done.

> The proposed amendments support the government's commitment to openness, transparency and accountability in the way government conducts business, including public advertising.
>
> Informed by the report of the Chief Electoral Officer, the Province will also move to strengthen rules around election-related, third-party advertising to protect the public interest.

The *Ottawa Citizen* reported in September that the federal government is spending millions targeting Canadians with Facebook ads.

In the Liberal Party's call for a third-party review process, there is a need to ensure that all forms of advertising are caught: print, video, audio, billboards, pamphlets, Internet, and increasingly, social media. The Conservatives have gone so far as to use ad spots on the XBox video game system, which is unheard of in Canadian history, by any order of government.

According to the *Ottawa Citizen*:

> The Tory government spends tens of millions annually on advertising and has been assailed for what opposition parties say is often a waste of taxpayer dollars on propaganda. Part of the advertising blitz has included spending millions of dollars on government ads during the NHL playoffs.

Canadians are not being fooled. They are growing weary of and hostile to all the economic action plan ads. Ask them about the billboards, and then ask them how they feel about $29 million being spent on almost 9,800 billboards around this country. The City of Ottawa, my home city, was forced to spend $50,000 to erect these billboards as a condition of getting infrastructure dollars.

What does $29 million buy? It could buy over 500 full-time public health nurses for one year, over 300 affordable housing units for Canadians desperately waiting for housing, or 15,000 doses of chemotherapy drugs at a time when Canadians are suffering on cancer treatment waiting lists. That is what $29 million could buy for Canadians at a time when they are in need.

In fact, as reported in *The Globe and Mail,* eight polls commissioned by the Department of Finance between 2009 and 2012 "suggest the TV, radio, print and Internet ads are starting to fizzle—and annoying some people".

In the most recently released survey, respondents say that it is "propaganda" and "a waste of money", while fewer people than ever are taking any action after viewing the ads. These are the government's own polls.

Perhaps the government should listen to the taxpayers of Canada and stop wasting their money on partisan advertising. Perhaps it should also stop advertising programs that do not even exist, which is the newest twist in the saga of the use of taxpayer dollars for political purposes.

In closing, there is an opportunity for all of us to improve the way we manage and allocate scarce taxpayer resources. This is a discrete, focused opportunity to make sure that any government of any political stripe today and in the future treats taxpayers' dollars with respect.

I urge all of my colleagues to support the Liberal Party of Canada's motion to wrestle this challenge to the ground and to do right by Canadians.

● (1220)

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find it just a little rich that this motion is coming from the Liberal Party.

Let me read something to the House. It states:

> This Inquiry has arisen as a result of the significant concerns raised in the Report of the Auditor General to the House of Commons with respect to the sponsorship program and advertising activities of the Government of Canada. According to her Report, there were failures of internal control systems, a lack of appropriate documentation justifying material expenditures of public money, the payment of large sums of money to private parties with no apparent value being received in return, a systematic disregard of the applicable rules including those contained in the Financial Administration Act, a lack of competition in the selection of advertising agencies, and a general bypassing of Parliament.

My question to my colleague is this: Did he never hear of the sponsorship program, and where on earth is the $40 million the Liberal Party owes to Canadian taxpayers? That is responsible control of Canadian taxpayer dollars, and the Liberals need to pay it back.

Mr. David McGuinty: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development for that question. I do not think I can be nearly as negative as she can be. There is an opportunity here for her to step up. This is an opportunity for all of us in this House to rise above this kind of dialogue and actually do something that will do right by Canadians.

We have an opportunity to support a motion. The government can take the bill. The government can take other measures. It had a chance to put it in its budget. We are going forward.

It is 2015. Our job as parliamentarians is to try to improve things for Canadians. This motion will improve things for Canadians.

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I certainly do not doubt the sincerity of my hon. colleague over there, but it is a little ironic that this is being proposed by the Liberal Party. I will provide a little history.

When the Liberals were in power, they used government advertising for partisan advantage as well. In the year 2000, when health care reform was a major plank in the Liberal Party's platform, the Liberal prime minister at the time, Jean Chrétien, spent almost $2 million of public money on a two-month TV advertising campaign to promote the need for the reform. When did the Liberal government run the ad? It was right in the middle of the playoffs.

We have two parties behaving badly on the dime of Canadians, which is completely unacceptable. Why does my hon. colleague think Canadians can trust them?

Mr. David McGuinty: Mr. Speaker, once again, it is important for all of us to look ahead. There is an opportunity here for all of us. For example, I could descend into the debate about NDP expenditures in different riding offices around the country, but that is not what we are here to do today. We are here to lift the debate up and take an opportunity in front of us to improve things for Canadians.

If my bill were ever passed in this House, and I offer up to the government that I am not proprietary about it, it would be an opportunity to bind any successive government, not just this government, going forward. Why would all parliamentarians want to come together to do that? It is because it is the right thing, and there is an opportunity for us to do so. This is about driving up confidence and trust in our democratic institutions and processes and the way we spend money, the scarce taxpayer resources sent to us every year by Canadians. That is the opportunity in front of us. That is why we are debating this motion. I think we can get it right for Canadians. We can certainly do it better than it has been done in the past.

● (1225)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, there is one kind of government advertising I would like to see a lot more of. I wonder if my friend could turn his attention to it.

In budget 2015, there is reference to some spending at some point, with details to follow, to promote Canadian tourism. I was shocked when I discovered that the current administration has cancelled all advertising to encourage people in the U.S. market, which is our single largest tourism market, to visit Canada. There has not been one penny spent by the current administration on encouraging our U.S. friends to come here for a holiday.

We have a tourism season coming up. The only advertising in the U.S. market has been in favour of the Keystone pipeline. It was a $200,000 ad. One single ad in the *The New Yorker* was $200,000 and was all about the Keystone pipeline, but there has been nothing about tourism.

While I completely agree with the point my friend has made about using taxpayer dollars for Conservative propaganda, I do want to see this House come together to support getting some ads in the U.S. market as soon as possible for this coming summer season.

Mr. David McGuinty: Mr. Speaker, I could not agree more with my colleague. That is why I spoke about legitimate expenditures, with respect to how advertising can be accomplished in this country if it is run through a third party review process. This is about ensuring that there is a third party review process. In the case that I am proposing, it would be an advertising commissioner inside the Auditor General's office to make sure that these legitimate expenditures go forward.

There is a need to advertise for tourism. There is a need to advertise for investment. There is a need to advertise for procurement, jobs and recruitment. There is a need to advertise when we have public health crises. These are profoundly important responsibilities for any order of government, and certainly a federal one.

My colleague is right. We are not recruiting the way that we should be for tourism in the United States marketplace today. We are not recruiting for investment purposes the way that we should be in the United States and foreign markets into Canada.

There is a whole series of legitimate exceptions that would be able to go through a robust and neutral filter. What would not happen, if we had a proper third party review process, is common look and feel advertisements coming out with Conservative blue all over TV ads, aligned with Conservative blue ads of a political nature. There would be no red ads either, nor orange ads or political colour ads. That way, we could drive up confidence and trust in our system so that Canadians feel better about what the government is doing with their resources.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was just about a year ago when one of the most egregious examples of government waste on advertising was displayed on television. A woman, Jenifer Migneault , was seen chasing the veterans minister, begging for help. She had quit her job to look after her husband, who was at home and suffering terribly from PTSD.

The very same day, the veterans minister admitted in committee that they had increased the budget by $4 million that spring to advertise a program on which they had spent only $290,000. They did it again in the fall of last year with another $5 million. That money could have easily kept open all nine veterans offices that they just summarily closed last year. I want to add that to the list that the member for Ottawa South had given to us as yet another example of the gravity of this situation.

I wonder if my colleague would like to comment further on that incident.

Mr. David McGuinty: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Guelph for his strong work on behalf of veterans and for advocating on their behalf.

It is always important to juxtapose government choices one against the other. The government had a choice. It could spend $29 million on 9,800 billboards or keep our Veterans Affairs offices open to serve our veterans. That was a choice. It spoke to values, priorities and, quite frankly, commitment.

What we have seen with this example and so many more is so many profound, deep needs in Canadian society, including rail safety, transportation safety and all kinds of interesting and important opportunities, but the government is choosing to spend the money elsewhere. It is unfortunate.

It can be stopped. There is a mechanism that is available to all of us in the House. That is why I brought forward this motion this morning. There is a positive alternative where we can come together, all parties, once and for all, to create a third party review mechanism, such as an advertising commissioner inside the Auditor General's office, and all of this would stop.

● (1230)

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the House today on this motion.

I would not suggest for one moment that the hon. member opposite brings this motion forward with anything other than the best of intentions. However, advertising campaigns are essential, for example, ensuring veterans and their families are informed about the services and benefits available to them as they transition to civilian life, and after that transition and later in life, when new needs related to service may become evident.

The government has proved an exceptionally good steward of taxpayer dollars. We need look no further than the fact that last week the Minister of Finance announced a balanced budget for this fiscal year. The evidence clearly shows that the government's fiscal bona fides are well established.

With that in mind, I suggest Canadian taxpayers are well served by the government, and that what I prefer to call information campaigns greatly benefit veterans and their families. To ensure Canada's brave men and women are getting the support they need and deserve, we need to inform them of the services available to them. To preserve the legacy of Canada's brave men and women, it is also important that Canadians are informed of their service and sacrifice.

My question to the hon. member is this: Do we not owe it to those brave Canadians to publicly honour their service? Do we not owe it to those Canadian heroes to share their remarkable contributions with our great nation? Do we not owe it to the families and descendants of those who served during the First and Second World Wars, the Korean War, in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the many peacekeeping missions, many of which involved combat and serious risk to life and limb, and our cold warriors?

Do we not owe it to them to remember and encourage all Canadians to remember their service and sacrifice? Do we not owe it to veterans and families to inform them of the programs available to help them transition to civilian life or support them if they have sustained an injury during service?

I believe we do owe it to them. I believe that is the very least that we owe them.

It is our responsibility to ensure veterans and their families are aware of what programs and benefits are available to them. Anything less would be a disservice to them and their families, to their sacrifice and a disservice to all Canadians.

Canada has an extremely proud military history. I believe we can all agree on that. For generations, the men and women of Canada's Armed Forces have made tremendously positive impacts throughout the world, as well as here at home in the natural disasters that struck Canada in the form of floods and ice storms. They support the historic national events, such as Olympic Games. They respond to worldwide natural disasters. Indeed, as we speak, there is the rapid deployment of a disaster alert response team to the tragedy unfolding and under way in Nepal.

It is extremely important that we honour their work, that we remember their service and recognize the sacrifices they made in our name and on our behalf. It is even more important that they are aware of the benefits available to them to ensure they transition to civilian life with the utmost success.

The services and programs available to Canadian veterans are wide-ranging and among the best in the world. Veterans have access to a network of over 4,000 mental health professionals nationwide, top-of-the-line medical treatment and generous financial benefits.

We need to communicate to Canadian veterans to ensure they are aware of the services and programs available to them. If veterans do not know about the benefits available to them, they will not use them.

Canadian veterans need to know that they have career transition services available. They need to know that they can access thousands of dollars each month if they have a serious service-related injury, or even that they have access to other services not necessarily related to injury but simply to their dedicated service over long periods of time.

These advertising efforts do what is needed so veterans across our great country have the information they need. Through this information campaign aimed both at veterans and Canadians writ large, we emphasize how the Government of Canada is committed to improving access to key supports and services, and reducing process delays, such as the recent announcement of hiring 100 additional case managers and 100 additional disability benefits adjudicators, and ensuring veterans have access to the full range of supports available to them.

The facts show that this campaign was a success. Post-campaign analysis shows that the campaign reached 46% of the general population. That is a lot of millions of people. Immediately following the launch of the information campaign, applications from veterans and their families for disability benefits increased 13%. People who need the benefits need to know, and this helped.

More importantly, and this is where the rubber hits the road, the number of My VAC Account registrations increased by 28% during the campaign. That is people who are now signed up, and who are known in the VAC system, and who will be communicated with pre-emptively by Veterans Affairs Canada.

● (1235)

For the benefit of members who may not be aware, My VAC Account is an extremely valuable online tool for Canadian veterans and their families and every veteran should have one. Anything that helps to increase awareness of this tool, and especially anything that helps increase participation in it, can be deemed nothing less than an overwhelming success.

That is not the end of overwhelming impacts with respect to this particular initiative. Comparing website visits prior to the campaign to those during the peak of the campaign, Veterans Affairs Canada experienced an 876% increase in web visits. That is pretty darn impressive to me.

Another example is the 2014 remembrance information campaign. This particular initiative invited Canadians to remember them and educated our nation on the service and sacrifice of all who have served our country in uniform. It encouraged Canadians to get involved in remembrance, to be active in their communities, to visit their local cenotaph on Remembrance Day, to go online and learn more about Canada's military history and to be more engaged in honouring the service of Canada's men and women in uniform.

A post-campaign evaluation said that 52% of Canadians recalled the campaign. That is pretty good awareness. That translates into roughly 14 million people, an increase of a million Canadians from the previous year. The same post-campaign analysis said there were 732,306 unique visits to the Veterans Affairs Canada website, compared to 518,990 in 2013. That is a pretty significant increase.

On Facebook, the numbers were equally or even more impressive. On Remembrance Day alone, there were over two million video views in 24 hours and 3.25 million views overall. On YouTube, there were 1.4 million vignette views, compared with 35,365 in 2013. That is a remarkable increase. All of these numbers matter because every time one of these videos is viewed that is one more person who is becoming more familiar with Canadian veterans, their achievements, their bravery and how they have made such a positive difference in our lives and the lives of people around the world.

It is very important to point out that these efforts in no way take away from the benefits and services offered to Canada's veterans. Each year, Veterans Affairs invests $3.5 billion, of which 90% goes directly to veterans services. Less than 1% of the total annual budget is used on information campaigns. This means that for every dollar spent on advertising, Veterans Affairs spends more than $800 on programs and benefits for veterans themselves.

Again, I ask the House, how could anyone question the effect of this campaign? How could anyone suggest that this information is not beneficial to veterans and their families? How could anyone suggest this information did not directly result in more veterans and their families accessing programs and services? It absolutely did.

Another case in point is this campaign also informed veterans about other programs. As a direct result, more veterans come forward to apply for these very programs. Veterans can only apply for something if they know it exists in the first place. Sadly, not all veterans or families are familiar with the wide range of support information, services and programs that are available. Through this advertising campaign, veterans and their families were informed about programs and services, such as career transition services, rehabilitation, financial support and mental health services. It also highlighted education supports, medical assistance and support services such as grass cutting, house cleaning and snow shovelling.

Of the roughly 700,000 veterans in Canada only about 200,000 veterans and their families access programs and services from Veterans Affairs Canada. Many of the numbers not receiving benefits are simply those like me who do not need services yet, but many are probably still unaware of what is available.

We can do better, and in order to do so we have to inform and educate. We have increased awareness of the programs and services that may be available to veterans and their families. It can only help them and to suggest otherwise is simply wrong and short-sighted. It serves no one to have a robust program of benefits and services that veterans know nothing about. Our sole purpose is to communicate with and reach out to Canadian veterans in need.

Why the opposition opposes this is simply beyond me. To ensure Canada's brave men and women have the support they need to transition to civilian life, it is essential they are aware of what programs and services exist to help them.

I also think it is important to highlight the practices of previous Liberal governments in any discussion of government advertising. Between 2002 and 2006, the previous Liberal government spent $270.6 million on advertising. I do not recall what colour those advertisements were but I am sure they were not just black and white. That equates to about $6 million every single month on average. Some of those months were much more than the $7.5 million that was quoted by my friend from Ottawa South that the government is spending in May.

● (1240)

We would like to go back further in Liberal spending, but the Liberal government did not even track the amounts of money it was spending on advertising before 2002. However, someone who did track the funds was Justice Gomery. He found the Liberal government illegally handed out government advertisement funds directly to friends of the Liberal Party.

I would like to read a portion of the Gomery report that I believe is quite relevant to the discussion at hand. Under major findings, it states:

> To understand the evidence presented to the Commission and my analysis of it, the Fact Finding Report must be consulted. It is those facts that allow me to draw the following conclusions:
>
> The Commission of Inquiry Found:
>
> clear evidence of political involvement in the administration of the Sponsorship Program;
>
> insufficient oversight at the very senior levels of the public service which allowed program managers to circumvent proper contracting procedures and reporting lines;
>
> a veil of secrecy surrounding the administration of the Sponsorship Program and an absence of transparency in the contracting process;
>
> reluctance, for fear of reprisal, by virtually all public servants to go against the will of a manager who was circumventing established policies and who had access to senior political officials;
>
> gross overcharging by communication agencies for hours worked and goods and services provided;
>
> inflated commissions, production costs and other expenses charged by communication agencies and their subcontractors, many of which were related businesses;
>
> the use of the Sponsorship Program for purposes other than national unity or federal visibility because of a lack of objectives, criteria and guidelines for the Program;
>
> deliberate actions to avoid compliance with federal legislation and policies, including the Canada Elections Act, Lobbyists Registration Act, the Access to Information Act and Financial Administration Act, as well as federal contracting policy and the Treasury Board Transfer Payments Policy;
>
> a complex web of financial transactions among Public Works and Government Services Canada (PWGSC), Crown Corporations and communication agencies, involving kickbacks and illegal contributions to a political party in the context of the Sponsorship Program ;
>
> five agencies that received large sponsorship contracts regularly channelling money, via legitimate donations or unrecorded cash gifts, to political fundraising activities in Quebec, with the expectation of receiving lucrative government contracts;
>
> certain agencies carrying on their payrolls individuals who were, in effect, working on Liberal Party matters;
>
> the existence of a “culture of entitlement” among political officials and bureaucrats involved with the Sponsorship Program, including the receipt of monetary and non-monetary benefits;
>
> a pattern of activity whereby a public servant in retirement did extensive business with former recipients of Sponsorship Program contracts; and
>
> the refusal of Ministers, senior officials in the Prime Minister’s Office and public servants to acknowledge their responsibility for the problems of mismanagement that occurred.

The Gomery report shed light on the corruption and mismanagement of public funds by the previous Liberal government. For Liberals to stand in the House and criticize our government's expenses on ads is the highest expression of hypocrisy.

It is worth noting that the Liberals are rolling out pre-campaign ads that will air during the Stanley Cup playoffs. Imagine that: advertising in places where they know Canadians will be watching. What a concept. Sort of like of us when we placed information aimed at informing veterans where we knew veterans would be watching, and that is the Stanley Cup playoffs. It is nice to know that Liberals are at least paying attention to what actually works.

I am proud of all the government programs and initiatives that have been discussed here today. It is shameful that the members on the opposite side would oppose informing veterans of programs that would benefit them, or the other programs that we advertise about regularly, especially because when our government spends money on advertisements, it goes into advertisements. When the previous Liberal government spent money on advertisements, it went into the pockets of the friends of the Liberal Party. They should be ashamed of themselves.

I have appreciated the time to speak on this important matter and I would like to thank my hon. colleagues for their attention. I look forward to the rest of this debate.

● (1245)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the remarks of the hon. member from my beautiful city of Edmonton and that he concentrated his remarks on the need to inform our veterans about services available to them.

However, we need to recall that the money the government has been spending on advertising has not solely been on informing veterans of their rights and opportunities to be better treated when they return from service. A lot of this money has been spent on simply advertising the Conservative Party under the guise of building Canada, economic action plan. What I found particularly reprehensible is the millions of dollars that have been spent on simply promoting one economic sector, one industrial sector, the oil and gas sector in the United States of America, and reportedly with very little result, having reviewed the usefulness and the deliverables on that advertising, yet not one dime has been spent on advertising the opportunities to diversify our economy, including promoting our burgeoning renewable energy and energy efficiency economy.

I would like the hon. member to respond to why they are not switching to diversify their ads instead of comparing themselves to the lowest common denominator.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, with respect to advertising and the oil and gas industry, that is the one industry, among many others but it is the primary industry that is giving us the quality of life we enjoy in Canada today, so yes, we are going to advertise. Yes, we are going to participate in the green economy. One might ask the people of Ontario how well that is working for them in terms of energy prices, which is not so well.

I concentrated on veterans, because as people know, that is one of my passions, but there are so many more things that we advertise. One on which I will actually be doing an S. O. 31 today, and I have just put out a press release and will try to do some more, is on the very fine city of Edmonton when it comes to the universal child care benefit. As we know there is a tremendous expansion and enhancement of those benefits for families. However, there are still 200,000 Canadian families who have not applied for those benefits. In Edmonton alone, there are 9,834 families, representing 16,617 children, who have not applied for those benefits. They need to apply by Friday, May 1, of this year. That is the kind of thing we also advertise.

We are not one-trick ponies. I know opposition members are fixated on the resource industy. That is just who they are, and that is fine. They are welcome to do that, but there are many more things that the government advertises well beyond veterans and well beyond families.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I must say I am disappointed in the speech that the member for Edmonton Centre delivered. He tries to make it seem as if the government is doing nothing wrong with taxpayers' dollars when nothing could be further from the truth. We are talking about three-quarters of a billion dollars that the government has spent, much of it absolutely wasteful, more about patting the Conservative government on the back than anything else. At a time when so many Canadians need support from the government, the Conservatives see fit to do nothing more than spend taxpayers' dollars, hundreds of millions of dollars every year, to pat themselves on the back. They are out of tune with Canadians.

My question for the member is very specific. Could he tell us how the Prime Minister can justify spending $7.5 million this May to promote the government's own budget, not the details of the budget, but to pat the government on the back for presenting a budget, which I must say is fundamentally flawed? Why is the government wasting 7.5 million taxpayer dollars to promote a bad budget?

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the impassioned question from my hon. colleague. It is always entertaining to listen to him.

I will go back to a couple of things I mentioned in my remarks. When we talk about dollars spent in promoting government programs, budgets, and that sort of thing, it is the same as the Liberal Party did before. There is no difference.

He talked about the $750 million, which is over about nine and a half years. That equates to about the same amount a year that the Liberals spent between 2002 and 2006, which was about $271 million. If one does the math, it is pretty much the same thing.

His feigned outrage is always entertaining, I suppose, but it really masks the truth, that governments advertise for legitimate reasons. Certainly governments are going to promote their agendas. That is the right of every government. Taxpayers and voters will ultimately decide whether the government has done a good job or not.

With respect to the acceptance of the budget, although I do not have it with me, there is a long, long list of Canadians and organizations that say this budget is extremely praiseworthy and the work being done on behalf of Canadian families and all aspects of Canadian society.

● (1250)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague was explaining earlier why the government advertises: to ensure that veterans are informed about the services available to them.

However, the best way to communicate with these people is to create a network, call them or send them personal letters. That would be cheaper and more effective. Worse still, the Conservatives spent over $5 million on an advertising campaign on the war, and yet they closed the offices that served veterans. The Conservatives have $4.3 million to spend on advertising, while our veterans are left with fewer services.

Is this advertising really for the veterans or is it for the Conservative Party? That is my question.

[*English*]

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, the premise of that question is absolutely 100% false. We are not advertising and promoting war. That is a ridiculous statement and the member should be ashamed of that.

With respect to benefits and services for veterans, they are absolutely not being reduced. They are absolutely increasing. There have been recent announcements of more case managers, more benefit adjudicators, the extension of the earnings loss benefit to lifetime, the increase in access to the permanent impairment allowance, and putting reservists on a level playing field with regular force members. We do reach out proactively with letters and contacts, but that is all part of the greater package, and advertising is part of that package. At times like during the Stanley Cup playoffs is exactly the right time to advertise, because that is exactly what veterans are watching. They are watching the playoffs. The member should enjoy that. She should watch a game and lighten up.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would accept and agree with many elements that the member just talked about concerning the defence forces and advertising; however, the concept within our motion comes down to having that third party as an arbiter to look at the type of advertising that may be misconstrued as something that is political. By way of example, several years ago the Conservatives painted the words "economic action plan" on a GO train. There was absolutely no information anywhere on that train that told people what programs they could avail themselves of. This is the type of thing that a committee would look at and say it was a bit much. It was just one billboard with three words that taxpayers are paying a lot for.

The motion is for the concept of having that outside body to say that they have crossed the line there.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, Canadians are well educated when it comes to accessing the Internet and accessing information online. If people see the words "economic action plan" and they wonder what it is, they can google "economic action plan" and they will find all the things that cannot possibly be put on the side of a train. When a train goes by at whatever speed it travels, people are not going to read details. They are going to see the main message that will drive them to other methods of obtaining more information that Canadians are all too familiar with and very good at.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the member.

At the height of the advertising campaign to commemorate the War of 1812, I would sometimes take the train, and the wine I was served was called '1812'. However, it was not really a wine from 1812; that was just a label. The government helped pay for that wine to be served on VIA Rail.

Can the member explain that?

● (1255)

[*English*]

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, advertising the War of 1812 and advertising Canada's military history is part of what every Canadian government has done and frankly should do.

I may have missed the comment about the wine, but if the question was regarding advertising Niagara wine, that is okay too. The wine industry in Canada, in Niagara or British Columbia or other places now, is another important part of Canada's overall economy.

Any way we can get the word out about Canada's military history, about the contributions it has made to what we have today, about Canadian industry, especially things like the wine industry, which I particularly enjoy, is a good thing.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Newton—North Delta.

Obviously, in the past, both Liberal and Conservative governments have run publicly funded, partisan government advertising campaigns in order to promote their own partisan interests. The abuse, particularly by this government, is unbelievable. For example, the Conservative Party's 2011 election platform spoke of a Canada that is strong, free and proud of its history. The same keywords are used on the Conservative Party's website today. That is interesting.

What is more, these keywords are also used in government advertising. The publicly funded advertising campaign for Canada's 150th anniversary celebration uses the same keywords in its slogan: "Strong. Proud. Free.".

The Conservatives have even refused to release the documents regarding the decision to use this partisan slogan in publicly funded ads. A reporter asked the Treasury Board to provide any information related to the decision to use the "Strong. Proud. Free." slogan, and he was told that there was a 149-page document submitted to cabinet to justify its use. That is a lot of pages. Imagine how long it took government employees to write 149 pages just so that the government could use a partisan slogan in its advertising. It is unbelievable.

What is more, much of the advertising for the economic action plan does not provide any useful information about government services. In a poll to evaluate the 2012 advertising campaign, respondents described the ads as propaganda and a waste of money. Those are not our words. They are the words of ordinary Canadians. Only six of the 1,000 respondents said that they consulted the actionplan.gc.ca website for more information.

The Conservatives also wasted $2.5 million on advertising for a Canada job grant that did not even exist. Advertising Standards Canada's standards council found that the government campaign, which ran during the NHL playoffs, was misleading because it was announcing a program that had not yet been negotiated with the provinces. It is unbelievable.

Today, the Conservatives continue to waste money on promoting their campaign promises to adopt policies on income splitting, which benefits the wealthy, while these tax breaks do not even exist yet. The Conservatives are treating taxpayers with utter disrespect.

Ads for the economic action plan have cost taxpayers more than $113 million since 2009. That money could have been used to create an innovation tax credit, for example, to allow businesses to invest in machines and equipment and create jobs for Canadians. That is one of the NDP's good ideas.

In 2013, the Conservatives spent $16.5 million on advertising natural resource development, millions of dollars of which was spent abroad. They are not even spending that money here in Canada.

In March 2010, Conservative government officials met with representatives of the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers; they agreed—it is lobbying, really—on an intense communication strategy. In one year, that money could have paid for 11,000 home renovations under the eco-energy retrofit program to help Canadians reduce their heating bills. Imagine that.

The Conservatives' hypocrisy never ceases to amaze us.

● (1300)

Since 2009, they have spent more than $40 million of taxpayers' money on advertising concerning tax relief for Canadians. They could have used that money to hold a national inquiry to obtain justice for missing and murdered aboriginal women. That would have been a good idea. Advertising for Canada's 150th anniversary will cost $12 million two years in advance of the celebrations in 2017. That money could have been used to keep the Kitsilano coast guard base open for 15 more years.

There is definitely a need for some of the government's advertising, such as advertising for government services for new Canadians. However, for the past few years, the government has been spending 10 times more on advertising for the economic action plan than on ads for government services for new Canadians. We have a duty to ensure that this advertising is not partisan.

As for 2014, while Veterans Affairs Canada was closing its regional offices and depriving veterans who were suffering of services they were entitled to, the government spent $4.3 million on advertising. Furthermore, poll results show that the advertising was not even effective. The government would have been better off investing this money in keeping the regional Veterans Affairs offices open.

Moreover, the Conservatives spent more than $5 million on an advertising campaign for the War of 1812. That $5 million could have been spent on hiring dozens of rail inspectors to help prevent another disaster like Lac-Mégantic.

The Conservatives spent $1.5 million on advertising the apprenticeship program even before the program officially existed, thus blurring the line between partisan advertising and advertising for government services that actually exist. It is understandable that Canadians do not know whether or not a program exists and how to access it. The Conservatives did nothing to inform Canadians about the changes to employment insurance.

It is quite impressive when you look at the numbers. This government spent $86 million on advertising in 2006, $84 million in 2007, $79 million in 2008, $36 million in 2009, $83 million in 2010, $78 million in 2011, $69 million in 2012 and $75 million in 2013. We do not yet have the figures for 2014, but since it was a pre-election year, it would not surprise me to see that the government spent even more than it did in 2013. We will see.

I have to wonder why the government continues to spend money on advertising campaigns, when its own internal assessments indicate that Canadians consider these ads to be a waste. How can the government justify these expenses when it is shutting down service offices? If these campaigns are as useful and as non-partisan as the government claims, why is it so afraid of submitting these expenses to a third party review?

Why did the Conservatives put money into this advertising, even though their own officials were telling them that the economic action plan ads violated Treasury Board rules? I also have to wonder why they do not want to release the documents related to the "Strong. Proud. Free." slogan. The answer is simple: they have something to hide.

Let us not kid ourselves, though. The Liberals were no different. If that were not the case, they would not be trying to improve their image with this motion. That is what this is all about. I would like the Canadians watching us to know that there was abuse, and I am not just talking about the sponsorship scandal. In fact, previous Liberal governments used taxpayer money to finance partisan advertisements.

● (1305)

For example, the Chrétien government used $2 million in public funds to promote the need for health system reform. It too chose to do that during the hockey playoffs, just like the current government.

If that party and its member are really serious about wanting to do something to address this problem, may I suggest they look at the Australian model, which has real teeth and truly respects taxpayers' money.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate many of the comments made by the member. However, I would reinforce the very important principle that my colleague has raised in a question, which is having a third-party process that would allow for a sense of independence and fair play in ensuring the tax dollars we are using to finance public advertising is done in the best interest of Canadians.

In other words, at times we need to recognize that there is a line that needs to be drawn when an ad does more for political opportunists for re-election opportunities versus passing on and disseminating information that is important to Canadians. One of the best ways to deal with that issue, as has been suggested in the motion, is to have a third party review government publicly-financed advertising. Would the member not agree?

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Mr. Speaker, I guess anything done is a good thing, but there is more that could be done than what is proposed in the motion.

[*Translation*]

Actually, the federal government of Australia implemented the solution that the member for Ottawa South has put forward, but it failed. The Australians then created an independent communications committee responsible for reviewing government advertising. That is a real solution. If we really want to do something, I suggest we do something like that.

My hon. colleague mentioned that it is all about electioneering. It is very clear that the Liberals are using this motion to try to improve their image, but that is just not going to happen. Canadians will remember.

Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech.

He made it very clear that all of the money the government is currently spending on partisan advertising could have been spent on funds that would actually help Canadians meet their needs. Advertising dollars could be used to explain programs that actually exist, but this government is spending more money on programs that do not yet exist and on partisan advertising. My colleague spent a lot of time talking about a slogan that, strangely enough, is being used by the Conservative Party to explain other programs that are not partisan. This is all really confusing.

What really worries me today is that this motion was moved by a party that has a history of spending taxpayers' money on partisan advertising. This is what the then auditor general said:

> Between 1998-99 and 2002, the federal government [which was a Liberal government] ran more than 2,200 advertising activities with contracts valued at about $793 million, making it one of the larger advertisers in the country.

It was the Liberals who did that. For decades now, we have gone from one government to another that both use the same tactics: taking taxpayers' money to pay for partisan advertising. I find it absurd that that party is the one proposing these changes today.

What does my colleague think of the fact that it is the Liberals, who also used partisan advertising, who are proposing this motion?

● (1310)

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Mr. Speaker, clearly, blue or red, it is all the same. Those are the old parties, and they have been in power too long.

It is time to replace them with parliamentarians and a government that respect taxpayers' money and the opinions of Canadians, and that believe in informing Canadians about changes to their programs and services. That is what government advertising should used for: to inform people.

[*English*]

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak in support of this motion. We have heard a lot about the advertising of government programs that do not even exist, and I think it is ironic when we get bills like this brought forward. However, I always say it is better late than never.

It pleases me that the Liberal Party has brought this bill forward. In the past, both the Liberal and Conservative governments have been criticized very heavily for using publicly funded government advertising campaigns to further their own partisan interests. That is not news, and I am not going to go into too much of the history around that. When the Liberals were in government, they acted just like the Conservatives.

It is a bit strange sitting here, having the Conservatives say that they only kind of did what the Liberals did. What matters is that it is the public's hard-earned tax dollars that are being used for partisan advertising. Taxpayers do not mind when their hard-earned tax dollars are used to pay for programs. They do not mind when they are used to promote something that is good for all Canadians. What they do mind is when it is just purely advertising in order to promote a particular party.

We all remember the sponsorship scandal. I was not an MP at the time, but I can tell the House that it was a big topic of conversation. In my social studies class, it was a major topic of discussion for a good few weeks.

It is time in Canada that we elect a government and a leader who have the experience and the principles, as well as what it takes to stop all of these scandals and mismanagement left behind by the Liberals, and now by the Conservatives. It is time for a principled government that will bring real change to Ottawa and get rid of advertising that is not necessary.

I have sat in the House today and listened to some of my colleagues from across the aisle, and I heard what a wonderful job they have been doing with Veterans Affairs. All of this advertising is to promote the programs they have. What I have found ironic is that they had to put them on during the hockey games because every veteran is out there watching hockey. I have big news for everyone: not everybody watches hockey. I know that might be sacrilegious and that some people might get upset at that, but there are many people who do not watch, especially many who are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, and those who are coping with having left the battlefield and readjusting to civilian life.

If we want to communicate with the veterans, surely we know who they are. Surely one way to communicate with them is directly. That would actually get to every veteran in a real way, instead of just throwing out the fairy dust and hoping that some of it lands in the right places.

Since I have been in the House, I have watched advertising for programs that do not even exist. I was the critic for employment and social development, as I am now, when the government was advertising the Canada job grant. The government had not negotiated a single agreement with any province, but we spent millions of dollars advertising a program that did not exist. To me, that is asinine and a waste of taxpayers' money.

Canadians work hard to earn their paycheques. They pay taxes, which they do not mind, if they know that their taxes are being well used.

● (1315)

However, the taxpayers I talk with do not want to have their hard-earned money used to promote a particular party or for partisan advertising, especially to promote things that do not exist. We have already begun to see some of the advertising around income splitting. As far as I know, income splitting has not yet been passed by this Parliament. We know it is an idea the government has in its budget, but we have not finished debate on the budget. It has to go through the cycles of parliamentary legislation, and then it has to come back here to be voted upon.

Instead of dealing with real issues and spending money where it is needed, the government would rather spend money on advertising income splitting—the new income splitting, by the way—that would only benefit about 15% of the population, not those who need it the most.

Constituents and other Canadians I have talked with coast to coast to coast tell me that they have been waiting years to hear about their appeals to the Social Security Tribunal. Some of these people are terminally ill and still waiting to have their appeals heard. Surely some of this money would have been better spent on hiring extra people, if that is what is needed, in order to process the appeals in a timely manner.

I am not against all advertising. I think there are some things that governments do have to advertise in a bigger way, on a larger scale. I heard another colleague mention tourism today. We live in a beautiful country. Of course, we should be promoting our country. I think it is wonderful to encourage people to come here, but also to encourage people within Canada to explore Canada as well.

However, what I find hard is why we have to spend millions of dollars promoting the oil industry in the U.S. when the oil industry makes billions of dollars in profit. Surely it is the job of the oil companies to promote themselves. Why would we take hard-earned money from Canadians who are working for $10, $12, $14 an hour, having to work two or three jobs in order to make ends meet, and use it to promote the oil companies in the U.S.? The oil companies make huge profits. That is called the government paying off its friends, and I think that is unconscionable when Canadians are hurting.

Let us talk about something else that the government should be highlighting: Campaign 2000. That was the year when Parliament unanimously agreed to take immediate action to end child poverty. Eradication of poverty or the proliferation of child poverty is still very real, whether it is in the north, in B.C., in the centre, or on the east coast. Think of the three-quarters of a billion dollars that has been spent on advertising. Some of that could have been used to address child poverty. When it comes to child poverty, we have a government that is very fond of supporting our motions to end child poverty and agreeing they are a good thing. Then, when we get a budget, we do not see many resources targeted in that area specifically. What we see sometimes are policies that would grow the gap between the rich and the poor, the haves and the have-nots.

I absolutely agree that we need to get this partisan advertising under control and that we need an independent body to review how it is done. It is time for the Conservative government to stop abusing the tax dollars of hard-working Canadians to promote itself for re-election.

● (1320)

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question starts with a comment about the government's spending plans that occurred back in November 2014. One of the topics in the video advertisement was about income splitting and changes to benefits that still have not been legislated in this House.

My concern in particular is that at the end of this advertisement there has to be a thing that says "measures subject to parliamentary approval". The problem is that these advertisements appeared as a kind of gateway to reading online newspaper articles. If an individual reads it on an ordinary computer screen, or even more so on a mobile screen, there is no way one could read the tiny font that appears for a couple of seconds saying "measures subject to parliamentary approval".

I am wondering if my colleague has seen these ads and she could comment on the appropriateness of concealing the idea that these measures have not yet gone through Parliament.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, I have enjoyed working with my colleague on a number of issues. He always asks thoughtful questions.

I think this is a prime example of a government, even when it is found guilty by the courts and is reprimanded, wanting to circumvent. Instead of saying that they are not supposed to be doing this, the Conservatives came up with the idea of having a tiny little tag flash on the screen which nobody will have the time to read, or it is so tiny that people, especially in my age group, cannot read it. They carry on with doing exactly what they were doing before.

It is a flagrant disregard for common-sense interpretation when they have been found guilty, in order to carry on misusing the tax dollars of hard-working Canadians.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I could not agree more with some of the comments about why the Canadian government is spending public funds to promote the oil industry in the United States. It is not as though it is a hardship case. It is a multi-billion dollar profit centre. We are spending money on ads for them, but in Canada as well, targeted to us in British Columbia.

I am sure my friend from Newton—North Delta will be able to immediately recall the ad for how fabulous the environmental protection will be with supertankers loaded with dilbit, which British Columbians do not want, and the great announcement from the Canadian government that these supertankers will now have to have double hulls, as though we can thank the current administration for this innovation. Double-hulled oil tankers have been required under international law since 1978. What we have had in British Columbia to protect our coastline is a moratorium on supertanker traffic on the north coast since 1972, which the current administration just imagined away. It is as if we never had a moratorium at all.

I wonder if my friend would comment on what looked like Enbridge ads, but were actually being paid for by our tax dollars.

● (1325)

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question that is targeted specifically to our beautiful British Columbia's pristine coastline.

I have had the pleasure of travelling all over B.C., and up and down that beautiful coastline. For British Columbians, there is nothing more important than protecting our coastline and our waterways.

That moratorium was there for a reason. The Canadian government now making sure that our tankers are up to international standard is not a cause to celebrate when maybe they should have had double hulls all along. However, what is disturbing is that once again the government is very much engaged in partisan advertising, supporting the oil companies and the pipelines.

What shocked me more than anything was that when we had the oil spill in Vancouver during that perfectly still day and a lot of damage was done, the company contracted out for the cleanup was Kinder Morgan. That is bizarre.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sharing my time with my colleague, the hon. member for Labrador.

I am pleased to rise in support of the Liberal motion. We are calling upon the government to submit its advertising proposals to a dispassionate third party to ensure the advertisements are non-partisan. Under the Conservative government, experience has shown that this measure is urgently required. As has been pointed out, it has spent three-quarters of a billion dollars no less on largely partisan advertising since coming into power. We see this all the time if we watch the playoffs and other broadcasts. It is hard to avoid advertisements that are partisan Conservative ads relating to the economic action plan and other measures of this kind.

There are two principal areas on which I would like to focus.

The first is that as a government, it is sometimes nice to have free reign over the advertising it can do because then it can bend it to the partisan and help its own cause a little. However, the Ontario government, under the leadership of then premier Dalton McGuinty, took the lead on this. Even though for those reasons it might have been to the disadvantage of the Liberals, they proposed a law, which has been in place for some years now, with respect to a third party system that limited their ability to advertise to what was deemed non-partisan by this third party. Therefore, it is our view that it is high time that the federal government emulate what Dalton McGuinty did for Ontario and bring forward such an approach, even though it might limit its own freedom of action, just as it limited the freedom of action of the McGuinty government.

My colleague, the member for Ottawa South, has proposed a private member's bill, which would do just that, set out a third party that would have the ultimate say on what advertising was permitted and what advertising was not permitted.

We in the Liberal Party support this measure. Even though we may well become the next government, we are happy to be limited in our ability to do partisan advertising, just as we recognize the Conservatives should also be so limited. We should all agree that this is the right thing to do whether we are or are not the government. It is simply wrong to use taxpayer money to advance one's partisan interest through advertising. If the Liberal government in Ontario could do that, then the Conservative government in Ottawa should also do that. We, as the federal Liberal Party, are willing to do it even though it might cost us down the road should we become the government.

If we look at today's polls. it is roughly fifty-fifty as to whether the Conservatives or the Liberals will be the next government. Therefore, each of us should pass such legislation and agree to such a rule, even though going forward there is perhaps a 50% chance that one of us would be limited in our freedom of action, but at the same time doing what is right from the point of view of taxpayer funding.

● (1330)

[*Translation*]

The second issue I would like to address is that all this government advertising apparently does not work, according to the government's own findings.

[*English*]

They do not work.

[*Translation*]

Apparently, Canadians are not significantly influenced by all these Conservative ads.

[*English*]

The best example of that is something we would think no Canadian in the country could have escaped hearing about in the last several years, which is Canada's economic action plan. The government is more concerned about the signs than the action. No matter where we go, we cannot help seeing these things. It does not matter what TV or radio station we turn on, we cannot help hearing about these things. This is one of the prime examples of the government using taxpayer money for partisan advertising, which should be stopped.

The bad news for the government is that it does not work. According to polls commissioned by the government, when Canadians were asked if they had heard of Canada's economic action plan, one would have thought 100% would have said yes. In the Ottawa bubble, it is impossible not to have heard of it. I would have thought a high proportion of Canadians would have heard of it, 99% or around there. However, the proportion saying no, that they had never heard of Canada's economic action plan, was 41% in 2010.

Then the government did way more adverting, year after year. How did that number progress? Maybe it went from 41% to 81%? No. In 2011, it was 40%. In 2012, it was 42.6%. In 2013, it dipped down to 37%. Then it was 38%. Therefore, it is within the rounding error. However, 40% of Canadians have never heard of the economic action plan. Difficult as it is for parliamentarians to believe it, that is a fact.

The point is not only is the advertising a waste of taxpayer money for partisan purposes, but it does not even work very well. With all of this advertising, day in and day out, about the economic action plan, 40% of Canadians still do not have a clue what it is.

It is the wrong thing to do, and it does not work. Those are two good reasons for the government to stop it.

I have one more illustration of why it does not work. This is a survey. Again, it was a government appointed survey. I think these surveys were brought in by the Liberal government, and they have continued to this day. This is a survey about the home renovation tax credit conducted in 2009. The question was, "Did you do anything as a result of seeing or hearing this advertising about the home renovation tax credit?" The percentage of people who said that they did not do anything as a result of this advertising was 74%.

The major point is that partisan advertising is the wrong thing to do. We should put in place a legislative mechanism, as Ontario has done and as my colleague from Ottawa South has introduced in the House. We in the Liberal Party, should we become government, would be perfectly happy and content to be constrained by such legislation. We think this should similarly constrain the Conservative government of today. It should act even before this law is proclaimed, and go to a third party to limit its advertising to items being non-partisan.

We think there is a strong case for this, and we are putting our money where our mouth is and supporting this. As a by-product, I would also make the point that for all this waste of taxpayer money by government advertising, it does not even seem to work very well.

● (1335)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was quite surprised to hear this kind of proposal for a review from the Liberals, especially on a special day like today, because the Liberals have a history of problems with sponsorship, as everyone recalls. This is a little like a criminal suggesting a new law to prevent crime. It is quite strange.

Would the Liberal member agree that is it rather ironic that they are criticizing the government, considering that his party was responsible for the sponsorship scandal?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question on past events that occurred 10 or 12 years ago.

Nonetheless, there is something else that happened much more recently and that is the fact that a large number of NDP members did not pay what they owe the government. They used taxpayers' money to pay for partisan expenses. They broke the rules and they still have not paid what they owe to taxpayers.

[*English*]

The NDP is no longer the master of virtue vis-à-vis every other party in the House. The NDP should pay its own bills before it starts preaching to the rest of us.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments put forward by my colleague from Markham—Unionville. I want to share with him a sense of warning. If the boys in short pants hear they are only reaching 40% of the Canadian electorate with their advertising, they are liable to shovel a little more at it. The rationale would be that the Conservatives are not spending enough.

There is one thing he did not mention, and most people who contact my office talk about this topic. They are most annoyed with the fact that the government, under the current Minister of Public Works, who was with Human Resources and Skills Development at the time, to much fanfare, announced the Canada jobs grant. The government had not talked to the provinces about it. There had been nothing in place, but it took out $3.5 million worth of advertising on the program. She got shuffled along and a new Minister of Employment and Skills Development. took over. He had to sit down and cobble together some kind of an agreement.

In the meantime, $3.5 million were spent on a program that did not exist. It was a ghost program. Has the member heard from his constituents about this colossal waste of taxpayer money on a program that did not exist?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is certainly right about what he calls the boys and girls in short pants. There is a risk of telling them their spending is ineffective. What I mean is that they should spend less, but they might take the opposite point of view that if it does not work at $750 million, maybe they need to spend a few billion more of taxpayer money to try to make it do the trick.

I am aware of it, although I have not heard from constituents about the case he raises. There are many cases where the government advertises before a program is legal, before it passes the House, before it has spoken to its provincial counterparts. It advertises programs that have not yet been passed into law.

My colleague raises a very good point, but it is just the tip of the iceberg on so many things the Conservatives do. They make huge budget announcements, not in the House. The list goes on and on of the inappropriate behaviour to which they subject themselves. However, the main point today is to get this rule passed so the kind of abuse my colleague has talked about will not happen in the future.

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Markham—Unionville for his comments on the bill and for sharing his time with me today. Obviously he has tremendous insight into what the actions of the government have been when it comes to using taxpayers' money to produce partisan ads in this country.

There has been some discussion about whether these ads the Conservative government has taken out in prime time, such as during Super Bowl games and hockey games, work or do not work. In my opinion, a lot of that is irrelevant. The real relevance is that the Conservatives are using taxpayers' money. Should it be permitted to use that money to produce ads that could be seen as partisan by promoting the message of a political party. I think that is the fundamental piece we need to look at.

We also need to look at whether the information in these ads is even correct. We have seen many ads the Conservative government has put out saying that people can access this program or apply under that program knowing that the programs do not even exist. A small asterisk under the ad says "if passed or if approved by Parliament".

Imagine a government taking millions of dollars of taxpayers' money, to the tune of $750 million, to produce ads when some of the ads are advertising programs that are not yet available. We do not know if they are going to be available. Talk about wasting money. That is what a real waste of taxpayers' money is.

Third, not only is the information incorrect, not only is there the partisanship of the ads, but the ads are being used at a time when there are so many other needs in the country. Every single day Canadians are reaching out to the government for better programs and services, for better use of taxpayers' dollars, and for better investments in their communities. All the while, the government is investing in partisan ads to promote its message at the same time it is cutting other services for Canadians. That is shameful.

I am pleased to speak today to the motion and to support it, because our motion calls for the creation of a third-party review process that would vet these ads before they are approved to ensure that they are appropriate, proportional, and a prudent investment of taxpayers' money.

For example, do the programs really exist that are going to be advertised to Canadians? We know that in 2013, Advertising Standards Canada sent a letter to the assistant deputy minister of employment and skills development at the time and indicated that the Conservatives had breached the Canadian Code of Advertising Standards, because they were airing commercials that urged Canadians to apply for the Canada job grant. At that time, the grant did not exist. There were no provinces that had agreed to the potential program. Why was the government advertising for a program that provinces had not signed onto and that was not available to Canadians? In my opinion, it should never have been permitted. We saw a similar thing take place in Ontario some years ago.

Others today have spoken about the Government Advertising Act, which was passed by the McGuinty government in 2004 in Ontario to ensure that these things did not happen. It is evident that we need to be doing something similar in the Parliament of Canada.

● (1340)

I know that my colleague, the member for Ottawa South, has a bill that is at second reading right now that looks to establish that kind of policy in legislation. I would encourage members to support that as well, because it is necessary. It is necessary to control misleading ads that are going out to the Canadian public and to control the partisanship of ads, because no political party, no matter which one is in government, should be using taxpayers' money for political advertising. That is certainly how this was interpreted when the Conservative government put out those ads.

Let me speak to the other side of it in terms of how a government makes decisions on where money should be invested. We have all seen the ads during the NHL playoff hockey games. I am proud to say that ads by the Liberal Party are paid for by the Liberal Party. They are not paid for by the taxpayers of Canada, the source of revenue for the Government of Canada. No, they are not, unlike the Conservative ads during those games, which have been paid for by taxpayers.

I will provide an example. This past year, we have seen the Conservatives spend $130 million to $140 million on advertising campaigns. We have seen them spend up to $100,000 for one ad during a hockey game. They have spent $750 million on those ads over the last number of years, yet they have cut things like, in my riding, the Institute for Environmental Monitoring and Research, one of the most important groups and institutes in the riding. It did studies on everything for the last number of decades, collecting data in Labrador and looking at all kinds of research on ducks, eagles, moose, caribou, water fowl, rivers, environmental contaminants, all kinds of transatlantic flights, and the impact of 5 Wing Goose Bay on aboriginal culture.

It was one group that looked at vital concerns about the environment in Labrador, and guess what? Shutters were put on their doors in March. It cost a few hundred thousand dollars to operate one of the most important northern institutes that looked at environmental issues, including climate change and the impact on our ecosystems, and the government closed the door on it. It could have paid for it with two ads during a hockey game. That is how sad that is.

We have heard the argument from Newfoundland and Labrador about the $400 million it did not receive as part of the CETA deal. It says it was a commitment, an agreement between two governments, but when the time came to ante up the money, the Government of Canada said no, it was not paying the money to Newfoundland and Labrador. However, it had no issue putting $750 million into ad campaigns.

These are the kinds of decisions governments make, and I believe that governments that make decisions to cut programs and services to Canadians and to use the money to promote their own messages and political interests is wrong. They should be ashamed of continuing to do it. In fact, those ads should probably be assessed, and where partisanship is determined, they should be paying back the money, in my opinion, to the people of the country. That is exactly what they should be doing. They should not get away with these kinds of initiatives. I do not care who is in power; they should not get away with those kinds of initiatives.

As one member of Parliament, I find it very frustrating to lobby for small amounts of money to keep important services in my riding, to keep delivering important services to Canadians, and to not have the fiscal ability to do it because the government in power says that advertising for programs that do not exist is more important than actually providing services to Canadians. That is wrong, and it should be ashamed of itself.

● (1345)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would ask my colleague to recognize that things change in time. Government and NDP members who say that this is the way it has been done in the past make me reflect on the issue of proactive disclosure. When the leader of the Liberal Party indicated that we needed to change things, the Liberal caucus led to changes on proactive disclosure, and both the Conservatives and NDP finally came on board.

What we are talking about today is that we need to have a third party in place, because it is in the best interest of taxpayers. Through that third party, we would be able to distinguish the line, and when something crossed that line, the political party, and not the taxpayer, would foot the bill. As long as it stayed on the fair side of that line, it would be okay to use public tax dollars.

The member might want to add some comment on that.

● (1350)

Ms. Yvonne Jones: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, the member for Winnipeg North, for that question. As members know, he is a great debater in the House of Commons. I am sure that this is one piece of legislation he will be very happy to stand and support when we come to the vote.

The member is exactly right. It has been the Liberals who have led the way on proactive disclosure in the House of Commons. We were the first party to report all of our budgets, all of our spending, and to provide the details to the public. We are the party that encouraged others in the House of Commons to do the same.

However, we cannot leave the disclosure of taxpayers' money as one small, isolated portion of spending. Disclosure has to be overall, which is why I do not see any problem whatsoever in advertising by the Government of Canada being scrutinized for fairness, prudence, and public interest. When it meets those targets, it is fine, but when it does not, it is an abuse of the government's power.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Quebec's motto is “Je me souviens”, or I remember. We remember the sponsorship scandal. We cannot forget it.

Today's motion moved by the third party seeks, among other things, to make things more transparent. We are not against greater transparency. The current government has spent $750 million on advertising.

Does the hon. member think that this motion will rub out the stain on the Liberal Party caused by the sponsorship scandal?

[*English*]

Ms. Yvonne Jones: Mr. Speaker, I can tell members what it would not do. It would not clear up the waste of public money we have seen by the NDP in recent months. That is very clear.

The purpose of the motion today is to ensure that advertising, no matter what party is in power, is done fairly, without partisanship, and is in the best interest of taxpayers. This is what the motion is asking the House of Commons to vote on.

I do not think there is any member in this House who does not want to tell their constituents that the money we spend, the money we are responsible for on behalf of the Government of Canada, is going to be used in their best interest and that it will not be wasted on promoting our own party or on promoting programs that do not yet exist.

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Yellowhead. I would advise the member that he will have about five and a half minutes before we break for statements.

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in the House today to speak in opposition to the motion on government advertising.

Mr. Speaker, your hon. predecessors have indicated in prior rulings that the government should be careful that its communication products, particularly its advertisements, do not convey the message that proposed legislation has been passed or will be passed in its current form. I can assure members that our government has been very vigilant in ensuring that communications materials indicate that new initiatives still before Parliament are proposed or subject to parliamentary approval.

There are government policies in place regarding the nature of the advertising the government can undertake.

The communications policy is one such policy. It is an extremely robust policy that provides direction to ensure that Canadians receive “timely, accurate...objective and complete information” about the government's “policies, programs, services and initiatives”. The policy states that in “the Canadian system of parliamentary democracy and responsible government, the government has the duty to explain its policies and decisions, and to inform the public of its priorities for the country.”

The policy also helps to ensure the government departments and agencies are “visible, accessible and accountable to the public they serve” and that their communication activities “safeguard Canadians' trust and confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the Public Service of Canada”. The policy has clear standards of accountability. Its goal “is to ensure that communications are well-coordinated, effectively managed“ and, most notably, “responsive to the diverse information needs” of Canadians.

The policy sets out 10 interconnected and interdependent policy commitments based on Canadian and public service values, statutes and regulations. It has 30 policy requirements. It also sets out roles and responsibilities for each institution involved in implementing the policy. Its procedures provide specific directions for advertising, publishing and public opinion research.

I want to take a moment to clarify what the communications policy says with regard to advertising. It clearly states that departments and agencies "may place advertisements...to inform Canadians about their rights or responsibilities, about government policies, programs, services or initiatives, or about dangers or risks to public health, safety or the environment". It also states that departments and agencies must "ensure advertising campaigns...are aligned with government priorities...themes and messages".

There seems to be a lot of misconception around how government advertising is planned and executed. Allow me to describe how the process works, for the benefit of the House.

Contrary to the motion before us today, the government advertising process involves many stakeholders that provide checks and balances. As my hon. colleagues may know, the Privy Council Office works with the departments to develop a government advertising plan that supports the priorities identified in the Speech from the Throne and the budget. Once approved by cabinet, the plan is sent to Treasury Board for funding approval. Once funding is secured, departments work with Public Works and Government Services Canada to implement their campaigns.

The Privy Council Office provides critical oversight throughout the entire process, and departments evaluate their campaigns and report on their results. The departments work closely with the Privy Council Office to develop advertising proposals. The proposals provide a detailed overview of the advertising campaign, including its objectives, key messages and government priorities it supports. Departments also consult one another to identify areas of common interests and opportunities to collaborate.

This type of collaboration is an example of how government treats taxpayer dollars with respect.

● (1355)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Yellowhead will have approximately 14 minutes and 50 seconds when we resume debate on this motion.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

IT STARTS WITH ONE—BE HER CHAMPION CAMPAIGN

Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it starts with one: one mentor, one supportive person, one champion.

I am talking about the "It Starts with One – Be her Champion" campaign launched recently by our Minister of Status of Women. The "It Starts with One" campaign is designed to engage leaders in public and private sectors as champions for women, encouraging leaders in all fields to take a pledge to participate in mentoring efforts to make a difference in a woman's career.

This is one of the ways that the government is supporting women entrepreneurs, an extremely important sector of the Canadian economy. In fact, women-owned businesses employ over 1.5 million Canadians and contribute an estimated $148 billion to our economy. When women succeed, Canada succeeds. This initiative is an extraordinary opportunity for accomplished Canadians to share their

experience and expertise, to join the movement for increasing women's economic prosperity in Canada.

I join the minister in issuing a challenge to Canadian leaders in all fields, women and men, to "Be her Champion".

* * *

● (1400)

[*Translation*]

YOUTH AND POLITICS

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on April 16, I visited the Gérald-Godin CEGEP. I was surprised to meet so many students who were interested in political issues, such as Bill C-51 or even the plans for the east-west pipeline.

[*English*]

On April 24, I met the students of John Abbott College. The Leader of the Official Opposition was visiting the college as he accepted the invitation from the student union.

We thank SUJAC for organizing this political discussion and for facilitating this meeting between students and politicians. This visit reminded me that contrary to what we often hear, youth are not only interested in politics and social issues, but they are also engaged and want to take concrete action to incite change.

[*Translation*]

When Conservative ministers claim to know what is good for young people as they cut future pension programs, or turn a blind eye to problems and say it is up to future generations to handle them, then I turn to the students at the Gérald-Godin and John Abbott CEGEPs and I have hope that things will change in this Parliament.

This also suggests to me that the NDP is right to get young people elected and give them important files and important responsibilities.

* * *

[*English*]

PRINCE EDWARD—HASTINGS

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what a family. Today, I wish to pay tribute to the Crawfords, a prolific Canadian hockey family from my riding of Prince Edward—Hastings.

Floyd Crawford is one of Belleville's most legendary hockey heroes. He was part of the Belleville McFarlands team that won gold while representing Canada at the World Hockey Championships in 1959. Three of their children, Bobby, Marc and Lou, went on to play in the National Hockey League.

The patriarch, Floyd is an Allan Cup and world champion. Marc Crawford, after an NHL career as a player, became a coach and led the Colorado Avalanche to a Stanley Cup win in 1996. Bobby had a playing career with the Hartford Whalers and Lou, after a brief NHL career, also became a coach and later stood behind the bench for the Belleville Bulls. I am told the Crawford name is on more hockey championship trophies than any other name. All together, the family of nine successful, competitive children has left an incredible stamp not only on the hockey world and Belleville but as tremendous ambassadors for Canada.

They are family, they are community and they are country. We thank Floyd, Pauline and the entire Crawford family.

* * *

JONATHAN CROMBIE

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Trinity—Spadina, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to remember Jonathan Crombie, known to many as the actor who played Gilbert Blythe on the acclaimed TV series *Anne of Green Gables*.

Jonathan Crombie also performed at the Stratford Festival and on Broadway. Jonathan Crombie is the son of the former cabinet minister and member of Parliament David Crombie, who was also mayor of Toronto.

My father served on council at the same time. I first met Jonathan during a royal visit to Toronto, with the children of all the city councillors looking out over the square as the councillors greeted the Queen; all of us except for one. Jonathan was at play in the outer office drawing some lost the most appallingly mischievous pictures I have ever seen. Each one funnier than the last. Each picture pinned to the wall of an unsuspecting staff member when they returned from the square.

The Queen may have been visiting, but Jonathan took centre stage. His talent, charm and wit made him a successful actor, and those are the characteristics that his family now misses. Jonathan passed away in New York City this month, and while his acting lives on through TV and film appearances, through the gift of life Jonathan also now lives on in the lives of others.

To his family our condolences and for his gifts to us all, we are truly thankful and remember him well.

* * *

2015 ESTEVAN BRUINS SPORTSMAN DINNER

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize four of my constituents who were presented with prestigious awards at the 2015 Estevan Bruins Sportsman's Dinner on April 16, 2015.

The Sportsman Dinner is an annual fundraiser organized by the Estevan Bruins hockey team and is the largest fundraiser for the team.

Anthony Melle, a championship golfer, and Auriel Bill, an accomplished water polo player, received the Boston Pizza Estevan's District Male and Female Athlete of the Year awards. Jace Carlisle took home the Kim Anderson Award for the top junior official, while Chad Chapman received the Estevan Kinsman Club Volunteer Coach of the Year Award for his coaching in female hockey.

As member of Parliament for Souris—Moose Mountain, I would like to congratulate all award recipients, as well as the volunteers and the many who came together to make this great event happen.

* * *

● (1405)

[*Translation*]

ÉLOÏSE CHARET AND ANNA CHARET

Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on Saturday, April 18, I attended Cambodian New Year celebrations at Thammikaram Pagoda in Rivière-des-Prairies.

While I was there, I met two men who talked at length about how as orphans during the Cambodian and Vietnamese wars they were saved from certain death by two wonderful sisters who brought them to Canada.

The heroines are Éloïse and Anna Charet, who were just 22 and 20 at the time. They risked their lives to save 55 infants and children. Forty years have passed since their acts of heroism, and all of us must honour these women on behalf of Cambodian and Vietnamese communities and all those who believe that humanitarian aid is a gift of self that sometimes is given at the risk of one's own life.

Thank you again Éloïse and Anna Charet for your heroism and your love. Today, these children are your children as well.

* * *

[*English*]

UNIVERSAL CHILD CARE BENEFIT

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as Canadians know, our Conservative government recently announced expansion of and enhancements to the very popular universal child care benefit.

This benefit used to apply only to children under six and provided $100 per month per child. Now, Canadian families with children under six will receive $160 per month per child and Canadian families with children between the ages of 6 and 17 will now receive $60 per month per child. This amounts to $1,920 per year for each child under 6 and $720 per year for each child between 6 and 17.

However, there are 200,000 eligible families in Canada who have not applied, including in my city of Edmonton 9,834 families representing 16,617 children. May 1, 2015 is the deadline to apply for these benefits in order to begin receiving them in July 2015.

Please visit esdc.gc.ca and click on the “Enhanced Universal Child Care Benefit - Apply now” feature to begin the application process.

This is how we are helping the best child care providers, mom and dad, raise their kids their way.

ARMENIA

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week I was privileged to travel to Yerevan to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Armenian genocide.

While in Armenia, I had the opportunity to speak at the global forum, "Against the Crime of Genocide", attend the canonization ceremony of the victims of the genocide, and place flowers at the memorial.

Although a century has passed, the horror of the Armenian genocide remains fresh in our minds and we continue to give voice to those silenced by this tragedy.

Many of today's Armenian Canadians trace their roots back to the survivors of the events of 1915 who, at a time of crisis, sought the opportunity to build a new life for themselves and for their families here in Canada. The Armenian Canadian community has made and continues to make a rich and vibrant contribution to Canada's multicultural society.

As chair of the Canada-Armenia Friendship Group and on behalf of all members of this House, we will continue to remember the events of 1915 and work together to safeguard human rights and dignity for all.

* * *

THE BUDGET

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when the finance minister delivered his budget, his goal was never to provide fiscal accountability; rather, it was to launch an election campaign that would buy votes with small, targeted tax breaks to the Conservative voting base, paid for with money from the rest of us. Fortunately, Canadians are not so easily duped.

Economists immediately pointed out that Canadians with higher incomes would be the big winners in this budget. Social justice activists noted that poverty was not even mentioned; neither was climate change. Once again, the EI fund was raided to pay for Conservative election promises rather than to help laid-off workers.

Others pointed out that this was a balanced budget built on sand, created with finance department pixie dust. It was one of the riskiest budgets in recent memory.

Even the finance minister acknowledged that his spending was not sustainable, but he simply shrugged it off by saying he would leave that to the Prime Minister's granddaughter to solve. I was shocked. I do not want my granddaughter to be responsible for picking up the mess that the Conservatives are intentionally leaving behind. Stella deserves better, and Canadians deserve better. This October, they will get better by electing an NDP government.

* * *

LIBERATION OF THE NETHERLANDS CEREMONIES

Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to my constituent, veteran Art Boon, who stormed the beaches of Normandy with allied forces on D-Day in 1944, and went on to help liberate the Netherlands from Nazi occupation.

Art has been officially invited by the Government of the Netherlands to attend commemorative ceremonies in Europe to mark the 70th anniversary of the liberation. Art wants to accept this honour and have his son, Rick, a teacher, with him at his side as he receives a hero's welcome in the Netherlands, but the Avon Maitland District School Board is refusing to allow Rick Boon unpaid leave to attend.

This is a travesty. Our government strongly condemns this decision and calls on the Avon Maitland District School Board to allow Rick Boon to travel with his father to be honoured.

This is about respect for veterans and their families. Our Conservative government stands firmly behind the Boon family.

* * *

● (1410)

[*Translation*]

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION IN LASALLE—ÉMARD

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last Friday I attended the Écocitoyenneté et biodiversité conference organized by the Sud-Ouest éco-quartier.

Also attending the conference were Les amis du parc Angrignon and Les amis du parc Saint-Paul. I then visited the photo exhibit put on by the Association des amis du parc des Rapides, in partnership with Héritage Laurentien, at the Centre intégré de mécanique, de métallurgie et d'électricité, a school-factory in LaSalle.

On Saturday, 20 or so volunteers braved the cold to participate in a spring cleanup, which I hosted with the Sud-Ouest éco-quartier and neighbourhood. We gathered more than 8 cubic metres of garbage.

All of these initiatives show that the people of LaSalle—Émard are committed, as am I, to protecting the environment and to living in a greener Canada.

* * *

[*English*]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with respect to crime and violence, I am proud to be part of a Conservative government that is taking strong action to keep British Columbians safe. We have passed tough new laws to clean up our streets, and we have put criminal gang members behind bars where they belong. We have passed over 30 new tough on crime measures, including new prison sentences for drive-by shootings. Shockingly, the Liberals and the NDP voted against these common-sense measures.

We have also made significant investments in the RCMP to ensure there are enough front-line police officers in our communities. Contrast this with the previous Liberal government, which actually closed down the RCMP training depot because it did not want to pay for new recruits, which was absolutely disgraceful.

People in my riding know that only this Conservative government led by this Prime Minister can be trusted to keep Canadians safe.

* * *

NEPAL EARTHQUAKE

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are shocked and saddened by the magnitude of devastation caused by the earthquake that hit Nepal and surrounding areas. Early reports indicated that the death toll is very high and survivors continue to be trapped in the rubble. I am pleased to see that Canada has sent our specialized military disaster assistance response team, DART, to Nepal, along with sorely needed supplies. I note that British Columbia has also sent emergency responder teams to the area. I ask the government to commit to provide rebuilding assistance once the search and rescue mission has concluded.

It is at times like this that all Canadians can see the benefit of our Canadian Armed Forces having the ability and capacity to respond in a timely fashion and come to the aid of those who need it most.

I believe I speak for all Canadians as we extend our deepest sympathy to those who have lost someone in this tragedy. We offer our hope that Canada's contribution to this relief effort will result in saving many lives.

* * *

[*Translation*]

THE HONOURABLE PIERRE CLAUDE NOLIN

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with a great deal of emotion that I rise to pay tribute to the hon. Pierre Claude Nolin and offer my condolences to his loved ones and to all those who had the privilege of being his friends and colleagues.

Our Canadian federation has lost a very wise man with a knowledge and understanding of life that allowed him to hold one of the most prestigious positions, that of Speaker of the Senate.

The hon. Pierre Claude Nolin was a man of integrity and honesty. He won many people over with his presence and his convictions.

For me, this exceptional man's qualities are those that every Canadian parliamentarian hopes to leave as a legacy to our great country. Some of those qualities include his unwavering courage, his candour and his genuineness.

The contribution that the hon. Pierre Claude Nolin made cannot be summarized in just one minute.

I extend my condolences to his wife, Camille, to his children, Simon, Louis and Virginie, and to his family and loved ones.

We will honour his memory well and we will remember him for a long time.

* * *

● (1415)

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals moved a motion condemning the Conservatives' use of public funds for partisan advertising. The Liberals say that, and I quote, “this is an affront to taxpayers who work hard and expect that the government will treat their money with respect”.

Somebody pinch me; I must be dreaming. When the Liberals try to teach the Conservatives a lesson and claim to stand up for taxpayers, that is a bit like putting Colonel Sanders in charge of the hen house.

Have the Liberals already forgotten the sponsorship scandal? When it comes to making taxpayers pay for partisan advertising, the Liberals could certainly teach the Conservatives a thing or two.

Einstein defined insanity as doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.

Luckily, though, Canadians and Quebeckers are not insane, and in October, when they vote for an NDP government, they will finally get different results.

* * *

[*English*]

THE BUDGET

Ms. Roxanne James (Scarborough Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government makes no apologies for ensuring that middle-class Canadians are aware of the measures that put more money back into their pockets. For example, we want Canadians to know about the new family tax cut and enhanced universal child care benefit, which will benefit 100% of families with kids. The vast majority of these benefits will go to low-income and middle-income families.

However, the Liberals and the NDP do not want Canadians to know about these benefits. Why? Because they want high taxes on middle-class families, high taxes on middle-class seniors and high taxes on middle-class consumers. That is their plan for the middle class. In contrast, our government's plan is all about reducing taxes for the middle class and for all Canadians.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*Translation*]

NEPAL

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, our thoughts go out to all those affected by the terrible earthquake that struck Nepal on the weekend.

As the international community comes together to provide humanitarian aid, Canada has a very important role to play.

Is the government prepared to match the donations that Canadians make to various organizations on the ground, as it has done for other disasters?

[*English*]

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of International Development and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, our thoughts and prayers are with those affected by the disaster.

I was pleased to announce today that there would be a matching fund. We stepped up very fast in this situation with an initial $5 million in humanitarian aid. Then today I am officially announcing that there will be a matching fund.

Canadians should be proud of that. They are generous and they will be able to participate with the government to ensure we help the Nepalis to recover.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the death toll of this weekend's devastating earthquake in Nepal continues to rise, our hearts go out to all those affected.

Could the government give us a further update on the relief that Canada has offered so far and on the assistance that is being provided to Canadians who are caught in this disaster?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of International Development and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I just mentioned, we had an initial response with $5 million announced last weekend in humanitarian aid. This contribution will help to provide safe drinking water and food to those in need, and provide medical supplies and shelter.

On top of that, I just announced that now we established a matching fund. After that, we will continue to monitor and take action necessary to assist in this crisis.

We will deploy soon the emergency stockpile from our storage facilities. We are monitoring the situation to ensure that—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Halifax.

* * *

[*Translation*]

THE BUDGET

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in his latest budget, the Minister of Finance decided to send the bill for his regressive measures to our grandchildren. He is not dealing with the huge economic, social and ecological debt that the Conservative government is leaving to future generations.

Why did the minister table a budget that clearly benefits the wealthiest Canadians instead of introducing measures to help middle-class families?

● (1420)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously the NPD believes that people earning less than $60,000 a year are too rich. Almost two-thirds of individuals who maxed out their tax-free savings account contribution earn less than $60,000 a year. We are allowing them to save more without having to pay tax on the interest.

The New Democrats want to raise these people's taxes. We will not let them do that.

* * *

[*English*]

TAXATION

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians will be paying for the Conservative handouts to the wealthy for generations to come. Adding insult to injury, the Conservatives will actually spend $13.5 million of our money for ads on their bad ideas.

Today the PBO confirmed that Conservatives would give billions to the wealthy, while leaving middle-class Canadians falling further and further behind. These latest Conservative handouts will cost tens of billions of dollars this year, and the doubling of the TFSA will give the wealthiest 20% twice as much as all other Canadians combined.

With so many families struggling to find affordable child care and looking for work, why are the Conservatives so fixated on helping out the wealthy?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the New Democrats think that people who earn less than $60,000 a year are wealthy. That is what they are suggesting.

The people who will benefit from the increased contribution limit of the tax-free savings account are those who have already maxed it out. Two-thirds of them earn less than $60,000 a year. Maybe they had a small inheritance from a deceased family member. Maybe they are required to take the money out of their RRSP or RRIF and are therefore looking for a place to shelter it from the hands of government.

The only way they will be able to do that is by re-electing a Conservative government. The NDP would tax that money away.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' finance minister has already admitted that our grandkids will pay for his handouts to the wealthy.

The Conservative proposal to double the TFSA limit is a scheme that overwhelmingly rewards the wealthy. It is kind of like some perverse Robin Hood tax going on. According to the PBO, the wealthiest Canadians will get almost ten times more than the entire middle class combined. That leaves middle-class families working harder than ever to make ends meet, while having to pay for this latest Conservative handout.

Why are Conservatives spending $13.5 million advertising handouts for the wealthy, yet are refusing to invest even one single dollar in creating child care spaces for everyone else?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me quote from the Department of Finance of Canada, "about 60 per cent of the individuals contributing the maximum amount to their TFSAs had incomes of less than $60,000 a year in 2013". That is on page 235.

The NDP members want to raise taxes on people earning less than $60,000 a year. That is exactly the wrong thing to do for our families. They want to take away the universal child care benefit and raise taxes on families. We will not let them do that.

* * *

[*Translation*]

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is telling Canadians to be frugal while he is wasting over $750 million on ineffective partisan advertising. He would rather spend hundreds of millions of dollars in taxpayers' money on self-promotion than on helping the middle class, creating jobs and growing the economy.

Will the Prime Minister commit today to put an end to this wastefulness and submit all advertising to a third party review process before it is made public?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are informing families of the tax cuts and enhanced benefits we are offering them. Let us start with the tax cuts. We are implementing tax cuts for families that will allow couples to split their incomes and reduce their taxes by $2,000 a year. We are also increasing the universal child care benefit to $2,000 for every child under 6 and $720 for every child between 6 and 17.

The Liberals do not want families to know that these benefits exist because they want to take that money away and raise taxes.

● (1425)

[*English*]

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the Liberals do not want is $29 million on 9,800 billboards, neither do Canadians.

The Prime Minister cynically preaches restraint, yet he spent more than $750 million on ineffective and wasteful partisan advertising. He would rather spend hundreds of millions of dollars on self-promoting advertising instead of helping the middle class, creating jobs and growth our economy.

Here is his opportunity. Will he commit today to ending this wasteful abuse of tax dollars and submit all advertising to a third party review process for vetting ahead of their release?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, now that the Prime Minister has balanced the government's budget he can help families balance their budgets. He brought in the family tax cut, which will allow parents to split their income to save up to $2,000 a year. He is increasing the universal child care benefit to $2,000 for kids under 6 and $720 for kids 6 through 17.

Unfortunately, 200,000 families have not signed up for that enhanced universal child care benefit. They have until the deadline of Friday to sign up to get that July lump sum payment. The Liberals do not want those parents to get any of that money. In fact, the Liberals would take it all away. That is why they are against us informing families that those benefits exist.

THE BUDGET

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the weekend, the Minister of Finance admitted that he had no idea how many jobs his budget would create. When challenged that the TFSA change would cost billions of dollars and create no new jobs, the finance minister said that this was a problem that the Prime Minister's granddaughter could worry about.

Well, Canadians are worried about jobs right now. Where is the minister's plan for jobs and growth for the middle class and those working so very hard to join it?

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows that the strong leadership of our Conservative government has steered Canada out of the global economic recession and has created 1.2 million net new jobs. The budget is full of new measures to create more new jobs. They are measures like reducing the small business tax rate, providing support to provinces to harmonize apprenticeship training, promoting blue seal certification and fostering training in response to the needs of employers.

We know the Liberals want high taxes on the middle class. We know that would kill jobs and set working families back. Canadians know they are better off with our Conservative government.

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, evidence from the trial of former Conservative senator Mike Duffy has given rise to new questions about the Prime Minister's Office and its involvement in unreported lobbying and communications between Mike Duffy and Enbridge executives.

Why did the Prime Minister ask Mike Duffy to send him a note on "Enbridge Line 9 problems" on February 17, 2012? What was contained in the note Mr. Duffy sent to the Prime Minister's chief of staff and Enbridge executives on February 20 of that year?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I completely reject the premise of the question and I will not comment on matters that are in front of the court.

The member could help me and Canadians recover the $2.7 million that the NDP owes them for illegal offices. That is $2.7 million that 68 members of the NDP caucus owe the Canadian taxpayers and I actually have not gone into the $1.1 million it owes for illegal advertising as well. Perhaps in a supplementary we could talk about that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ève Péclet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we now know that former senator Mike Duffy was not appointed to the Senate just to introduce or amend bills. His discussions with the Prime Minister's entourage and the oil companies were part of his duties. His diary indicates that on April 4, 2012, he spoke directly to the Prime Minister about Enbridge projects.

Can the Prime Minister confirm that he indeed had this discussion with Mike Duffy in April 2012?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I reject the premise of that question, but there is another really important question.

There are 68 NDP members who used House resources in violation of the rules of this place. The member who asked this question used over $25,000 in violation of the rules of the House. I hope that she will do the right thing and pay taxpayers back the more than $25,000 she owes them.

* * *

● (1430)

THE BUDGET

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a matter of choice: the Conservatives chose not to help families save for retirement and not to help the unemployed find work. The Minister of Finance himself does not know how many jobs his budget is going to create.

Why did the Conservatives not invest in measures that will create jobs for the middle class, instead of favouring the wealthy?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are creating jobs by lowering taxes for small and medium-sized businesses.

This will allow them to hire more workers. At the same time, our program is training over 500,000 apprentices. All of these measures help create jobs, especially for our young people. The New Democrats want to raise taxes for small and medium-sized businesses to pay for the high cost of bureaucracy. We will not let them do that.

[*English*]

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, rather than skipping over the facts, the Minister of Finance is sure his budget will leave an economic burden on future generations, while rewarding the wealthiest with billions in new handouts, but he has no idea whether it will create any jobs.

There are 1.3 million Canadians looking for work. They were looking for some help to find a good job so they could support their families and save for their retirement, but the Conservatives left them hanging. Why is giving billions to the wealthy a higher priority than creating good jobs for Canadians?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our program for jobs is tax cuts, training and trade.

On tax cuts, we are reducing the small business tax rate from 11% to 9%. That will free up more money for small business owners to hire people in their community.

On training, we have given out 500,000 apprenticeship grants that prepares electricians, plumbers, carpenters and others for the high-paying, in-demand jobs of the future.

Free trade with Europe will create 80,000 net new jobs.

The NDP opposes all three of those steps.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the fact is that the finance minister has no idea how many jobs his budget will create in Canada, but we do know that the Conservatives are helping to create jobs in Mexico.

Export Development Canada announced it would loan Volkswagen $526 million without any guarantee of Canadian jobs. The Conservatives have failed the auto sector and have lost more than 400,000 good manufacturing jobs. How can they possibly justify investing in jobs in Mexico, while 1.3 million Canadian are out of work?

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a result of our government's actions since we were first elected, Canada has the strongest job creation record in the entire G7. Economic action plan 2015 will help create even more jobs, reducing the small business tax rate, ensuring that training reflects labour market needs, investing in federal infrastructure. We know that with all of these measures, the NDP and the Liberal Party would only reverse the measures that would create jobs. They would increase tax rates. They would put a higher tax on middle-class Canadians. We will not let that happen.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would remind the House that the manufacturing sector has lost 400,000 jobs because of the Conservatives. Last fall, the Conservatives said it would be too expensive to help Ford create 1,000 jobs in Windsor, and yet they somehow found $525 million to help Volkswagen create jobs in Mexico.

Why does the Conservative budget contain millions of dollars to move jobs to Mexico and nothing to create jobs for the middle class here in Canada?

[*English*]

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. This agreement with VW would create jobs and opportunities for Canadian manufacturers by providing them with access to supply chains of a large multinational company. It is already doing lots of business in Canada selling to domestic auto manufacturers. We want to open the world to our auto product manufacturers.

On this side of the House, we believe in supporting our Canadian manufacturers, opening up opportunities all around the world for trade, for investment. That is what our government is getting done.

● (1435)

[*Translation*]

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last fall, 11,000 Canadians who were refused disability benefits by the government were still waiting to go before the Social Security Tribunal of Canada. The Minister of Employment boasted about setting up a top-notch team to eliminate the backlog by this summer. Since December, these so-called reinforcements have only processed the claims of 428 Canadians.

Why do the Conservatives bend over backwards to please the wealthy while breaking the promises they make to middle-class families?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my predecessor put in place a plan to task government officials with clearing up the backlog of people waiting for benefits. We are making progress. Public servants are trying to deal with files even before they go before the tribunal. We will continue to move forward with this plan in order to make decisions more quickly for people in need.

[*English*]

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, thousands of Canadians living with disabilities, some of them mentally ill, have been waiting years without income for a hearing at the Social Security Tribunal. The Conservatives promised to clean up the mess and to resolve these cases quickly, but now we learn that was just another broken Conservative promise. Only a fraction of them have received a settlement, while the rest are still waiting.

These Canadians need help now. How much longer will the most vulnerable Canadians have to wait for Conservatives to clean up their mess?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my predecessor put in place a plan to deal with this backlog. Officials within the employment and social development department are reviewing the cases on the waiting list in order to find settlements for them so that they do not even need to go before the tribunal. That will reduce the backlog, and we continue to be on track to having the backlog eliminated by the end of summer.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are talking about people who are desperate. They have serious health issues; some of them are depressed and suicidal. These problems are made worse by the lack of income, and yet there have been nothing but delays and broken promises from the government. Vulnerable Canadians are being made to pay the price for Conservative incompetence. They deserve better.

Will the Conservatives finally clean up the mess they made and give these Canadians fair and speedy hearings?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Our hope, Mr. Speaker, is to resolve many of these cases before they even have to go to a hearing. That is why doctors and other disability experts within my department are reviewing these cases and offering settlements to disabled people in order to resolve the matters and get rid of the backlog before the end of summer.

* * *

THE BUDGET

Ms. Chrystia Freeland (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Michael Kinsley defined a gaffe as the moment when a politician accidentally tells the truth. That is what happened when our usually invisible Minister of Finance said that the high cost of doubling the TFSA limit will be a problem for the Prime Minister's granddaughter. His remark revealed the Conservative government's profoundly cynical and short-term approach to economic policy, and its utter lack of a long-term vision for Canada.

Why are the Conservatives building up billions of dollars of debt for all of our grandchildren with this $10,000 tax break for the already wealthy, and where is their plan for long-term growth and jobs?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, maybe the member could explain something about gaffes. She is the one who said amen to higher taxes. Her leader said that budgets balance themselves. On the day of the budget, her leader said that he would raise taxes on small businesses, the very same day as our Prime Minister was cutting them.

On this side of the House, we are more concerned with ensuring that taxpayers have money in their pockets. They are worried about whether government bureaucracies and politicians will have enough money 40 years from now. We are cutting taxes today.

● (1440)

Ms. Chrystia Freeland (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to say that we are worried about long-term solvency for the Government of Canada, and we are worried about jobs and growth now.

According to Carleton University economist Jennifer Robson, the Conservative income splitting plan "will only reach, at most, 12.9% of all Canadian households and a maximum of one third of families with children".

Two-thirds of families with children will not save even one dollar from these so-called family tax cuts. When will the Conservatives start giving help to those who need it rather than to those who do not?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative family tax cut and benefits will help 100% of families. It will allow income splitting for couples to save up to $2,000 a year, and it will increase the universal child care benefit to $2,000 a year for kids under six and $720 for kids six through 17.

The Liberals are already admitting that they would raise taxes on millions of Canadian families and take away the universal child care benefit. We will not let them do that.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Trinity—Spadina, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance says that he has no idea how many jobs his budget will create. That is understandable because most of the country has no idea why he is the finance minister. I am wondering even if he is the finance minister.

The reason that he has no real job numbers is because the budget has no real numbers. For example, none of the so-called new infrastructure money will even arrive this year, which means no new bridges, no new water plants, no new transit, no new housing. None of them will get built, thanks to the minister's inaction.

Why will the minister not fight unemployment? Why will he not help vulnerable Canadians? Why will he not invest in cities now?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Infrastructure, Communities and Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me quote Mayor John Tory: "a major step forward" for Toronto and for the country.

It is good news for Toronto and good news for cities across Canada. The federal government committed to establishing a dedicated fund to invest in public transportation. Very well done.

* * *

[*Translation*]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are failing another generation of aboriginal children with their latest budget.

Every child in Canada, regardless of where they live or where they come from, deserves a high-quality education. However, instead of being part of the solution, the Conservatives would rather be part of the problem, by blaming aboriginal communities for their own failure with Bill C-33.

Why does the Prime Minister refuse to honour his pledge to invest $1.9 billion to address the underfunding of aboriginal education?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government believes that first nations students, like all other Canadians, deserve access to a high-quality education system.

That is why our government has invested over $10 billion since 2006 in elementary and secondary school education for more than 117,000 first nations students living on reserve. Last week, in the latest budget, we announced a $200 million investment to improve the education system, and we will continue in the same vein.

[*English*]

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is not just in first nations education where Conservatives have dropped the ball. When it comes to health services, it is as if indigenous peoples are actually living in a different country than Canada.

Despite first nations and Inuit having higher rates of chronic disease and infant mortality, the current government has cut basic services and made them harder to access. The Conservatives' latest budget offered next to nothing on aboriginal health.

Why has the Conservative government abandoned its responsibility toward indigenous peoples health care?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to the health and safety of all Canadians, including our aboriginal communities. We provide over $2.5 billion toward programs and services with aboriginal health. This includes 24/7 access to nursing services in 80 remote communities, home and community care, and $34.5 million to improve the quality of health services in aboriginal communities. Those are just a few of some very important measures that we are doing in terms of aboriginal health.

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, to add insult to injury, the minister would like first nations to believe that he is actually doing them a favour by cutting services. He is targeting the poorest of the poor in this country by cutting welfare rates for New Brunswick's first nations.

Does the minister really believe that the only reason for keeping first nations on welfare is their "passiveness", or perhaps it has something to do with high unemployment rates in the region?

● (1445)

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government believes that income assistance in first nations communities all across Canada should be consistent with provincial rates. We have been working with Atlantic first nations on aligning government assistance program policies with the national policy.

As the hon. member very well knows, this is before the courts, and I will not comment further.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is simply disgraceful, but nobody is surprised to hear that kind of thing from the Conservatives.

According to Chief George Ginnish, the anticipated cuts mean that a family of four will receive about $908 per month, which is well below the poverty line, yet the minister would have us believe it is for their own good.

Does the minister really think that New Brunswick first nations receive welfare because they are too passive?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my answer will be the same.

We are implementing the national directive that welfare rates for first nations members in the provinces should be comparable to those provided in the given province. As the member is well aware, this matter is before the courts, so I will not comment further.

* * *

[*English*]

NEPAL

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are ready to respond to the disastrous earthquake that struck Nepal and northern India this weekend. The loss of life and the ensuing humanitarian crisis are unimaginable. I know that all members of this House will extend their deepest sympathies to all those affected.

Canada is always at the forefront when it comes to aiding those in need. Can the Minister of Foreign Affairs please update the House on the actions that our government is taking to respond to this natural disaster?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all Canadians, I extend our deepest sympathies and heartfelt condolences to the people affected by the earthquake in Nepal and northern India.

Canada is responding, as we always do. We have deployed the DART assessment team. A C-17 Globemaster is bringing supplies and equipment to the region; and, as we heard from my colleague, we have also announced $5 million in assistance and deployed additional consular staff to assist Canadians. We will continue to work with our international partners and stand ready to take all necessary action to help those in need.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is a new member of the growing coalition of Canadians telling Conservatives and Liberals not to pass Bill C-51. That is the high-tech business community. This is an absolutely critical sector of our economy, and now high-tech entrepreneurs and CEOs say this dangerously vague legislation would make it harder to attract and grow businesses like theirs in Canada.

After so many concerns from so many people, how can the Minister of Public Safety still claim that passing Bill C-51 is a good idea?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member seems to forget that Canada has been targeted by the international jihadi movement, that on October 20 there was a terrorist attack in Quebec, and there was a terrorist attack here on October 22. The least that Canadians are expecting from their politicians is to take action. That is what this government is doing.

That is why is I am so proud of being a Conservative member. Conservatives are not only investing in our police forces to keep Canadians safe but are also giving them the tools. Canadians can count on us to keep on doing so.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Christianne Boudreau, whose son died in Syria and who is now trying to prevent the radicalization of young people, believes that Bill C-51 will only make matters worse.

Business leaders in the high-tech industry also fear the disastrous consequences of this bill. Bill C-51 undermines Canada's global reputation as an open, tolerant business environment.

Why, then, is the minister going ahead with a bill that nobody wants?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the New Democrats have opposed every measure our government has introduced to combat terrorism. They even opposed our counterterrorism strategy.

Raheel Raza, president of the Council for Muslims Facing Tomorrow, has said that this legislation is important in the fight against radicalization.

We need tools to track terrorists who travel abroad, and that is what Bill C-51 does.

I hope the NDP will finally wake up and support this bill.

* * *

● (1450)

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada's chairmanship of the Arctic Council will certainly not be fondly remembered. That is unfortunate because the Conservatives lost another opportunity to show leadership on the world stage and on environmental issues.

For his part, the U.S. Secretary of State, who will be the chair for two years, did not waste any time and stated that the fight against climate change is his priority.

Will the minister actively support the U.S. agenda?

[*English*]

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of the Environment, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under Canada's leadership, we held a mental wellness symposium, the first of its kind, and we also promoted aboriginal traditional knowledge and the traditional way of life. We created an action plan to prevent marine oil pollution in the Arctic. We also developed a framework to fight and reduce climate pollutants, like black carbon and methane.

Under Canada's leadership, we also established the Arctic Economic Council, which is promoting business opportunities, trade, and investment in the north.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Northwest Territories, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, Canada's out-of-step business agenda in the Arctic Council was an international embarrassment. The very moment the United States took over the council chairmanship, the agenda shifted, rightly, back to the urgent issue of climate change. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said, "This is not a future challenge. This is happening right now."

Why did the government waste a critical opportunity to work with the Arctic nations to address climate change for the whole two years of its chairmanship?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of the Environment, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under Canada's chairmanship, we consulted with northerners from Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut to establish the priorities under our chairmanship for two years.

Clearly, the member does not understand how the Arctic Council functions. It is a consensus-based organization. We built consensus across the Arctic nations to build Canada's agenda.

The member had two years to ask a question about the Arctic in the House and failed to do so.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with regard to the environment, the Prime Minister said that "this government's position has been...that we want to see...regulations on a continental basis".

However, when President Obama announced the new U.S. target, well, the Prime Minister bailed, saying that Canada would announce its targets separately. Yes, but when? Will it be anytime soon?

There is no mention of climate change in a 600-page budget.

Does the Prime Minister really want to bequeath these problems to our grandchildren?

[*English*]

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of the Environment, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have always said that to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, all major emitters must be on board. We have aligned regulations with the United States in several areas, and we are working closely on developing clean energy. Canada has one of the cleanest electricity supplies, with 80% of our energy coming from sources that emit no greenhouse gas emissions. The United States has only 30%.

At home, our government is reducing emissions while growing the economy, without a job-killing carbon tax.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for years the Prime Minister has maintained the fiction that Canada would be in lockstep with the U.S. GHG targets.

When President Obama announced his country's latest goal, the Prime Minister bailed and said that Canada would announce its own targets. Apparently these targets will be announced without a plan, without talking to the premiers, and without pricing carbon.

Why embarrass Canada again at the G7 and in the lead-up to Paris with fictional and delusional targets? Why even bother with the pretence? Why humiliate Canada internationally once again?

● (1455)

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of the Environment, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me just read a quote. The United States just took over the chairmanship, and let me tell the House what U.S. Secretary Kerry had to say about our actions related to reducing pollutants, like black carbon and methane, and other initiatives.

He thanked Canada for our work and said that he would continue to work with Canada on the work we started. He also said, "it has given all of us a strong platform on which to build".

That is a quote from Secretary Kerry, who has now taken over the Arctic Council chairmanship from Canada.

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GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada is supposed to be there to serve all Canadians, so why do we see Conservative Party candidates, like Tim Laidler, being promoted all over official government websites and social media feeds? He is there for a photo op with a foreign dignitary. He is standing there with the minister for an official policy announcement in Vancouver. He is even there with the minister on the Veterans Affairs website.

Why can the Conservatives not seem to understand that public resources are there to promote the public interest? Why is the Government of Canada promoting Conservative candidates?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is kind of rich coming from a member opposite, when 68 members of his own party illegally used resources of this House to fund an illegal office, a partisan NDP office, in Montreal.

It was 68 members, and that does not even include the 23 other members who actually illegally used resources to fund advertising, in the middle of a by-election campaign, for another $1 million.

Between the NDP and the Liberals, some $45 million of taxpayer money is outstanding. It would be nice if they paid it back.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Conservative ministers seem to be using events paid for out the public purse to boost the visibility of their party's candidates. We saw a Conservative candidate from British Columbia on hand to greet a foreign dignitary at the airport. The Minister of National Defence even played photographer. This same candidate attended official events with the Minister of State for Social Development and the Minister of Veterans Affairs.

Why is the government using public money to promote Conservative candidates?

[*English*]

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it really is unfortunate to see the NDP making a personal attack against a Canadian veteran.

Tim Laidler is still the president. They are attacking a Canadian citizen. He is still the president of the Veterans Transition Network. He has been recognized across this country for his work with veterans. He reaches out and supports Canadians who are veterans who are impacted by PTSD. He has won awards from the province of British Columbia for his great work. He continues to work with veterans.

Of course, New Democrats take every opportunity to take a potshot at this individual. He is a great Canadian doing great things for Canadian veterans.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week the Minister of Finance delivered our government's plan for trade, training, and tax cuts. While the opposition is focused on raising taxes, the Conservative government is focused on giving more money back to hard-working Canadian families. I do not want a single Canadian family to miss out on these cuts and benefits.

Would the Minister of State for Social Development please update this House and all Canadians on the important deadline that is coming up for Canadian families?

Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC): Mr. Speaker, all Canadians with children will benefit from our expanded universal child care benefit, but about 200,000 families in Canada need to register. There is a deadline coming up. That is this Friday.

If Canadians are wondering if they are going to receive that benefit, they can go to Canada.ca/taxsavings, or they can talk to a Conservative member of Parliament, because Conservatives want to help Canadians get their benefits, so 200,000 of them need to register by this coming Friday.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians believe and expect that when Parliament passes legislation or motions, the government will see to it that such laws are implemented. One such motion, carried by a strong majority in this place, was put forward by the member for Wascana calling for a national public safety officer compensation benefit for first responders.

Why has the government failed first responders by not providing funding in the budget for the public safety compensation benefit, as duly passed by this House with a strong majority?

● (1500)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government just invested $200 million to help communities cope with disasters, and we will continue to work with the provinces.

We are working with the provinces, but we also respect their areas of jurisdiction, unlike the Liberals with their centralizing vision. We will continue in this direction and ensure that we provide support for first responders and communities when a disaster occurs.

* * *

[*English*]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Duchess of Kent Legion is an important part of my community for cadets, wounded and homeless warriors, seniors, and veterans. However, it has faced tough times, and earlier this month, the members sold the building. The Legion is proposing that the officers' mess at Wolseley Barracks, which is slated for demolition, be sold to the Duchess so that it can be converted into a new home for the Legion.

Will the Minister of National Defence consider the Legion's proposal so that it can continue to provide support and services for veterans in London?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of National Defence and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will take the member's intervention under advisement.

Of course, the Canadian Armed Forces only maintains those facilities that serve a valuable purpose. I understand that this facility is over 60 years old and is not providing value for money for the Canadian Armed Forces, but I will review the matter.

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HEALTH

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is deeply disturbing that the City of Vancouver is looking to legitimize the illegal marijuana drug trade. This irresponsible scheme to sell marijuana in stores just like alcohol and cigarettes can have only one effect: increasing marijuana use and addiction. That is exactly the plan the Liberal leader has been peddling for months.

Can the Minister of Labour, a practising physician, please update the House on our government's approach to actually discourage kids from smoking marijuana?

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch (Minister of Labour and Minister of Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country for his great work on the subject. As a practising pediatric surgeon, I say with confidence that marijuana is an illegal drug for a reason. It has serious and lasting health effects, particularly on children, including schizophrenia and psychosis.

Our government does not support making access to illegal drugs easier, and the Minister of Health has made this clear to the mayor of Vancouver.

Unlike the Liberal leader, who wants to make smoking marijuana a normal everyday activity and have marijuana available in stores, like alcohol and cigarettes, this Conservative government wants to stop children from smoking marijuana. Storefronts selling marijuana are illegal. Under our government, they will remain illegal, and we expect—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: The hon. member for Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour.

* * *

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the employment insurance program no longer meets the needs of Quebeckers and is having a negative impact on all of Quebec's regions. The latest federal budget does nothing for the development of our regions, nor does it offer anything to improve jobs there. The federal government would rather help itself to $8.2 billion over two years from the EI fund to finance the increased TFSA limit and income splitting instead of improving the lives of unemployed workers.

Is that the federal government's new social policy: stealing from the poor to give to the rich?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not true. The hon. member needs to get his facts straight. During the recession we had to subsidize the EI fund. The fund is now reimbursing taxpayers.

However, we will lower EI premiums by 21% in 2017. This will give small businesses access to more money to hire employees and will put more money in workers' pockets.

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NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, FD): Mr. Speaker, when Ottawa claims that the National Energy Board, which is reviewing the energy east pipeline, is a neutral agency, we have our doubts. The board refuses to get documents translated into French, and its lawyer declared before the courts that: "Pipeline projects are generally advantageous for Canadians and energy east is no exception."

People are already concerned about what might happen with the pipeline. Now they have to be wary of the board's bias in assessing the project.

Will the government put an end to this sham and amend the legislation in order to prevent the board from becoming the oil companies' puppet?

● (1505)

Hon. Greg Rickford (Minister of Natural Resources and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the National Energy Board has fulfilled its obligations under the Official Languages Act. All of the documents produced by the National Energy Board must be published in both official languages. Questions related to documents filed by the applicant should be directed to the project proponent.

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[*English*]

TAXATION

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, Thursday is tax filing day. While April 30 is always painful for Canadians who owe taxes, with more than 120 different federal tax credits, filing has become so complicated experts believe that filers are missing out on hundreds of dollars owing to them. Moreover, the Fraser Institute states that Canadians are spending $6 billion in tax compliance costs.

Rather than forcing Canadians to either hire accountants and tax lawyers or spend hours themselves searching for tax credits, why not simply reduce the tax rates for all Canadians?

Does the government not believe that a simplified tax code and broad-based tax relief is preferable to make-work projects for tax lawyers and accountants?

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member knows that our Conservative government has numerous steps to simplify the tax system, but more important, we have reduced taxes for the middle class. Shamefully, the opposition has voted against all those measures.

Our low-tax plan is putting $6,600 back into the pockets of the average family of four, but we know that the opposition wants to reduce that. It wants high taxes on the middle class, high taxes on middle-class families, high taxes on middle-class seniors, high taxes on middle-class consumers.

We are the government that will keep taxes low. Canadians know they are better off with this Conservative government.

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INDUSTRY

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the government on finally balancing a budget after seven unsuccessful attempts. However, budget 2015 still contains questionable industrial subsidies, such as the $100 million allocation to the automotive supplier innovation program.

When will the government learn that industrial subsidies, special treatment for some industries but not others, picking winners and losers, and corporate welfare do not constitute true conservative fiscal policy?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course, our government wants to have a robust industrial policy that will create jobs all across the country and we are working with provinces and we are working with the private sector to keep taxes low. We have a 13-point lower corporate tax rate than what is offered in the United States. We have a number of policies to keep us competitive and to keep us moving forward.

With regard to our support for the automotive sector, I sure liked the member for Edmonton—St. Albert when he voted for these things, but now that he is speaking against them in the Parliament of Canada just shows how far he has fallen from reasonable public policy.

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PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of His Excellency Ditmir Bushati, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Albania.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: I would also like to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of Mr. Sadakazu Tanigaki, President of the Japan-Canada Diet Friendship League.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

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BOARD OF INTERNAL ECONOMY

The Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that Mr. Julian, member for the electoral district of Burnaby—New Westminster, has been appointed member of the Board of Internal Economy, in place of Ms. Turmel, member for the electoral district of Hull—Aylmer, for the purposes and under the provisions of section 50 of the Parliament of Canada Act.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and for La Francophonie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to six petitions.

* * *

CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-671, An Act to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act (hate speech).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce a bill that would restore the anti-hate speech provisions of the Canadian Human Rights Act, along with appropriate safeguards.

In 2012, the Conservatives responded to valid concerns about section 13 hate speech provisions of the Human Rights Act by essentially throwing out the baby with the proverbial bathwater and repealing the section outright. I was one of many who argued at the time that the section should be refined, not repealed, so as to result in hate speech provisions, such as those I am proposing today.

For example, the bill would institute protections against frivolous suits and abuse of process, such as requiring the consent of the attorney general for a complaint to go forward and allowing also for the awarding of costs.

Freedom of expression is the lifeblood of democracy and the bill expressly protects it. However, as Justice Rothstein wrote in the Supreme Court's unanimous 2013 decision regarding laws against hate speech:

> The objective for which the limit is imposed, namely tackling causes of discriminatory activity to reduce the harmful effects and social costs of discrimination, is pressing and substantial.

Hate speech is not simply a matter of offending sensibilities or being politically correct, which is protected speech. It causes real and tangible harm, can assault the very values underlying free speech, can breach our international commitments and can assault the principle of equality. I thus invite all members to support this legislation.

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

* * *

● (1510)

UKRAINE

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move:

> That a take-note debate on the subject of the ongoing situation in Ukraine take place, pursuant to Standing Order 53.1, on Wednesday, April 29, 2015.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PETITIONS

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions. The first one is with regard to the current impaired driving laws which the petitioners say are too lenient. They request tougher laws and the implementation of new mandatory minimum sentences for those convicted of impaired driving causing death. They also request that the Criminal Code be amended to redefine the offence of impaired driving causing death as vehicular manslaughter.

SEX SELECTION

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition resulted from a documentary that said ultrasounds are being used in Canada to tell the sex of unborn children so that pregnancy can be terminated if the unborn child is a girl. The petitioners ask members of Parliament to condemn the discrimination against girls occurring through sex selective pregnancy termination.

STEWART-HYDER BORDER CROSSING

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from dozens and dozens of people across the northwest of B.C., and particularly from Stewart, B.C., who have recently seen the border between Stewart, B.C. and Hyder, Alaska closed for eight hours in every 24-hour period. They note in their petition that this is the only connection particularly for our American neighbours just to the outside of Stewart and that it is important for the mining and power industries, as well as the vital tourism sector that much of the community relies upon.

The petitioners find it offensive as there are no cost savings for the Government of Canada. In fact, now the American government has offered to make up the costs, if there are any. It has gone from the ridiculous to the sublime. The petitioners call for the border to be open for the full 24 hours, for us to be good neighbours and to support small and northern communities like Stewart, British Columbia.

GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I present a petition signed by hundreds of people from Guelph and elsewhere around Ontario bringing to our attention the possible negative health effects of GMOs, the negative impact on organic and non-genetically modified crops, the inability of farmers to save their own seed, and indeed, the concern about the absence of labelling of genetically modified food products.

They ask the government to put a moratorium on the further licensing and release of GMOs and particularly put a moratorium on the release of genetically modified alfalfa.

● (1515)

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition signed by about 150 people from my riding in the region of Waterloo. They are asking the government to adopt international aid policies that support small family farmers, especially women, and recognize their vital role in the struggle against hunger and poverty.

The petitioners are also asking the government to ensure that Canadian policies and programs are developed in consultation with small family farmers and protect the rights of small family farmers in the global south to preserve, use and freely exchange seeds.

[*Translation*]

CANADA POST

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to table this petition regarding the cuts at Canada Post. It is signed by hundreds of my constituents, who are opposed to Canada Post's plan to eliminate home mail delivery and the associated job losses. They are calling on the Government of Canada to reject Canada Post's plan and ensure that we can keep home mail delivery and protect those jobs.

[*English*]

KOMAGATA MARU

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am presenting a petition signed by many members of my constituency, particularly from the Sikh society gurdwara. They are asking the government to recognize that the Punjab assembly in India unanimously has passed a resolution calling on the Canadian Parliament to apologize for the *Komagata Maru* incident.

This incident was a dark moment in Canada's past, back in 1914, when 352 passengers aboard the steamship were denied entry into Canada based on discriminatory immigration policy.

The petitioners are asking that the Government of Canada provide a formal apology in Parliament with respect to the *Komagata Maru* incident in 1914.

[*Translation*]

AGRICULTURE

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am tabling three petitions from the constituents in my riding who are calling on the government to ensure that Canada's policies and programs are developed through a consultative process with small farmers and that they protect the rights of small family farmers in the global south to preserve, use and freely exchange seeds.

[*English*]

CBC/RADIO-CANADA

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Trinity—Spadina, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition signed by hundreds of members of my riding protesting the cuts to the CBC.

Not only is French and English programming being significantly impacted by these cuts, but in the riding I represent, hundreds of jobs are being lost and hundreds of families are being impacted.

The signatories to this petition ask the government to restore the funding, restore the independence of the CBC and make sure that our public broadcaster remains public.

41ST GENERAL ELECTION

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present two petitions today. The first petition is from residents of North Vancouver who are writing that this House should consider and take action on the attempt to defraud voters in the 2011 election. I think this becomes only more urgent as we approach the 2015 election.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from residents of British Columbia, particularly the Kootenay region, as well as from Thunder Bay, Ontario, asking this House to reject Bill C-51, the so-called anti-terrorism bill.

[*Translation*]

ANIMAL WELFARE

Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am rising today to present two petitions.

The first is signed by thousands of people from across Quebec who are calling on the government to recognize animals as sentient beings that can feel pain and to include provisions in the Criminal Code to better regulate animal cruelty and negligence and impose harsher sentences for such crimes.

CANADA POST

Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition was signed by hundreds of people in my riding who want the government to talk to Canada Post about ending reductions in postal services. People are angry because they know those cuts will result in job losses, which will lead to further service cuts. This has already started in my riding. People are angry because there will be mailboxes on their property that will reduce the value of their homes. They really want the government to listen to them and take steps to prevent these postal service cuts.

* * *

[*English*]

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and for La Francophonie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the following questions will be answered today: Nos. 1111 and 1112.

[*Text*]

Question No. 1111—**Mr. Scott Andrews**:

> With regard to the Department of Employment and Social Development and the 1.2 million net new jobs created in Canada since 2008, what information does the government possess as to the following: (*a*) in which economic sectors have these jobs been created; (*b*) in which areas of the country have these jobs been created; (*c*) how many of these jobs are full-time and how many are part-time; (*d*) how many of these jobs are permanent and how many are temporary; and (*e*) how many of these jobs are remunerated at minimum-wage?

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with regard to the 1.2 million net new jobs created in Canada since 2008, ESDC is not the proper channel for the level of details requested in the question and therefore is unable to provide an answer. This question would be best answered by the Department of Finance.

Question No. 1112—**Mr. Scott Andrews**:

> With regard to Canada Post and the reduction of services to communities in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL): (*a*) what communities in NL will be affected by reductions in postal service; (*b*) what type of reductions in service are being implemented; (*c*) how much money will Canada Post save by implementing these reductions in service; and (*d*) what is the timeline to implement these reductions in service?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on December 11, 2013, Canada Post announced its five-point action plan to better serve all customers and return the corporation to profitability.

The announcement followed broad engagement with Canadians to identify how their needs and expectations were changing. In 2014, Canada Post began implementing the plan, which will form the foundation of a new postal system designed to serve Canadians' evolving postal needs and help the corporation succeed in the digital age. The conversion to community mailboxes is the most visible part of the five-point action plan. All Canadian households that still receive mail at the door, representing about five million addresses, are starting to be converted to community mailbox delivery, including in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Also as a part of the five-point action plan, Canada Post is expanding access and convenience to postal services through franchises and streamlining internal operations across Canada, including Newfoundland and Labrador. In order to ensure the postal service is sustainable, Canada Post is making changes where necessary and is reviewing hours of operations in some corporate post offices across the country to ensure they represent the real needs of the communities. All changes honour the Canadian Postal Service Charter and the moratorium on closing rural post offices.

The implementation of the five-point action plan is forecasted to take five years to complete. Once fully implemented, four of the five initiatives contained in the five-point action plan are expected to contribute an estimated $700 to $900 million per year to the corporation.

[*English*]

Mr. Bernard Trottier: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1520)

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Yellowhead has 15 minutes left for his remarks.

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Privy Council Office provides critical oversight throughout the entire process, and departments evaluate their campaigns and report on their results. Departments work closely with the Privy Council Office to develop the advertising proposals. The proposals provide a detailed overview of the advertising campaign, including its objectives, key messages and government priorities it supports.

Departments also consult each other to identify areas of common interest and opportunities to collaborate. This type of collaboration is an example of how the government treats taxpayer dollars with respect. It maximizes efficiency and prevents unnecessary duplication between departments.

Once campaign and funding approvals have been given, departments consult with Public Works and Government Services Canada regarding contractor options for advertising services. These options include a call-up against the standing offer, a competition among agencies pre-approved on a supply arrangement and request for approvals through buyandsell.gc.ca.

With a contract in place, departments work with their advertising agency to provide creative concepts and a media plan based on the objectives of the campaign. Here is an important note. Advertising campaigns must meet all related Government of Canada legislation, policies and standards, including those set out in the federal identity program policy, communications policy of the Government of Canada, contracting policy and the Official Languages Act, as well as related policies and directives.

Just to be clear, those are four policies that have to be followed in order for an advertising campaign to get the green light. What is more, all campaigns must also be guided by the Canadian Code of Advertising Standards. That is a substantial amount of oversight and accountability.

Departments then approve all production estimates and schedules, and are responsible for financial and administrative procedures, including documenting their campaigns in the advertising management information system. After this is done, departments provide final creative and media plans to the Public Works and Government Services Canada, which reviews for compliance with applicable legislation, policies, and standards.

That is not all. The government also conducts thorough assessments of all major advertising campaigns to ensure that they are functioning as intended. These results are posted online for all Canadians to see. Departments track campaign results using a variety of metrics. For advertising campaigns with a media component of over $1 million or more, departments must conduct a mandatory, standardized post-campaign evaluation. The evaluation tracks audience recall of the campaign and gauges the audience's understanding and response to the advertisement. This is responsible management of taxpayer dollars.

It should be clear that funding for government advertising is nothing if not accountable.

I stated earlier that the communications policy required the government to be responsive to the diverse information needs of Canadians. It is also designed to ensure that it complies with acts, policies and procedures, and provides value for money. In fact, there are three ways in which the government reports on advertising spending.

First, all funds set by the Treasury Board for government advertising are accounted for in a quarterly report produced by the Treasury Board Secretariat. These quarterly reports are posted online and are accessible to all Canadians.

Second, total annual spending on advertising is reported by Public Works and Government Services Canada through the Annual Report on Government of Canada Advertising Activities. It provides an overview of the government's advertising management practices and outlines the Government of Canada's advertising initiatives. It also lists all expenditures by federal institutions, as well as by media type.

In fact, there is a significant amount of proactive disclosure involved. All advertising-related contracts are posted on Contracts Canada, a website managed by Public Works and Government Services Canada. In addition, departments and agencies are required to post all contracts over $10,000 on their respective websites.

● (1525)

Third, parliamentarians and Canadians can find detailed information on government advertising spending in the Public Accounts that are tabled in Parliament every fall.

In addition to these reports, the government updated its procedures for management of advertising in August 2014. The updated procedures ensure that Government of Canada advertising is well coordinated, transparent and managed in a way that provides value for Canadians. This is transparency.

Complementing the communications policy of the Government of Canada is the federal identity program policy. These policies often operate in tandem so as to frame the voice and the face of government. The communications policy promotes coherent, consistent communications, one government speaking with one voice. The federal identity program policy supports the government's corporate identity to help shape the face of government.

The federal identity program policy is about clear and consistent identification. It projects the government as a coherent, unified administration and enables Canadians to recognize at a glance where their government is at work for them. The federal identity program policy governs the use of three identifiers of the government: the coat of arms of Canada; the signature, that is to say the flag with the title of the institution or the Government of Canada; and the “Canada” word mark.

My hon. colleagues will see the results of the federal identity program policy on every Government of Canada building, on every piece of official correspondence, on signs, vehicles and uniforms. These two policies govern how advertising is carried out by the Government of Canada.

To be clear, departments and agencies must ensure that the design and presentation of advertisements conform to the communications policy and its procedures, as well as to the requirements of the federal identity policy program. What is more, all advertising campaigns are reviewed by the Privy Council Office, and contracts must be issued through Public Works and the Government Services of Canada. Of course, departments and agencies may not be used for public funds to purchase advertising that supports political parties.

I cannot support the motion before us today. That is because our government has an obligation to communicate with Canadians about important government programs and services. Canadians need to know how government programs and services have a positive impact on their lives, their communities and their country.

I can think of a number of examples.

Let us take the home renovation tax credit as one. After announcing the economic action plan in 2009, our government launched an advertising campaign to make people aware of some of the initiatives in the plan that would create jobs and boost the economy. As a result, Canadians took advantage of programs like the home renovation tax credit to upgrade their homes. People were informed, and homeowners and the construction industry benefited. So did our economy, with the creation of jobs and growth that enabled Canada to perform better than most during those challenging times.

I think all of those present would agree that advertising plays a crucial role in Canada's successful recovery. It allowed our government to reach the largest number of Canadians in the most effective and efficient way possible. Advertising is essential to the success of any government programs or services that benefit Canadians and Canada. It is the best practice that governments in Canada and around the world have used to great benefit.

I am proud of all the government programs and initiatives that have been discussed here today. It is absolutely crucial to ensure that Canadians are aware of these opportunities so they can take advantage of them. It is shameful that members opposite would oppose informing Canadians of programs that would benefit them, especially because the money our government spends on advertising goes into advertisements. When the previous Liberal government spent money on advertising, it went into the pockets of friends of the Liberal Party. The Liberals should be ashamed of themselves.

● (1530)

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I note that the hon. member mentioned how part of the policies, which he talked about in great detail, forbid the use of advertising money to promote political candidates. Does he not believe that once someone becomes a candidate in the next election, he or she should not appear in government ads?

The problem is that we have not had an epidemic of New Democrat or Liberal candidates appearing in government ads, but we seem to have had an epidemic of Conservative-nominated candidates appearing in government ads. Therefore, how do those policies he talked about at such great length justify Conservative candidates appearing in government ads?

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Mr. Speaker, I would debate whether the event the hon. member was questioning was an ad or was it just a program that was revealing what was taking place at that point. I do not believe it was an ad that was sponsored the Canadian government.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, could the member comment on the abuse of government advertising? I am referring specifically to the action plan ads. The government brought in a budget. Now it will spend over $13 million over a few weeks to tell Canadians how wonderful Conservatives are by presenting a budget.

There are many flaws within the budget. There is absolutely no doubt about that. The vast majority of Canadians, I would suggest well over 85%, would say that this is a wasteful way to spend millions of tax dollars when there are so many other needs in every region of our country.

Strictly speaking about the action plan ads, does he believe taxpayers are getting good value for the dollars the government is wasting on action plan ads promoting this budget, not the details of the budget, just saying how wonderful the Conservative government is in presenting a budget?

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Mr. Speaker, yes, I believe our government is doing what is required. We need to advise people of the initiatives in our action plan, things like services to newcomers, protecting the health and safety of Canadians, which we have to let them know, priority occupations, women in the recruitment campaign. We have to get these things out to the public to allow people to understand what our action plan will do. This is no different than what the Liberal government did between 2002 and 2006 when it spent $250 million doing exactly the same thing this government is doing today.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I find it disgusting that the Conservatives have wasted $750 million on self-congratulatory advertising since coming to power.

Over the past few years, the Conservative government has saved money by closing offices and cutting services to veterans, but it has still found $5 million to pay for advertising about the War of 1812. That makes absolutely no sense.

How can the Conservative member justify spending $5 million to advertise the War of 1812 when his government is closing regional veterans' services offices?

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Mr. Speaker, it goes back to just last year when the hon. member for Pontiac showed great interest in how the government would advertise Bill C-21, the red tape reduction act. He said:

> I'm wondering if there has been or if there will be outreach done that explains this to the mom-and-pop shop that's doing great work with 25 employees or fewer. How are we going to tell them how it affects them?

There is no difference in the question he has asked right now. We are passing information on to Canadians about important issues, and it is a message that has to be passed on.

● (1535)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if we were take the time to go through the entire budget of 2015 alone, we would see many examples where it is necessary for the government to inform Canadians about changes that are coming. One of those changes is on page 240, regarding extending compassionate care benefits.

Just this weekend, I happened to look at Twitter and there was a tweet from someone who said, "Without advertising I wouldn't have known to ask about #caregiverstaxcredit #cpc #thankyou". This is an example where we are getting the word out to people who may need to avail themselves of these kinds of benefits that are available to them, and the compassionate care benefit is just one example.

Would my colleague care to give a few more examples of programs that our government has initiated where it is important that we take the time and effort, and spend the money, to get the word out to Canadians so they will be aware of the programs that are available to them?

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Mr. Speaker, it is very important. Just last week I received a call from one of our constituents who said "I do not understand the family tax credit. What is in there for me? What is in there for my kids who are in sports?" I sat down and I explained to him where he could get those credits.

Many Canadians are not getting the opportunity to see that message. It is up to us as a government to pass that message on to Canadians and families, so that they understand what tax benefits are there and can claim those tax benefits. We know that over 200,000 people are still unaware of them. We need to get that message out. The best way is by advertising.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is one thing to advertise a government program when it has passed in this House and exists; it is another to advertise a government program when it is being considered by Parliament. According to government policy, which my colleague talked so much about in his speech, if one puts out a video, it must contain the words "measures subject to parliamentary approval".

I have a case where the government has not followed the spirit of its policy. Last year, November 17 was the day of the Whitby—Oshawa by-election, and if we wanted to read an online article in the local newspaper, we had to pass through a gateway advertisement. It was a little tiny box with a video. The video contained a government advertisement about its spending plans. It was so small that we could not read the words "measure subject to parliamentary approval".

I do not think the current government wanted to follow its own policies, and perhaps diluted the message that this video was sending on that by-election day. It was clear to me that nobody in those two seconds could read the fuzzy words. In fact, I had to go to the government website itself and look at the full high-definition ad to actually see the words. The government was not following the spirit of its own policies, and I wonder if my colleague would agree with me.

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Mr. Speaker, I do not totally agree with the hon. member's perception of that. I am not sure what he was watching at the time that he saw that video. If he was watching it on an iPhone, it might be very difficult to see. However, if he did see it and took the initiative to go back and look on his computer, I give him credit for that. Under the act, the ad requires those words, and we are following with that compliance.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my friend's speech with some interest. I have to take one strong exception with something that he said, which was that the Liberals spent, I think it was $250 million over a certain period of time. That is exactly what the Conservatives are doing. There is something quite different about what the Liberals did, which is that they handed a bunch of that ad money to friends, in the sponsorship scandal. I hope that is not exactly what the Conservatives are doing. They are running many millions of dollars in self-promoting ads, much like the Liberals did, and when the Conservatives were in opposition they said that was terrible, that it was an awful waste of taxpayer money.

The member said that these ads need to be effective, yet through access to information, we have seen that the government's own assessment of these ads is that they are not effective and do not prove their worth and money. That is from his own department's assessment.

My specific question is this. For the last 17 months, the economy has had less than a 1% job growth, which is the worst record outside of a recession since we started taking statistics on this. It has been four decades since we have had such a poor performance in creating jobs. Why is there so little in the ads, and anything else that the Conservatives are doing, including their budget? The answer is the elephant in the room, which is that under their watch the Conservatives are not helping the economy to grow as it ought to.

● (1540)

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is entitled to his opinion as to where the money should be spent with the ads we are placing. Those ads are looked at with strategic planning and action by our government and are placed in areas that we believe need to be addressed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to say that I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the member for Kings—Hants.

I am honoured to rise in the House today to speak to the motion put forward by my colleague from Ottawa South to put an end to partisan government advertising that is paid for by Canadian taxpayers.

The motion proposes that a neutral third party review and approve spending on government advertising. Given the Conservative government's frequent and dangerous use of partisan advertising, I am proud to support this motion, which basically seeks to protect the interests of Canadians as taxpayers first, but also as citizens of a modern democracy. These two objectives are both important, and they are what concern me most as a member of the Liberal Party of Canada and as the representative of the people of Bourassa.

At a time of fiscal restraint and in a worrisome economic context, when the economy is not growing and unemployment is high, I am outraged that this government can spend a fortune on partisan ads without any concern for their effectiveness or any serious consideration of their cost. We already know that since coming to power, this government has spent close to $1 billion on advertising. The total cost is $750 million, but to what end? These campaigns are supposed to inform the public. However, studies show that very few people retain new information after seeing these ads. This government keeps promoting programs that do not even exist yet. It is not only a waste of Canadians' hard-earned tax dollars, but also a sign of wanton disregard for this Parliament, which has a say in these programs.

The government's arrogance caught up with it in 2013, when it had to withdraw its ads promoting the Canada job grant because the ads suggested that the program was available when it still had to be approved not only by this Parliament, but also by the 10 provinces. In fact, a year later, this program was still not in place. The government was basically told that it was misleading Canadians.

Last spring, when I was watching the NHL playoffs, I was troubled by the fact that the Conservatives were wasting taxpayers' hard-earned money on partisan ads during this expensive advertising period. I therefore asked the government in the House how much it had spent on those ads. I was told that $1 million of taxpayers' money was wasted on promoting a program that—I repeat—did not even exist.

Today, we learned that another $13 million will be spent to promote the government's election budget. Let us remember that this budget favours the rich at the expense of the middle class and the people who are working hard to get into the middle class. The Canada Revenue Agency will spend $6 million. However, it is important to note that the Conservatives have been making drastic cuts to services for some time now. They made $253 million in cuts in 2012 and $61 million in cuts in 2013. All of the Canada Revenue Agency counters are now closed. That is where taxpayers used to be able to take their documents and always meet with the same person to get information. It is the average Canadian who is paying for these cuts. Let us not forget that the government is completely out of touch with Canadians' priorities.

Members will recall that, last week, I again asked the question because Ms. Ronald said she was receiving letters from the Canada Revenue Agency promoting the Conservative government. As usual, this government is trying to put out partisan announcements to justify the ideological cuts that directly affect Canadians.

● (1545)

I must say that this is a slippery slope for the government. It is time to stop this abuse. My colleague is proposing that a third party protect the interests of taxpayers, and this is highly justified in view of this kind of waste.

This abuse does not affect just public money. Our democratic institutions are tarnished when the machinery of government is made to serve a political party, the Conservative party, which is what is happening today.

We should remember that when each taxpayer pays his or her taxes at this time of year they are not contributing to the Conservative Party, they are paying their fair share to fund public services.

The government does not serve the Conservative Party. This is a tired and arrogant government that we are dealing with. This puts at risk the very foundation of our democracy.

I am bringing this up because charitable organizations that disagree with the Conservative government's policies are being systematically audited by the Canada Revenue Agency. It is a witch hunt and charitable organizations are speaking in unison against the government's rhetoric.

Three national medical associations—the College of Family Physicians of Canada, the Canadian Medical Association and the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada—denounced the partisanship in another very specific advertising campaign. I am not talking about the opposition or the media here. These associations denounced Health's Canada's ad campaign last fall, specifically because it was partisan.

We also believe that Canadians want to protect the integrity of their federal government. Democracy Watch has already started a campaign calling on the Auditor General to look into this issue. That is what our motion proposes.

Lastly, I would like to ask government members whether they truly believe that their ads are informative, that they are not primarily partisan ad campaigns and that taxpayer money was properly spent, despite disagreement from Advertising Standards Canada and the three national medical associations I just mentioned.

What do the Conservatives have to lose by letting a third party ensure that taxpayer and government money was properly spent? What do they have to lose?

With the establishment of the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer they are quickly learning that their practices are being exposed, when they would have rather kept them in the dark.

However, today we are giving them an opportunity to show some integrity and to submit their advertising practices for an impartial assessment.

Canadians, as both taxpayers and citizens, deserve transparency, and I hope that the Conservative Party will vote in favour of our motion.

● (1550)

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to what my colleague from Bourassa had to say.

What a strange day this has been. Our two parties have been lobbing the ball back and forth trying to pin down who has used the most public money for advertising over the years, but there is really only one way to truly change things, and that is to vote in an NDP government on October 19.

Still, the motion itself presents an interesting idea, and that is what I would like my colleague from Bourassa to comment on because once again, this is a typically vague Liberal proposal.

Can my colleague delve further into this idea of a third party? Who does he think should be responsible for analyzing government advertising? Would it be the Auditor General or another organization? The motion does not say much about that.

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I am happy to hear that he likes part of the motion. As he said, he finds it interesting. It is an interesting motion, in fact, and I hope that the NDP will vote in favour of it.

However, he started off by talking about the old parties that are in the habit of using public funds. He must have been talking about the distant past because, during my campaign for the byelection in my riding, it was the NDP that used public funds to pay for partisan advertising.

The NDP now has to pay back over $2 million but is refusing to do so. The member should remind all members of his party to pay that money back as soon as possible for the good of Canadian taxpayers.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a general comment, I want to say that we would need a referee to ensure that all the players are playing the game honourably.

That said, I want to ask a my colleague a couple of questions. First of all, would he not agree that the Conservative government has abused the trust of Canadians by using this thinly veiled and highly partisan advertising?

Second, does he think that Canadians can see right through the government, which is trying to polish its image on the taxpayer dime?

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. Without a doubt, it is fair to say that the Conservative government is abusing the public trust.

As I said, $757 million in partisan advertising is completely unacceptable. Just think of what $757 million could have done for my riding, Bourassa, or for any other riding. What could we have done with that money to help people in need?

In addition, it is true that we will definitely need a referee to review and rule on this advertising.

After presenting the budget, the Minister of Finance himself is incapable of telling us how many jobs his budget is going to create in Canada. Furthermore, every time we ask him a question, he says that we need to let the Prime Minister's grandchildren worry about these problems. This government is being completely irresponsible.

[*English*]

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak today on the Liberal motion on government advertising from my colleague, the member for Ottawa South.

The Conservative government has proven time and time again that it has absolutely no shame in spending tax dollars on wasteful, ineffective and highly partisan advertising. The Conservatives have spent more than $750 million on government advertising. In fact, just today we have learned of new plans by the Conservative government to spend even more tax dollars on wasteful ads.

According to a new media report, not only is Finance Canada spending another $7.5 million on radio and television ads for April and May, but the Canada Revenue Agency has a multimillion dollar advertising campaign of its own right now. I will quote from the report today:

> The Canada Revenue Agency is spending $6-million on a concentrated TV bulk buy this month that includes pricey NHL playoff spots in what internal government documents describe as a continuation of an existing campaign that's been running all winter.

Under the Conservatives, the CRA has seen massive cuts that have caused service standards to plummet and Canadians to be left frustrated. The Conservatives have in fact closed all of the CRA service counters and allowed the backlog of complaints to rise to more than 35,000. Even CRA's internal audit shows that its telephone support lines for small businesses go largely unanswered or are giving out erroneous information. Despite these ongoing problems, the Conservatives have still managed to find millions of dollars to spend on TV ads this month, the very month that Canadians are most likely to need CRA's help and be left wanting more.

As the motion states, a great deal of these ads have been partisan in nature and have served very little in terms of real public interest. This abuse of tax dollars is an affront to Canadians who work hard and expect their government to treat their money with respect.

To clean up this mess, we need greater checks and balances in place. The government should be required to submit its advertising to a third-party review process to ensure that the ads are appropriate, proportional and a sensible use of public funds.

● (1555)

[*Translation*]

Canadians are angry, and rightly so. They have a government that is asking everyone to tighten their belts, while the government spends hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayers' money on self-promotion ads.

[*English*]

I would like to give just a few examples of wasteful Conservative advertising.

In May 2013, the Conservative government ran an ad during the Stanley Cup playoffs advertising the Canada jobs grants. The Advertising Standards Council of Canada declared that the ad was misleading and was a breach of the Canadian code of advertising standards because it omitted relevant information. It also neglected to mention that the program did not even exist. In fact, the government had not engaged the provinces on an area of shared jurisdiction.

The Conservative government has already spent nearly $12 million on ads to promote Canada's 150th birthday, an event that will not take place for another two years. The Conservatives also spent tens of millions of dollars promoting the Canada economic action plan three years after the program actually ended.

[*Translation*]

The Conservatives have also frequently purchased really expensive ads during the NHL playoffs, the Super Bowl and the Oscars, and when asked to explain, they refuse to reveal any details to Canadians about the cost. Canadians are right to wonder about the priorities of the Prime Minister and his Conservatives.

[*English*]

It comes down to priorities. The Conservatives have lost touch with what really matters to Canadian families. While the Conservatives spend hundreds of millions of tax dollars on partisan advertising, they are also shortchanging our veterans. They shut down nine veteran service centres across Canada. They have spent as much advertising veteran services, which the Auditor General says are not actually meeting the needs of the veteran community, as it costs to maintain these nine offices, which actually were serving veterans.

The Conservatives have also chosen economic action plan ads over measures that would actually create jobs. There are still almost 160,000 fewer jobs for young Canadians compared to 2008, before the downturn.

Students across Canada are struggling to find summer jobs that can help pay for their school. Instead of helping students out, the Conservative government has cut the number of jobs created by the Canada summer jobs program by more than half.

However, a single ad during the NHL playoffs could actually pay for more than 30 student jobs in the Canada summer jobs program. Instead of creating summer jobs for students who need the work to pay for their schooling, the government is instead wasting that money on partisan ads in the NHL playoffs.

It is an issue of priorities. The Conservatives are out of touch with the priorities of middle-class families. Taxpayers are in fact disgusted by the flagrant abuse of their tax dollars on these ads. The Conservatives must end this wasteful spending of tax dollars immediately. For a plan, they need look no further than to my Liberal colleague, the member for Ottawa South and his private member's Bill C-544. His legislation would end wasteful government advertising by requiring the ads be vetted by an independent, non-partisan body before they can be released. It is the right thing to do.

If the Conservatives fail to act, then Canadians will have to wait until a Liberal government, after the next election, brings in these measures that would take partisan politics out of government advertising, and put an end to this wasteful spending and abuse of tax dollars.

The Conservatives like to preach that government has a responsibility to communicate with Canadians, but they fail to mention that they also have a duty to taxpayers to ensure that the way in which we communicate to Canadians is ethical, economical and responsible. In this respect, the Conservatives have failed miserably.

A Liberal government, led by the member for Papineau, would clean up this mess, would put in place good governance to ensure that tax dollars are not wasted, and would ensure that the government is able to communicate with Canadians and provide valuable services to Canadians, while at the same time respecting tax dollars and ensuring the power of government is not abused for partisan purposes.

● (1600)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, again, I listened closely to my Liberal colleague's speech and I come back to the same question, which remains unanswered. Perhaps this time around, we will get a bit further.

In fact, what I want to know—the Liberals moved this motion, they must have given this some thought—is what third party will be given this mandate. For example, will it be entrusted to the Auditor General, with all the problems that go with it? Or are we talking about a completely independent committee? Where do the Liberals stand on this?

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

The Government of Ontario is a good example of a government that created an independent authority for ensuring that all government ads are not partisan and that they offer good value to taxpayers. This is an example of a government whose approach works well. It may be possible to work with the Auditor General on this.

Nonetheless, for today's debate, the priority is to lay out a principle for the government to respect and to create a completely independent authority to ensure that the Conservatives' practices will cease.

● (1605)

[*English*]

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this has to be the day of the greatest irony in the House of Commons since I have been here. We are actually hearing the Liberal Party of Canada bring forward a motion on government advertising. I will tell members the difference between the Conservative government and a Liberal government when it comes to spending advertising money. On this side, we actually spend it on advertising. On that side, they blow $40 million out the door to support their buddies. That is the real difference.

The member for Kings—Hants also does not have a very good track record of picking the right party at the right time that actually forms the government. He could actually be in government and have an effect on these kinds of policies.

I want to ask the member what type of advertising he believes is appropriate. Is it appropriate, as an example, that we run ads to recruit men and women to serve in the Canadian Armed Forces? Is is appropriate that we run ads to recruit men and women to serve with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police? Is it appropriate that the Government of Canada informs Canadians about specific programs and services they are entitled to receive, which is the bulk of the advertising the government spends on. On that side, when they were in government, the money went to their buddies.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, the member cited several examples of legitimate government advertising, and of course, legitimate government advertising would be approved by an independent authority, which we describe in this mandate. There would be no quarrel with this independent authority about legitimate government advertising that actually provided value to Canadians and informed Canadians of valuable information and data they required and that was not partisan.

He asked about my decision to join the Liberal Party 11 years ago. I assure him that I am very happy to be part of a progressive, enlightened party that bases decisions on evidence and not ideology, that celebrates the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, that defends minority rights in Canada, and that will form an extraordinary government after the next election that will restore some of these basic values to the Canadian government. Many Canadians are ready for a change, and they are ready to embrace a Liberal government.

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand here today to address this motion, because this gives me the opportunity to highlight some of the health portfolio's recent advertising campaigns, to reinforce their importance, and to discuss their impact. Allowing Canadians to know about the things that are going on in the ministry of health and how they will impact their lives is an important thing for us to do.

Today I am going to use my time to paint a clear picture of the Government of Canada's health advertising. I will lay out the government's role in advertising about health, what forms the advertisements take, and how they serve to inform Canadians about matters that are important to their health and safety.

I am going to focus on four recent high-profile health advertising campaigns and will provide the House with the details surrounding those campaigns. Finally, I will show how the health portfolio's advertising regime is not only in line with government processes and spending regulations but also with this government's priority of protecting and maintaining the health of Canadians.

Members will hear today about the broad role of Government of Canada advertising. Advertising is an essential component of the government's commitment to effective communication with the public. We use it to convey critical information about policies and programs. We use it to point Canadians to the services that can help individuals, families, and businesses. We use it to raise awareness about the issues that impact Canadians' health, including infectious diseases, food safety, and the effects of drug abuse. As well, we use it to reach Canadians where they are, in an ever-evolving world of communications.

This is a critical component of the government's priority to keep families and communities healthy and strong. Families and communities are the cornerstone of this great country, and they want a partner in the government. They want to learn about the information and services available to them in a way that is flexible and that meets their needs. It is not always easy for our families and communities to get the timely, practical, and evidence-based information they need to make informed decisions in the way they need it.

I would like to insert here that for the family tax plan we would put in place in our budget, it is important for the families that are eligible to receive that tax break to register with the Government of Canada. Right now, some 200,000 families across this country have not registered, and they have only until Friday to register so that they will get the benefit sent to them in July, as our government wants to do. I urge Canadian families to register with the government so that the family tax package will be available to them to enhance the tax credits they get from the Canadian government.

In the health portfolio, many different forms of advertising can help us meet that challenge. We know that the bulk of federal advertising happens through media buys on television. However, the government has to keep up with the times, and it is doing so in innovative ways. We are reaching out to Canadians outside of their homes and online, in magazines, at the movie theatre, and even in their doctors' offices. We are getting them the messages they need through unique social media tools. I am pleased to note that the health portfolio is leading the way in reaching all Canadians, including families and communities, through many of these innovative and targeted awareness campaigns.

I hearken back to the days of the SARS event and H1N1, the viruses that hit so many Canadians across Canada. When the SARS event happened, we did not have the advantage of being able to use Twitter accounts to let Canadians know about the impact it was having in their own communities.

● (1610)

I have a very good friend, a constituent, who was terribly affected by the SARS virus and still bears the ill effects of that terrible disease that impacted her and her family.

I look at how we can reach into the homes of Canadians today with social media and can get messages to them about the precautions Canadians need to take when these diseases hit our country.

I think of the Ebola crisis that has hit West Africa and how the lack of information for people in those affected countries has impacted so many people there. They have had no information to help them combat the disease and the terrible spread of that disease throughout those countries.

We know that we are able to connect with Canadians through advertising via multiple sources, whether that be magazines, Twitter, other social media now available to us, or, of course, television ads that we are able to purchase.

The government's advertising on issues impacting Canadians' health gives the public many options. Health portfolio advertising provides convenient information where the majority of Canadians are, and they are online. That includes new emerging opportunities through social media sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, and unique partnerships with media, including youth television programming.

Our health portfolio advertising also provides toll-free numbers to call for more information, along with a spectrum of opportunities for Canadians to ask questions and learn more.

Does our health advertising help? I think today of the number of people situated in Nepal who need assistance from the Canadian government. Of course, that is not health advertising. It is advertising we have been doing through Foreign Affairs to help people get connected with the kind of information they need to get the help they need. The advertising Canada is doing to help those people is direct, it is immediate, and it is helpful today.

Does our health advertising help? Absolutely it does. Our research tells us that large percentages of Canadians who see our health advertising take action. It tells us that this advertising achieves higher levels of awareness on important health issues. It tells us that Canadians are able to recall the advertising we promote, and it tells us that our advertising on health issues is engaging Canadians, starting important discussions, and promoting dialogue between the government and the public. These are all critical elements of communicating with Canadians. Nowhere is this more important than in health, because what we want to do is engage Canadians in all aspects of their own health care. We want them to know what Canada is doing and what measures we are taking to assist them.

I want to reflect, though, if I may, on the situation with the former Liberal government, the things we saw it do with Canadians' money, and where that money went. It is unfortunate that we had to have the Gomery inquiry in Canada. The Gomery inquiry took issue with where the money went that the Liberals spent. There was money spent that is still not accounted for. The report from Justice Gomery identified that the money had been taken and was ill-spent. There were people who had charges against them because the money was not found. We know that approximately $40 million of Canadians' money has not been paid back by the Liberal government, and we would like the Liberals to come forward with that money, because it was not money spent advertising for Canadians. It was money that went into the pockets of Liberal partisans.

● (1615)

I would really like the members on the opposite side who have brought this motion forward to explain where that advertising money went. I would like to know if they had tracked that money and if Canadians could have known where that money went. I would like to know why they took Canadian taxpayer dollars and put them directly into the pockets of Liberal Party friends. I would really like to have a straight answer from the members in the Liberal Party. I would like them to tell us if they ever intend to pay back that $40 million they took from taxpayers and put into the pockets of the Liberal Party.

How would the members of the Liberal Party respond to the following findings of the Gomery report? The report states that there is “clear evidence of political involvement in the administration of the Sponsorship Program”. Why does the Liberal Party not come forward and answer that question?

Also, there is “a veil of secrecy surrounding the administration of the Sponsorship Program and an absence of transparency in the contracting process”.

It was the member for Kings—Hants who said that it is really, really sad that we had to have this inquiry. Would the member for Kings—Hants tell us when it is that the Liberal Party is going to pay back that money? He obviously recognizes that the situation took place.

The commission also found the “use of the Sponsorship Program for purposes other than national unity or federal visibility because of a lack of objectives, criteria and guidelines for the Program”. It also found there were “deliberate actions to avoid compliance with federal legislation and policies”. It also found that there were “certain agencies carrying on their payrolls individuals who were, in effect, working on Liberal Party matters”. It also found “the existence of a 'culture of entitlement' among political officials and bureaucrats involved with the Sponsorship Program, including the receipt of monetary and non-monetary benefits”.

We have a responsibility to inform Canadians how their money is being spent. Part of being government means that we have to use a portion of the funds so that Canadians know where the money is being spent. The money that we are spending on advertising is allocated in our budgets. It is there for Canadians to see. We can identify, dollar for dollar, what we do with Canadian taxpayer money. Whether it is telling Canadian taxpayers of the effectiveness of their money in health care programs, or whether it is letting our veterans know what services are available to them so that they can connect with the points of service where they can get assistance, or whether it is advertising on issues in agriculture to let our farmers know what things are available to them for their assistance, these are all areas that affect Canadians directly. We believe that we have a responsibility to let Canadians know what is happening in their Canadian government and what it is that they can do to get information from the Canadian government.

What is the right information for us to give? What can we trust?

The Government of Canada's health and safety campaign helps the public answer those questions. Health Canada led a multi-departmental advertising campaign to raise awareness and to promote access to the wealth of expert information the government has developed in the areas of children's health and safety, for instance.

We have, on our side of the House, a person who is an eminent physician in the Minister of Labour. She has helped to inform the Canadian government on issues where we can spend money more wisely to be of assistance to Canadians to advise on children's issues. She is a pediatric doctor. She has extensive information that can help inform the government.

● (1620)

When we make some of those things into policy, it is important that Canadians know how that can affect the health of their children. The Canadians' health and safety advertising campaign helped to increase Canadian parents' awareness and access to information on their own health and safety and that of their families. It helped to maximize the number of parents who went online to obtain information related to the health and safety of their children, and it helped to increase the number of parents taking simple actions to protect the health and safety of their children.

This campaign ran from 2010 to 2012. As I said, all of that money is accounted for in our budgets, unlike what the former Liberal government did with shovelling money into the pockets of their own Liberal friends.

This particular campaign included various creative television, print, Internet and out-of-home advertisements, including in medical waiting rooms. It resulted in a high recall of the advertising; in fact, it was a recall higher than the Canadian benchmark.

We all know that protecting Canadians from risks to their health is a central role in the health portfolio. The government has been very clear about the importance of underlining the risks of drug use in particular.

The many dangerous and unpredictable consequences of drug abuse make it a very real and widespread public health issue. The Government of Canada has an important responsibility to inform Canadians of the dangers of illicit drug use. It is a critical part of our commitment to the health and safety of Canadians. That is why we invested $30 million over five years between 2007 and 2012 for a national anti-drug strategy to increase knowledge about the harms of illicit drug use and encourage youth to lead a drug-free lifestyle. Again, this is unlike the Liberal Party which wants to legalize marijuana, which I am sure will be in its platform in the upcoming election.

Through our national anti-drug strategy, the government collaborates with provincial and territorial governments, non-governmental organizations and community stakeholders, including health professional organizations, to address the risks and harms related to illicit drug use. Specifically, the strategy is designed to prevent the use of illicit drugs and the abuse of prescription drugs to help with efforts to treat dependency for those who have serious addiction problems and to work towards reducing the production and distribution of illicit drugs. The strategy is led by the Department of Justice with the involvement of 11 federal departments and agencies. Health Canada, for example, leads the strategy's action plans on prevention and treatment, while Public Safety Canada leads the enforcement action plan.

Since 2007, over half a billion dollars have been invested in initiatives under the purview of the national anti-drug strategy. Our advertising under this strategy involved TV and digital advertising, including web and social media. This five-year youth drug prevention mass media campaign was very successful. It helped us reach parents and youth. It increased the percentage of youth deciding not to go on drugs. It increased the number of parents engaged with their teens in discussions about the risks of drug use. Specifically, one in five youth who recalled the advertising said they did something to address drug prevention in their lives as a result of seeing the ads. The social media aspects of the campaign attracted more than 100,000 Facebook fans, over one million visits to the DrugsNot4Me website and nearly half a million views of the YouTube videos.

● (1625)

I will finish by saying that I firmly believe we have a responsibility to help Canadians understand, specifically in the area of health care. We want to give them helpful and engaging guidance, reassurance and information for the 21st century. They want a partner in their health, a partner that is there when families need it, a partner that provides practical support and clear advice, a partner that keeps up with the times, engaging them when, where and how they need it.

I have appreciated the opportunity to speak on this very important issue. I look forward to questions.

● (1630)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest, but I noticed one area that the member failed to mention, which is the tens of millions of dollars spent by the Conservative government promoting the oil and gas sector in the United States. In one year alone, $40 million was spent on ads in subways.

The Conservatives may be able to defend that by saying they are standing up for a particular sector, but if we take a look at what some of their messages are, we become concerned. One was that Canada is one of the few major suppliers of crude oil in the Gulf coast taking concrete action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. There is not a lot of truth in that ad. They also stated that America and Canada have the same the greenhouse gas reduction targets. That might have been true a few years ago, but the Prime Minister has been clear that is absolutely not the case anymore. One thing that the Gomery commission pointed out was that it wanted annual mandatory audits and value-for-money evaluations of all advertising campaigns. When that campaign was analyzed, it was found that there was no understanding what the message was, other than that Americans and Canadians were friends.

Could the member speak to what the value for money was in spending taxpayer money promoting one singular sector and not others?

Ms. Lois Brown: Mr. Speaker, we use the advertising dollars to let Canadians know the things that we are doing across government sectors. I spoke specifically about health, but I also recognize that we speak to every area. Whether it be the environment, the economy, agriculture, all of these things are departments for which the Government of Canada has a responsibility, and a responsibility to let Canadians know.

Again, I find it very rich that the New Democrats want to point fingers at the Government of Canada when they have been found to have taken $2.7 million illegally, Canadian taxpayer dollars that the New Democrats used for their own partisanship, particularly in Quebec, funnelling money through to Montreal. Every one of those 68 members needs to start paying that money back. Those are Canadian taxpayers' dollars, not theirs.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Trinity—Spadina, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the comments regarding the Gomery inquiry. I note that the Liberals called that inquiry to hold themselves accountable in front of the country, and they were held accountable. We also paid back the $1.14 million that was directly ascribed to our misconduct. That is a far different record than other parties in this House might claim credit for.

As well, it is important to suggest that the $40 million mark that keeps being bandied about has no basis in fact. Members will note that the Conservatives never make reference to that amount outside of the House of Commons, perhaps because their privilege does not extend outside these four walls.

The member opposite spoke about how critical and how important the advertising is to let people know what good work the current government is ostensibly doing. In Prince Edward Island, the cost of one billboard was almost five times more than the cost for the actual project that was being advertised. All the government did was change the doorknobs to make them accessible to those with disabilities. The billboard cost more than the infrastructure program. I would love to hear the member opposite explain that one.

The member also spoke about the need for health information to be distributed. What we have heard from the commissioner who oversees languages is these communications are only communicated in English. If it is critical information, why is the government not talking to all Canadians? If it is so critical, why is it not talking to people who are francophones?

Ms. Lois Brown: Mr. Speaker, we are a country that has two official languages and we advertise in two official languages. It is the responsibility of the Canadian government to do so. I would encourage the member opposite to take a closer look, because we have everything in both official languages.

I would be remiss if I did not point out some of the things that the Gomery inquiry did point out. When he spoke specifically about the Chrétien golf balls, Mr. Chrétien actually made a mockery of the whole process when he held them up and asked if he would call them "small-town cheap". They were specifically advertising. Why on earth the prime minister of Canada of the day would have golf balls with the names of American presidents on them is beyond the understanding of anybody, but it was paid for with Canadian taxpayer dollars. The Liberals need to pay back the $40 million that they owe Canadian taxpayers.

● (1635)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my Conservative colleague boasted about the $750 million her government has spent on advertising since coming to power in order to promote its own record. That money belongs to taxpayers. I find that deplorable.

In response to the NDP's concerns, she said that Canadians were provided with good information. A survey by the government concerning the 2012 economic action plan campaign revealed that only 6 out of 1,000 respondents said they consulted the www.actionplan.gc.ca website to find out more after seeing the ads.

Is my colleague pleased that so much taxpayers' money was spent so that an average of 6 out of 1,000 people could benefit from the information?

[*English*]

Ms. Lois Brown: Mr. Speaker, I do not know to whom he is speaking because people in my constituency of Newmarket—Aurora tell me how often they are pleased with getting the information from the Canadian government. It is remarkable that he has only spoken to six people, because there are all kinds of pieces of information out there that Canadians are making use of.

I come back to the situation with the NDP who have been found to have taken $2.7 million of Canadian taxpayers dollars. They owe that money back to Canadians. We ask them to come to the table with that money, pay back Canadians and put that money back into the pockets of ordinary Canadians who have worked hard to provide tax dollars to the Canadian government.

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Newmarket—Aurora for an incredible, accurate speech.

When we have a government program that has come out in a number of budgets that talk about economic growth year after year and it is shown that now there is 1.2 million net new jobs and that we have one of the strongest economies in the world, do you have the sense that because we actually bring out the programs and talk to Canadians about it that the advertising is important?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before I go to the hon. member, I just remind all colleagues to direct their questions and comments to the Chair rather than directly to the member.

Ms. Lois Brown: Mr. Speaker, I have spoken to people who are members of chambers of commerce in Newmarket and Aurora who have used that advertising that we have put out to find out about the kinds of programs that we have put into our economic action plans year over year to help them find out about the information on the cuts to EI, the cuts to the small business tax. Those are the kinds of things that are helping the companies in my riding to create jobs and to become profitable far more quickly when they can do capital cost write-offs.

Those are the kinds of things we want to advertise, because it is all about jobs, it is all about growth and it is all about long-term prosperity. That is what this government is advertising. That is what we want Canadians to know. We want a healthy, vibrant economy and Canadians will benefit.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I remember when Conservatives sat over here and how much they hated when Liberals did the exact same thing they are doing now.

My question is this: When the Conservatives raised the old age retirement from 65 to 67, did they let Canadians know about that important fact? When Conservatives doubled the TSFA from $5,000 to $10,000, did they note to Canadians that the largest share of all of that money will go to the highest income earners? Did they tell Canadians that when they bring in income splitting across the board for all Canadians that only 15% would receive any benefits and that 100% of Canadians will pay the cost?

The problem Canadians have with these ads is that they are self-promoting. They line up almost perfectly with Conservative Party ads, so people are suspicious. This is why my colleague, she was not here but her Conservatives colleagues hated the very same practice when it was Liberals doing it. Now that Conservatives are doing it, it is all wonderful.

Do the Conservatives not understand that their own reports show the ads to be ineffective, do not communicate the messages that are sought, and eventually bring Canadians to a greater level of cynicism?

● (1640)

Ms. Lois Brown: Mr. Speaker, of course we have let Canadians know. We wanted Canadians to know about the change to the GIS because it is going to be 12 years from now before any of that starts to take place. Canadians can start preparing now for that change.

As for the changes to the tax-free savings account, let me remind my colleague that that is Canadians' money. It is after-tax dollars when they start to put that into their TFSA, so we are going to allow that to grow tax free.

My constituents are thrilled to pieces that they have this opportunity to put more money into their TFSAs. For seniors who are going to take money out of their RRIFs, we have increased that age. They can convert that into their tax-free savings account and still have the opportunity to grow that money tax free.

The Canadians who live in the riding of Newmarket—Aurora are absolutely thrilled and are very pleased they are getting the information from the government so they know how to best use their own money.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina, Housing; the hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, Official Languages; the hon. member for Malpeque, Public Safety.

[*English*]

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this important motion before us today. However, before I speak directly to the motion I have to say how disappointed I was with our previous speaker, the member for Newmarket—Aurora. For her to stand up and specifically say things that are nothing short of outright lies, trying to mislead people, I would like to offer an invitation to her to come outside of the House and say those very same comments because there would be a lawsuit, clearly. Therefore, I would like—

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

The member for Kitchener—Conestoga is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, I do not profess to be an expert on the rules of the House, but I do think it is inappropriate for a member to accuse another colleague of outright lies and that was the language that was used, if I heard her correctly.

I would ask you to rule, or better yet, ask her to withdraw those comments and apologize.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Unfortunately, I was distracted at the time that the comments were made and I did not hear what the hon. member said. Having said that, obviously she is a veteran of this place and if she said something that was inappropriate she can deal with that. The Chair will look at the blues to see what was said.

Just as a reminder to all hon. members, there are practices and rules in this place in terms of what is and is not parliamentary language. I would just encourage all hon. members to respect the spirit, as well as the letter of those rules.

With that, I will give the floor back to the hon. member for York West.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the heat of the moment, the word “lies” should not be used here even though it is clearly used a lot in a variety of different ways. I was expressing my disappointment that members would stand and say things that are so outrageous and misleading in the Parliament of Canada. I have been here going on 16 years and I do my best to be as straightforward and direct as I can be. There are lots of things that many of us could throw around here all that we want, but I do not believe that is what we are supposed to be doing.

The reason I am speaking to this very important motion has to do with a lot of the things that the government has been spending over $750 million on, telling us about how wonderful the government is and clearly is nothing short of partisan advertising. The reason for the motion is to be able to have a third party in the future that would review those advertising opportunities to clarify whether or not they are properly being used as taxpayers' dollars. That is the point of the motion, to put a third party there so that when taxpayer money is being spent to deliver a message, it is a message that is clear and direct and not a partisan message. That means for either side of the House or any party that would form government.

It is an important motion and I would hope that everyone would support it because I believe it would ensure that whoever forms the next government has very clear rules. Given the fact that I am very hopeful on this side of the House that the Liberals will have that opportunity, we are prepared to stand by this now, pass this motion so that when we do form the government, that we are already putting down rules as to how we are going to govern. We are not afraid of that. We are willing to go to the taxpayers on a variety of issues and that is one of them.

I want to thank my Liberal colleague from Ottawa South whose private member's bill that has been spearheading this because of the fact of clear abuse of dollars. Most Canadians who look at those ads know they are ineffective and know they are an absolute waste of money. There is nothing else in the ads other than promoting a government's false agenda. We need to fix the problem that is widely out of control and getting worse as the government becomes more and more desperate ahead of the next election, as we have clearly heard today.

For example, between fiscal years 2006-14, the Government of Canada spent $758 million telling us how wonderful Conservatives are, advertising phony programs and trying to make themselves look like they were doing great things, which they were not. The budget was released last week, supposedly the 2015 budget, I do not call it that. It is a 2017 budget because very little is going to happen before 2017. Let us be straight about that. The Conservatives are spending $7.5 million on that budget issue alone.

As I indicated earlier, I will be splitting my time with my colleague from Trinity—Spadina, a new member who is doing a fabulous job for us representing his critic role on the cities file and we will have a lot to advertise as a result of the work that he is doing when the time comes.

The Conservatives have repeatedly used taxpayer money to buy highly partisan ads during some of the most expensive timeslots available, including the Stanley Cup finals, a timeslot that costs over $100,000 for a 30-second ad. I need to repeat that: with a 30-second ad and it costs taxpayers $100,000 to tell them about their so-called economic plan. Put that into perspective a different way. That $100,000 is equivalent to more than eight years of OAS for a low-income senior. For many of the people who live in my riding of York West, or Trinity—Spadina, or Winnipeg North, that would be eight years of old age security for a senior. That is what they blew on one ad in the Stanley Cup.

● (1645)

Again, that money alone could have funded the federal contribution toward the creation of 32 jobs for families devastated by the manufacturing crash. That one ad could have entirely paid the average monthly survivor's allowance for 156 people with disabilities. However, this debate is not just about spending too much money; it is about wasting money by advertising programs that do not even exist.

We all remember occasions when the current government launched multi-million dollar ad campaigns for programs that did not exist then and probably never did exist. Similarly, we remember when the Advertising Standards council forced the government to pull its May 2013 ad campaign, calling it misleading, like many of the comments we have heard here today. At that time, the council verified that the Conservatives had breached the Canadian Code of Advertising Standards by airing commercials that urged Canadians to apply for the Canada job grant, something that did not exist and there was no way to even apply for.

As has already been pointed out here today, the government is not the first in history to abuse the public purse in this way, although it has taken the practice to unprecedented heights. Mike Harris did that a lot, and I guess the government's advisors are continuing along that line. As the representative for York West, a riding that contains the Black Creek neighbourhood, Glenfield-Jane Heights, and several other communities with very high needs, to see the abuse of these advertising dollars when the need for effective programs to help people get on their feet is very disappointing.

Communities in my riding and others are filled with good people who work hard and deserve better than to have their tax dollars used to trick them into thinking that government services are being expanded in that area. They make the phone call and find out they are not eligible because the program has very specific guidelines that exclude most of the people who really need the help. I say this because they already know that government services are not being expanded to the people and communities of York West. For example, the most recent budget ignores the pleas of students at York University, Humber College, and Seneca College. It does nothing to expand the vital community programming offered by groups at Elspeth Heyworth Centre, Ephraim's Place, San Romanoway, or for seniors living at 35 Shoreham or 7-11 Arleta. No amount of advertising is going to help their lives.

The Conservative government is clearly obsessed with spending its money in an inappropriate way and no doubt will continue to do that.

● (1650)

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are attacking the government on ads to promote programs that Canadians need. Canadians need to understand that these programs are available to them. If we do not advertise, many Canadians might miss out. For example, Canadians wanting to register for the universal child care benefit who have young children who have either previously not received that benefit, or have children aged 15 or 16 in their homes who may not have received it before they were six years of age, have to register by this Friday. These ads are needed by Canadians so they can access some of these programs.

Let us compare that type of advertising to the type of advertising that the Liberal Party did. If we look back to 2004, an Auditor General's report clearly said that things were scandalous. Over $100 million was paid for advertising that did not exist. Can the Liberal member across the way talk about how our ads actually promote the programs that Canadians need to access while Liberal ads did not even happen?

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, it continues to amaze me. I do not know what the government is so afraid of. This is simply a nice motion that, if passed, would put in place certain rules to make sure that taxpayer money is spent appropriately when it comes to advertising. When Canadians need to be notified of various programs, it will still be done. Nobody is saying that the government is not going to be able to advertise.

Frankly, it spent $758 million in advertising, but I am sure that $50 million would do the job properly. The government can advertise programs, but it needs to do it in a non-partisan way. It is the abuse of the partisan ads that we are talking about today and how to put an end to them in Parliament, the same way that Ontario did with the current Liberal government. There are no ads run unless they are validated by a third party that they are not partisan and they deliver a message to consumers.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it was ironic hearing from the Conservatives that at least their ads had produced something. We all fondly remember the Canada job grant, where the government spent millions of dollars on a program that did not exist. It encouraged Canadian companies and Canadians to apply for what? Nothing. All that money went down the drain, but the Conservatives are happy with what it was intended to do. What it was intended to do was to gloss over their bad economic record and say that they were doing something.

Of course, where Canadians get frustrated, and they were equally as frustrated when the Liberals did it, is when taxpayer money is used to fund a campaign or advertising blitz that is not cheap, especially during playoff time in Canada, to promote messages where partisan parts of the conversation are also promoted at the same time.

The Conservatives are defending themselves by holding up the Liberal record on misspent advertising revenue. As New Democrats, we say it is not much justification to say that the Liberals were bad and there was a sponsorship scandal but they at least have not done that. What the Conservatives have done is to try to perfect the beast, to make it even more insidious and lead people to more cynicism.

My question for my friend is on whether her consideration of the motion on the third party, to validate whether advertisements are partisan or not, is to turn it over to somebody like the Auditor General, someone clearly non-partisan, who does not have a stake or a role in any of the actions of any of the individual parties.

● (1655)

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, we are not recommending who it should be, but it clearly has to be a third party that is independent. There is no question that there are a lot of those bodies that can do the advertising.

There are two issues: one is the content on the partisanship issue, and the other is the amount of money being spent. In history, the Conservatives have never spent $758 million to tell Canadians about all of the great things that frankly they are not doing. It is the amount of money that is way overspent, as well as the fact that they are using it for partisan uses rather than to inform the public properly.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Trinity—Spadina, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I had the great honour when I was a child to be Marshall McLuhan's paperboy. Marshall McLuhan had a lot to say about advertising. One of the things he said baffled him was why anyone would do it when nobody believes it. There is a certain validity to that because when we look at these ads, we cannot believe them because in fact they are not true.

Nowhere is that more profoundly obvious than on the infrastructure ads that we see running on television. The Conservatives claim to be spending new dollars on infrastructure, and yet the budget documents clearly indicate there is no new money in the budget this year, and no new money was there last year.

When we ask questions about it, the Conservatives cite things like the gas tax, which is something that a Liberal government put in place. They seem to think that answers the questions being asked.

However, when we talk to the mayor of Vancouver and ask what he got in new building Canada funds last year, the answer is zero. When we ask the mayor of Calgary, the answer is zero: Winnipeg, zero; Regina, zero; Toronto, zero; Mississauga, zero; Ottawa, zero; Montreal, zero; Halifax, zero. There is not a single new penny in new building Canada infrastructure funds that the government has announced as the biggest rollout in the history of the country. It has never been rolled out.

However, the advertising has landed in these cities faster than the infrastructure dollars. There is a problem there. Conservatives can quote scandals and problems that have existed with other governments until they are quite literally blue in the face.

Let us talk about a specific scandal and all the money wasted building railroads in the country. Imagine if all the bribes paid to Conservatives had actually been spent on building rail infrastructure back to the time of Confederation. How much better would our rail system would be if John A. Macdonald had not been so corrupt? I do not see the Conservatives threatening to call an inquiry into themselves on that one.

An hon. member: Are you saying we should not have connected? We should not have done that.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Mr. Speaker, maybe the member should have connected. He may have found out some things and changed parties.

The issue is this. Not only is the advertising about infrastructure that does not happen, the government's own accountability offices have said that the ads are ineffective. At some point one would think that the government that claims it wants to do nonpartisan ads, that it is advertising real services, that its ads meet the highest test, would simply agree with this policy because its ads meet the test.

The fact that the Conservatives are protesting and not going to support this motion shows that they know their ads are in fact partisan, ineffectual, and a waste of money. However, they are not just a waste of money in terms of wasting money on advertising. When we look at the priorities that are not being addressed by the government and could be addressed by the money that is being spent on advertising, it is actually shameful.

There is not a penny to improve first nations education on reserves in this year's budget, despite report after report and plea after plea and representation after representation by first nations and aboriginal leaders in this country. There is not a penny.

However, the Conservatives can spend $100,000 advertising during a sports event. That is a strange set of priorities for Canadians to understand. When the Conservatives will not even submit those ads to be tested to see if they are nonpartisan or accurate but would rather protest, the Conservatives' cynical approach has reached new levels and has to be curbed.

I agree that there have been problems in the past. I was a journalist who covered those problems, those issues. The challenge we have in front of us is not to go back and reprosecute, re-inquire, and repay, because it has already been repaid and it cannot be done twice.

The issue is this. When are we going to move forward with an advertising policy that legitimately explains new policies to Canadians, at the same time as actually leaving enough money in the budget to deliver new programs to Canadians? When are we going to have ads that do not get appealed to Advertising Standards council and are shown to be bad advertising?

That is the challenge and the question being put before the House today. We need a new standard. I think all parties have said that partisan advertising by the government should not be allowed. This bill accomplishes that. It will be interesting to see which parties support it.

We have said that the priority of Canadians is not to convince Canadians that the government they have elected is necessarily doing a good or bad job; it is to advertise government services that Canadians need. One would think that this party that claims to be a good financial steward would understand it is good fiscal policy and support a motion like that. It would have nothing to hide if all its ads were subjected to that process.

● (1700)

Yet, what we get are protests. There are $750 million not arriving in cities, not arriving in first nation communities and not being delivered to small towns that need new water plants. Nothing is being done with that money other than to support the government's ideological objectives.

One would think the backbench members would start to revolt when programs are advertised that do not exist and slogans are used that have no meaning. One would think they would start to protest when their very own communities cannot get the infrastructure funding they need, and instead dollars are being wasted on Super Bowl ads and NHL playoff ads.

I would add one other thing. One of the most persistent problems we have in our country is youth unemployment. One ad, at $100,000 for 30 seconds, could produce hours and hours of work for young people doing real work, building real strength in communities and adding to the economic capacity of our country. Instead we have advertisement that basically says that people might want to apply for a program if Parliament happens to pass it. It may be a benefit, but it may not, but people will find out later, not to worry.

As Marshall McLuhan said, nobody believes the advertising. As the reports have said, they are ineffectual. Why would the Conservative government continue with an ineffective policy and throw $750 million at it? Where on God's good earth is that sound fiscal policy, good social policy or at the end of the day even good advertising?

Hon. Shelly Glover (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to correct the record on a couple of things that were said, being that they were so important to Canadians and it was probably the explanation that was most required in the House.

Advertisements actually do correct the record when inappropriate things are said or misleading things are said in the House, so I will take that opportunity without advertising it but just stating it.

First nations people, aboriginal people, are very important to this government. We have displayed that time and time again, through an apology for the residential schools, through the matrimonial real property act, which was voted down by some of our opposition. Thankfully, we were able to get it through so all aboriginal women across the country finally have the same rights as other Canadian women.

It has been absolutely crucial to this government to move first nations education forward. Therefore, when the opposition member says that there is no funding available in this budget, that just simply is not true. On top of the $1.7 billion made available to pay for education on reserve every year, we have announced $200 million more in the budget and in November the Prime Minister announced $500 million more for the construction of new schools on first nation reserves.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Mr. Speaker, I was with aboriginal leaders in Toronto yesterday. On the residential school apology, the apology came but there was no follow through. They are asking why there has not been restitution made for the individuals who suffered one of the worst chapters in Canadian history. When the Conservatives talk about the funding for aboriginal children of first nations and traditional territories, the reality is that they get less funding per capita than every other kid in our country, and that has not been addressed in this budget.

However, I would add to this debate these words:

> Given the growing evidence of widespread waste and mismanagement of government advertising business and the fact that the government's incompetent handling of its advertising...is already under review, will the prime minister stop the waste and abuse right now and order a freeze of all discretionary government advertising?

That was Stephen Harper. His voice is silent in this debate is it not?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. I would remind the member, as I am sure he already knows, that he cannot refer to other members by their given name.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

● (1705)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I really do not think there is anything that any member in this place, in the Conservative ranks or in the opposition, can find fault with in the proposal to have a third party review of whether taxpayers are getting value for money and whether ads are actually telling Canadians about things they need to hear versus what we see far too often. Some of the ads are legitimately helping Canadians find out about things they need to hear, but far too many of them are clearly political propaganda to a level we have not seen from previous administrations.

Through the course of today's debate, has my hon. colleague heard anybody put forward an objection to the idea of creating a vetting process for all future Parliaments, administrations and cabinets to ensure we do not waste money in future as it has been wasted in the last nine years?

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Mr. Speaker, this debate will not fix problems of the past. The debate is about addressing the problem in the future.

As a journalist, I used to listen to politicians talk about their opponents being soft on crime. That is ridiculous. Then we hear the other side say, "that side wants to waste money". No politician campaigns on the platform of wanting to waste money. It just is not a reality.

What we are asking for and what we are looking for is the House to come together on this issue and realize that government advertising should be just that, the advertising of government services, not the advertising of political parties or ideologies.

If the Conservatives really believe their ads are truly a public service and independent of their party platform and ideology, they would be unafraid to support this motion and unafraid to submit their ads to this process. Instead, we hear reluctance on the other side and finger pointing. They want to avoid the test because they know they will fail that test.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me today to address the motion on government advertising, an issue that I know continues to preoccupy our hon. colleagues on the opposition benches. These preoccupations are unfounded and distracting us from the important work of building a strong Canada. I am pleased to have this opportunity to discuss the government's important duty to communicate with Canadians about programs that affect their economic and social well-being.

For example, if we go back to 2009, after launching the stimulus phase of Canada's economic action plan, we put in place an advertising campaign to make Canadians aware of key initiatives designed to create jobs and strengthen the economy. That was a responsible use of taxpayer dollars. Businesses depend on information and predictability to plan successfully and invest in the future. Individual Canadians also depend on information and predictability to take full advantage of programs designed to help them. That is why we have a duty to communicate about government programs.

Advertising creates awareness of such programs and provides important information that Canadians can use in their business and personal lives. A great example from a few years ago was the successful temporary home renovation tax credit, which was a key component of Canada's economic action plan. I am sure every member in the House has heard from many constituents who benefited from this great initiative, the home renovation tax credit. Not only did it help individuals complete projects and help create jobs for people who were looking for work, but we heard many times that it also helped to bring attention to the underground economy. Small business owners who were operating businesses above board were very thankful that all of these measures had to have tax receipts to legitimize the expenses that were made.

This program created jobs and incomes in the home renovation and construction sector, while allowing Canadians to make their homes more energy efficient at a reduced cost. Indeed, more than three million Canadians, about one out of every three owner-occupied households, took advantage of this program.

Many examples prove the value of the government advertising its program. Consider, for example, communications regarding various tax-relief measures that our Conservative government has made available. I am also thinking about our communications to encourage Canadians to file income tax and their benefit return on time and online to claim benefits and credits to which they are entitled.

We do not need to remind Canadians that this is tax-filing season, and CRA is hard at work processing over 28 million returns that will be filed by Canadians this year. By the end of this filing season, there will be over $22 billion in credits and benefit payments issued to individuals and families. We on this side believe that good tax policy means putting money back into the hands of hard-working Canadians.

We have also had advertising campaigns to highlight opportunities such as training for young people, retraining for older workers and support available for small business owners and manufacturers. Examples of this would be the apprenticeship initiative to get apprentices into the skilled trades market.

All of these programs were good for Canadians, their communities and the economy. Advertising them has been an important part of ensuring that Canadians learn about and use them to full advantage. The fact is that government advertising has had, and continues to have, an important role in advancing our priorities and in strengthening our economy.

It is hard to argue with what has been achieved. The stimulus phase of Canada's economic action plan was successful in securing the recovery by protecting jobs and families, while making important investments to contribute to Canada's long-term prosperity. The economic action plan provided more than $63 billion in timely stimulus. These funds helped create local jobs, supported communities, large and small, and renewed Canada's research and science base. They also contributed to a strong labour market recovery.

● (1710)

Today we can be proud of the fact that the Canadian economy has experienced one of the best performances among the G7 countries over this period of recovery. Over 1.2 million more Canadians are working now than at the end of the recession, one of the strongest job performances among G7 countries. As well, over 85% of those jobs created since June 2009 are full-time positions, over 80% are in the private sector, and nearly two-thirds are in high-wage industries. Indeed, it is the private sector that is driving much of our recovery. It is private sector job creation that is essential for recovery and expansion.

In addition, the World Economic Forum rated Canada's banking system the soundest in the world for the seventh year in a row in its annual global competitiveness report. In fact, four credit rating agencies, Moody's Investors Service, Fitch Ratings, Standard and Poor's, and Dominion Bond Rating Service have reaffirmed their top ratings for Canada, and it is expected that Canada will maintain its AAA rating in the year ahead. This economic resilience reflects the actions our government took before the global crisis: lowering taxes, paying down debt, reducing red tape, and promoting free trade and innovation.

Our government's continued efforts to ensure that every tax dollar is spent as efficiently as possible and that inefficient spending is eliminated have kept our country on track to budgetary balance. Without these measures, we would be in a much worse situation. All the while we have taken all of those measures without raising taxes or reducing investments in health care and social service transfers. The result is that Canada is well placed to retain its fiscal advantage, but most important, we have fulfilled our promise to return to balance the federal budget.

One of the most important contributions a government can make to bolster confidence and growth in our country is to maintain a sound fiscal position. This is especially true in certain and uncertain times, such as those we have faced since the 2008 global recession.

By reducing debt we can free up tax dollars that would otherwise be absorbed by interest costs. We can reinvest that money in things that matter to Canadians, such as health care, public services, and lower taxes. Reducing debt also helps to keep interest rates low, which in turn encourages businesses to invest and create jobs, and it signals that public services are sustainable over the long haul. It also preserves the gains made in Canada's low-tax plan, fostering the long-term growth that will continue to generate high-wage jobs for Canadians.

Government advertising has contributed to our country's long-term prosperity. It is a responsible, efficient, and effective use of taxpayers' money. It is responsible in another way as well. It is responsible because it is accountable. It is governed by rules regarding both the kind of advertising the government can undertake and the reporting of the costs. For example, the communications policy of the Government of Canada clearly states that departments and agencies may place advertisements to inform Canadians about, first, their rights or responsibilities; second, about government policies, programs, services, or initiatives; and finally, third, about dangers or risks to public health, safety, or the environment. The policy also goes on to say that departments and agencies must ensure that advertising campaigns are aligned with government priorities, themes, and messages.

These rules exist to ensure that Canadians receive value for the money their government spends on advertising, and we follow those rules. For example, to ensure accountability, we follow a strict process. Every year, departments and agencies prepare advertising proposals reflecting government priorities, and recommendations are submitted to the Privy Council Office. The Privy Council Office then prepares an advertising plan for the whole of government, which is provided to cabinet for approval. Cabinet then decides which proposals will go ahead and determines the maximum allocation for each. Following Treasury Board approval, funds are allocated to departments to be managed by them.

● (1715)

Once funding is secured, departments work with Public Works and Government Services Canada to implement their campaigns. Then Public Works and Government Services Canada administers contracting and procurement for approved initiatives, administers the advertising management information system, and develops and issues an annual report.

In addition, there are mechanisms in place to ensure that parliamentarians and all Canadians are well informed about government advertising activities. One of these is Public Works and Government Services Canada's "Annual Report on Government of Canada Advertising Activities", which I just mentioned. This report gives an overview of the government's advertising management practices and outlines its advertising initiatives. It also lists all expenditures by federal institutions as well as expenditures by media type. Through this annual report, total annual spending on advertising is reported to Canadians.

In addition, every quarter the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat posts on its website the approved allocations made from the annual amount set aside for advertising initiatives. On the Treasury Board Secretariat's website we can find interesting examples of the type of advertising campaigns the government undertakes. For instance, it includes campaigns on issues such as cyberbullying, which is led by Public Safety Canada. This advertising makes Canadians aware of the problem of cyberbullying and informs parents and kids about what they can do about it. I doubt that there is anyone in this room who does not think that this is money well spent. We all know that the most effective way to deal with a problem like this is to expose it, and advertising helps us with that.

Let me add that all advertising related contracts are also posted on buyandsell.gc.ca. This is Public Works and Government Services Canada's website for contract related information. All contracts over $10,000 must be posted on the departments' and agencies' own websites.

In addition, advertising research contracted out by the government, whether to pretest or evaluate campaigns, is also available to the public through Library and Archives Canada. Information on that research is also posted online and is reflected in Public Works and Government Services Canada's "Public Opinion Research in the Government of Canada Annual Report".

Finally, the government's advertising allocations must be approved by the Parliament of Canada. Before spending any funds, an organization must request parliamentary approval to spend through the main or supplementary estimates. The main estimates, set out by March 1 of each year, are the initial budget allocations for each department over the fiscal year ahead. These are then adjusted through the supplementary estimates throughout the fiscal year. Typically advertising expenditures are included in either operating expenditures or program expenditures. As I said, the actual expenditures are reported through Public Works and Government Services Canada's "Annual Report on Government of Canada Advertising Activities".

The process for approving the government's advertising expenses is thorough, and it is subject to scrutiny at both the top levels of government and here in Parliament.

Canadians expect elected officials and public servants to manage their tax dollars wisely, and they expect us to uphold the highest standards of ethical conduct. To instill that confidence, the government must be open about what it has achieved. It must assure Canadians and parliamentarians that the right controls are in place, and it must provide them with the information they need to judge its performance. That is exactly the approach we are taking with respect to government advertising. It is the kind of government Canadians not only expect but deserve, and it is the kind of government we are delivering.

Government advertising has played an important role in strengthening the Canadian economy when it needed it most. It is efficient and effective in informing Canadians about government programs available to them. It makes responsible use of taxpayers' money. It undertakes it according to the rules and the associated expenditures disclosed in Public Works and Government Services Canada's annual report and in the Public Accounts of Canada.

● (1720)

I see no reason why we should stop what has proven to be a responsible, effective, and efficient use of taxpayers' dollars and why the government should not do everything it can to help Canadians succeed.

I am proud of all the government programs and initiatives we have discussed here today. It is absolutely crucial to make sure that Canadians are aware of these opportunities so they can take advantage of them.

It is shameful that the member opposite would oppose informing Canadians of programs that would actually benefit them, especially since when our government spends money on advertising, it goes to advertisements. When the previous Liberal government spent money on advertising, it went into the pockets of the Liberal Party. That should be cause for shame.

I therefore urge all hon. members of the House to reject the motion before us. As I said earlier, the motion represents a distraction. It is distracting us from the important work of planning for the economic recovery and ensuring that Canada continues to succeed in today's modern economy.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have another question for another one of my Conservative colleagues regarding the $750 million that was used to promote the Conservatives' accomplishments over the past few years. I think it was a waste of money.

A few years ago, the Conservatives spent—or in my opinion, wasted—$2.5 million on advertising for a Canada job grant that did not even exist.

My question for my colleague is simple. Does he think that spending $2.5 million to advertise a federal program that did not exist was a good investment?

[*English*]

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, obviously there are times when we forecast what we are going to be doing. That was clearly one example. I remember very clearly sitting down with members of Conestoga College, for example, and discussing the Canada jobs grant and their excitement about what that would actually bring to the table in terms of providing a better stream of skilled workers and helping workers who had been in a particular occupation who may have lost their jobs and needed to upgrade. There was certainly wide acceptance of that program, even though it has been adjusted from its original idea.

Our government has spent money on many initiatives that are very important for Canadians to be aware of, such as services to newcomers. I have had the privilege of attending new citizenship ceremonies in my riding. Actually, the office is just outside of my riding. I have probably attended more than 100 new citizen welcomes in this last nine and a half years. There is nothing more enjoyable in my job as a member of Parliament than to look into the eyes of these new citizens as they arrive, and after they have been for three years, as they take the oath of citizenship. It is important that we inform newcomers about the steps our government is taking to create a fast and flexible immigration system, including improvements to foreign credential recognition and super visas to speed up family reunification.

These and many other things I could list are important advertising initiatives we have taken to inform Canadians about programs that are available to them.

● (1725)

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is clear that Canadians do not support wasteful partisan advertising. Their dollars are being spent on just such advertising by the government. While the government has spent $750 million on advertising, it has cut any number of very important services, whether it is providing services for veterans' front-line needs, cutting in half the number of youth employment program dollars, or cutting settlement services, contrary to what the member just said, by $15 million in my province of British Columbia.

What is mystifying is that the member was saying that their advertising is so great. If so, then they would have no concern with this motion, because it simply says that there would be a third-party review process. If the advertising was appropriate, it would be approved, so what are they fearing? Perhaps they fear that the bulk of their advertising is the kind of wasteful partisan advertising Canadians do not want their tax dollars spent on.

I would like to ask the member why there is concern when the motion simply says that there would be a third-party review rather than the Orwellian kind of review the member talked about, approval at the highest levels. That means his Prime Minister, who wants this wasteful partisan advertising, and subject to parliamentary scrutiny in a majority—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. The hon. member for Kitchener—Conestoga.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, it does not surprise me that the Liberals are intent on creating yet another bureaucracy to oversee a process that I clearly outlined in my remarks. All of the checks and balances that are already in place to create another bureaucracy, to oversee another bureaucracy to oversee another one; this is the kind of Liberal government that members would create.

I have a more fundamental question. Many times today I have heard the member and her colleagues talk about partisan advertising. I am wondering if she would consider the advertising that existed prior to the Gomery inquiry as partisan. That is one question, but does the member have any idea where the $40 million is? Would she please encourage her colleagues to pay it back?

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I heard my colleague from Kitchener—Conestoga say that he thought this motion said that the opposition party that put it forward and the opposition member actually opposed government advertising to tell Canadians about programs. As I read the motion it is quite clearly saying a third party review would ensure only advertising in future by other parties and other administrations, with which my hon. friend may not be quite as friendly.

Would it not be a good idea to control how they spend taxpayers' money in the future by making sure a third party does ensure that advertising is actually for the purpose of informing Canadians and not attempting to delude them with propaganda?

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, I outlined throughout my remarks the various checks and balances that are already in place as they relate to getting government advertising approved. We could argue about whether or not something is partisan or not because of the colour of it, for example.

These are extraneous arguments that are taking us away from the important fact that it is incumbent upon any government to let its citizens know about what programs are available to them and how that will actually help them whether it is a tax credit, or the ability to take apprenticeship training, for example, or the upcoming child care benefits that are going to be available. We know that those who have children between ages six and 17, if they have not been enrolled in a previous program, will not qualify until they enrol. It is important for government to let people know what programs are available to them.

● (1730)

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sure my good friend from Kitchener—Conestoga would agree with me that regardless of the stripe of party that is in government at the time, there is a fiduciary responsibility for governments to communicate, to advertise and to make sure that Canadians are aware of government services and programs. It is the height of hypocrisy that Liberal Party of Canada members bring this motion forward in the House today. There is no way they can possibly suggest that while they were in government that none of their advertising was "partisan" whatever that means.

However, my residents in Mississauga—Streetsville appreciate the fact that they are informed of exactly the programs and services the government is delivering, and how they can take advantage of programs, services and benefits that they need. I want the member to clarify that he agrees with me that this is an important role of government, that we do advertise, we do make sure Canadians understand the programs and services that are available to them.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, that is a very clear question with an easy answer. Most of us in the House try to inform our constituents in our individual ridings about things that we are doing. For example, each year I host what is called the shredding party where people can bring their old financial records and shred them so they are not available for potential cyber thieves. We have the RCMP and regional police services there to explain to people how they can prevent identity theft.

The way I get the word out to my constituents is through what we call the ten percenter. Many times I have had complaints about the fact that I send out ten percenters at parliamentary expense. I remember one day a person at a shredding party complained about all the mailings I was doing. I asked him how he became aware of the event and he was holding the announcement in his hand. Sometimes we argue one way, but really we realize that unless government is taking the time to inform Canadians about what is available to them, there is really no other option.

I mentioned the home renovation tax credit, the job-sharing program that helped many employers retain some of their most skilled employees during the economic downturn, elder abuse awareness programs that we have advertised, income splitting for seniors, child fitness tax credits, caregiver tax credits. I could go on and on.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We are out of time for our questions and comments, but I see the hon. member for York West rising.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, in my comments earlier this afternoon, I used the word "lies" and I would like to withdraw that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I thank the hon. member for York West for responding to the earlier intervention, and I think we will consider the whole matter closed.

Resuming debate.

The hon. member for Random—Burin—St. George's.

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to the motion from my liberal colleague, the member for Ottawa South, on the very serious issue of wasteful partisan advertising.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to be splitting my time with the hon. member for Winnipeg North.

All members of this House have an obligation to ensure the hard-earned dollars of taxpayers are spent responsibly, which is why this debate on the use of public funds for partisan ineffective advertising is so very important. At a time when the current Conservative government preaches fiscal restraint and belt-tightening to everyone else, it has spent hundreds of millions of dollars on self-promotion. For over nine years, the Conservatives have used taxpayer money to broadcast highly partisan advertising, often containing little to no useful information. Between fiscal years 2006-07 and 2014-15, the Government of Canada spent $758 million on advertising.

According to figures revealed in media reports today, the current Conservative government is planning to spend $13.5 million to promote its pre-election budget in April and May alone; $13.5 million of taxpayer money to promote targeted tax breaks.

It has wasted millions of dollars on advertising during high-profile events when the cost to do so is so much higher, such as the Academy Awards, the Grammys, the Super Bowl, the World Junior Hockey Championships, and the NHL playoffs, while refusing to disclose the costs to Canadians.

The Conservatives have repeatedly used taxpayer money to pay highly partisan advertising during some of the most expensive time slots on television, including the Super Bowl and Stanley Cup finals; a time slot that, by the way, costs over $100,000 for a 30-second ad. This is simply unacceptable and irresponsible. I can only imagine the number of young students who could find jobs with that money.

It is not just Liberals who are concerned about this issue. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation, an organization where the Minister of Defence served as CEO and the Conservative member for New Brunswick Southwest served as national director, has called upon the government to end these taxpayer-funded partisan ads.

In a recent release, the organization's federal director said:

> If a government can use public dollars to "inform" Canadians by conveniently putting a positive spin on the governing party's policies at the same time, they probably will. This is not only a waste of precious resources; it's also an affront to fairness in a democracy. Further, it violates the democratic principle that public dollars shouldn't be directed towards partisan ends.

The current government has spent millions of dollars on ad campaigns, advertising programs that do not even exist yet.

Earlier this month, I was watching TV and, to my surprise, I saw a government ad advertising proposed tax measures, such as the so-called family tax cut that has not been approved by Parliament. In fine print, I saw the words "subject to parliamentary approval" written across the screen.

Surely the government should be waiting until its program or measure has actually been approved by Parliament before advertising it.

This is not the first time a government ad has advertised a program that did not exist, but I hope we can make it the last, as a result of this responsible motion by the Liberals that we are discussing before this House.

A particularly egregious example of this occurred in 2013 when Advertising Standards Canada forced the government to pull its May 2013 ad campaign, calling it misleading. Advertising Standards Canada sent a letter to an assistant deputy minister at Employment and Social Development, stating that the Government of Canada had breached the Canadian Code of Advertising Standards by airing commercials that ask Canadians to apply for the Canada job grant. At the time, the grant did not exist and no provinces had agreed to the potential program, despite the fact that the original model required provinces to pay for one-third of the grant.

● (1735)

Advertisements have also continued after a program has ended. In yet another example of waste, the government spent $37.4 million promoting the Conservative economic action plan since the program ended. Even when the programs advertised do exist, government public polling about its own advertising campaigns has consistently shown that the ads have little to no effect on Canadians. The vast majority of them report that they did nothing upon seeing a Government of Canada advertisement. According to a government-funded poll on the effectiveness of the 2013 budget ads, only three respondents of the 2,003 surveyed actually visited the action plan website and not a single person called the 1-800-O-Canada number promoted in the ad.

Ads by the Government of Canada aired overseas do not fare any better. A series of ads in the Washington, D.C. area subway stations praising Canada's environmental record and oil industry were found to have little effect, according to research funded by the government itself. Even so, the Conservative government decided to extend this campaign using $22.7 million over two years. I repeat, $22.7 million for ineffective subway advertisements in a foreign capital. Just think what Canadians could do with that money. Just think of the vulnerable Canadians who could use that in programs that this very government has cut, programs that have been so needed by the most vulnerable in our country. The government's research shows these vague, partisan ads are not working, and yet it continues to fund them with taxpayers' own dollars.

At the same time as the Conservative government is spending over a quarter of a billion dollars on ineffective partisan advertising, sometimes for programs that do not yet exist, there are people throughout our country who are struggling to make ends meet and having to tighten their belts to provide for their families. This, too, is blatantly unacceptable. The Conservatives should focus on strengthening the economy and helping to create jobs, not spending taxpayers' money on expensive partisan ad campaigns.

This most recent budget by the Conservative government built an artificial surplus on the backs of Canadians by cutting programs and services that are, indeed, meant to help the most vulnerable in our country. This is part of a larger pattern, unfortunately. In recent years, the government closed nine regional Veterans Affairs offices, which helped veterans who really need our support, who have given so much on behalf of our country, and yet when they need us to be there for them, the government is not there.

It ended funding to low-income co-operative housing units and raised the age of eligibility for old age security from 65 to 67. I know people who just cannot work beyond age 65 and if they are not eligible until age 67, they are going to have to turn to programs in their provinces, assisted welfare programs, which pay a lot less than they would get on old age security.

It is not right that throughout our country we are seeing reduced health care funding to the provinces by nearly $36 billion in the name of financial prudence and austerity. The Conservative government spent more than $100,000 in one year to increase the reach of Twitter posts by Veterans Affairs Canada while neglecting veterans themselves. Last year, Veterans Affairs Canada spent $4.3 billion on an ad campaign advertising rehabilitation, financial support, mental health services and career transition services, while closing the very offices that veterans would need to visit or get in touch with to discuss these services. By going forward with all of these services, the Conservatives still neglect veterans because they do not make it possible for them to be able to access the services. The backlash from viewers was noticeable.

● (1740)

The backlash from viewers was noticeable. According to an internal analysis, when asked to describe the main point of the ad, some 150 people who saw the ad said that it was either that veterans were being neglected or it was government self-promotion for not doing enough for veterans. Despite the backlash, the department claimed the campaign was effective.

Liberals would remove the partisanship from taxpayer-funded advertising and ensure that government ads only provide useful information to Canadian taxpayers. The Liberal member for Ottawa South has a bill at second reading that would take the partisanship out of government advertising by saying that the Auditor General must approve the content before it is broadcast.

We have seen that system work in Ontario. During the previous Progressive Conservative government's tenure, taxpayers paid for commercials that featured then-premier Mike Harris. In 2004, the Liberal government in Ontario—

● (1745)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. Questions and comments.

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have sat here most of the day. I have listened to the debate on the Liberals' opposition motion on advertising, yet I have not heard one single member of the Liberal Party who stood up to speak apologize to Canadians for the sponsorship scandal, not one.

The member who just spoke is her party's whip. She is in a senior leadership position of the current Liberal caucus in the House of Commons. I want to ask her if she will stand in the House right now and apologize for the $40 million that is gone, wasted, finished, that we will never see again. Will she apologize for the sponsorship scandal, and apologize for what Liberals put Canadians through in the 1990s under the Chrétien and Martin governments in their attempt to spend advertising dollars?

I think the Liberal Party owes this House an apology.

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge the question from my colleague across the way. I want to say that given his comments, it is pretty obvious that he, as a member of the Conservative Party, is actually embarrassed by what is happening with the Conservative government. The amount of money and the numbers I talked about in my speech clearly show that, given the anger that seemed to come out of the member in terms of his remarks, he is embarrassed.

I think the member recognizes that what is happening is wrong, and that this motion is exactly what this House needs. What is being put forward by the Liberal member for Ottawa South is exactly what all parties should be considering and should in fact be supporting unanimously, so that we do not see any more of this partisan advertising, the use of taxpayer dollars to do anything other than promote programs that Canadians need and deserve.

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to listen to my colleague's thoughtful remarks.

To a certain extent in response to the last Conservative speaker, let us just illustrate what the government has been doing. There was $29.5 million spent on erecting 9,800 billboards in Canada. Not only that, but the Conservatives compelled the municipalities where those billboards were put up to spend the money out of the infrastructure proceeds they were receiving from the federal government, to be able to blame the municipalities. This is the kind of subterfuge that is surrounding the advertising choices being made by the government.

Surely my colleague would agree that $29 million, for example, would pay for 515 public health nurses for a year, would build 500 affordable housing units, or would pay for 15,000 chemotherapy treatments for cancer patients on waiting lists. That is exactly the kind of responsible spending we are looking for, which is why the suggestion here, as the member rightly points out, is to have a third party, an advertising commissioner inside the Auditor General's office, provide a perfectly reasonable, balanced and objective review.

Could the member help us understand what the alternative expenditures could be for this kind of wasteful advertising spending?

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Ottawa South on two fronts: first, in putting forward this motion today, which is very important to Canadian taxpayers, and second, for his question.

I acknowledge, as we have discussed here today, that we really need to do things differently. What is being proposed is important because we do need to be advertising programs to Canadians. They do need to know what is available and what we are doing. What we do not need to be doing is wasting taxpayer dollars by being partisan and suggesting that only the Conservative government can do this.

This is meant to be fair use of taxpayer dollars. It is not government money. It is taxpayers' money. Having a third party look at how we are going to spend money is a responsible way to go forward. It is responsible to have someone other than one of the parties in the House of Commons, someone other than the Conservative Party, the Liberal Party, the New Democratic Party, the Green Party, or any other party, decide what is good use of taxpayer dollars when it comes to advertising.

We need to ensure that what we are advertising is something Canadians need, want and deserve, and that it is not being portrayed as somehow a great initiative by a particular party when in fact it is taxpayer money. We are going to be doing things from a leadership perspective that will offer those programs that Canadians want and have asked for, because we have been listening from coast to coast to coast. What we are not going to do is say—

● (1750)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the best place to start is where my colleague and friend just left off in terms of the importance of the issue. We need to recognize that we are talking about is tax dollars. The government establishes all sorts of programming, and no one would deny government the opportunity to promote and encourage legitimate programs through advertising. There are many different measures the public needs to know about and there is a role for the government to use tax dollars to promote those information-type ads.

However, the Prime Minister more than any other prime minister likely in the history of Canada has used and manipulated public tax dollars to purchase public advertising. We are not talking about a few million dollars; we are talking about $750 million. That is three-quarters of a billion dollars. A good portion of those taxpayer dollars is being used for advertising nothing more than political partisan propaganda so the Prime Minister's Office can send out the Prime Minister's message to pat the Conservative Party, the collective back of the cabinet, on the back.

I believe Canadians will not be fooled by the government's gross neglect of tax dollars. They recognize the government has gone too far in squandering tax dollars when there are so many other needs out there.

I have been here throughout the day listening to both the Conservatives and the New Democrats being critical of the motion, even though I suspect we will get support for the motion from the New Democrats. What it reminds me of is political parties that do not recognize the reality of the day. Members will recall when the leader of the Liberal Party stood in his place and brought forward proactive disclosure. They will recall that the Conservatives and the NDP said no. We continued to push the issue. Eventually, the Conservatives came onside and the New Democrats were dragged kicking and screaming and we had to force it to a vote, but eventually they too came on side, and now we have proactive disclosure.

Proactive disclosure would have been a wonderful thing to have had a number of years ago, just like what we have proposed today. It is a significant step forward. We are talking about a huge amount of tax dollars being spent every year on public advertising. Why not allow for an independent body approve what a political party should pay for versus a government? Why would the government oppose that? That is what it is doing today. The Conservatives have tried a great deal to change the channel.

Let us be focused on this issue. The motion we are debating today deals with public advertising and the creation of an independent body that would allow for the determination of which ads could go ahead because they would be in the best interest of the Canadian public, not the Prime Minister and the PMO. It is an independent agency. By doing that, we would have much better advertising on important issues facing governments and Canadians today.

I have heard members talk about the importance of some of the veterans and housing programs. No doubt there are a lot of good programs that need to be advertised. The Liberal Party is not saying no to that.

● (1755)

We are saying that there needs to be that independent body. When those very important tax dollars are being spent, we need to ensure there is an independent body that makes sure it is not being done for the wrong reason. A wrong reason would be that it is too political and it is more about the endorsement of a political party, the party that happens to be the government of the day.

The government's only response as to why this is a bad initiative is to reflect on years past. The Conservatives say that because of the past, they should not have to subject themselves to this. The NDP members will climb on their high horse as if they are not to blame and have no responsibility for any misgivings. They will say that fine, maybe we should have something like this, but why should the Liberals be the ones to introduce it? This is much like the approach on proactive disclosure where the Liberal Party ultimately led the charge because we recognized that there was a need for it. The same thing is happening here. The only difference is that the NDP members are the ones who are being a little reluctant in supporting us, but we kind of sense that they will. It is the Conservatives that are rejecting the motion.

I would suggest to the Prime Minister and his staff within his office, because they are the ones who circulate everything to the Conservative caucus members, that if they fail to recognize the importance of this issue, if they want to continue to hide and not be transparent with Canadians on literally hundreds of millions of dollars, then the Liberal Party will incorporate it into the next election. We are prepared to make the bold statement that it is time for change, whether there is the unanimous support of this House or not. The Liberal Party is committed to making a difference, because we recognize the importance of tax dollars.

There is absolutely nothing to be lost by taking the initiative that my colleague from Ottawa South has brought forward in the form of Bill C-544. If the government truly cared about the taxpayers and understood the importance of advertising in a legitimate fashion, it would recognize that there is a piece of legislation that we could debate and provide tangible results for Canadians today. This is not something that is difficult to understand. It is a fairly straightforward idea. It is an idea that is necessary.

We recognize the importance of advertising, but there has been a great insult to the collective intelligence beyond this chamber when we see the abuse of expenditures. The best example I can come up with offhand is the action plan ads. Some $13 million is being spent based on a budget that has been presented telling Canadians how wonderful the budget is. Well, if it is, where is the Minister of Finance? He is never around to defend it.

The budget is debatable at best in terms of its true value. It is an assault on the middle class. It is not creating jobs. At the end of the day, the budget is very limited in terms of the degree to which it would propel Canada into the future, both our economy and our social fabric. Yet, the Conservatives are spending $13 million to give false impressions to Canadians, as if the government has actually been doing a good job. Well, that has not been the case.

We can look at some of those underlying realities. There are trade deficits. There are infrastructure crises, depending on the community, in every region of our country, because the government refuses to spend the money but would rather wait until after the next federal election. There is underspending on important budget lines. The Conservatives talk tough about crime. They want to get child predators, yet the RCMP underspends because it is told to underspend in terms of the programs that would get tough on individuals who are exploiting our children on the Internet.

● (1800)

There are endless examples I could share with members today, just to show how bad this budget is, but they have no shame. They will spend millions promoting this budget and wasting tax dollars, in my opinion.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have heard a great deal of protest from the Liberal Party regarding the Conservatives' advertising expenditures. Although I agree with them that the $750 million the government has spent in recent years to promote its accomplishments and programs is too much, particularly in times of budget cuts, I would like to remind them of the facts.

I analyzed the amounts the Conservatives spent on advertising per year in recent years. They spent the most in 2006, when they spent $86 million. They spent the least in 2009, when they spent $36 million. On average, the Conservatives spend $73 million a year on advertising.

However, we see that the Liberals also like spending money on advertising. When they were in office, they spent $111 million on advertising in 2002, $70 million in 2003, $50 million in 2004 and $41 million in 2005.

Their spending is therefore rather similar to that of the Conservatives. What does my colleague think about that?

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the only thing missing that would have been nice to hear is how much advertising the New Democrats spent in B.C. when they were in government, or in Manitoba, where they are unfortunately still in government.

At the end of the day, I am asking the members of the New Democratic Party to recognize that what we have before us is a good idea. It is an idea that would make a difference. If the member were to consult with his constituents, I would suggest that he would find overwhelming support for a motion of this nature, because it makes sense. I believe that the taxpayers of Canada would appreciate it, and that is why I suspect that we will end up seeing the New Democratic Party voting in favour of the motion. We welcome that support.

Instead of reflecting on the past and previous governments, whether provincial or national, we need to recognize that we are talking about public advertising. There is a better way to ensure that there is a higher sense of accountability and transparency, and it is by having a third-party group established to protect the interests of the taxpayer.

Mr. Arnold Chan (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wanted to follow on the comments from my friend from Winnipeg North. Is this not ultimately a function of transparency? Is it a function of the fact that the government is afraid of a motion that proposes transparency in government advertising?

I want to specifically focus on the excellent piece of legislation, the private member's bill from the member for Ottawa South, Bill C-544, and particularly the proposal to bring in an advertising commissioner, a newly appointed position, under the rubric of the Auditor General. It would be an independent officer of the legislature.

Why is this a positive initiative in terms of dealing with transparent measures, which the government seems to be opposed to?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I welcome the member back. It is great to see him here, and I very much appreciate the excellent question.

What we are hoping to see through this particular resolution is recognition. The recognition could easily be had by the government looking at Bill C-544, a bill that has been introduced by my colleague from Ottawa South. I have heard a number of speeches on that very important bill. It is a bill that would ensure a higher sense of transparency and more accountability. It is real. It is tangible. It can be done.

I would look to government members in particular and challenge them to explain why they would oppose a third party coming to the table and providing that authorization. It is only a question of time before it happens. The Prime Minister has a choice. He can either get out in front of the issue or he will be left behind on it. Whether it is the leader of the Liberal Party or the public, not only are they demanding it, but it is only a question of time before it happens.

● (1805)

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to once again stand in this place on behalf of the good people of Davenport in the great city of Toronto to speak to this motion put forward by the Liberals.

To touch very lightly on some of the comments by the previous speaker, who seemed to be a little unclear about whether we would be supporting this motion, and so that he understands, we will be supporting the motion.

However, just so he is also clear about some apparent trepidation, it is not so much the motion, but the record of previous Liberal governments. The Liberal Party in the House of Commons does not want Canadians to dwell on that history. I heard the member for Winnipeg North say that his party would bring these measures forward after the next election, if they were given that opportunity. I suppose one would forgive Canadians for skepticism around that promise, given that this is the party that promised to rip up the GST if they were elected, were then elected, and did not proceed to do that. It was also the party that said it would rip up the free trade agreement with the United States, were then elected, and did not rip up that trade deal. We look forward to the promises that the party makes in this place to see how much Canadians want to forget previous governments. We rest on our record and our past actions.

Speaking of that, there is no doubt among New Democrats that the government has been using public money for partisan purposes. The advertisements that the Conservatives are using on television are a clear example of that, and the cost is an outrage. However, when I listen to the debate today in this place, it seems to be more a debate of who has the worst record on this issue, the Liberals or the Conservatives. They have been going back and forth on that, as they have on many other issues, because on many issues they behave in the same way. When they are in opposition they want to be holier than thou, but we have seen both parties behave in a similar fashion.

Because it is important to the people in my riding and the people of Toronto, I want to touch on government services, access to them, and the information that Canadians need. This is vital stuff. In many ways the way to access information, to find out about government programs, is through advertising. It is a great way to serve Canadians. However, too often we see that it has become a way to serve the Conservative Party. This is wrong. This has to stop. We need much greater transparency, much greater oversight.

I have many immigrants in my riding. Many people in my community are trying to bring their families to Canada. They have been promised, through the immigration system in this country, that when they have their status, they too can apply to be reunited with their parents and grandparents. I want to tell a quick story because it connects to the opportunities that communications have for government.

One constituent came into my office with an application that she had sent. It had been stamped as being received on January 4, but her application to bring her father from the home country was denied. There was no explanation. The government had said through advertising that it was accepting 5,000 sponsorship applications for parents and grandparents and it was capping it at that.

● (1810)

My constituent couriered her application in. It was received January 1. There was no explanation for why it was denied and no recourse. We phoned Citizenship and Immigration. It did not even have a record of it, even though we have a stamp that says it was received. The reason I bring this up is that this constituent had been told that there was a cap of 5,000, and she knew she had to get the application in right away. The government gave her no explanation.

We have Service Canada, where many immigrants access services in a variety of languages. A couple of years ago, the very busy office in my riding was closed, leaving many in my community very concerned, because they would go and speak face to face with people in that office. I bring this up because this is about interfacing with government. This is about access to government services. This is not about spending millions of dollars on government propaganda trying to tell Canadians all the great work the government is doing while wasting opportunities and wasting money, and in fact, not giving Canadians, certainly not the people in my riding, the information they need to live a decent life here in our country. That is what concerns me about the misuse of public money.

We have been leading a campaign for greater protection for unpaid interns in the country. The government could have spent a fraction of that money to let young people know what their rights are, to let them know that they in fact have no rights under federal regulations as unpaid interns. It could have spent a little money to let young people know that if they took an unpaid internship in a federally regulated industry, they would have no protection under the Canada Labour Code. It could have let Canadians know that. It did not. Unfortunately, that has led to injured young workers, and tragically, to the death of one young worker in Alberta. Luckily the government bowed to our pressure and included measures in the budget to protect interns. However, it could have let people know this.

In other words, there are huge opportunities lost, and for the government, massive amounts of public money wasted on partisan adventures.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): It being 6:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

● (1815)

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

Ms. Lois Brown: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the vote be deferred to Tuesday, April 28, at the expiry of the time provided for government orders.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Accordingly, the recorded division stands deferred until tomorrow at the end of government orders, or just before the time provided for private members' business.

I see the hon. member for Newmarket—Aurora standing, perhaps on a point of order.

Ms. Lois Brown: Mr. Speaker, I think you will find unanimous consent to see the clock at 6:30.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

THE BUDGET

FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF MINISTER OF FINANCE

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Pursuant to an order made on Monday, April 20, 2015, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the amendment to the amendment to Motion No. 18, under ways and means proceedings.

Call in the members.

● (1840)

(The House divided on the amendment to the amendment, which was negatived on the following division:)

(Division No. 379)

YEAS

Members

Adams	Allen (Welland)
Atamanenko	Aubin
Ayala	Bélanger
Bennett	Benskin
Bevington	Blanchette
Blanchette-Lamothe	Boivin
Borg	Boulerice
Boutin-Sweet	Brahmi
Brison	Brosseau
Byrne	Casey
Cash	Chan
Charlton	Chicoine
Choquette	Christopherson
Comartin	Côté
Cotler	Crowder
Cullen	Cuzner
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Day
Dewar	Dion
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Dubé
Dubourg	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseault	Easter
Foote	Fortin
Freeland	Garneau
Garrison	Genest
Genest-Jourdain	Giguère
Godin	Goodale
Gravelle	Groguhé
Harris (St. John's East)	Hsu
Hughes	Jones
Julian	Kellway
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Latendresse	Laverdière
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Leslie	Liu
MacAulay	Mai
Marston	Masse
Mathyssen	May
McCallum	McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Michaud
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Mourani
Murray	Nantel
Nicholls	Nunez-Melo
Pacetti	Papillon
Péclet	Pilon
Plamondon	Quach
Rafferty	Rankin
Rousseau	Saganash
Sandhu	Scarpaleggia
Scott	Sellah
Sgro	Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)
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Aglukkaq	Albas
Albrecht	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Ambler
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Armstrong
Aspin	Barlow
Bateman	Benoit
Bergen	Bezan
Blaney	Block
Boughen	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Bruinooge
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Carrie
Chisu	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Crockatt	Daniel
Davidson	Dechert
Devolin	Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Eglinski	Falk
Fantino	Fast
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Fletcher
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Gill	Glover
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Grewal	Harper
Hawn	Hayes
Hillyer	Hoback
Holder	James
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Lebel
Leef	Leitch
Lemieux	Leung
Lizon	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Maguire	Mayes
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Nicholson	Norlock
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Payne	Perkins
Poilievre	Preston
Rajotte	Rathgeber
Reid	Rempel
Richards	Rickford
Saxton	Schellenberger
Seeback	Shea
Shipley	Shory
Smith	Sopuck
Sorenson	Stanton
Strahl	Sweet
Tilson	Toet
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PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the amendment to the amendment defeated.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

● (1845)

[*English*]

HOUSING

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Trinity—Spadina, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight to talk about housing. I have asked several questions and quite often have received the exact same response from the minister, and I am troubled by it.

We know that housing agreements, which were initiated by the Liberal Party, have been renewed and we know the renewals in places like Ontario constitute about $801 million in funding. I did the math when I was in city council, and certainly have done since I arrived in Parliament. When we do that math, it means that approximately 60 new units of housing will be provided by this agreement each year for the next 5 years in a city like Toronto.

Because there is no money for state of good repair, because there is no money for new housing and because the capital repair backlog, which is effectively downloaded onto the city by a provincial Conservative government, is now close to $1 billion, we are losing more units of housing in Toronto through disrepair than we are gaining in the new housing agreements.

My question for the government is very simple. We know that housing solves problems. We know that housing pays for itself through the social investment. We know that housing is an integral part of building strong cities, strong neighbourhoods, but most important, strong families. In light of the fact we are facing an unprecedented crisis in Toronto, with 92,000 families, close to 200,000 people waiting for assisted housing, close to 5,000 people a year living in city shelters of whom half are children, with this calamity facing Canadians living in Toronto, with a calamity that is replicated unfortunately right across the country in every major city, every minor city, every medium city and every city of every description, why is the government satisfied with the status quo when it is literally putting people in harm's way?

Why is there not one new dollar in this current budget for one new unit of housing anywhere in the country, let alone a city, let alone the aboriginal or traditional territory, let alone in any single settlement in Canada? Why is not one dollar put into new housing, one dollar into fixing new housing? Why is the status quo, which people suffer under, acceptable?

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know the member for Trinity—Spadina does not like to acknowledge it, but economic action plan 2015 provides $150 million to support social housing in Canada by allowing social and co-op housing providers to prepay their long-term non-renewable mortgages without penalty. This initiative will allow eligible, co-operative and non-profit social housing providers to significantly reduce their mortgage expenses. With lower mortgage expenses, housing providers will be allowed to undertake capital repairs to improve the condition and quality of these housing units.

Listen to what the Co-operative Housing Federation's executive director Nicholas Gazzard had to say about this important investment being made by the Government of Canada:

> This is very good news. The elimination of prepayment fees will make a real difference to housing co-ops, and the low-income households who make housing co-ops their home in communities across the country.

This is all in addition to ongoing federal investments that support close to 600,000 households living in existing social housing on and off reserve. It is in addition to federal investments that support the construction of about 400 new homes in first nation communities each year, as well as the renovation of 1,000 existing homes on reserve. The investment in affordable housing, which I mentioned previously, is a model of partnership and collaboration.

Federal funding is matched by the provinces and territories, which are responsible for designing and delivering programs to address local housing needs within their own jurisdictions. New housing is one way this money is being invested, but it is not the only answer to reducing the number of Canadians who have housing needs.

The provinces and territories can also invest in renovation projects. For example, they can provide rent supplements, shelter allowances and assistance toward home ownership. There are often other ways our government has invested in new housing. Economic action plan 2013 also extended the homelessness partnering strategy with nearly $600 million in funding over five years.

Our new evidence-based housing first approach aims to stabilize the lives of homeless individuals for the long term by first moving them into permanent housing and then providing additional supports that they may need.

I would also remind hon. members that we have made significant investments in new housing during the stimulus phase of Canada's economic action plan, including $400 million to build new affordable housing for low-income seniors, $75 million for new housing for people with disabilities, and a combined total of $600 million in housing construction and repairs in the north and on reserve across Canada. We also invested $1 billion in renovating and retrofitting existing social housing off reserve.

We will continue to meet our long-term commitments under existing agreements and we will continue to work with the provinces and territories to deliver effective social housing for Canadians across our great country.

● (1850)

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Mr. Speaker, this is the problem. What the parliamentary secretary has just described is the existing program. It is the status quo. When he talks about aboriginal housing and 1,400 houses being built or repaired this year, that is 2 houses per reserve. That is tragically ridiculous, because it puts people in harm's way.

Here is a question to which I would like a very quick answer. When those co-ops and affordable housing providers renew their mortgages, will the subsidy agreements expire when the old mortgages expire, or will the subsidy agreements continue?

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Mr. Speaker, our government stands by its housing record, and we are proud of our record investment in this area.

We have made smart, targeted investments that have helped hundreds of thousands of Canadian families and individuals get access to the housing they need. We have also moved away from federally designed programs to models that allow for local solutions, knowing that provinces and territories are best placed to understand local needs.

It is about more than just putting a roof over someone's head. When people are in housing, it is much easier for them to obtain an education, upgrade skills, look for a job and contribute productively to society.

This is what our policies aim to do. We want Canadians to achieve for themselves, for their families and for the country as a whole. Having a place to call home is a big part of this. Hon. members can rest assured that our government will continue to make smart investments in housing as we have shown in our economic action plan 2015. We will continue to do our part to ensure Canadians can succeed.

[*Translation*]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on March 11, I asked a question in the House concerning Air Canada's failure to comply with the Official Languages Act. The ministers hesitated over who was going to answer the question. Finally, the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages rose to tell me that she was not the person who could answer my question.

The Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages should have been able to answer my question about official languages instead of passing the buck to others. My question was very simple and addressed directly to her. I asked her if she thought it was acceptable for Air Canada to develop unilingual English work tools, thereby ignoring the right of workers to use the official language of their choice. In her reply, she did not even mention the name of the airline. I was very disappointed with her answer. The minister just spewed her usual rhetoric and stated that she was proud of her government's record on official languages. Canadians and my constituents in Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles expect more than just empty rhetoric from their minister. They expect answers.

The government knows full well that Air Canada is a repeat offender; Air Canada has ranked among the worst offenders since 1995. Year after year, Air Canada has had its knuckles rapped by the Commissioner of Official Languages for the many complaints sent to the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, for non-compliance with the recommendations of the Office, and for quite simply ignoring its action plan.

Need I remind the minister that the Official Languages Act mandates more than simply being able to say "Hello, Bonjour" to customers? The Air Canada Public Participation Act, which has been around for more than 25 years now, requires Air Canada to fulfill its obligations under the Official Languages Act. The government claims to be tough on crime, but it does nothing to encourage our largest airline to comply with the law. This is serious.

I also want to take this opportunity to point out that since I became the official opposition's critic for la Francophonie, I have met with a number of groups that work on the ground. They plead with me and they are sounding the alarm. It is more than alarming to see how much the French language is struggling in linguistic minority communities. The relative weight of francophones has been continuously dropping in Canada for more than 30 years. We already know that the government will not reach the targets it set, in spite of its roadmap and the related investments. The minister should coordinate the implementation of the language commitments at all federal institutions.

According to the Official Languages Act, the minister is required to encourage and promote a coordinated approach to the implementation by federal institutions, enhance the vitality of English and French linguistic minority communities, and foster the full recognition and use of both English and French in Canadian society.

One wonders whether the minister has enough leadership to enforce the law. Personally, I highly doubt it. As already mentioned, we are leaving the task of protecting our language, French, up to a government that does not consider the protection of both official languages a priority in the least.

Let us look at the budget tabled last week as an example. There is no mention whatsoever of Canada's francophonie or official languages, even though the equality of status and use of English and French is enshrined in the Canadian Constitution. The Conservative government even put funding for many community groups on the chopping block. As a result, the ability of francophone minorities to live in French is constantly eroding.

● (1855)

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to protecting and promoting Canada's official languages. French and English are both integral parts of Canada's culture, and the defence of the cultural richness we derive from our bilingual nature is a priority of the first order. Air Canada's passengers and employees are obviously no exception.

Since its privatization in 1989, Air Canada has retained the official languages obligation it had as a crown corporation by way of the Air Canada Public Participation Act. The Air Canada Public Participation Act not only requires the carrier to provide communications and services to the public in both official languages but to also maintain a bilingual working environment. The company is also subject to provisions that guarantee equal opportunities for employment and advancement to ensure a workforce that reflects the linguistic composition of the Canadian population to the greatest extent possible.

Finally, Air Canada must make efforts to support and assist the development of official languages minority communities and to promote bilingualism.

The Commissioner of Official Languages plays an essential role in supporting our bilingualism. This is also the case where Air Canada is concerned. If an Air Canada employee feels that he or she is unable to work in his or her language of choice, there are mechanisms in place that allow for an investigation. In brief, employees or passengers of Air Canada can address their concerns to the official languages commissioner, who is specifically mandated to examine these complaints. Of course, Air Canada employees can also opt to raise such issues with their employer with a view to arriving at a solution.

The commissioner is authorized to investigate complaints made against the carrier. Furthermore, the complainant can take this issue to court, as well.

My colleague has referred to a specific incident involving the use of particular equipment. I cannot comment on this particular case, but I would like to underscore that this is precisely the sort of issue for which the existing mechanism should be engaged to appropriately address the overall issue.

Once again, all complaints related to official languages can be heard by the Commissioner of Official Languages, and there is a mechanism in place for the investigation of these complaints. Our government remains firmly committed to the defence and promotion of bilingualism in Canada.

● (1900)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Mr. Speaker, there should be minimum penalties to force Air Canada to comply with the legislation.

I address the House as a sort of guardian of the French language in Canada. I cannot keep silent about the cuts to the CBC, which will result in the loss of 100 additional jobs from the broadcaster's French-language services. I cannot keep silent about the fact that the budget voted by Parliament for the development of French-language skills has not been spent when the communities are in dire need of that funding. I cannot keep silent about the delays affecting many programs under the Roadmap for Canada's Official Languages 2013-2018.

Can the minister tell us whether she intends to stop flouting the Official Languages Act and begin consulting with and providing adequate funding for official language minority community organizations? Can she tell us whether she will take appropriate action to ensure equality of status for both official languages in Canada?

In closing, will the minister force Air Canada to comply with the Official Languages Act so that our airline uses French as it should?

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Mr. Speaker, I would like to reaffirm before this House the government's commitment to protecting and promoting bilingualism in Canada.

Under the Air Canada Public Participation Act, Air Canada has an obligation to serve customers in the official language of their choice. We expect Air Canada to be compliant with this act. This act provides for a mechanism that allows anyone wishing to put forward a complaint regarding official languages to do so to the commissioner. The commissioner will undertake an investigation and take the appropriate measures to follow up on all of these complaints.

Our government has maintained unprecedented and indisputable support for official languages in Canada. We expect Air Canada to continue to take the necessary measures to provide the required bilingual services and to maintain its ability to respond to its obligations under the Official Languages Act to passengers and to employees.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on December 8, I asked the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness to explain to the House why it was that individuals reportedly operating with ISIL in Syria and Iraq, known to the authorities in Canada, were not detained. The minister informed the public safety committee on October 8 that the government was aware of some 80 individuals who had returned to Canada who had violated Canadian law. Well, quite simply, why were they not arrested if they had violated Canadian law? The minister has yet to explain why those individuals were not detained.

In the wake of the October attacks in Quebec and Ottawa, prior to the passage of any new anti-terror legislation, authorities have in fact detained and arrested a number of individuals. Again, the new anti-terrorism legislation had not been brought into effect, demonstrating that existing laws could have been used, should have been used and were finally used.

What is required is a government that is both consistent as to what it can achieve through legislation in place and what challenges require new legislation. The responsibility of any government is the protection of its citizens.

The concern has been raised that, in an effort to compensate for the rather slow response to the growing terrorist threat, to the failure to develop with communities effective de-radicalization programs, instead we have a government that is prepared to implement measures that would clearly be found unconstitutional. Empowering CSIS, through a warrant, to be able to violate the rights of Canadians in an effort to respond to a terrorist threat is not something that should be reassuring to Canadians. A failure to use the law as it stands is not justification for bringing forward laws that could be found illegal.

What I called for in December, and the Liberal Party has been calling for since, before the incidents of last October, is a government that can demonstrate that the safety of Canadians is first and foremost and that measures to increase that security would be brought forward in a manner consistent with their fundamental values.

I would therefore ask the government that if the police were able to make arrests that in fact resulted in convictions, why has the government brought forward legislation that would likely be overturned by the courts? If that happens, then because of poorly designed legislation that would be in violation of the charter, those arrests would be thrown out by the courts. The government has not been cautious in terms of its development of the legislation and could in fact jeopardize the ability to detain those individuals because it has failed to ensure that this new legislation is charter compliant.

My original question still stands: Why has the government not used the existing laws to arrest and detain potential terrorists?

● (1905)

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is not the government that arrests people. It is actually our security forces and the RCMP that arrest people and implement the legislation.

Our Conservative government is very concerned about the threats posed by individuals involved in terrorist activities abroad. We are concerned because the international jihadi movement has declared war on Canada and like-minded countries. While recent events have raised the profile of the threat of terrorism and radicalization to violence, our government has been actively engaged with this issue and has been developing measures to combat the threat of jihadi terrorists for some time now.

Unfortunately, the opposition parties have been unable to support anything when it comes to protecting Canadians. There is good reason for concern with the number of suspected travellers and approximately 80 returnees as noted in the 2014 “Public Report on the Terrorist Threat to Canada”.

Let me state that we take all threats to the security of Canada and Canadians very seriously. That is why we are moving forward with Bill C-51 and the crucial provisions contained in it to protect our national security.

While I cannot comment on active investigations, I can assure the member for Malpeque that our national law enforcement and security agencies are working diligently to investigate suspected high-risk travellers and bring the full weight of Canadian law to bear against those people who would violate us. The RCMP is actively engaged in investigations on numerous high-risk travellers, placing a priority on those who pose the most significant threat to Canadians and Canada's interests at home or abroad.

While the member believes that politicians should be meddling with our national security agencies, we believe in the work that our agencies are doing, and we are committed to providing them with the tools they need to accomplish their task. In addition to the efforts to detect and deny terrorist activity, our government is making efforts to work with communities to prevent individuals from being radicalized to violence in the first place.

Early engagement with individuals at risk is the key to the preventative approach. Such efforts are most effective when they are shared with other levels of government in a shared initiative between governments, police, communities, and all of these people involved together, aimed at young people and stopping violent extremist activity. We are taking this approach under the government's counterterrorism strategy by working with and supporting communities, especially young people, to develop critical thinking and effective counter-messaging against the kind of ideological messaging that we have seen in the many disgusting videos that ISIL has released of violent beheadings, among other things.

Success requires support and participation from all levels of government, civil society, and most of all, local communities and individual Canadians, families, and community groups, which are the foundation of a safe and resilient country. Everyone must play their part in keeping our communities safe.

Terrorism is a serious crime with harsh penalties, which warrants a thorough investigative response. However, such investigations are also extremely challenging, time consuming and resource intensive. Despite these challenges, the RCMP has had significant successes. However, we must ensure that as the threat of terrorism evolves, our laws and tools provided to our national security agencies evolve with it. That is just what the anti-terrorism act, 2015 would do.

We are committed to doing everything in our power to prevent Canadians from either becoming victims or perpetrators of terrorism-related activities. The Combating Terrorism Act, which came into force in May 2013, makes leaving or attempting to leave Canada for terrorist purposes a criminal offence. The act gives our national security agencies the powers to investigate and prosecute terrorist travel planning, and to stop potential extremist travellers before they leave our country.

● (1910)

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, therein lies the problem. The parliamentary secretary did mention that the Combating Terrorism Act, which came into force in May 2013, gave certain authorities to deal with the terrorism element. Section 10 of that act, in fact certain sections under it, gives the police the ability to arrest and detain. The problem is that the government failed to push to ensure that those sections were in fact utilized by the police authorities under their jurisdiction.

Yes, the government has the responsibility to develop laws, but part of the problem for the Conservative government is that when it develops a law, it is overly reckless. We have seen that several times laws have been turned back by the Supreme Court. Without ensuring that Bill C-51 is charter compliant, like the government should have done, that could happen again. That is a worry.

Yes, we agree that we need to deal with the terrorist element, but the government has to have a responsibility to ensure that the laws are charter compliant.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Mr. Speaker, the act gives our national security agencies the powers to investigate and prosecute terrorist travel planning and to stop potential extremist travellers before they leave our country.

I would also encourage the Liberals to reread part 2 of the anti-terrorism act, 2015, which expands the passenger protect program. Currently only an immediate threat to the aircraft itself would be no-boarded. Bill C-51 would expand that to include those using the aircraft to travel abroad to commit terrorist attacks.

Unfortunately, the member could not bring himself to vote in favour of part 2 of Bill C-51 at committee. I would encourage him to reread the section and fully get on board with this important legislation to combat the current threat of jihadi terrorists to Canadians.

[*Translation*]

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

(The House adjourned at 7:12 p.m.)

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