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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, October 17, 2013

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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CORRIGENDUM

In the English version of *Hansard* for October 16, 2013, in the left-hand column of page 6, paragraphs 6 and 7 should be deleted and replaced with the following two paragraphs:

Our Government will reform the way the federal system manages spending.

Our Government will make further targeted reductions to internal government spending.

In the English version of *Hansard* for October 16, 2013, in the right-hand column of page 7, under the heading "Farms, Fisheries, Forestry", the following paragraph should be inserted:

Canada was built on the work of farmers, fishermen, and foresters. They work hard to feed our families and sustain rural communities.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, October 17, 2013

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)
[English]

INFORMATION COMMISSIONER OF CANADA

The Speaker: I have the honour, pursuant to Section 38 of the Access to Information Act, to lay upon the table the report of the Information Commissioner of Canada for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2013.

[Translation]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h), this report is deemed permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

* * *

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 255 petitions.

* * *

RESPECT FOR COMMUNITIES ACT

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Health, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-2, an act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

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

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will try this again. There have been discussions among the parties, and I believe you will find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, when Government Motion No. 1 is called, no Member shall speak for more than 10 minutes, with no question and comment period, provided that Members may divide

their time with another Member; the Speaker shall not receive any amendments; and when no Member rises to speak or after 40 minutes of debate, whichever is earlier, the motion shall be deemed adopted on division.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

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

[Translation]

Once again, there have been discussions among the parties and I believe you will find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of the House, Statements by Ministers shall be taken up following Question Period today.

[English]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, finally, there have been discussions, and I expect unanimous consent to the following:

That the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs be the committee designated for the purposes of section 20.1 of the Enhanced New Veterans Charter Act.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Points of Order

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Craig Scott: Mr. Speaker, in the spirit of the previous unanimous consents, I rise to seek the unanimous consent of the House for a motion related to the Prime Minister's tabling yesterday of pro forma Bill C-1, which symbolically asserts the supremacy of Parliament and the authority of the House to deliberate and take decisions.

The government is accountable to the House for its actions, as Bill C-1 signalled. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister may need more than Bill C-1 to remind him of this.

Accordingly, I would like to seek the unanimous consent of the House to move the following motion, which reaffirms what the House previously adopted in 2010, and which I had also placed on the Order Paper before prorogation ironically killed the motion.

I move that the House reaffirm its expressed will and support of the motion moved by Jack Layton on March 17, 2010, that in the opinion of the House, the Prime Minister shall not advise the Governor General to prorogue any session of any Parliament for longer than seven calendar days without a specific resolution of the House of Commons to support such prorogation.

Let there be no mistake that the government and the Prime Minister have not honoured the will of the House as expressed in March 2010. Canadians deserve better than democracy with dishonour.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

* * *

PETITIONS**GENETICALLY MODIFIED ALFALFA**

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition from Nova Scotian citizens on the issue of genetically modified alfalfa.

The petition says that the undersigned citizens of Canada draw to the attention of the House the following: That Monsanto's Roundup Ready genetically modified alfalfa requires variety registration before it can be legally sold as seed in Canada, but it has already been approved for human consumption and environmental release in Canada. It also says that genetically modified alfalfa has been and is currently planted in test plots in Canada, that unwanted contamination from GM alfalfa is inevitable, that organic farming prohibits the use of genetic modification and that the organic sector in Canada depends on alfalfa as a high-protein feed for dairy cattle and other livestock, and also as an important soil builder.

Therefore, the petitioners call upon Parliament to impose a moratorium on the release of genetically modified alfalfa—

• (1010)

The Speaker: Order. I will stop the hon. member there, as he has had the floor for a little over a minute and it sounded suspiciously as

if he might have been reading the petition, which we are not supposed to do.

I will move on now to the hon. member for Burlington.

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition here signed by a large number of constituents of mine from the Roman Catholic faith who were upset and appalled by the CBC program *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* when it made fun of the sacrament of Holy Communion, which they found to be a very objectionable and disrespectful attack on their faith. I would like to put that on the table.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by many Londoners regarding the protection of Canada's oceans. As we all know, our oceans are in a rather poor state of health, which affects our climate, our ecosystems and our economy. Canada, unlike other countries, has only protected 1% of our oceans. The Americans have protected 8% of theirs, and the Australians, 40%.

Therefore, the petitioners call upon Parliament to protect our oceans by establishing enough marine protected areas to protect at least 10% of our oceans, which is the international target to which Canada has already committed, and thereby ensure the future health of our oceans, our economy, our environment and this important asset for decades to come.

The Speaker: The Chair has notice of a question of privilege from the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Does the hon. government House leader seek the floor?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up on the point of order that was raised yesterday, with a response.

The Speaker: I will hear the hon. government House leader first because the point of order was raised first. I will hear the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay after the response to the point of order.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER**MOTION NO. 2**

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise with a more detailed response to the official opposition House leader's point of order of last night on government Motion No. 2. Quite simply, the entire motion has a unifying purpose: the arrangement of business here and in our committees for the autumn.

As I said yesterday, it is a fair, balanced and principle-based proposal for restoring everyone's business without prejudice resulting from the prorogation and enabling the government to bring forward a Speech from the Throne. The "chapeau" of the motion, the words before paragraph (a), say just as much: "...for the purposes of facilitating and organizing the business of the House and its committees in the autumn of 2013...".

Of course the main thrust of the motion provides for us to pick up where we left off in June with business where it was, whether it be government legislation, studies by the procedure and House affairs committee arranged by unanimous consent, a special committee that was set up unanimously in February or a finance committee study flowing from a private member's motion. We also see some housekeeping schedule amendments, by revising a couple of deadlines in our Standing Orders in view of the time frame available for us this autumn, as well as the customary accommodation of a political party's national convention. However the principle is simple: no member of Parliament, no party, whether government or opposition, should see their priorities cut off or cut short or diverted simply because of the fact of prorogation.

As we heard yesterday, one political party, the NDP, has a concern, "a fundamental concern", if we go by some public comments the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley made about our negotiations, with just one clause of the motion.

Our rules and procedures have a long and proven way of handling this type of objection, and that is by proposing amendments. Citation 567 of Beauchesne's *Parliamentary Rules & Forms*, sixth edition, tells us that:

The object of an amendment may be either to modify a question in such a way as to increase its acceptability or to present to the House a different proposition as an alternative to the original question.

If it is the perspective of the opposition that government Motion No. 2 could be improved, then it is open to it to propose an amendment and then to let the House decide whether it is actually an improvement.

Motions that reinstate business are not novel. Page 383 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, makes reference to this procedure. If one looks back through our records, one will see that such motions have been proposed at the start of second or subsequent sessions of Parliament by parties on both sides of the House in 1991, 1996, 1999, 2002, 2004 and 2007.

Some of these motions were not just limited to the conduct of government legislation. For example, in 1996 government Motion No. 1 provided for the continuation of private members' bills as well as a series of temporary standing order amendments on the business of supply. In 2002, government Motion No. 2 provided for the re-establishment of a special committee, as we heard.

At other times, too, the House has considered multifaceted motions that either amended the Standing Orders or implemented a sessional or a special order to facilitate the conduct of our business. The most recent is government Motion No. 17 just this May. The motion was ruled by you, sir, on May 22, 2013, at pages 16804 and 16805 of House of Commons Debates to be in order.

Should the Chair, however, be open to the hon. member's argument on dividing the motion, let me offer a few comments on that front.

Citation 557(2) of Beauchesne's advises from a 1966 ruling of Mr. Speaker Lamoureux that, "It is only in exceptional circumstances, and when there is little doubt, that the Speaker may intervene..."

Points of Order

More recently, Mr. Speaker Milliken said on October 4, 2002, at page 299 of the *Debates* that:

Research into Canadian practice reveals few instances where a Speaker has moved to divide a motion. In my view, this indicates that the Chair must exercise every caution before intervening in the deliberations of the House in the manner requested in this instance.

As a testament to just how rare it is, pages 562 and 563 of O'Brien and Bosc refer to five previous instances where the matter of dividing motions arose. Of those cases, one saw unanimous consent giving the Speaker that authority, and another—the case forming the Beauchesne's citation I just read—saw the Chair decline to intervene. Of the three remaining cases, one instance related to a government motion proposing a new flag for Canada and the future standing of the Union Jack, an issue that any student of Canadian history or of this place would know was an emotionally supercharged debate dominating the 26th Parliament.

● (1015)

That motion was divided into separate motions for debate by Mr. Speaker Macnaughton on June 15, 1964. Mr. Speaker Macnaughton based his approach on the prevailing British practice at the time, since our rules were silent. Standing Order 1 required him to look to Westminster in such unprovided-for cases.

With respect to that selfsame British approach, page 389 of Erskine May's *Parliamentary Practice*, 20th Edition informs us that "The House does not recognize the right of individual Members to insist on the division of motions giving special facilities for the transaction of public business".

Government Motion No. 2 refers to facilitating or giving facilities for the conduct of public business this fall in the chamber and in our committees. We are not dealing here with an emotionally fraught debate that goes to the heart of how we identify ourselves as Canadians. We are simply dealing with a proposal to reconcile the business of the House and committees to our calendar and circumstances this autumn, but particularly to see things picked up where we left off, without just cherry-picking the stuff we like that we initiated last session. It is indeed an approach that is fair to all that seeks to allow everyone's business, not just the government's business, to be restored.

In 2002, Mr. Speaker Milliken hived off for separate debate a portion of government Motion No. 2, which related to future travel authority for our committee, because it was not cognate with the purpose of the motion, as expressed on its face, "to provide for the resumption and continuation of the business of the House begun in the previous Session".

Points of Order

As I quoted earlier, the opening words of our motion are not limited in scope to business from the past session. They make reference to the facilitation and organization of business this autumn that is going forward into this session. In our case, there is really just one element singled out by one corner of the House for objection. The way of dealing with that objection is not to throw out the motion, or even to exercise the extraordinary and exceedingly rare power to divide it. The simplest course of action is to allow the debate to proceed as normal and await an amendment to be proposed thereto. In other words, to rephrase our position, consistent with the approach laid out by Speaker Lamoureux, there is significant doubt that the best way of dealing with the situation is through dividing government Motion No. 2.

The solution is not to veto our proposal from going forward by having the motion ruled out of order simply because one does not like it. That is not democracy. Democracy is served best through debating a proposal, considering an amendment, and making a decision at the end of the day to vote.

● (1020)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, listening to the government House leader, I was reminded of words said in this place in 2002, which he referenced often, by my friend from Halifax West, who was sitting in the Liberal government at the time, arguing exactly what I heard from the government House leader this morning. That is that there is a unifying argument, a principle, in what the Liberal government then had proposed, and that because they said the words “unifying argument”, it must have meant that everything that followed had to be cogent and contained in one motion.

Speaker Milliken did not find that argument true then. I suspect that given the precedence and also the practice of this place, it will be difficult for the Chair to find a unifying argument now.

I also recall that the person who argued against the Liberal government, Mr. Chuck Strahl, who would be familiar to many of my friends across the way, said during the debate, and I think this may be helpful:

However as far as the business of the House, the House leader's argument on the Liberal side that they just want to continue with business as usual is the antithesis of that.

The government decided that the business of the House had to stop, that it had to prorogue, clean the tables and start anew with new committees, new agendas and a whole new legislative package. For him say that all the business they want on the Liberal side has to also continue uninterrupted is simply false.

Prorogation stops some things and until the House agrees, it cannot continue as if nothing happened. Prorogation requires the decision of this House, if we are going to continue with an old agenda, a decision that each of us as parliamentarians has to be willing to take part in and vote on.

That was the point of the motion we raised yesterday, both in practice and in principle.

I will read from O'Brien and Bosc to remind my friend across the way of page 478 of Marleau and Montpetit, which existed at that time.

It states:

When a complicated motion comes before the House (for example, a motion containing two or more parts each capable of standing on its own)...

That is the test. Is each of these motions capable of standing on its own: the government's agenda to try to reintroduce all the previous legislation it killed due to prorogation, and on its other leg, coupling that with a study on murdered and missing aboriginal women? Can that vote stand on its own? Is that a distinct concept to continue?

...the Speaker has the authority to modify it and thereby facilitate decision-making for the House. When any Member objects to a motion that contains two or more distinct propositions, he or she may request that the motion be divided and that each proposition be debated and voted on separately.

Those are the rules that guide us.

Mr. Speaker, clearly the power is contained within your Chair to divide the motion as two separate issues, which we have argued.

I will remind my government House leader friend across the way that the Conservative House leader at the time, in 2002, Ms. Skeleton, quoted:

I must come to the conclusion that the motion before the House contains two propositions and since strong objections have been made to the effect that these two propositions should not be considered together, it is my duty to divide them.

That was in reference to Speaker Milliken as Chair to the intervention by the House leader.

It seems to me passing strange that the Conservatives have so consistently argued positions previously taken up by the Liberals and have forgotten all of the arguments they made when they sat in the opposition benches.

We see two clear, distinct proposals, one that we find objectionable, linked together: the government's effort to reinstate its agenda, which it shut down due to prorogation, its attempt to reset and renew, and the proposition to study the expenses of the members of Parliament, bringing further clarity and transparency; and even more objectionable, the work that had been started and initiated by this place to look into the travesty and the devastating effects of missing and murdered aboriginal women. Somehow those two are linked and must forever remain linked, and only one vote to sustain that idea or to reject it will be allowed in this place, causing members to be in opposition to their own values when voting just once.

The precedence is here. The rules are here. The Conservatives argued this very case when they were in opposition to the Liberals. It seems clear to me that they find this cumbersome, as they so often find democratic values and institutions an annoyance. However, the fact remains that members of Parliament need to be able to stand in this place and cast a free and fair vote clearly on the issues before the House. To couple things together in these omnibus motions and omnibus legislation further erodes the connection between members of Parliament and their constituents and the views that we seek to represent when we stand in this place.

● (1025)

Again, my friend says that there is no passionate debate going on here. I would argue quite the contrary, both on the principle of members of Parliament being able to conduct themselves in a way such that they can go back to their constituents and inform them as to what the vote was and on the substance of the matter, which is that work into missing and aboriginal women is an important enough issue to stand on its own.

Finally, my friend across the way said that if there were any recommendations to improve the motion, they should be presented forthwith. He maybe was not listening yesterday, because I did offer one. It was plucked word for word from the omnibus motion allowing the Conservatives to have their convention in November in Calgary. I have other motions available to hive off the pieces placed together that we find objectionable. If my friend across the way is looking for those recommendations, we have them already. He rejected one yesterday. If the government House leader is now open to them, we can make those submissions and divide this motion properly so that members of Parliament can freely and clearly express their views, and then the House can get on it with its business.

The Speaker: I thank both hon. members for their contributions to the point of order, and I will endeavour to come back to the House as quickly as possible with a ruling on the question.

Now I will turn to the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay, who has provided the Speaker with a notice of a question of privilege.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

STATEMENTS BY PRIME MINISTER REGARDING REPAYMENT OF SENATOR'S EXPENSES

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as always, it is a great honour to rise in this chamber; however, today I am rising on a question of privilege pursuant to section 48(1) of the Standing Orders. It is a question of grave importance because it concerns the new evidence that has come through the RCMP investigation, which suggests the Prime Minister provided misleading information to the House in terms of the deal that was struck between his former chief of staff, Nigel Wright, and Senator Mike Duffy. That deal was to pay the \$90,000 of fraudulent living expenses for Mr. Duffy.

This is an extremely serious matter because we are dealing with the unprecedented situation of an RCMP investigation into the office of the Prime Minister, so the misleading statements are not only a breach of parliamentary privilege but are, more importantly, a breach of trust with Canadians, who expect that the House of Commons and its members will ensure that there is a standard of accountable government.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I will be laying out this case today and asking that you find that a prima facie case of privilege does exist so that this matter can be properly dealt with at committee.

I want to point out right away that I would have brought this issue sooner; however, the government decided to prorogue for the month of September, so this is the first actual opportunity to bring this issue before you. As well, in the interim period between last June and this September, a number of new evidence pieces have come forward through the RCMP affidavits that have provided a much broader picture of how much knowledge was actually in the Prime Minister's Office regarding Mr. Duffy and the relationship with Mr. Wright.

Mr. Speaker, I am not going to try your patience this morning by going through all the various evidence that has come forward. I want to focus particularly on one aspect, which was the issue of the

Privilege

payment that was made by the Prime Minister's former chief of staff, Nigel Wright, to Senator Duffy, and who in the Prime Minister's Office was aware of that deal.

We know that Nigel Wright and Senator Duffy had met over the issue of the \$90,000 in fraudulent housing expenses, and according to the reports that have come forward through the media and through the RCMP, there was a deal whereby Senator Duffy would become silent on the scandal with the auditors in exchange for the \$90,000 that then would be used as repayment for the expenses. When this became public, Nigel Wright resigned from his position.

Over the following days and weeks, during question period a series of very straightforward questions were asked of the Prime Minister regarding what he knew about the deal. The Leader of the Opposition wanted to find out who exactly in the Prime Minister's Office may have been aware that a particularly criminal act had occurred.

On June 5, 2013, the Prime Minister said:

Mr. Speaker, as I have said repeatedly, it was Mr. Wright who made the decision to take his personal funds and give those to Mr. Duffy so that Mr. Duffy could reimburse the taxpayers. Those were his decisions. They were not communicated to me or to members of my office.

However, we now know that this statement was false. On July 4, 2013, a letter surfaced from Corporal Greg Horton of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police that was filed as part of the application for a production order. In this document Corporal Horton explained that on June 23, 2013, the RCMP received a letter from Peter Mantas, the lawyer for Nigel Wright. This letter, Corporal Horton explains, advised that Mr. Wright recalls that he told the following people that he would personally provide the funds to repay Mr. Duffy's claim for secondary residence expenses: David van Hemmen, in the Prime Minister's Office; Benjamin Perrin, in the Prime Minister's Office; Chris Woodcock, in the Prime Minister's Office; and Senator Irving Gerstein.

As I pointed out, the first three individuals are or were working in the Prime Minister's Office, respectively as the executive assistant to the chief of staff, the former legal adviser to the Prime Minister, and the director of issues management for the Prime Minister.

The RCMP's letter also explains that the investigation revealed that the Conservative Party was initially going to repay the money for Mr. Duffy from the Conservative Party fund when it thought that the amount owed was \$32,000. However, when it was confirmed that Mike Duffy had actually inappropriately taken \$90,000, it was decided that this was too much money to ask the Conservative Party to cover. It was then that Mr. Wright apparently offered to cover the cost. The RCMP writes in its statement, "Some people within the PMO were aware of this arrangement...".

According to the RCMP, the facts are clear. Under direct, clear and concise cross-examination, the Prime Minister stated in the House that the decisions to pay back the money for Mr. Duffy were not communicated to him or members of his office, but in black and white we can see that this is a complete contradiction of the evidence that has been provided by Mr. Wright to the RCMP.

Privilege

• (1030)

There can be no doubt that within the weeks of cross-examining that occurred in the House, the Prime Minister would have sought answers from his staff regarding this issue. Can any Canadian seriously believe that in day after day of being asked to account for what happened in his office, the Prime Minister never sat down with senior staff to work out the facts of the matter?

It would also seem very difficult to believe that his staff would have heard him misstating the facts of the matter in the House and would have chosen not to correct him and would have let him intentionally state a falsehood.

This leaves us with two possibilities: either the Prime Minister's staff lied to him, which left him armed with untrue answers on the highest-profile story of the day and an unprecedented political scandal, or the Prime Minister himself perhaps chose to ignore the truth when being held accountable in this place.

Either way, this is an extremely serious breach of the rights and privileges of the members of this House, as well as a breach of the public trust to all Canadians.

I ask you, Mr. Speaker, today to defend the rights of our democratic institutions by finding that there is a prima facie case of privilege, of contempt of Parliament.

For the sake of clarity, let me remind everyone here of the rights that are afforded to members of Parliament so that they can carry out their duties on behalf of Canadians.

On page 75 of the 23rd edition of Erskine May's *Treatise on the Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament*, parliamentary privilege is defined as:

...the sum of the peculiar rights enjoyed by each House collectively ... and by Members of each House individually, without which they could not discharge their functions...

Parliamentary privileges are of the utmost importance not only for parliamentarians but, more importantly, for Canadians, who put their trust and faith in their elected members to legislate on their behalf and to hold government to account. Therefore, they trust that government will provide truthful answers in the House. These are the basic principles that are of paramount importance if we want Canadians to continue to believe and take part in the democratic process.

Breaches of privilege can take many forms, but the one we are dealing with—misleading the House—is one of the most serious. Page 111 of Erskine May states that:

The Commons may treat the making of a deliberately misleading statement as a contempt.

The second edition of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* by O'Brien and Bosc also tells us on page 111 that the provision of misleading information constitutes a prima facie breach of privilege.

Let me also quote from page 63 of Erskine May, which tells us:

...it is of paramount importance that ministers give accurate and truthful information to Parliament, correcting any inadvertent error at the earliest opportunity.

I would add that this is an even important responsibility for the Prime Minister himself.

There is no doubt that providing misleading information to the House is a serious offence and a breach of our collective privileges.

Now, again, it may be that the Prime Minister himself was unaware of the actions of his staff, but it is still a breach of our privileges for his staff to have misled the Prime Minister. His staff watched him providing these misleading statements in the House, and previous speakers have ruled that this is as much a breach of privilege and contempt for parliamentarians as if the member himself had made these statements.

On December 6, 1978, in finding that a prima facie case of contempt of the House existed, Speaker Jerome ruled that a government official, by deliberately misleading a minister who in turn provided misleading information to a member, had impeded the members in the performance of their duties and consequently obstructed the House itself. Speaker Jerome said:

The complaint which is the subject matter of the question of privilege is not directly a complaint about the minister. Indeed, it is founded on the fact that it is one of the minister's officials who has calculated to contrive this deliberate deception of the House.

In the same vein, on February 25, 2004, Speaker Milliken reminded the House:

It is not, of course, absolutely necessary that the minister be aware that a document is misleading in order for a contempt to occur.

It is a very unusual and disturbing case we have before us. I have never heard before of a Prime Minister and, by extension, the House being deceived by members in the Prime Minister's Office.

• (1035)

Mr. Speaker, in your ruling on whether this is indeed a prima facie case of privilege, I would like you to consider the following quote from Erskine May's *Parliamentary Practice*, page 136, which states:

It may be stated generally that any act or omission which obstructs or impedes either House of Parliament in the performance of its functions, or which obstructs or impedes any Member or officer of such House in the discharge of its duty, or which has a tendency, directly or indirectly, to produce such results may be treated as a contempt even though there is no precedent of the offence.

It is deeply troubling to think that the Prime Minister could have been deceived by members of his staff, but I think you would agree, Mr. Speaker, that it would be even more disturbing to discover that the Prime Minister knew of the deal between former chief of staff Nigel Wright and Mike Duffy and then intentionally misled the House when he stated that neither he nor anyone in his office knew about this deal.

Mr. Speaker, on May 7, 2012, you stated the following regarding a similar case:

It has become accepted practice in this House that the following elements have to be established when it is alleged that a member is in contempt for deliberately misleading the House: one, it must be proven that the statement was misleading; two, it must be established that the member making the statement knew at the time that the statement was incorrect; and three, that in making the statement, the member intended to mislead the House.

The first of these conditions has clearly been met. Statements were made in the House by the Prime Minister that have been shown to be misleading by official court documents.

The other two elements, however, do need to be clarified, and this is the reason I am asking you, Mr. Speaker, to find that there is a *prima facie* case so that the issue could be studied at greater depth by the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Did the Prime Minister know at the time that the statements he gave to the House were misleading? We cannot answer this question with certainty at this point, but if he did not know, then at least according to the RCMP, three senior individuals within the Prime Minister's Office, two of whom are still employed there, knew and failed to tell the Prime Minister, and thus are culpable of the Prime Minister's misleading of the House.

Did the Prime Minister intend to mislead the House? Again, we will only be able to answer this question after having the opportunity to hear the facts on the matter from all individuals involved.

Let me repeat that whether the Prime Minister misled the House intentionally or as a result of being misled by his own staff, members of Parliament have had their privileges breached and democracy has suffered as a result. Canadians have not been able to receive a truthful answer from the head of their government.

This situation is unacceptable. Truth is never an option if we want our democratic institutions to work properly. That is why I am here today, and why I have explained the situation at length to my colleagues and to you, Mr. Speaker. I hope that the proper committee will be able to study this matter in depth and shed light on what has transpired.

On December 6, 1978, Speaker Jerome said:

The job that I have in matters of privilege is a preliminary, procedural review of the matter to determine whether in fact it touches the privileges of the members of the House of Commons or the House itself. ... The House itself makes the decision on whether the motion shall carry, whether it shall be amended, or in any way altered and, in fact, whether there is a contempt. I do not make that decision; the House does.

I believe that the facts before us clearly indicate there has been a breach of our privileges, and this must be further studied. The only question seems to be whether the Prime Minister deliberately misled us or whether the Prime Minister's staff lied to him. The truth will only be revealed through proper investigation at the appropriate House committee, but what we do know and what is clearly and totally avoidable is that misleading statements have been made to this House, which is not only a *prima facie* breach of the privileges of all members but also of all Canadians who put their faith in government.

I cannot insist enough on this point. Yes, I have stood here and presented procedure and technical points, but this is the more important point: parliamentary privileges are principally of the utmost importance for Canadians. In times of cynicism, voter apathy, and disengagement, Canadians need to have a basic trust in our democratic institutions. To that end, the severity of having a Prime Minister providing misleading statements about a criminal investigation must be addressed.

Mr. Speaker, if you find that indeed this matter does need further looking into, I am prepared to move the appropriate motion to have this case referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Privilege

I would like to leave the final word not to me but to another hon. member of this place, who spoke on two consecutive days. On January 31, 2002, he said:

I would suggest in the strongest possible terms that members of the House of Commons must be able to rely on the information they receive in response to questions placed to ministers. This goes to the very cut and thrust of the responsibilities of members of the House of Commons. A high standard has to be met....

● (1040)

On February 1, 2002, the same member said:

Integrity, honesty and truthfulness in this Chamber should not ebb and flow like the tides. This should be something that is as solid as the ground we walk on and as solid as the foundation of this very building in these hallowed halls. Every time we come into this Chamber, we should be reminded of that.

Mr. Speaker, those words were said by the hon. member for Central Nova who, incidentally, is now the Conservative Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada.

These are wise words. I hope that the minister and all the members will follow them and I leave the decision in your hands, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I stand to express a few thoughts on this very important issue.

I have been a parliamentarian for over 20 years and whether it was inside the Manitoba legislature or my short stay here in the House of Commons, one of the most serious issues we deal with is being truthful. We like to consider all of us as being honourable members. At the end of the day, we in the opposition anticipate that if we ask questions, we will be given truthful answers.

The leader of the Liberal Party and many others in the House asked questions specifically of the Prime Minister about an issue that has been on the minds of many Canadians from coast to coast to coast. Those were questions dealing with corruption within the PMO and the serious allegations that have flowed from the actions that Mr. Nigel Wright is alleged to have taken, including writing a \$90,000 cheque; something which members of the Liberal Party have been calling for the government to provide a copy of.

Over the summer months we found out more detailed information with regard to what the Prime Minister could have or should have known. What we found out over the summer is that, indeed, there is reason to believe the Prime Minister did in fact deliberately mislead the House, and that is a very serious allegation. It is serious when an allegation is made against any member of the House of Commons, but we are talking about the Prime Minister of Canada. Did the Prime Minister of Canada intentionally and deliberately mislead the House? That is the question being posed today.

Privilege

Throughout the years when allegations like this have been brought forward, what do we often see? We will see the person against whom the allegation has been made stand in his or her place and provide clarification as to whether he or she had intentionally misled the House. That is what I would like the Prime Minister to do. The Prime Minister had a choice. After all, he prorogued the session. He had a choice as to when he was going to come back to the House of Commons, when he was going to be accountable on this important issue. He chose to have the throne speech yesterday. What I and members of the Liberal Party would like to see is the Prime Minister stand in his place today and deal with this issue head-on. He owes it not only to parliamentarians but to each and every Canadian.

Canadians are concerned. They want a prime minister that is going to be honest and transparent. What happened? Did the Prime Minister's staff, as has been pointed out, not tell the Prime Minister? Did the chief of staff and the most important individuals in the Prime Minister's Office keep the Prime Minister completely in the dark so he had no idea what was happening? It appears as if there were more than one or two people who knew about it in the Prime Minister's Office. Did the Prime Minister in fact mislead Canadians?

Ultimately, I believe that the Prime Minister needs to stand in his place and give an explanation. Even if he takes longer to allow the issue to die down, which is maybe what he is hoping for, it is not going to happen. How much did we spend, maybe \$1 million, for yesterday's throne speech? It was absolutely not necessary. We spent an excessive amount of money on a throne speech. Having said that, when matters of privilege have been raised against members, they are afforded the opportunity to respond. We would like the Prime Minister to respond to this.

• (1045)

In short, the Liberal Party is concerned that the assertions—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I would be a little sensitive on this issue, too, if I were those members. Absolutely.

In short, Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party is concerned that the assertions made by the Prime Minister about the extent to which his own staff and advisers were informed of the illicit deal between his own chief of staff, Nigel Wright, and Mike Duffy may well be in conflict with the facts that have since come to light.

We will be adding more to this as the debate continues on this privilege, but we challenge the Prime Minister to stand in his place as soon as possible to defend what it is that Canadians have a right to know, whether the Prime Minister did in fact—

The Speaker: Order, please.

On the same point, the hon. member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

[Translation]

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to come back to a very relevant point that my NDP colleague from Timmins—James Bay raised during his excellent speech.

My colleague very clearly explained the crux of the problem, and I agree with the arguments he made. However, I would like to add a

few points. The issue before us today is a very serious one. The Prime Minister made misleading statements in the House when he said that no one in his office knew about the agreement between Nigel Wright, his former chief of staff, and Senator Mike Duffy. That constitutes a breach of the privilege of all members of the House, as O'Brien and Bosc explain on page 111 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*:

...some matters found to be *prima facie* include the damaging of a Member's reputation, the usurpation of the title of Member of Parliament, the intimidation of Members and their staff and of witnesses before committees, and the provision of misleading information.

Above all, this is an affront to Canadians who put their trust in this Parliament and who expect their government to provide truthful information to the House.

I can already hear the type of arguments that my colleagues opposite, particularly the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, could put forward to keep this issue from being thoroughly examined, as they unfortunately so often do. For example, I imagine that they will say that the statements the Prime Minister makes in the House are protected by freedom of speech, that an MP's privileges when he addresses the House are absolute and that we cannot conclude that a statement that is protected by parliamentary privilege can violate that same privilege.

On page 93 of O'Brien and Bosc, it states:

The House of Commons could not work effectively unless its Members were able to speak and criticize without having to account to any outside body. There would be no freedom of speech if everything had to be proven true before it were uttered.

What needs to be understood here is that parliamentary freedom provides specific protection so that legal action cannot be taken against MPs for what they say in the House. O'Brien and Bosc indicates that:

Freedom of speech permits Members to speak freely in the Chamber during a sitting or in committees during meetings while enjoying complete immunity from prosecution or civil liability for any comment they might make.

Freedom of speech allows MPs to do their work in the House in the interest of Canadians. That does not mean that MPs can provide the House with misleading information on issues where the facts are clear and spelled out in black and white—as is the case here—without any repercussions from the House. MPs, particularly the Prime Minister, cannot use freedom of speech as an excuse for misleading the people who elected them.

Former speaker Fraser clarified this concept in 1987. He said:

These institutions [Parliament and the courts] enjoy the protection of absolute privilege because of the overriding need to ensure that the truth can be told, that any questions can be asked, and that debate can be free and uninhibited.

However, there are limits to freedom of speech. Former speaker Fraser went on to say:

Such a privilege confers grave responsibilities on those who are protected by it. By that I mean specifically the Hon. Members of this place. The consequences of its abuse can be terrible....All Hon. Members are conscious of the care they must exercise in availing themselves of their absolute privilege of freedom of speech. That is why there are long-standing practices and traditions observed in this House to counter the potential for abuse.

One of the practices we have to prevent abuse is to denounce misleading statements and to determine whether they constitute contempt of Parliament.

Privilege

● (1050)

I also expect that some of my colleagues opposite will try to claim that this is not a question of privilege because it concerns the Prime Minister's replies during question period and nothing can dictate the content of his answers.

My hon. colleagues might also say that members just happen to disagree on the facts and this is a question of debate rather than privilege.

Indeed, the Speaker's role is limited during question period, as described in O'Brien and Bosc, at page 510, and I quote:

The Speaker ensures that replies adhere to the dictates of order, decorum and parliamentary language. The Speaker, however, is not responsible for the quality or content of replies to questions. In most instances, when a point of order or a question of privilege has been raised in regard to a response to an oral question, the Speaker has ruled that the matter is a disagreement among Members over the facts surrounding the issue. As such, these matters are more a question of debate and do not constitute a breach of the rules or of privilege.

First, what we have here is not a disagreement on the facts. The facts could not be any clearer. We have the Prime Minister's statements in the House and we have the statements of Nigel Wright's lawyers and the RCMP. There is an obvious and direct contradiction there.

Furthermore, in reference to the Speaker not being responsible for the quality of the answers during question period, we are talking about cases where a prime minister and his ministers either avoid answering questions from the opposition or do not provide all the available information, which unfortunately happens far too often with this Conservative government.

There are no parliamentary rules that allow a prime minister or his ministers to provide false or misleading information, once they do choose to answer a question. This applies to any other questions.

When misleading information is provided in the House, the Speaker not only can, but must, rule on that question.

There was in fact a similar case, in 2002, when the Conservative member for Portage—Lisgar stated that the Minister of National Defence had intentionally misled the House in his response to a question about prisoners in Afghanistan during question period.

The Speaker ruled that it was a *prima facie* question of privilege, and the matter was referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Furthermore, I would remind the House that question period is one of the only times when the Prime Minister addresses the House and Canadians. If he cannot be held accountable for what he says at that time, then when can he be held accountable?

If the Prime Minister can say whatever he likes during question period without having to answer for what he says, how can Canadian voters be assured that their government will be held to account?

As my hon. colleague from Timmins—James Bay put it so well, whether the Prime Minister misled the House intentionally or as a result of being misled by his own staff, the upshot is that members of Parliament, and therefore Canadians, have had their privileges breached and our democracy has suffered as a result.

How can Canadians rely on the truthfulness of any information provided by the government if we do not get to the bottom of this?

I therefore hope that you will find that there is a *prima facie* question of privilege and that you will allow my hon. colleague to move his motion to have the matter referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

In closing, to ensure that all members have access to the relevant information on the matter, I would like to ask for unanimous consent to table RCMP Corporal Greg Horton's production and sealing order.

● (1055)

[*English*]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

● (1100)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in this matter, things are actually very clear. The Prime Minister has been very clear on this matter and there is no mystery. He had no knowledge of Mr. Wright's personal payment until May 15, after it was reported. The file was handled by Mr. Nigel Wright and he has taken sole responsibility.

As the Prime Minister said in a press conference during the summer adjournment, "When I answered questions about this in the House of Commons, I answered questions to the best of my knowledge".

Since that time it has been reported that Mr. Wright chose to advise others in the Prime Minister's Office of his payment to Senator Duffy using Mr. Wright's personal funds. The Prime Minister also addressed this matter in the same press conference. "had I known about this earlier I would never have allowed this to take place".

We will reserve the opportunity to review further the more detailed elements of the hon. member's arguments and get back to the House.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleagues who have already spoken, but I disagree with the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, who just spoke to this question of privilege.

The House of Commons is governed by its own rules, found in O'Brien-Bosc. On page 111, it states that no member of Parliament, including the Prime Minister, who is one of the 308 members of Parliament in this House, shall provide misleading information to the House, whether or not it is deliberate.

In this case—and this may also be the case in civil society—ignorance of the law is no excuse. The Prime Minister should be aware of the rules governing the House of Commons.

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Mr. Speaker, there is new information that you must take into account. When the Prime Minister was answering questions and when the RCMP was getting deeper into its investigation, some information started to be made public. That information must be brought to your attention.

You must look at the answers the Prime Minister gave about his chief of staff, his senior aide, who gave a large amount of money—\$90,000—to a senator for inappropriate expenses.

The government and the Prime Minister must take responsibility. This government introduced an accountability bill—rightfully so—and could not stop bragging about this legislation. Now it needs to be consistent by making sure that elected members of this House are accountable and responsible.

I think it makes sense to consider as a question of privilege the responses given by the Prime Minister and some information that came out before and especially after these events.

I leave this in your hands and good judgment.

[*English*]

The Speaker: I would like to thank all hon. member for their contributions today and I look forward to further submissions on this point.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

ADDRESS TO HER MAJESTY CONCERNING CONGRATULATIONS ON THE BIRTH OF PRINCE GEORGE

Hon. Peter Van Loan (for the Prime Minister) moved:

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty the Queen in the following words:

TO THE QUEEN'S MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY:
MOST GRACIOUS SOVEREIGN:

We, Your Majesty's loyal and dutiful subjects, the Commons of Canada in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our congratulations to Your Majesty on the birth of a Prince, a son to Their Royal Highnesses, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, and assuring Your Majesty that this happy event affords the greatest joy and satisfaction to Your faithful Members of the House of Commons of Canada.

That the said Address be engrossed;

That a Message be sent to the Senate informing their Honours that this House has adopted the said Address and requesting their Honours to unite with this House in the said Address by filling up the blanks with the words "the Senate and"; and

That a Message of congratulations be sent by the Speaker, on behalf of this House, to Their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge upon the joyful occasion of the birth of a son to Their Royal Highnesses.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Shelly Glover (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, although by international standards Canada is a relatively young country, we are already preparing to celebrate our 150th anniversary in 2017. It is a very important anniversary.

As a result of Confederation we became a country and a people. We have accomplished a great deal together. Many things have

changed, but Canada and Canadians have remained strong. One hundred and fifty years ago we chose to become a constitutional monarchy.

Today, our heritage makes us unique and provides a link to our past while nourishing our hopes for the future. The birth of His Royal Highness Prince George Alexander Louis of Cambridge is a reminder of this heritage.

● (1105)

[*English*]

Since the House was not sitting at the time of the royal birth, I would like to take this opportunity at the outset of this latest session of Parliament to officially congratulate their Royal Highnesses, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, on the birth of their first child. It is my pleasure to also offer special congratulations to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II on the arrival of her great grandchild.

Prince George, named after Her Majesty's grandfather King George VI, is the third in line for the throne of Canada after the Prince of Wales and the Duke of Cambridge. As such, his Royal Highness represents the continuity and stability of the monarchy and of our Canadian system of government.

Canadians' relationship with the royal family is one of mutual respect and admiration. For example, in 2012 Canadians joined people around the world in celebrating Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee. This was a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the Crown in Canada, our history, traditions, symbols, values and institutions.

For over 60 years, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth and His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh, have exemplified the meaning of service to Canada with steadfast purpose and dedication.

[*Translation*]

During the Diamond Jubilee celebrations, exceptional Canadians from across the country who have served their fellow citizens in their communities, small or large, were awarded a Diamond Jubilee Medal. During the Diamond Jubilee year, Canada welcomed Their Royal Highnesses, the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall.

Together, we highlighted Canada's achievements and celebrated our heritage. We agreed to continue working together over the next few years to build an ever stronger Canada.

This summer, Canadians across the country were delighted to learn of the birth of our future king, little Prince George.

[*English*]

To celebrate the royal birth, on July 22 the Peace Tower on Parliament Hill was lit up in blue from dusk until midnight. Many Canadians sent messages of congratulations to the royal couple through the Governor General's website. Our government was pleased to send gifts to the prince himself. We sent a handcrafted Canadian muskox-wool blanket embroidered with the arms of Canada. His Excellency the Governor General and Her Excellency Mrs. Johnston, as well as the Prime Minister and Mrs. Harper, offered his Royal Highness a selection of Canadian children's books in English and French.

Finally, we were pleased to comply with the wishes of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge by offering a heartfelt donation to a special children's charity in the name of their son. Their Royal Highnesses asked that their subjects in England consider giving to a local hospital foundation and that others consider donating to children's charities, because the well-being of children and young people is an issue very close to the heart of the Duchess.

As a result, our government recently announced that we would donate on behalf of Canadians \$100,000 to the Canadian Centre for Child Protection in honour of the royal birth. The centre is an extremely worthy recipient of this gift. As an example, its work to combat all forms of bullying across the country through education awareness and prevention activities is producing real results in helping to reduce child victimization. I am so proud of the work done at this centre located in my city of Winnipeg. It gives vulnerable children hope and strength to succeed, and our children and young people are our absolute greatest resource. It will help build the Canada of the future and our country will remain rich in diversity and forever strong and free.

[Translation]

In closing, on behalf of everyone present in the House and all Canadians, I would like to express our best wishes for health and happiness to His Royal Highness Prince George of Cambridge and his parents, grandparents and great-grandparents, especially Her Majesty the Queen.

● (1110)

[English]

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured, as a member of Her Majesty's Official Opposition and as the deputy critic for heritage, to speak to the government motion today. We do indeed celebrate the arrival of another heir to the throne.

New Democrats stand in support of the government motion and I am delighted to have been asked to present this address to Her Majesty The Queen marking the birth of His Royal Highness Prince George on July 22, 2013.

July 22 is an auspicious day in history and in legend. Legend has it that on July 22, 1376, the Pied Piper acted to end the plague in the town of Hamelin to secure the good health and safety of the people of that town. It was also on July 22, 1812, that English troops, under the Duke of Wellington, defeated the French at the Battle of Salamanca in Spain. On July 22, 1926, Babe Ruth, the Sultan of Swat and baseball Hall of Famer, caught a baseball at Mitchell Field in New York City. Now this would not seem so historically remarkable except that the ball was dropped from an airplane. On July 22, 2000, astronomers at the University of Arizona announced that they had found the 17th moon orbiting Jupiter.

Therefore, as members can see, before July 22, 2013, the day was already a day set aside in history to mark feats of emancipation, military victory, human achievement and discovery. However, certainly none of these rivals the joy with which the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth responds to the birth of His Royal Highness Prince George Alexander Louis on July 22. May I also add that there is no prouder community in Canada than Prince George, British Columbia.

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It is in that light that the New Democratic Party members of the Queen's Official Opposition of the Parliament of Canada join the other members of the House in congratulating Prince William and his wife Kate, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, on the safe and healthy delivery of their first born child, as well as offering congratulations to Prince Charles on becoming a grandfather.

Of course, we gather in the House today to especially offer most hearty and sincere congratulations to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip Duke of Edinburgh on the arrival of their great-grandchild and heir to the Throne of England.

As royal biographer Christopher Warwick has noted:

Obviously the great thing is that the new royal birth secures the line of succession for the third generation, which is the first time since 1894, since the birth of Queen Victoria's great-grandson, the future Edward VIII.

That succession has been secured to the third generation.

In addition to ruling the United Kingdom, George Alexander Louis will one day be the king of 15 other Commonwealth countries, including our great nation of Canada.

Prince George shares his name with his great-great-grandfather, King George VI, her Majesty's father. The name "George," has most appropriately come to stand for the continuity of the monarchy. As many of us know, Prince George's great-great grandfather, George VI, showed, through his great courage, the ability to overcome the vulnerability of his stammer and became the symbol of one who stood steadfastly for his nation and his people.

George Alexander Louis comes from such stock and, as Mr. Warwick has noted, his birth on July 22 ensures the succession of the throne for three generations, well into the 22nd century.

Of course, as every family knows, a new baby heralds joy and renewed hope for the future. We all look forward to the milestones of our children's first words, first steps, first day of school, first love, and we stand by as parents ready to provide steady support through the challenges that may arise out of all those firsts. Along with the joy and hope a new baby brings, all parents know the feeling of renewed commitment to working toward creating a legacy worthy of the next generation. It is no different when we speak of the Commonwealth family and the legacy we would, as the nations of the Commonwealth, wish to pass on to our royal heirs, and all our children and the children of the future.

● (1115)

As New Democrats, we are committed to creating a peace-filled world, where human rights and equity are upheld as values, where no child goes hungry, where clean air and clean water and the health that comes from them are accessible to all, and where freedom and democracy are an integral part of everyday experience.

We wish for our children unfettered access to education, both formal and through life experience, that enlightens and enriches their lives. We wish for our children the prosperity of abundance and the satisfaction that comes from engaging in meaningful work. We wish for our children the understanding that none of us has made it until we all have, and the love of community engagement that comes with that understanding.

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These words of thanks from the New Democratic Party founder, J. S. Woodsworth, come to mind. He said, as we reflect the happiness and hope we share with the Commonwealth on the birth of a royal heir:

We are thankful for these and all the good things of life. We recognize that they are a part of our common heritage and come to us through the efforts of our brothers and sisters the world over. What we desire for ourselves, we wish for all. To this end, may we take our share in the world's work and the world's struggles.

I believe that with these kinds of hopes fuelling us, we are well-equipped to forge a future that we will be happy and proud to entrust to the heirs of all our families.

Nothing says better what we wish for the Commonwealth and for the world than the words of our late New Democratic Party leader, Jack Layton, in his letter to Canadians. He said:

Canada is a great country, one of the hopes of the world. We can be a better one—a country of greater equality, justice, and opportunity. We can build a prosperous economy and a society that shares its benefits more fairly. We can look after our seniors. We can offer better futures for our children. We can do our part to save the world's environment. We can restore our good name in the world...consider that we can be a better, fairer, more equal country by working together. Don't let them tell you it can't be done. My friends, love is better than anger. Hope is better than fear. Optimism is better than despair. So let us be loving, hopeful and optimistic. And we'll change the world.

This is the legacy of leadership and humanism. It is certainly what we wish for Prince George as he grows into his role as a leader: love, hope and optimism.

As an executive member of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, I can say from first-hand experience that the values and aspirations of Canadians are shared throughout the Commonwealth. The birth of an heir serves to galvanize our focus on these common goals with renewed energy and enthusiasm as we naturally look to the future together and want to do what is in our power to make sure it is a bright one.

Canada is a country rich in natural beauty, cultural history and artistic achievement. New Democrats work daily to ensure that this heritage is preserved, protected and promoted within our borders and around the world.

Canadians already enjoy a warm relationship with Her Majesty and her family, and welcome royal visits with enthusiasm, joy and boisterous celebration. We recall fondly her first visit in 1951, as Princess Elizabeth. Six years later, in October 1957, following her ascension to the throne, Her Majesty returned to Canada, a country she called "wonderful" and "exhilarating". In all, there have been 22 royal visits to Canada by Queen Elizabeth II. She has visited every province and territory. This is clearly a demonstration of her love for Canada and the loyal people who have always welcomed and celebrated her as their Queen.

In the same spirit of joy and celebration, we look forward to welcoming Prince George when he accompanies his parents on future visits to our home and native land. What a wonderful opportunity we have to further explore and expand the relationship between our two sovereign countries and, indeed, the relationship of the entire Commonwealth.

Again, all the members of my caucus stand with me in this joyful expression of congratulations and hope for the future. We celebrate the birth of His Royal Highness Prince George Alexander Louis.

May he live a long and glorious life and may he know the love and respect in which he is held by the people of Canada.

• (1120)

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Liberal critic for the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and on behalf of the Liberal leader and the Liberal caucus, I am honoured to rise in support of this initiative and to convey our heartfelt congratulations to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, the Royal Highnesses the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall, and of course the Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge on the birth of Prince George.

We need only recall the crowds that welcomed the Duke and Duchess when they visited Canada in 2011 to see proof of the affection in which they are held by so many Canadians who are truly delighted at the healthy arrival of their son.

[*Translation*]

I would like to take this opportunity to explain why the institution of the monarchy is more than just a relic of the past and why it remains relevant to Canada in the early 21st century.

First, many Canadians are still quite attached to the monarchy. While some do not feel so strong a connection, they nevertheless have no desire to deprive the queen of those people who love her and wish to keep her. This is a testament to our nation's hallmark sensitivity and respect for others.

Second, our system bestows so much power on the Prime Minister that it is healthy to withhold some of that prestige from the officeholder and confer it, albeit symbolically, on an individual who was raised from birth to embody the state and the nation.

Third, the fact that the Canadian head of state lives in another country is a peculiar quirk of our political system, but it is a quirk that serves us well because nobody has reason to wonder whether our head of state is a Liberal, Conservative, New Democratic or Green supporter. Better that she be above our partisan divisions than involved in any of our inner circles.

Fourth, while Canadians have many qualities, we are not especially gifted when it comes to debating our symbols. It may be that we know not with what or whom to replace the monarchy. That is what happened to the Australians.

Those four reasons prove that the monarchy serves our democracy well. There is a fifth, however: the fact that Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II has reigned with unimpeachable dignity for so many decades.

[*English*]

As I reflect on Her Majesty's recently completed Diamond Jubilee celebrations, I must add that as Prince George is called to a life of service, he could look to no greater model than his great-grandmother. Her Majesty has devoted her entire life and energies to the service of the many nations of which is the constitutional monarchy.

Over the past 60 years, she has stood with Canada through key moments of our country's history and as our nation went through change and transformation has been a rock of stability and a steadfast keeper of tradition.

As any new parent will say, the arrival of a child is a time of great happiness and lifelong memories. We are thrilled to share this joyful time and are honoured to send our warm congratulations to Her Majesty and the Royal Highnesses.

[Translation]

If I might add one final argument in favour of the monarchy, it is said that Princess Diana had French royal blood in her veins. If that is true, her son William and her grandson George, whose name happens to be bilingual, unite the two great monarchic traditions that gave birth to Canada. Let us remember that we were born under the lily and grow under the rose.

• (1125)

Long live the royal baby!

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to the order made earlier today, Motion No. 1 under government business is deemed adopted on division.

(Motion No. 1 agreed to)

* * *

CANADIAN ECONOMY

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (for the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons) moved:

That this House take note of the Canadian economy, and

- (a) recognize that Canadians' top priority remains economic growth and job creation; and
- (b) commend the government's economic record which includes the creation of more than one million net new jobs since July 2009, a banking system recognized as the safest and soundest in the world for the past six years, and the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio among G7 countries.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all parties for the speeches that have just been given in congratulations of the birth of Prince George.

It was an important moment to sit here and listen to all parties being on the same page. I am optimistic. We are moving into debate on the throne speech, and maybe it will carry on and we will all be able to support this very good throne speech.

I am very pleased to rise in the House on this day and take part in today's debate. Two and a half years ago, Canadians elected our government with clear instructions: navigate the global economy; create jobs; create growth; keep taxes low.

Canada has faced challenging times, and we have made some tough decisions. I am pleased to say that we have made the right decisions, the right choices, for Canadian employees, businesses, families and communities.

The results of these choices are clear. Debt is low and deficits are falling. Businesses are creating new jobs, new opportunities for Canadians, and Canadians are working today more than ever before. Under the strong leadership of the Prime Minister, and as we all

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know, the world's greatest finance minister, Canada has weathered the economic storm well, and the world has noticed.

Both the International Monetary Fund and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development expect Canada to be among the strongest growing economies in the G7 over this year and next year. For the sixth year in a row, the World Economic Forum has rated Canada's banking system as being the world's soundest. Real gross domestic product is significantly above pre-recession levels, the best performance in the G7. In addition, three credit rating agencies—Moody's, Fitch, and Standard & Poor's—have reaffirmed their top rating for Canada, and it is expected that Canada will maintain its triple A rating in the years ahead.

Since the depth of the recession, over one million net new jobs have been created, an outstanding achievement for Canada and the best record in the G7. In fact, we are not only leading the G7 in job creation but also on the strength of our balance sheet and in political stability. However, as we all know, and are too often reminded, the global economic recovery is fragile, and global economic turbulence remains. Our largest trading partners, the United States and Europe, continue to wrestle with serious challenges and are struggling to find lasting, effective solutions. Not only is the global economy uncertain, it is also increasingly competitive. Canada faces increasing competition from a host of rising powers.

In addition to the threats to the Canadian economy that lie beyond our borders and beyond our shores, I am concerned about the potential threats to the Canadian economy from within our own nation, such as the threats we hear from the leader of the New Democratic Party. As if imposing a \$20-billion carbon tax was not enough, the leader of the New Democratic Party has another multibillion dollar tax hike that he would love to impose on Canadians. Last week, the New Democratic Party leader reaffirmed his plan to take over \$10 billion each year out of the pockets of Canadian entrepreneurs, out of the pockets of Canadian business, to fund big, bloated government schemes.

As I traveled throughout my constituency this summer, I did not hear anyone suggest that Ottawa needed more money and that they needed less. Everyone wanted just the opposite. The New Democratic Party tax hike would target job creators, especially small and medium-sized companies, with a nearly 50% increase in their tax bill.

• (1130)

This NDP tax scheme would kill jobs and stall the Canadian economy, all of this during a time of global economic uncertainty.

Canadians know better. That is why Canadians gave our Conservative government a mandate to keep their taxes low. I am pleased to report that this is exactly what we have done and continue to do.

Dan Kelly, president of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, said:

At a time when the economic recovery is still quite fragile, it's important that governments focus on balancing their budgets and not hitting entrepreneurs with payroll tax hikes.

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We agree with him.

Year after year we have lowered taxes not just for business but for families and indeed for all Canadians. For example, we have cut the GST from 7% to 6% to 5%. We have established a \$5,000 tax credit for first-time home buyers. We have reduced the lowest personal income tax rate and have increased the basic personal exemption. We have introduced income splitting and pension splitting for seniors. Overall, the federal tax burden is at its lowest level in 50 years. As a result of our government's low tax plan, in 2013 the average family now pays \$3,200 less in taxes than it paid in the past.

Not only are we delivering on our promise to keep taxes low, we are also delivering on our commitment to balance the budget. Last year's deficit was less than forecast. Our government will balance the budget in 2015.

Unlike the opposition members, who support reckless tax-and-spend policies, our government knows that Canada needs responsible fiscal management. Responsible fiscal management ensures the sustainability of public services and lowers the tax rate for future generations. In an uncertain global economy, the most important contribution our government can make to bolster confidence and growth is to maintain a sound fiscal position.

I will quote Denis Mahoney, chair of St. John's Board of Trade, who said:

We are pleased that the federal government is staying the course of their long-term plan. There is still much volatility in the global economy and a prudent course of action is a safe course of action for our federal economy.

We agree with him.

Just as our government manages debt, we are also tackling spending. We are reducing the size and cost of government to ensure that tax payers get value for their money. Through economic action plan 2013, we announced further savings in government spending totalling \$2 billion through numerous common-sense improvements. These include reducing wasteful departmental spending, reducing travel costs through the use of videoconferencing and other technology, and eliminating tax loopholes.

Economic action plan 2013 announced a number of measures to close tax loopholes to address aggressive tax planning, to clarify tax rules, to combat international tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance, and to improve tax fairness. Ensuring that everyone pays their fair share helps to keep taxes low for Canadian families and businesses, thereby improving the incentive to work, improving the incentive to save, and improving the incentive to invest back in Canada.

By 2017-18, both program expenses as a share of gross domestic product and the federal debt-to-GDP ratio are expected to fall to pre-recession levels.

Our government's commitment to sound public finances will help to ensure that Canada will by far maintain the lowest debt burden among the G7 countries. This is just one of the many ways we are leading the G7. I mentioned earlier that we lead the G7 in job creation.

• (1135)

In regard to economic action plan 2013, Lori Mathison, chair of the Government Budget and Finance Committee of the Vancouver Board of Trade, commented that our government is "...demonstrating a commitment to returning to a balanced budget in the short term, but at the same time, supporting economic growth and job creation".

Ms. Mathison is correct. Since we introduced the economic action plan to respond to the global recession, Canada has recovered more than all of the output and all of the jobs lost during the recession. Since July 2009, employment has increased by over one million and is now 605,000 above its pre-recession peak, the strongest job growth among the G7 countries over the recovery. Almost 90% of all jobs created since July 2009 have been in full-time positions. Close to 85% of those jobs are in the private sector, and about 60% of those jobs are in high-wage industries.

These statistics are just a few of the many examples that demonstrate our strong record on job creation, but they also demonstrate that we have not been willing just to stay there, just to stop there.

Economic action plan 2013 also helps connect more Canadians with available jobs. This includes the creation of the Canada job grant, providing \$15,000 more per person in combined federal, provincial or territorial and employer funding to help Canadians get the skills they need for real jobs that are in demand. We have strengthened the apprenticeship program, making it easier to get needed experience for journeyman status. We are supporting job opportunities by providing tools to persons with disabilities, youth, aboriginals and recent immigrants to help them find a job. Economic action plan 2013 will not only help individuals to find employment, but it will help all business, small, medium and large alike. It will help them to succeed.

For example, the hiring credit for small business will be expanded and extended for one year, allowing Canadian small business to reinvest \$225 million in job creation. Our plan will increase support for small-business owners, farmers and fishermen by raising the lifetime capital gains exemption to \$800,000 in 2014 and indexing the new limit to inflation, thereby providing federal tax relief of \$110 million over five years.

In the forestry sector, we will provide \$92 million over two years, starting in 2014-2015, to continue to support the industry's ongoing transformation to higher value activities and its expansion into new export markets.

Our government is also announcing economic and security initiatives that will implement Canada's commitments under the Canada-U.S. beyond the border action plan, with a view to ensuring the secure and efficient flow of legitimate goods and people across the border.

I could go on, but I also want to say a few words about our government's investments in world-class research and innovation. Since 2006, our government has provided more than \$9 billion in new resources to support science, technology and the growth of innovative firms, helping to foster a world-class research and innovation system that supports Canadian businesses and economic growth. Canada's entrepreneurs and risk takers are confronted with the many challenges of a globally competitive marketplace. As the global economy becomes more competitive, Canada must continue to break through with new ideas, so our businesses can become more competitive and create and sustain high-paying, value-added jobs. By supporting advanced research and technology, our government is choosing to invest in the current and future prosperity of Canadians.

To ensure that Canada remains a global research and innovation leader, economic action plan 2013 announced a number of investments, including \$225 million to support advanced research infrastructure and the Canadian Foundation for Innovation long-term operations.

• (1140)

In addition, there will be \$37 million annually to strengthen partnerships between industry and researchers, to help transform knowledge into innovative new products and services; \$20 million over three years to help small and medium-sized enterprises access research and business development services at a not-for-profit research institution of their choice; and \$325 million over eight years to Sustainable Development Technology Canada to support the development and demonstration of new clean technologies, which can save businesses money, create high-paying jobs and drive innovation. By consistently supporting advanced research and technology, our government is choosing to invest in the current and future prosperity of Canadians.

We are also choosing to invest in infrastructure. That is no secret. We have been doing that over the period of the global downturn. Infrastructure investment creates jobs, supports trade, drives productivity, and contributes to economic growth and prosperity. For Canadians, our government's infrastructure investments will mean less pressure on daily work life, less congestion and shorter commutes, which mean more time at home with their families.

That is why this year our government launched the new building Canada plan, the largest long-term federal commitment to job-creating infrastructure in our nation's history. Over the next decade, we will invest \$70 billion in federal, provincial, territorial and community infrastructure. This includes projects such as making improvements to Highway 63 in Fort McMurray, Alberta; building subways in the Greater Toronto Area; replacing Montreal's Champlain Bridge; building a new Windsor-Detroit crossing; and the twinning of Highway 11 in Saskatchewan. All of these projects will create jobs and are welcomed by communities across Canada.

Let me quote the mayor of Regina, who said he is "glad there's a long-term, predictable, sustainable infrastructure investment in Saskatchewan, in Regina, and right around the country". The Toronto Region Board of Trade "commends the federal government for making important, long term enhancements to infrastructure development while supporting economic growth". It agrees that "Long-term, predictable and sustainable infrastructure financing is

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imperative to helping build the Toronto region transportation plan...". The board stated that it is "pleased the federal government has renewed its commitment to helping meet this objective". Mark Gerretsen, Mayor of Kingston, said he is "pleased to see infrastructure spending" and that our government's long-term commitment to infrastructure investment allows Kingston to better plan for infrastructure priorities.

Of course, there are many other steps we are taking to create jobs, many other steps that are promoting growth and many other steps that are helping to realize long-term prosperity for Canada and for Canadians. I have only had time this morning to highlight a few. Thanks to our strong leadership, Canada is universally recognized for its resilience through the global recession and recovery, its low-tax environment, its highly educated and skilled labour force, its natural resource endowments and a financial sector that is the envy of the world.

By staying the course, the Government of Canada will continue to promote economic growth, continue to work toward job creation and continue to plan for the prosperity of all Canadians.

• (1145)

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member opposite's rather breathless enthusiasm for his government's initiatives. It strikes the same chord as the government ads, which have been squandering tens of millions of Canadians' hard-earned tax dollars promoting programs and services that frankly just do not exist. We hear a lot of hot air, but we actually do not see where the rubber hits the road. Most Canadians will tell us they are being squeezed today as never before and that the vast majority of benefits from economic growth in Canada, both under this government and under its predecessors as well, have gone to those at the very top.

We hear a lot about jobs, but in fact the government has been destroying jobs. We have almost 300,000 fewer jobs in Canada than we did before the recession. Many of the jobs that are being created are precarious and low wage. I want to know what the government is going to do for the generation of young people who are facing almost 15% unemployment today and who are struggling under unprecedented student debt. They cannot get a foothold in the job market and all they hear is the oxymoron of Conservative jobs. Frankly, they do not exist. The government is betraying a generation of young Canadians.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, I welcome back my critic across the way.

It is no secret that our government has been focused on job creation. We have seen the history. We know that jobs are what matters to Canadians. We know that economic growth is what matters to Canadians. We understand that the economic growth is going to create jobs.

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Unlike the New Democratic Party, our government is not planning just to increase the public sector and say we have now created jobs. We are building and creating. We are helping to foster an environment that is conducive to the private sector creating jobs. We realize that, if jobs are going to last, they are going to be created by small and medium-sized business. We understand that in small-town Saskatchewan, Alberta, Nova Scotia and all across the country, small and medium-sized businesses are the drivers of job creation. That is what we are continuing to work on.

Even though the global economy remains fragile, as the member mentioned, especially in the United States and Europe, our economic policies have helped protect Canada and helped with the more than one million new jobs that have been created. As I said in my speech, by far the majority of those jobs are full-time jobs in high-paying industries.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the minister on his new responsibilities.

Today there are 224,000 fewer jobs for young Canadians than before the economic downturn. This high unemployment threatens to rob a generation of Canadians of their potential to contribute and grow in the Canadian economy. Middle-class parents and grandparents are contributing financially to help subsidize this generation, which is why we see record high levels of personal debt. In fact, 43% of Canadian middle-class families have actually had their twenty-something youth living at home for extended periods of time and have been supporting them financially because they cannot support themselves.

Given the challenges faced by young Canadians and middle-class Canadians, why in the throne speech did the Conservatives promise to help Canadians find Franklin but not help young Canadians find jobs and opportunity?

• (1150)

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: I also thank you for your congratulations and wishing me all the best luck in this position—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I know we are back and just starting, but I remind hon. members to address all comments to the Chair and not to individual members of Parliament please.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, in response to the question that came from my colleague across the way, Canada is well positioned.

We talk about more job creation, and that is what we are focusing in on. We understand that if we are going to have jobs for our young Canadians there are a number of things that we need to do. First, we need to improve innovation. When we have innovation and when we have new jobs being created because of innovation, generally speaking it is the youth, the younger people, the educated, who those jobs will be available for. Innovation is going to be very key.

Canada is well positioned because, as members know, Canada has one of the best educated labour forces in the world. There are still too many people without jobs, but going forward, especially in a fragile global economy, those countries that have a highly skilled labour force are those countries that are going to succeed and prosper.

That is what the government is committed to. The government is committed to skills training. The government is committed to providing opportunities for young Canadians, men, women, aboriginals, all sectors, to get the proper education for those jobs, which are going to be available, tomorrow's jobs. We are well positioned. We continue to look to innovation and to education. We continue to look to reinvestment back into businesses, and to businesses' reinvestment back into their own businesses to help create those jobs.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will congratulate my friend on his posting and I will wish him luck, because he is going to need it as the backup to the Minister of Finance while Canadians are experiencing these incredibly difficult times with the highest personal household debt in Canadian history.

I counted because this was important. I noticed it was three and a half minutes before the first partisan attack in his speech started. It seems that if the government put as much energy into focusing on restoring Canada's strength, particularly in the manufacturing sector, and into helping young Canadians find the jobs that they need, as it does on attacking the opposition with made-up, make-believe ideas about what we propose and do not propose for the Canadian people, it might get somewhere.

There are 350,000 missing manufacturing jobs in Canada since before the recession. The government can put out all the numbers it wants, but that is the reality. Replacing those jobs with service industry jobs does not create the kind of wealth that Canadians are looking for.

There was \$150 million-plus wasted in self-promotion advertising, interrupting hockey games and soap operas, which the government somehow thinks is good for the Canada economy. It thinks that spin is going to make a job become a reality and that partisan attacks are going to get to the solution. They are not. The member needs all the congratulations and help he can get, because the Conservative government has consistently shown a prejudice and a bias toward helping those who do not need the help, and a complete ignorance and an attitude of despair toward those Canadians who are struggling to just get by.

We know, because it is in the numbers that Stats Can reports every year, that the income gap is growing every year in Canada under the current government and the previous government. That is what has to change. Poverty affects all of us, each and every one of us. The government simply has no response, other than promising to buy jets that we do not need and that do not work, building jails rather than solving the problems of crime, and not dealing with the environment in a sustainable and prosperous way.

If the government would address some of those things and drop the partisan attacks, Canadians would be more encouraged and feeling more hopeful about the future.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, I would certainly apologize if the member feels that I made a partisan attack. The opposition stands and offers policy, and then six months later the same policy it offered becomes a partisan attack against them if we use their policy.

Thanks to Canada's economic action plan, Canada has enjoyed strong economic performance during both the recession and the recovery. Over a million new jobs were created. Let us think about it, nearly 90% are full-time jobs and over 80% of those full-time jobs are in the private sector, since July 2009. Everywhere we look, the IMF, the OECD, any international agency that looks to Canada looks with optimism. They say Canada is the place to be in the future. The only ones who have dismal, pessimistic views of Canada seem to be across the way. I am sorry to state the obvious. It is not a partisan attack.

• (1155)

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by welcoming back all members of Parliament, except one.

I am glad to have this opportunity to talk about the Conservatives' dismal record on the economy. It has been over 120 days since the House last sat. It has been over 160 days since the Prime Minister showed up for work more than five times. We have some questions for that Prime Minister.

[Translation]

Here in Ottawa, we have a government on its way out that is shirking its responsibilities. Five weeks ago, the Prime Minister locked up Parliament yet again. Since 2006, the Prime Minister has prorogued Parliament for a total of 181 days, which is a record for a prime minister in this day and age. It is even worse than Jean Chrétien's record at the height of the Liberal sponsorship scandal.

This fall, the Conservatives have done nothing for Canadians, nothing to help the unemployed find full-time work, nothing to help families reduce their debt, nothing to reverse the worrying trend of climate change and nothing to improve railway safety.

[English]

We all know the reason that the Prime Minister has been avoiding questions. We all know why Parliament was prorogued. We all know why the return of the House was delayed for another five weeks. We all know why he got on *Con Air* and sneaked off to Brussels—in a word, corruption.

There are now eight senators facing allegations of wrongdoing and in one case already a conviction. Five of those senators are Conservatives and all five were named by the current Prime Minister.

[Translation]

Senate corruption is not just a Conservative issue. It really is an issue that involves the two old parties: the Conservatives and the Liberals.

First, there are the Conservative senators: Mike Duffy, Pamela Wallin and Patrick Brazeau. Then there is Liberals senator Mac Harb. They are all being investigated by none other than the RCMP for illegal travel and housing claims.

Conservative Senator Carolyn Stewart-Olsen and Liberal Senator Rod Zimmer are being investigated by the Senate's board of internal economy. We cannot forget about Conservative Senator Leo Housakos, who was charged with violating the Canada Elections Act, or Liberal Senator Raymond Lavigne, who is still having his

housing costs paid by Ottawa because he is sitting in jail in the nation's capital.

Canadians have every right to be angry, and not just because of prorogation. Over the past year, they have witnessed a sorry spectacle in which the Prime Minister's Office has tried pitifully and desperately to hide a senator's corruption. The Prime Minister continues to claim that nothing has changed. For once, he is right.

This lack of transparency and culture of entitlement is the Prime Minister's political modus operandi. He promised to put an end to the Liberal way of doing things. Now, in fact, it is worse.

[English]

Canadians are sick and tired of corruption and scandal. They are sick and tired of the revolving red and blue doors of Liberal and Conservative entitlement and corruption. Canadians have had enough. The fact is that Ottawa is broken and the NDP is the only party that Canadians can trust to fix it.

Now of course Conservative corruption and scandal does not end with the Senate. The Prime Minister's parliamentary secretary has been formally charged for taking and for making illegal campaign contributions. The Prime Minister's chief of staff is under investigation for paying hush money to a sitting Conservative senator. Three other officials in the Prime Minister's Office are refusing to answer questions about their own involvement in that very same payoff. Senator Irving Gerstein, the chief financial officer of the Conservative Party, is not only accused of knowing about that payoff but of approving it as well, at least until he found out just how much money it would take to buy the silence of Mike Duffy.

• (1200)

The list of Conservative scandal and corruption just does not end. In 2012, the Prime Minister's special adviser, Bruce Carson, was charged with influence peddling. In 2011, four top Conservative Party officials were charged in the in-and-out scandal. In 2006, the party president and the party's national director admitted to making a secret \$50,000 payment to get rid of an inconvenient Conservative Party candidate. Finally, who could forget that in 2005, the Prime Minister's top strategist, Tom Flanagan, offered "financial considerations" to a sitting member of Parliament in exchange for his support in Parliament.

All in all, under the Prime Minister 17 senators and top party officials have been accused of ripping off taxpayers, breaking election laws or making secret backroom payoffs. They are not low-level staff or minor functionaries gone rogue. These are senators that the Prime Minister appointed himself. They are members of his chosen inner circle, 17 of them in all.

This all leads to two very simple questions. First, how did so many people so close to the Prime Minister all get the same impression that corrupt behaviour of this sort is acceptable to the Prime Minister? Second, when will the Prime Minister finally take responsibility for the climate of corruption he created?

And on the second day, he went to Brussels. He did not even make it to the seventh day.

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Yesterday, the Prime Minister tried to change the channel on all of this. He asked Canadians to forget about the scandals and mismanagement that are plaguing his government. He tried to convince them that he has changed. However, watching the Prime Minister sitting there in the Senate yesterday, at the very scene of the crime, with the perps down the hall watching television, I can understand why he wants to change the channel.

I do not think that Canadians are going to forget that easily. In this case, the elephant is the room. If the Prime Minister wants to convince Canadians that he has changed course, if the Prime Minister wants to convince Canadians that he is ready to clean up Ottawa and clean up the corruption in his own caucus, in his own party and in his own office, it will take more than words. It is going to take action.

[Translation]

After each election, a new batch of MPs and staff from all parties arrive here in Ottawa. They all come with the best of intentions, with hope and optimism for the future. However, the old parties have lost something along the way, and things have changed. Their leaders have forgotten whom they came here to serve.

While the old parties fight to protect their well-connected friends, Canadian families are struggling more than ever to get by. From Kamloops to Cape Breton, from Churchill to Chicoutimi, income inequality has reached levels not seen since the Great Depression. We are losing the balanced economy that we have built since the Second World War. Canadian household debt has reached record highs. As my hon. colleague just said, hundreds of thousands of well-paying manufacturing jobs are disappearing, and for the first time in Canadian history, middle-class wages are declining steadily. This is the first time that has ever happened.

Over the past 35 years, under successive Liberal and Conservative governments, incomes have increased for the top 20%, but have decreased for everyone else; 80% of Canadians have seen a drop in their income. Our economy has grown by 147%, yet the real income of the average Canadian family has dropped by 7%.

The Liberals can always hope that Canadians will forget their poor record. They can always hope that time will erase those memories, but it will not be that easy. Listen to this, Mr. Speaker: over the same 35 years, 94% of the rise in income inequality in Canada, in our society, happened under Liberal governments. The House heard correctly: the Liberal Party of Canada is responsible for 94% of that growing gap. Because of Liberal neglect, an entire generation of middle-class families is on the verge of bankruptcy, crushed under the weight of their household debt.

• (1205)

At the end of last year, Canadians' household debt reached 166% of disposable income. It may be hard to believe, but this record high is all too real. Canada's total household debt is dangerously close to the peak levels prevailing in the United States just before the 2008 economic crisis. Indeed, the Bank of Canada is now referring to this debt as the "biggest domestic risk" to the Canadian economy.

This is more than a burden on Canadian families; it is a threat to our entire economy. However, all the Conservatives have to say to

the millions of families struggling to make ends meet is that they have to make do with less—their children have to make do with less.

A tiny minority of Canadians are getting ahead while more and more people are falling behind. The cost of living keeps rising while good jobs continue to vanish.

Our party can do better, and we will do better, because Canadians deserve better.

[English]

What has the Conservative response been? Tinkering with a mortgage rule here and saying that they will adjust a lending practice there: too little, too late.

Conservatives have done nothing to rein in the high cost of living for families. They have done nothing to guarantee retirement security for our seniors. They have watched a generation of middle-class jobs disappear, but they have done nothing to create the next generation of middle-class jobs.

We can do better and we will do better because Canadians deserve better.

We are going to rise to meet this challenge. If we are going to start to close the growing gap created by successive Liberal and Conservative governments, we will have to address all sides of the ledger. That means making life more affordable for families. It means helping workers save and invest for their retirement. It means creating high-quality middle-class jobs.

Yesterday, in the throne speech, Conservatives pretended to adopt some parts of the NDP's consumer-first agenda. Unfortunately, we have heard these words before from Conservatives with nothing to show for it but more broken promises.

Were Conservatives putting the consumers first when they let credit card companies regulate themselves with a voluntary code of conduct? Or when they enacted a wireless code that did nothing to create new competition or lower cellphone rates?

Were Conservatives protecting airline passengers when they voted, twice, against the NDP's airline passenger bill of rights?

Were they protecting families when they let meat packing plants perform their own safety inspections? Or when they allowed one-person crews to operate freight trains carrying highly dangerous materials?

This selective enforcement of the law is not just applied in the private sector either. Conservatives have cut \$250 million and 3,000 staff from the Canada Revenue Agency. They have eliminated the special team of tax auditors at the CRA who were responsible for investigating organized crime. Little wonder that they sent a \$400,000 cheque to a mafia boss, while he was in prison, who owed \$1.5 million. That is the Conservative record. Maybe it is because they are planning to make him a senator.

The Conservatives have actually opposed international efforts to crack down on tax havens at the G8. Not surprisingly, today, Canada is losing as much as \$5 billion to \$8 billion a year in government revenue to international tax havens alone.

The fact is whether it is food inspection and rail safety or consumer protection and cracking down on tax cheats, the leadership role that governments once took to protect public interests now takes a back seat to private interests.

● (1210)

[Translation]

The Conservatives, much like the Liberals before them, heeded the siren call of what is called deregulation.

They dismantled the measures in place to protect the public interest, relying instead on the industries to regulate themselves. They applied this approach across the board.

Budget cuts of \$46 million to food security were followed by the largest recall of contaminated meat in Canada's history. In aviation safety, airline standards for the number of flight attendants required on board WestJet flights were lowered against the recommendations of the International Civil Aviation Organization, ICAO, jeopardizing passenger safety.

I can mention another tragic event that could have been prevented. This summer, 47 people died after a train loaded with highly volatile shale oil derailed and exploded in Lac-Mégantic. Experts from the Transportation Safety Board of Canada, the TSB, and Transport Canada are studying what part decades of deregulation might have played in this tragedy.

[English]

Where governments once took a leadership role in protecting the public interest, now they protect only private interests. In so doing, they have sacrificed our long-term prosperity for their own short-term political gain.

The New Democrats have laid out a clear plan to protect consumers and to make life more affordable for Canadian families. That means limiting ATM fees, cracking down on payday lenders and giving every Canadian access to at least one no-frills, low-rate credit card. It means protecting small businesses by creating clear rules that prevent credit card companies from using their monopoly power to hit retailers with exorbitant merchant fees. It means protecting drivers from price gouging at the gas pumps. And it means protecting the millions of travellers who are sick and tired of being stuck with the bill for delays and cancellations by passing a real airline passengers bill of rights. Unfortunately, despite their talk, Conservatives have voted against these measures every step of the way. That is their real track record.

Now the Prime Minister stands before Canadians, a man who has run out of ideas, maybe not today standing before Canadians but members understand the notion. He has been reduced to stealing our ideas, a practice he stole from the Liberals. Not only that, he has been reduced to stealing ideas that he has already voted against. Quite frankly, all this is a desperate last-ditch effort to regain the confidence of Canadians. However, it is just too little, it is just too late and it just will not work.

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Just to remind our Conservative friends so they are not confused this time, if they want a bill to pass, they actually have to vote for it, not against it.

Just as families across Canada are facing a steep rise in the cost of living, too many are facing a financial cliff as they near retirement. As many as 5.8 million Canadians, nearly a third of our workforce, will see a sharp drop in their standard of living once they retire. For young Canadians, the situation is even more dramatic. By retirement, as many as 60% of young Canadians will face a drop of 20% or more in their quality of life. Without action now, Canada is facing a retirement security crisis. That is a social debt that we are leaving on the backs of future generations, in addition to the financial and ecological debt that the current government is already leaving them.

Yet, instead of action to strengthen pensions, Conservatives are planning to cut \$11 billion out of old age security by increasing the retirement age to 67 from 65. I can guarantee that the NDP government in 2015 will put it back to 65.

● (1215)

The Parliamentary Budget Officer reported just two weeks ago that far from putting our financial house in order, the Conservative cuts to old age security had simply downloaded costs to provinces and individuals.

[Translation]

The Minister of Finance promised to meet with his provincial counterparts this summer in order to work on the plan to improve Canada's and Quebec's public pension plans. The Minister of Finance made a formal commitment on behalf of the Canadian government. He made a promise and gave his word. However, even though he had an extra month, the minister did not keep his word. He did not come up with a plan and he did not meet with anyone.

The provincial governments, unions and the largest seniors' organization in Canada all asked the government to move forward with improvements to public pension plans, but the government did nothing. Even the president and CEO of CIBC said that the government must do its part to find a solution to the retirement security crisis. Many people are convinced that the improvement of public pensions cannot be avoided. By dragging their feet, the Conservatives are creating uncertainty for businesses, governments and individuals.

For that reason, my colleagues from Parkdale—High Park and Victoria, our finance and pension critics, wrote to the Minister of Finance last month to ask him why he did not keep his word, why he did not hold this meeting and why he broke his promises to Canadian seniors. They asked him to hold a meeting and cover the shortfall created by years of Liberal and Conservative cuts so that Canadians can retire with dignity.

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What was the Minister of Finance's response? Absolute silence, nothing. Canadians deserve better. Canadians deserve answers and here, in Parliament, the NDP will go after those answers.

[English]

Today, in 2013, there are still nearly 300,000 more Canadians unemployed than before the recession. Of the 280,000 jobs that young people lost during that recession, only 50,000 have been recovered. In Toronto alone this is an incredible statistic. In Toronto alone, a staggering 50% of workers cannot find a stable full-time job. Instead, they are forced to rely on part-time jobs, split shifts and precarious contract work. Parents are seeing less and less of each other and children and families are paying the price.

Conservatives have repeatedly missed their own targets for economic growth and on the heels of hitting a new record for household debt reported just last month, the International Monetary Fund has now just downgraded its projections for Canadian economic growth once again. The Conservatives' solution to all this: spend \$100 million of taxpayer money on economic action plan advertising. That is their solution. Canadians deserve better.

Canadians deserve a government with a plan to create jobs for our young people instead of one that accepts a youth unemployment rate that is double the national average.

Canadians deserve a government that understands the key role that cities play in economic growth and job creation instead of one that cuts \$6 billion in local infrastructure funding, as Conservatives did in their last budget despite their promises to the contrary.

Canadians deserve a government that understands that the only way to increase wealth in a society is to increase knowledge instead of one that slashes tax credits for research and development, hampering innovation.

Canadians deserve a government that works together with the provinces to strengthen skills instead of one that tries to impose its will on the provinces from Ottawa.

They deserve a government that has a long-term vision for developing our natural resources instead of a government with a reckless rip and ship approach to resource development, an approach that does nothing to protect our own energy security or help create value-added jobs.

Canadians deserve a government that is focused on creating the next generation of middle-class jobs in every region, in every sector, a government that will create a fairer, greener, more prosperous Canada for all. An NDP government will do that in 2015.

• (1220)

However, clearly this is not a government focused on building a Canada that is more prosperous for everyone, and nowhere is that more obvious than in the government's approach to first nations, Inuit, and Metis people. It has been five years since the historic residential school apology on the floor of the House of Commons, five years since the Prime Minister promised to renew our nation-to-nation relationship with first nations, Inuit, and Metis people, but what we have seen since that day is, unfortunately, more of the same: more broken promises, more delays, more cheap talk.

For far too long Liberal and Conservative governments have failed indigenous peoples in Canada. There has been no partnership, no real consultation, no recognition, and no respect, even though our Constitution and international law require them. Instead, all we have seen from Liberal and Conservative governments to this day is the same old paternalistic father-knows-best approach.

This summer I visited with aboriginal leaders at the First Nations Summit in British Columbia. These are first nations leaders who have tried to take a constructive approach to treaty negotiations with this Conservative government, but who simply do not have a willing partner sitting at the table across from them.

They have seen government representatives sent to negotiate with a take-it-or-leave-it proposal rather than a real mandate for dialogue. They have seen the federal government threaten to simply walk away from the table if its demands are not met. They have seen demands to renounce and extinguish their inherent rights as the price of reaching a deal, a practice so egregious that it has been denounced by the United Nations itself. All of this has resulted in a treaty process that has become so slow that it sometimes seems as if it has ground to a halt.

As BC Treaty Commission chair Sophie Pierre has said, this failed approach has not only produced delays and distrust but has left a growing number of B.C. first nations drowning in debt. First nations are being asked to mortgage their children's future just to protect their children's inherent rights. This is not just wrong, it is shameful.

[Translation]

We are living in an era of innovation that is unlike anything we have seen in Canadian history. Human capacity is greater than ever and the potential to maximize that capacity is unprecedented. Our capacity and potential are not lacking. What is lacking is political will.

The NDP believes in a Canada where people who work hard and play by the rules will succeed. We believe in a government in Ottawa that puts the public interest ahead of its own interests.

I can guarantee that the only powerful interest any member of an NDP government will ever serve is that of the people.

We in the NDP believe that we must give Canadians the support they need and are entitled to receive not only to survive, but also to prosper in a 21st-century, knowledge-based economy.

What does that mean? It means targeted tax relief for companies that create jobs and train young workers, rather than across-the-board tax breaks for companies that are shipping our jobs overseas.

Throughout the summer, I met with young people who, instead of having found the type of full-time, stable employment that our generation had, are being forced to take low-paying jobs and precarious contract work. It is shameful.

Today's young people are better educated and more dynamic than ever, but can we honestly say that we are giving them the same opportunities our parents gave us? I doubt it.

As a generation of middle-class jobs disappeared, what did we do to create the next generation of middle-class jobs?

This fall, New Democrats will continue to focus on protecting Canadians from the unfair practices of credit card companies and payday lenders, as well as from excessive ATM fees.

New Democrats will keep fighting for a Canadian energy strategy that will create value-added jobs, contribute to our energy security and protect the environment.

Government after government, whether Liberal or Conservative, failed to take action on climate change. That is endangering not only our environment but also our entire economy. It is time to come up with a new plan, a new way of doing things, a new direction forward.

• (1225)

It is true that the challenges before us sometimes seem too great. To rise to these challenges, we need more than words, more than the Conservatives' constant cheap talk. New Democrats know that we are up to the task and that, unlike the old-guard parties, we will get it done.

I move, seconded by the member for Parkdale—High Park:

That the motion be amended by deleting all of the words after “job creation; and” and replacing them with the following:

(b) condemn the Conservatives' economic record, which has resulted in over 1.3 million unemployed Canadians, drastic cuts to employment insurance, growing inequality and the downloading of billions of dollars of costs to individuals and other levels of government; and

(c) call on the government to introduce a real plan to create high-quality jobs and combat stagnating wages, provide tax incentives targeted to hire young Canadians, improve retirement security through increased Canada pension plan/Quebec pension plan benefits, and reduce credit card fees charged to small businesses and Canadian families.

Together, we will get it done.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, following the speech by the leader of the official opposition, we do need to get a sense of a reality check. I find it somewhat interesting that he likes to tie the Conservatives and the Liberals together, which is why I say it is time for a reality check here.

The Leader of the Opposition made reference to aboriginals and stated that there was a failure from the past. He would be familiar with the Kelowna accord. It was a huge accomplishment that first nations, aboriginal peoples, and different levels of government came on side to support, but in fact the Conservatives and the NDP got together to defeat the Kelowna accord.

When we talk about Liberal Party history, let us refer to some of the positives. At times the leader can get somewhat angry if we refer too much to the positive measures that take place inside the House of Commons. However, let us look at the social programs, such as pension programs and health care programs; they are all wonderful programs that were brought in by the Liberal Party of Canada.

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My question to the member is in relation to sales tax. He points to Manitoba and says that he wants to be like Manitoba because, after all, there is an NDP government in Manitoba. In Manitoba, Premier Greg Selinger stated in an election campaign that he would not increase the provincial sales tax; in the last provincial budget, the NDP increased the provincial sales tax. The hero of the leader of the New Democratic Party, Mr. Greg Selinger, whose government the NDP always points its finger to, has—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. Before I go to the leader of the official opposition, when he completed his speech, he moved an amendment. Unfortunately, the Chair was in a conversation with one of the clerks at that point. I am wondering if, in order to clarify, the hon. leader could read the amendment one more time. I apologize.

• (1230)

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, the amendment states:

That the motion be amended by deleting all of the words after “job creation; and” and replacing them with the following:

(b) condemn the Conservatives' economic record, which has resulted in over 1.3 million unemployed Canadians, drastic cuts to Employment Insurance, growing inequality and the downloading of billions of dollars of costs to individuals and other levels of government; and

That will be part of our answer for our friend from Winnipeg, so that works out well.

The amendment continues:

(c) call on the government to introduce a real plan to create high-quality jobs and combat stagnating wages, provide tax incentives targeted to hire young Canadians, improve retirement security through increased Canada Pension Plan/Quebec Pension Plan benefits, and reduce credit card fees charged to small businesses and Canadian families.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The amendment is in order.

At this point, with my apologies for having made the mistake, the hon. Leader of the Opposition can respond to the question from the hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, let me start by telling my hon. colleague that it was with a bit of surprise that we heard him use the term “the aboriginals” in referring to first nations, Inuit, and Metis Canadians.

Let us also deal with the substance of what appears to be his question. He takes umbrage with the fact that we say that the Liberals did nothing on first nations issues, but he has pointed to an accord that came in after 13 years of a majority government. I know a little about that accord, because I was sitting in Quebec City at the time and I knew exactly about it. It was a stunt before the election. There was no money associated with it, and it was never intended to do everything. After 13 years of doing nothing, it was a political stunt on the eve of an election.

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After 13 years of majority rule, there was nothing on daycare. There were 13 years of majority rule. When the hon. member talks about tax increases, I am sure he is referring to Chairman Chrétien's little red book, in which he promised to get rid of the GST. We can ask Sheila Copps; she knows all about that. That is called a broken promise.

When they asked Chrétien how he could promise to get rid of the GST and then look Canadians in the eye, what did he say? "You must be kidding. I never intended to do that."

The Liberals balanced the books by downloading billions in expenses in health care and education onto the provinces. That is the Liberal record. It is the same as the Conservative record. That is why we need an NDP government in Canada.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the leader of the NDP for that rousing explanation to Canadians as to why they need to vote for the real choice, the NDP, in the next federal election.

I heard him quite eloquently say in his remarks that middle-class families are getting squeezed more and more by this government, as they were by previous Liberal governments, and that household debt has skyrocketed to near-record highs.

Shockingly, the government did not even mention household debt in its throne speech. In the past it has done some minor tinkering to reverse some very reckless changes that it made to mortgage rules in the country, but other than that it has done nothing to deal with household debt. It was not even mentioned in the throne speech.

Would the hon. leader of the NDP care to hazard a guess as to why that would be?

• (1235)

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, the reason, as far as we are concerned, is that the Conservatives simply do not understand the problem.

It is worth reminding Canadians that Canada is one of the countries that has seen the largest and sharpest increase in inequality. In other words, the richest have gotten far richer, and far faster, than in other countries, and everyone else is lagging behind.

It is also worth noting that if we go back over a 35-year period, 94% of that increase in inequality in Canada was during Liberal governments. The Liberals are actually worse than the Conservatives with regard to increases in inequality in our country. OECD statistics show that Canadian families support the largest household debt in the OECD; that is because of decades of incompetence and not taking care of Canadians by successive Conservative and Liberal governments. We will start changing that in 2015.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the leader of the official opposition seems to be stuck on the past. As Canadians are listening in and thinking about the future, they want to see a sense of hope that the country is moving in the right direction. They want to get a better sense that the politicians in the House of Commons are in fact reaching out and listening, engaging Canadians in a very real and tangible way, and coming up with ideas that are going to make a difference and provide that hope going into the future. That is something the Liberal Party is committed to doing.

My question to the leader of the official opposition is this: does he believe, as the Liberals believe, that it is time to start getting over the past, focus our attention on the future and bring forward ideas that will address issues such as our middle class?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, that speaks volumes about the Liberals' desire to forget about their track record, their broken promises, and their impressive ability to decode what Canadians want to hear, to tell them they are going to do that, and then to do the exact opposite once they are elected. We are not going to let Canadians forget the broken promises on everything from the GST to Kyoto.

It was not I who said that they signed Kyoto as a public relations stunt; Eddie Goldenberg admitted as much. That is why the Liberals went on to have one of the worst records in the world on greenhouse gas reduction. That is the tragic Liberal record: decoding what people want to hear on the environment, on daycare, on first nations issues, and on getting rid of the GST, and then once they are in power, they do whatever they want. When they have gotten what they wanted, which is power, they forget about Canadians.

The NDP will stay there, remain faithful to its promises, and take care of Canadians.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there could not be a starker contrast between what the Minister of State for Finance laid out as the Conservative vision, specifically restraint and cuts to public services and social programs such as EI, and the vision of hope and optimism that the Leader of the Opposition shared with us.

I would like to go back to the issue of consumer protection. Yesterday we heard the Speech from the Throne, in which the Conservatives tried to portray themselves as consumer advocates. However, they poached several NDP ideas, such as eliminating some companies' fees for paper billing and the polluter-pays principle, which the Leader of the Opposition has championed since he was elected and became party leader.

I would therefore like to hear what the Leader of the Opposition has to say about the NDP's approach to consumer protection and how it compares to what the Conservative government has presented so far.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, we must remind Canadians that every time the Conservatives had the opportunity to do more than just talk about protecting the public by passing a bill, they voted against it. Not once but twice, we introduced a bill to protect air passengers and they voted against it. Over the weekend, they put the Minister of Industry on the air to say that this would be in the throne speech, yet there was not a word about it in the speech.

We made the same suggestion as the government with respect to the \$2 charge to get a paper copy of a bill. My colleague from Sudbury shared that suggestion in writing with the Conservatives, who laughed in our faces. They made this suggestion in yesterday's speech, but it has no credibility.

In conclusion, my colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour introduced Bill C-540, an act to amend the Criminal Code respecting the non-consensual making or distributing of intimate images. This was in response to the Rehtaeh Parsons tragedy. If the Conservatives are honest and sincere, they will pass this bill—which is already drafted and ready to go—right away. We will see whether or not that happens. If not, we will know that everything else is nothing but a farce, a fantasy, an illusion, and it all means nothing. This will be even more proof that the Conservatives and the Liberals are no different: they make empty promises to get elected and then do nothing for the public.

● (1240)

[English]

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to take part in this debate. Let me start by stating my disappointment that we are not actually debating the Speech from the Throne.

Instead, we are having a short debate on the self-congratulatory motion from the government. After eight years, we have grown used to that tone. More troubling, it is again limiting the opportunity for members of all parties to participate in a debate on the government's agenda.

One of the things I have seen across the country is disappointment that the government does not even respect its own members of Parliament. Canadians elected MPs to represent their voice in Ottawa. Instead, what they got is the Prime Minister's voice in their constituencies.

That the government is denying the traditional role for its own back bench to speak on the throne speech is only the latest example.

[Translation]

That is not what Canadians expect from MPs. Like many of my colleagues, I spent the summer meeting with Canadians. I spent time with my family at home in Montreal and with my constituents in Papineau. I visited over 60 major centres, cities and towns, where I spoke with teachers, truckers, farmers and small-business owners about their concerns.

It is wonderful to have the opportunity to meet with Canadians, speak with them, listen to them and learn more about the challenges they face. It is a privilege that we share here and I hope to be able to do them justice today.

A recurring theme of the hundreds of in-person discussions I had with people is that Canadians feel as though they have been abandoned by this government. Although it is great to get out there and hear honest feedback, that feedback is hard to hear for anyone who cares about public service.

[English]

The more I listened, the more it became obvious that it was not easy for Canadians to talk about either. There is cynicism now, but it

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is not what we Canadians like to feel. It is not who we are, when we are engaged and connected with people. These stirrings of mistrust and suspicion just do not sit well with Canadians. However, at the same time, I get it. It is hard not to feel disappointed in one's government when every day there is a new scandal, another lapse in judgment.

Canadians are being led by a government that says it is committed to accountability and transparency, but that same government has lost five caucus members to scandal. The Prime Minister's Office remains under RCMP criminal investigation for a \$90,000 cheque written to a sitting legislator. The former chair of the Security Intelligence Review Committee is charged with fraud, abuse of trust and money laundering. The member for Peterborough, until this past summer the Prime Minister's own parliamentary secretary, has been charged with four counts of breaking election laws. Those are just the ones we know about.

The individuals in question can resign from the Prime Minister's Office or be told to leave caucus; they can even flee extradition in Panama. However, the Prime Minister put them there. He gave them an opportunity to abuse the public trust. He thought they were worthy and, one by one, they are proving him wrong. What does that say about the Prime Minister's judgment?

● (1245)

[Translation]

I understand that Canadians are disappointed and that they feel abandoned. It is only natural when, day after day, people realize that their trust is being broken and that their hopes have been misplaced.

The Speech from the Throne that we heard yesterday was an opportunity for the government to get back on track and regain the confidence of Canadians. What the government told us yesterday can be grouped into two categories: hot air and background noise.

[English]

The priorities they identified are fine as far as they go, but they do not go very far. Canadians need more job opportunities, better job opportunities, not a jobs grant that has been rejected by all 10 provinces because it demands extra funding from stretched provincial budgets. Canadians need to feel that their priorities are the government's priorities, that their interests get more attention and air time than the government's desperate attempts at self-preservation. Where is the plan to attract investment to this country, to create good middle-class jobs? Instead, the government turns investment away with its Keystone Kops approach to policy.

[Translation]

Where is the plan for our youth when this so-called economic recovery is practically non-existent for them? Where is the plan for middle-class Canadians who are being crushed under a record level of debt, debt they acquired to keep this country afloat during the economic crisis? All they are seeing from this government is a crass attempt to take credit for their work, their entrepreneurial spirit, and their willingness to take risks.

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These are difficult problems to solve. The government has grown so long in the tooth, so tired, that it seems it cannot even be bothered to try. Instead, we get policies focused on bringing the CRTC firmly into the 1990s. Instead of a forward-looking approach to data and telecom, we get a smattering of policies that the government itself rejected in the past. In a world of Apple TV, YouTube, Netflix and big data, the Conservative government is still looking under the couch for the remote control. No wonder it is having such trouble changing the channel.

To Canadians, I say there is much more to the government's agenda than what they heard yesterday afternoon. As Conservatives approach their party's Halloween convention in the great city of Calgary, they are once again putting on a costume, but really just revealing how out of touch they are with Canadians. Their environment minister doubts climate change, questioning evidence about melting summer sea ice in her own constituency.

[Translation]

Their development minister indicated that the government will not provide funding for any more projects to help war rape victims or young girls who are forced into marriage.

Their health minister is opposing the decisions of her own department's doctors and health care professionals.

Their anglophone ministers are criticizing the PQ government's plan to legislate minority rights, while the minister responsible for Quebec is saying that there is nothing that upsets him in that plan.

[English]

These are not rogue members of Parliament. These are cabinet ministers, the most senior elected officials, hand-picked by the Prime Minister. Their positions—climate change denial, a crackdown on reproductive rights, denying Canadians medical treatment, finding no fault with an attack on individual rights and freedoms—are an affront to Canadian values.

Canadians elected the government to represent their interests, but one thing has become perfectly clear: the Conservative government serves only its own interests. It has only one goal, and its goal is not to serve Canadians. The Conservative government is a political government staring down an unending series of political problems, and it is responding the only way it knows how, with political solutions, and none of it is helping our struggling middle class.

Our economy has more than doubled in size in the past 30 years. Who has benefited from that growth? Not the middle class. Despite all of our economic progress as a country, middle-class families have not had a real raise in decades.

As incomes have stagnated and costs of key items like post-secondary education and transportation have risen far faster than inflation, Canadian households have had to shoulder more and more debt. As a share of disposable income, our households are now more in debt than even those in the United States.

● (1250)

[Translation]

Members of the middle class are now worried—and rightly so—about the fact that no matter how hard they work, they will not be able to give their children the same opportunities their parents gave them.

Canadians struggling to get by on lower incomes are also worried about this. They are watching the dream of hard work being rewarded by upward mobility go up in smoke.

The success of the middle class is vital even to more fortunate Canadians. Until the government recognizes that a strong economy is one that provides the greatest number of quality jobs to the greatest number of Canadians, economic growth policies are likely to lose popular support.

[English]

Canadians were promised by those guys, above all else, leadership when it came to the economy. It is what many voted for, but what are the results?

First, growth has been particularly stagnant under the Conservative government. Now in his eighth year in office, the right hon. member for Calgary Southwest has the worst record on growth of any prime minister since R.B. Bennett in the depths of the Great Depression.

Under the Conservative government's self-proclaimed steady hand, we have seen ten consecutive federal budget surpluses turn into seven consecutive deficits.

The government has ballooned our national debt at an unprecedented rate. By the next election, it will have added more than \$150 billion in just eight years, according to its own numbers.

[Translation]

The unemployment rate remains unwaveringly higher than it was before the recession hit five years ago, with the youth unemployment rate nearly twice the national average. Unfortunately, our unemployment rate seems to improve only when workers give up and leave the labour market.

We saw this in our own families and in the communities we live in and represent from coast to coast. Meanwhile, the government kept telling us not to worry, that the economy was its priority and that everything was fine.

[English]

I think we could handle the hypocrisy if it did not come packaged in a slick marketing campaign that we ourselves, as Canadians, paid for. Do members know what always drives home the government's economic record for me? It is that economic action plan logo. Every time I see it, with three arrows pointed heavenward, I think to myself, "Yup, that's exactly what the economic action plan has delivered: rising debt, rising unemployment, and rising disappointment for Canadians". That is the economic legacy of the current government.

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As I listened to the Speech from the Throne, one word came to mind. It is one I have used to describe the government before. Not surprisingly, it still fits today. That word is “unambitious”.

As I said back in April, this is a government whose primary economic message is, “Well, it could be worse. Be happy you don't live in Spain”.

That attitude is completely out of step with the values of Canadians. The Canadians I spent time with this summer are ambitious. They are not complacent. They are not willing to settle for good enough when they know that better is possible.

[Translation]

That is the profound difference between this government and the people it is supposed to serve. Session after session, this government does everything it can to convince itself that it is impossible to do any better and that expecting more from our leaders and ourselves is a waste of time—naïve, even. That may be true of those who have been in power for too long and who are out of touch with reality. They might start to believe that making special, rigged appointments and secret agreements and denying the facts in no uncertain terms is the norm. If so, that kind of vision of the world might very well start making sense.

● (1255)

[English]

However, to tell Canadians that their political engagement is futile, that their occupy-activism is empty, that their 1,600-kilometre Idle No More walk, through a Canadian winter, makes no difference, well that kind of defeatism has no place in this House. It has no place in the Canada I know and serve. It has no place in this country whose future we determine together. Canadians expect more, and so they should. They have every right to.

We look forward to having even more conversations with Canadians, to doing our part to restore hope where it is fading. It is time—actually, it is well past time—to return to these great stone buildings the respect, the dignity, the public trust that they deserve.

On top of all that, it is good to be back here.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened very closely to the Liberal leader's speech. I remember that in 1994 the Liberals made huge cuts to health care. In the 1980s, the federal government transferred 50% of health care costs to the provinces and, under the Liberals, that dropped to 17%. In 1994, the Liberals slashed money for our lone public radio station, the CBC, by \$400 million.

In addition to all that, in 1996, the Liberals made cuts to employment insurance. The Liberal leader spoke about the suffering of middle-class families, but I remember that the Liberals made cuts of not just \$57 million, but \$57 billion that affected men and women who had lost their jobs.

I want to ask the Liberal leader why, in his speech, he did not talk about employment insurance and the cuts the Conservatives continued to make following the Liberals?

Mr. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, if my friend from Acadie—Bathurst wants to campaign against the 1990s Liberals during the 2015 campaign, I wish him the best of luck.

The Liberals of 2013 to 2015 are steadfastly focused on the future, on middle-class Canadians and the challenges they are facing. We will continue to work hand in hand with Canadians to build a more prosperous, open and secure future. We will not do it through negativity and attacks, but by building together, and I am looking forward to it.

[English]

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there were two parts of the hon. member's speech. The end of the speech was about trust and having Canadians trust what is going to be done for them, and as an opposition leader should do, the member criticized the government's plans. However, the only plan we have heard from the third party is that the member would legalize drugs.

Were there any economic plans he would like to share, and build trust with Canadians, that he has developed? Are we waiting? What are we waiting for, or do the Liberals just not have any?

Mr. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I am extremely pleased that after a year and more of my emphasis on the struggles of the middle class in this country, the Conservatives have finally taken note that Canadians are hurting. The Conservatives are so incredibly out of touch, arrogant and disconnected that they think that throwing a few little baubles at Canadians to buy them off with their own money is going to be enough to respond to the very real anxieties Canadians feel about where we are going as a country.

What we did not hear yesterday was any sort of vision or plan for how the country is going to be built stronger and better. That is where my commitment to reaching a 70% attainment rate for post-secondary education and my commitment to open and transparent measures around trade and foreign investment, which the current government has bungled entirely over the past months, demonstrate that Canadians need to be served by a better government with truer priorities than the government is providing.

● (1300)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend my leader on the job he has done, not only on his speech but certainly on connecting with and listening to Canadians over the last number of months, because obviously we saw none of that reflected in the Speech from the Throne.

My good friend from Acadie—Bathurst made a comment about cuts to employment insurance. One thing we did during that time was take down the unemployment rate. When the Liberals took over in 1993, the unemployment rate was at 12.5%. The inflation rate was in the double digits. Interest rates were in the double digits. It was a mess.

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We see that the number of Canadians who are working for minimum wage has doubled under the tenure of the current Prime Minister, and we see that the Canada jobs grant is being laughed at by seven out of ten provinces. Did the leader think that at least there would be some kind of mention in the throne speech as to how the Conservatives could fix the mess they created with the Canada jobs grant?

Mr. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, it was actually quite astonishing to me, because I crossed this country this summer and heard from millions of people through our website and through online engagement, which continues, their frustration with finding jobs, with getting help, and with fixing the mismatch that exists between jobs without people qualified to do them and people who desperately want to do jobs they are unqualified for. I heard about the way the government has imposed upon the provinces a Canada jobs plan that is not going to work, that has been rejected by the provinces. It is based on its optimism in being able to do the one thing the government has not been able to do in its entire time in office, which is actually work collaboratively with provinces to get a deal signed.

It is absolutely ridiculous that once again, in the throne speech, the Conservatives said that they would make the Canada jobs plan work, when there is no chance of that working. There is no chance of the current government actually giving Canadians the help they need to get the jobs they need.

[Translation]

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the hon. member for Papineau.

I was around when the Liberals were in power in the 1980s, and I can attest that what his party did never improved the lot of 80% of the people of this country. It is clear that the hon. member for Papineau does not want to look at the past record. Let us talk about today, then.

He said that he spoke to Canadians. To which Canadians did he speak when he says he wants to open the doors to the Chinese government to buy our natural resources and allow the Chinese an agreement that would favour the Chinese government and people over Canadians?

Mr. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I am disturbed at the almost frightened and xenophobic tone that our question has provoked.

The NDP members should be well aware that the salaries paid to Canadians by the big exporting companies are on average 50% higher. Indeed, the Canadians who work in these companies receive higher salaries than those who work in companies that are not export-based.

We need foreign investment. The well-documented position of the New Democratic Party against international trade and commerce is very disturbing, because that is what will spur growth and boost our middle class. Their attack on international trade and commerce will make us poorer.

This is one of the many reasons why the Liberal Party knows that the NDP will never be ready to govern this great land.

• (1305)

[English]

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member and the leader of the Liberal Party for his speech and also for listening to Canadians, given that we have youth unemployment today that is two times the rate of regular unemployment and that we have 224,000 fewer jobs for young Canadians today than before the downturn.

After having listened to Canadians extensively from coast to coast to coast, which does the member believe would be the higher priority for young Canadians and their middle class families: jobs and opportunities for training for young Canadians, or lower cable rates?

Mr. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, of course, everyone can use a break on their bills. That is certainly fine as far as it goes. However, the issue is that it does not go very far.

Our young people are spending longer and longer living in their parents' basements, even after they graduate from university, because they cannot find jobs. The government prefers to spend money on economic action plan ads advertising a jobs program that does not yet exist, and probably never will exist, rather than on financing summer jobs for students. The government's priorities are purely electoral in nature rather than actually strengthening our economy.

Young people deserve better as they look to this place for leadership. They are getting none from the Conservative government. They are very hopeful that there will be room for them in the shaping of this great country in the coming years, and I assure them that there will be.

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to participate in today's debate. Specifically, I would like to dedicate my allotted time to explaining in more detail exactly how Canadians and their families can benefit from Canada's economic action plan.

The opportunities presented by economic action plan 2013 are substantive and far-reaching, which is why I am proud to stand today to highlight how our government is continuously helping with something that is on the minds of most Canadians: jobs. Since the recession in 2009, Canada has created over one million net new jobs, nearly 90% of which are full-time and over 85% of which come from the private sector. Indeed, our unemployment rate is at its lowest level since December 2008.

[Translation]

However, the support to Canadians does not stop there, and these measures are designed to meet some of the real challenges facing us because of demographic change and an increasingly competitive world.

[English]

Canadian workers, for example, are among the highest educated and best trained in the world. However, Canada is facing a skilled labour shortage in key sectors of the economy. In particular, persistent pockets of unfilled positions exist for skilled tradespeople and professionals, such as electricians, carpenters, machinists, heavy equipment operators, engineers, and architects, among others.

The president of the Canadian Construction Association put the situation into perspective when he said:

Many construction firms are experiencing shortages of skilled workers today because past government efforts to align training with job market opportunities failed [...] Getting skills development right will be critical for the construction sector moving forward. With construction demand and industry retirements expected to rise throughout the decade, there is no time to waste.

Clearly, with thousands of jobs available across Canada that are going unfilled, Canada's growth prospects are being restricted. In fact, CIBC World Markets stated in a report in December 2012 that 30% of businesses in Canada—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Vaudreuil-Soulanges is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Mr. Speaker, I take umbrage with a comment made by the member for Papineau when he used the term “xenophobic” to characterize me and my comments. As someone who has lived and worked overseas in many countries for many years, I am certainly not an individual who would encourage xenophobia. I take umbrage with the comment made by the member for Papineau. I find the term “xenophobic” a personal insult and slight on my character and I humbly ask you, Mr. Speaker, that the member for Papineau withdraw his comment from the record.

• (1310)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. I am sure the member is aware that when someone raises a point of order, he or she should be raising it relatively soon after it occurs. If you want to wait 10 or 15 minutes, half an hour or whatever—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. First, I would like to take this opportunity to remind all hon. members that when they are speaking in the chamber, they are to make comments directly to the Chair rather than their colleagues. In the past this has been overlooked and from time to time members slip into this habit, but there are some in this place who do it repeatedly and constantly. If that is the case in future, those members will be interrupted at that point and whatever they are saying will be terminated.

Second, with regard to the point of order that has been raised, the Chair will take it under consideration and will return to this matter, if necessary.

To address the specific point raised by the member for Winnipeg North, he is correct that there is an issue of timeliness, but it would be taking that argument to its extreme to suggest that less than five minutes is in fact too long to bring this matter back before the House.

With that, I will resume debate with the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, in fact, CIBC World Markets stated in a report in December 2012 that 30% of businesses in Canada were facing a skilled labour shortage.

[Translation]

Furthermore, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce also pointed out that the skills shortage was the primary issue for its members.

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[English]

Therefore, to help Canadians connect with available jobs, economic action plan 2013 sets out a three-point plan to address these challenges.

First, it introduces the new Canada job grant, which provides \$15,000 or more per person, combining federal, provincial, territorial and employer funding. Once fully implemented, it is expected to provide nearly 130,000 Canadians each year with access to training at eligible institutions, including community colleges, career colleges and trade union training centres.

The CEO of the National Association of Career Colleges recognized the importance of these efforts when he said:

Thanks to the reforms proposed in this budget, including the new Canada Job Grant, an increased number of unemployed and underemployed Canadians will be able to obtain the training that they need to access jobs that are in demand now, and will be in the future

Second, our plan will create opportunities for apprentices. Supporting apprenticeships is a critical component in addressing Canada's work shortage because they allow students to learn skilled trades while gaining paid on-the-job work experience. Our government recognizes the value of apprentices, which is why we have invested nearly \$2.7 billion per year since 2006 to support skills and training programs and have made support for apprentices and the employers that hire them a priority. It is evident in programs like the apprenticeship and incentive grant, the tradesperson's tools deduction and the apprenticeship job creation tax credit, to name a few.

[Translation]

In order to reduce the obstacles to the recognition of skilled trades and to improve the opportunities available to apprentices, our government will work with the provinces and territories in order to harmonize the requirements for apprentices and examine the use of practical tests as an evaluation method in targeted skilled trades.

[English]

This will ensure more apprentices complete their training and encourage mobility across the country. In addition, economic action plan 2013 announces that our government will support the use of apprentices in federal construction and maintenance contracts. We will also ensure that funds transferred to provinces and territories through the investment and affordable housing program support the use of apprentices. As part of the new building Canada plan for infrastructure, the government will encourage provinces, territories and municipalities to support the use of apprentices in infrastructure projects receiving federal funding.

Finally, economic action plan 2013 will also support labour market participation and a more inclusive skilled workforce with a range of measures that provide support to groups that are under-represented in the job market, such as persons with disabilities, youth, aboriginal people and newcomers, to help them find good new jobs.

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I will give a few specific examples of some of the initiatives that will help make this three-point plan a reality.

To begin, our Conservative government recognizes the contributions persons with disabilities can and do make to the economy. That is why economic action plan 2013 will enhance skills training opportunities for Canadians with disabilities through a new generation of labour market agreements for persons with disabilities. These agreements will be introduced by 2014 and are designed to better meet the employment needs of Canadian businesses and improve the employment prospects for persons with disabilities.

Economic action plan 2013 also recognizes the importance of engaging with employers that are committed to promoting the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workplace. That is why it provides an investment to support the creation of the Canadian employers disability forum as recommended by the Panel on Labour Market Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities.

The forum, an initiative led by a number of Canadian businesses, including Loblaw Companies Limited, will be managed by employers for employers to facilitate education, training and sharing of resources and best practices concerning the hiring and retention of persons with disabilities. Under the leadership of the forum, employers will help to promote and further the invaluable contributions that persons with disabilities can make to business.

• (1315)

[Translation]

In addition, in order to help more persons with disabilities acquire the experience they need to participate fully in the labour force, we are going to modernize and expand the opportunities fund for persons with disabilities in order to find demand-driven training solutions for these Canadians and to make it more responsive to labour market needs.

[English]

However, there is still more to come.

Economic action plan 2013 also extends the enabling accessibility fund on an ongoing basis at a level of \$15 million per year to support capital costs of construction and renovations related to improving physical accessibility for persons with disabilities through projects with demonstrated community support, including workplace accommodation.

However, we are not the only ones who think these initiatives will help persons with disabilities find employment. In fact, the Council of Canadians with Disabilities, CCD, also agrees. According to the CCD, it was pleased to see that economic action plan 2013, “continued support for Canadians with disabilities through extension of the Labour Market Agreement for Persons with Disabilities, and the fact that the Enabling Accessibility Fund and the Opportunities Fund have been made permanent programs”. It goes on to say that it is “pleased to see the creation of a Canadian Employers’ Disability Forum that will seek greater engagement of the private sector in expanding employment opportunities for Canadians with disabilities”.

The praise does not end there. I think the Canadian Association for Community Living has it right when it openly supported our government's plans, saying:

Budget 2013 sets the right tone and target for people with disabilities... We know the tremendous potential that exists throughout this country to enable the 500,000 working-age Canadians with intellectual disabilities to join and help build Canada's labour force.

Economic action plan 2013 also proposes strategic investments that target youth at different stages of their educational and early labour market careers. Providing young Canadians with the information and opportunities to make smart education and employment choices is essential in securing Canada's long-term economic prosperity. Indeed, economic action plan 2013 promotes education in high-demand fields by reallocating \$19 million over two years to inform young people about fields of study that will help them get in-demand jobs, including science and engineering, mathematics and the skilled trades.

[Translation]

This also confirms our government's commitment to Pathways to Education, a non-profit agency that provides a wide range of types of support to students from low-income communities, including tutoring and mentoring, in partnership with the private sector, other levels of government and community organizations.

[English]

Early support for high school students has been shown to drastically increase post-secondary education prospects for young people and ultimately employment. Since 2001, more than 1,000 students have graduated from the program, with 73% pursuing further studies. Because the transition to a first job can be challenging, economic action plan 2013 also provides support for an additional 5,000 paid internships for recent post-secondary graduates, ensuring they get valuable hands-on work experience to ease this transition.

Our investments in Canada's youth are also evident in the \$330 million per year for the youth employment strategy to help young Canadians get the skills and work experience they need to transition to the workplace and the ongoing summer jobs program, which is an extremely popular program in my home riding of North Vancouver.

In addition to providing support for Canadians with disabilities and today's youth, our government is providing support to Canada's young aboriginal population as well. While young aboriginals are under-represented in both the labour market and in post-secondary institutions, there is tremendous potential for long-term success and economic prosperity.

That is why economic action plan 2013 invests \$241 million over five years to improve the on-reserve income assistance program to help make it easier for first nations youth to find the skills and training needed to secure employment.

• (1320)

[Translation]

We are also going to work with the first nations to improve this program in order to ensure that young recipients who are in a position to work are encouraged to take the training required to find a job.

[English]

The new first nations job fund, totalling \$109 million over five years, will fund the provision of personalized job training to these recipients. Economic action plan 2013 also confirms our government's commitment to consult with first nations across Canada on the development of a first nations education act.

At the same time, it proposes \$10 million over two years to Indspire to provide post-secondary scholarships and bursaries for first nations and Inuit students. Led by Roberta Jamieson, Indspire has a proven record of success, providing scholarships to over 2,200 aboriginal students annually and raising significant support from a range of corporate donors to help support student success.

Indeed, Jamieson herself recognized the significance of this investment by saying:

With the federal government's commitment of \$10 million and its endorsement of Indspire's plan to match the funding with investment from the private sector, we'll be able to provide a total of \$20 million in new funding for students.

[Translation]

Through this new investment, Indspire can provide scholarships to thousands of young people from first nations and Inuit communities, helping them to achieve their full potential and strengthening aboriginal communities throughout the country.

[English]

However, there is still more. Economic action plan 2013 also proposes \$5 million over five years for Cape Breton University's Purdy Crawford Chair in Aboriginal Business Studies to encourage business studies by aboriginal students. This initiative will help build a brighter future for aboriginal youth and help to promote independence and economic self-reliance for aboriginal communities.

Every one of the initiatives that I have outlined so far will help connect Canadians with high quality jobs, improving not just their personal circumstances but also supporting their families, communities and the Canadian economy.

There is something else that our government has been doing since 2006 that helps to keep our economy strong as well, and that is keeping taxes low. The opposition might be interested to know that since 2006 we have cut taxes over 160 times, reducing the overall tax burden to its lowest level in 50 years. In fact, we have cut taxes in every way government collects them: personal taxes, consumption taxes, business taxes, excise taxes and much more. Overall our strong record of tax relief has meant savings for a typical family of four totalling over \$3,200. This includes cutting the lowest personal income tax rate to 15%; introducing pension income splitting for seniors; reducing the GST from 7% to 5%; introducing and enhancing the working income tax benefit; introducing the tax-free savings account, the most important savings vehicle since RRSs; reducing the small-business tax rate from 12% to 11%; and more.

It does not stop there. In economic action plan 2013, we extended and expanded the hiring credit for small business, helping an estimated 560,000 employers and saving them about \$225 million in 2013 alone.

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It is clear that our government has a plan to keep Canada's economy strong. Indeed, it is our economic leadership that helped Canada emerge from the worst economic recession since the Great Depression better than most other countries in the world. Not only does Canada have the best job creation record since the depth of the global recession, with over one million net new jobs created, but the IMF and the OECD project that Canada will have among the strongest economic growth in the G7 in the years ahead.

• (1325)

[Translation]

The primary responsibility of all nations is to balance efforts made in support of job creation and economic growth, while fulfilling their commitments to reduce the deficit and return to a balanced budget in the medium term.

[English]

Indeed, this is what Canada has done and what we will continue to do. In fact, the Vancouver Board of Trade recognized this balance by saying:

The government is demonstrating a commitment to returning to a balanced budget in the short term, but at the same time, supporting economic growth and job creation.... Given the state of the global economy—where we are seeing recessions, drops in national and sub-national credit ratings, and out-of-control deficits—we are truly fortunate in Canada to be contemplating balanced budgets, receiving AAA credit ratings, and growing our GDP.

It is unfortunate that the NDP and the Liberals do not share this view. While we are building a stronger Canadian economy and returning to balanced budgets, the Liberal leader openly admits he does not have a single idea on the economy and the NDP leader keeps pushing higher taxes and big spending schemes. We have a different route and we are going to take that route.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I noticed in the throne speech that there was no mention of pensions, even though lack of retirement security is a reality for far too many Canadians, especially young Canadians.

The Minister of Finance promised that over the summer he would meet with provincial ministers to decide on a plan for increasing the Canada pension plan and the Quebec pension plan. Why did the Minister of Finance break that promise?

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, helping seniors is one of our top priorities. After all, it was seniors who helped build the country called Canada that we enjoy so much today. We are enhancing pensions. In fact, we have introduced the pooled pensions, which will be available for people in the private sector. This is an enormous achievement considering that nothing had been done in this regard by previous governments. We will continue to do what is necessary to make sure that our seniors have the support they need. For example, income splitting for seniors was also introduced by our government and is a tremendous savings for seniors when they are paying taxes. We will continue to introduce measures such as this to help our seniors.

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Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague spoke about the youth employment strategy in his speech. I am glad that he spoke about this program, which was introduced under a Liberal government. As I said earlier, since the spring of 2006 the number of youth who have been helped by this program has decreased by 48%, so that is not consistent with the claims that my hon. colleague has made. I am wondering if he could comment on that.

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, helping youth find jobs is a top priority of the government. That is why we have dedicated \$330 million to help train youth to find new jobs. We have also enhanced the apprenticeship training program, the internship program and the summer jobs program. We are creating new training opportunities so that young people can get that first job or if they already have a job, they can go to a higher paying job after they get retrained with new skills.

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the throne speech. I have spoken to the minister about the end of the long-term agreements between CMHC and groups like co-operatives many times. Many of these agreements are expiring soon. People could end up on the street if the agreements are not renewed. There is absolutely nothing about this in the throne speech. There is not much about housing in general. What will be done for these people? Why is there nothing in the throne speech about this?

• (1330)

[English]

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, CMHC has been and continues to be an extremely important vehicle for people buying homes. It provides them with mortgage security and mortgage guarantees and it will continue to serve these important purposes. At the same time, household debt is of concern to this government, which is why we have reduced the period that mortgages can go to 25 years. We have also enhanced the program and will continue to do so.

Ms. Joan Crockatt (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am the member for Calgary Centre and my constituency had the unfortunate circumstance of having Canada's largest natural disaster this summer with the flood. I noticed a comment in the throne speech indicating that our government will continue to support the citizens of Lac-Mégantic and affected communities in Alberta as they move forward. I am wondering if I might receive some information on that, please.

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, disasters like what happened in Calgary with the flooding and the terrible disaster in Lac-Mégantic concern Canadians greatly. As the Governor General said yesterday in the throne speech, we will continue to support our fellow Canadians with additional federal funds as well as support from the communities.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with youth unemployment being almost two-and-a-half times higher than regular unemployment, the delta between youth unemployment and regular unemployment is the highest it has been in about 40 years. With there being almost 250,000 fewer jobs for young Canadians than before the downturn, why is the government more focused on giving cheaper cable TV rates to young Canadians than actually

getting them off the couch and out of their parents' basements and into the workforce?

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, youth unemployment is a big concern for our government. That is why we have taken significant measures to help youth find that first job. We have enhanced the apprenticeship system and the internship system. We have also enhanced and increased the summer jobs program.

One particular investment that we have made as well, which I would like to highlight, is the Aboriginal Mine Training Association. I went to one of its graduation ceremonies in Vancouver this summer. I can tell you it is a tremendous success, ensuring young aboriginals have the opportunity to increase their skills in the mining sector. They have been able to increase their average incomes from \$13,000 to \$50,000 a year, almost quadrupling their average annual income as a result of this program, which we put in place to help train young aboriginals to get better jobs.

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Mr. Speaker, the answer I got to my previous question had nothing to do with the question I asked. I will try again.

I mentioned the long-term agreements between CMHC and groups—for example, co-operatives—that will be expiring soon. The government has not yet renewed these agreements. As I was saying, groups of people could end up on the street very soon.

I would like to know why the Conservatives have no plan to fix this problem.

[English]

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, I correct my colleague opposite. We have in fact renewed the affordable housing agreements and we will continue to support affordable housing.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, over the course of the summer I had the chance to consult with over 125 different stakeholder groups in western Canada. One of the things we heard about in these consultations was the need for government support around innovation and ensuring we have an innovative economy for long-term economic growth. Certainly this is something that WD Canada has had a strong track record in supporting, as has our government. I wonder if my colleague could talk a bit about why innovation is important to the Canadian economy and how our government will continue to support this very important agenda.

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for that excellent question. Of course, innovation and research are extremely important to the Canadian economy today and also in the future. That is why we are supporting advanced research. We are providing increased funding for research through the federal research granting councils, colleges and polytechnics, and Genome Canada. We are supporting business innovation by helping businesses invest in innovation, making them more competitive and creating more high-paying jobs in Canada. We are enhancing Canada's venture capital system by fostering entrepreneurial talent and ideas, promoting an entrepreneurial culture in Canada and supporting youth entrepreneurship.

• (1335)

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Mr. Speaker, the second answer did not answer my question either. I was not talking about affordable housing or that program. I was talking about the long-term agreements that CMHC signed between the 1970s and 1990s that are now expiring. That is not at all the same thing.

Could the member please answer my question this time?

[English]

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, CMHC plays an important role in our economy by helping Canadians to buy homes and have those mortgages secured, and it will continue to play an important role.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure to speak to the House today. It is my first opportunity to give a speech after the very long prorogation of the House by the federal government.

I want to begin with a recognition of the earthquake yesterday in the Philippines. A number of members of my community, the riding of Parkdale—High Park, are of Filipino origin. I want to express my condolences to them. We know how worried they and people of Philippine origin around the world must be about the well-being of loved ones there.

On the issue at hand, to begin, I have to say how disappointing the throne speech was for Canadians. It was very long but very thin. It was a bit of a string throne speech. There was not much substance to it. Throne speeches ought to be about vision, about where the government wants to take the country. They should be about what we can do together as a nation in addition to our efforts as individuals, as families and as communities and how the government helps us to do more and to be more than the sum of our parts.

Instead, we keep getting the message from the government that we are on our own and should not count on it, that we will keep paying more taxes and user fees, but services will be consistently fewer and fewer.

Young people growing up in Canada today are receiving the message from the government that they cannot count on it to help them in any way.

What a puny vision for Canada. What a sad vision for Canada. It is part of trying to change the channel after so many scandals and allegations of fraud and economic mismanagement. I dare say it will

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take a lot more than copying the New Democrats' consumer protection agenda to make Canadians forget about scandals in the Senate and to get them to change the channel that quickly. I have heard from constituents across my community who are infuriated by the misspending of the government and the lack of accountability. What really got on their nerves was the Conservatives spending millions of tax dollars on advertising but falling short of taking any real action to help Canadian families. Their action plan was all about the action of spending Canadian tax dollars.

Governments have announced even more cuts that will hurt services but are putting more money into advertising for themselves. While they like to tout their record, they are only faring middlingly well among the OECD countries. In fact, our economy is underperforming. Growth in Canada is stalling, and other countries are overtaking us in spite of Canada's many advantages and in spite of the government's rather breathless talking points this morning.

The Conservatives have taken Canada from a trade surplus to a \$62 billion current account trade deficit in 2012. That is quite a breathtaking record.

When it comes to a new trade deal with Europe, the Conservatives have been very effective at keeping Canadians in the dark throughout these negotiations. When it comes to trade, details matter. Of course we will closely review the text of any agreement before we decide whether to support it, and of course we support trade in general with Europe as long as it is a good deal for Canada. We want to deepen and broaden our economic ties with Europe. It is a partner with high standards, the rule of law and exactly the kind of economy with which we should be strengthening our relationship. I hope we get the opportunity to have a democratic debate and vote on it.

Unlike the Conservatives and the Liberals before them, New Democrats support an open and progressive approach to trade, one that is based on promoting our interests as a country, increasing our exports and building a stronger global economy.

• (1340)

What we have seen under the current government is the decline of our manufacturing sector. The sector continues to shed thousands of jobs. Job creation has not kept pace with the population growth, and we still have almost 300,000 more Canadians unemployed than we did before the last recession.

[Translation]

The unemployment rate among young Canadians remains at 13%, and our youth face precarious working conditions and an unprecedented underemployment rate. There are currently 1.3 million unemployed Canadians.

How can the government justify the fact that the number of unemployed workers has increased by more than 200,070 since the Conservatives took power? That is unbelievable.

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● (1345)

[English]

The unemployment rate fell this month, but only because 20,000 young Canadians gave up searching for work, deciding to accept unpaid internships, going back to school or simply giving up hope of finding a job. In fact, a generation of young Canadians facing double-digit unemployment and precarious low-paying jobs has a very uncertain future.

The Conference Board of Canada and others rank Canada near the bottom, compared with 15 of its peers, in innovation and research and development. As I am sure all my colleagues know and as Canadians know, innovation is essential to a high-performing economy. Given that my colleagues across the way have been fond of quoting supporters of theirs, I quote the Conference Board, which has stated:

Countries that are more innovative are passing Canada on measures such as income per capita, productivity, and the quality of social programs. It is also critical to environmental protection, a high-performing education system, a well-functioning system of health promotion and health care, and an inclusive society. Without innovation, all of these systems stagnate and Canada's performance deteriorates relative to that of its peers.

That is what has been happening. Canada's performance has been deteriorating relative to that of its peers. This has clearly been another Conservative failure, and its solution has been just silence on innovation.

Household debt for Canadians is at a new record high, a sure sign that Canadian families are being squeezed. Household debt stands at a near-record high of 166% of disposable income. Why would that be? Incomes are stagnating. In fact, the average Canadian is even going backwards when it comes to income, whereas the benefits of economic growth are disproportionately going to those at the very top of the economic scale. That is simply unacceptable. We have based our success as a country in the post-war period on what I would call economic and social solidarity—in other words, the notion that we are all on the same bus heading in the same direction, that we all have to work together as Canadians. The notion is that when we do that and Canadians go to work everyday, work hard and do a good job, supporting themselves and their families, we will all share in the economic benefits of that prosperity and there will in fact be a shared prosperity for Canadians.

That commitment is being broken, and not only under the current government but by previous governments as well. I say that is a tragedy for Canadians and they start to lose faith in their ability to act together when that kind of social solidarity is broken.

I hear the Conservative government talk about families, but I also think about first nations families and how they are facing Third World conditions, and the despair that many young people feel in first nations communities.

The federal government knows that funding for first nations education is 30% less than the funding provided by provincial governments, and yet in the throne speech there was silence, nothing about closing the gap. I speak to business owners across the country, some of whom are crying for more skilled workers. They want to get more first nations youth into skills training programs, but young people need to first pass the hoop of a secondary school education.

That is not happening because of the failure of the government to work with first nations as equals and negotiate better funding for first nations education.

Canadians fundamentally believe that we need to work together to build a better tomorrow, and when we do, we count on government to protect us in certain areas. Yes, these are consumer issues, things like rail safety. The fact that the government has failed to implement recommendations to improve rail safety leaves Canadians vulnerable. The fact that food industries are self-regulating when it comes to safety is simply unacceptable and has led to E.coli outbreaks. The fact is that airline passengers are left to their own devices because the government has voted, not once but twice, against an NDP proposal for an airline passenger bill of rights.

The government has a philosophy of leaving people to their own devices. Do not get me wrong; people do not want governments to dictate to them, but they believe that governments have a role in helping to create the economic conditions that can improve their lives. Over the summer and fall, as I have gone door to door in my constituency of Parkdale—High Park, I have heard people say again and again that they are concerned about the same basic things. They are concerned about growing inequality, a lack of environmental protection and the terrible environmental record of the government.

One of the boundaries of my riding is the mighty heritage river, the Humber River. This river has lost its environmental protection because of changes made by the government, and people are very concerned about it. They are concerned that there is no federal funding to make sure that a new infrastructure project, the air-rail link in Parkdale—High Park, is going to be clean electric transportation rather than dirty diesel. We hear silence from the government. They are concerned about the undermining of our scientists and science—the abandonment of the long form census, for example—and they are definitely concerned about good-quality jobs and what the lack of good jobs means for the next generation.

I am increasingly convinced that Canadians believe our economy should deliver some basic things. It should make sure everybody has a place to live. People need homes to go to, roofs over their heads. People need dignity at work. They need decent jobs with a decent standard of living, where they are treated with respect. People should expect from their economy a secure retirement. No senior in this country should live in poverty. What people expect most of all is that the next generation will have at least as much opportunity as the generation that went before.

We did not hear the government address these issues. We did not hear it lay out a vision for the Canada of the future. We hear about mandatory balanced budgets but not the requirement for governments to deliver for seniors or the next generation. Where are their mandatory commitments to Canadians? In fact, the Conservatives have done everything possible to undermine the ability of this or future governments to deliver on many of these fronts. They have cut the GST and took billions out of our budgets every year, when most economists and tax experts agree this was the wrong approach. The Conservatives and the Liberals before them have cut corporate taxes in half, again reducing government's ability to act, but that money is not being reinvested by businesses in the economy and not creating jobs.

New Democrats, like most Canadians, believe we do not get something for nothing. We do not get handed tens of billions of dollars in tax cuts with no strings attached.

• (1350)

New Democrats believe that employers, large and small, should earn a tax benefit. If they invest in innovation, invest in cutting-edge equipment, create new jobs, and train people, then yes, let us offer an incentive. However, they do not just get a big tax cut, put it in their pockets, and then walk away and have a nice day.

What we did hear about were consumer issues. Believe me, it is flattering to have the Conservatives poach some NDP proposals, even if, sadly, they voted against them again and again in the House. Sadly, there is still nothing on airline passenger rights or the crushing credit card fees small businesses pay.

We also cannot ignore the bigger picture. Today Canadian families are squeezed like never before. Under successive federal Conservative and Liberal governments, when the economy has been growing most Canadians have seen relatively little benefit. They are struggling to keep up as the cost of living is rising and middle class jobs are disappearing. Over the past 35 years, our economy has grown by nearly 150%, but the average family has seen its income fall by 7%. Too many students are graduating with a debt the size of a small mortgage, and just as families are forced to carry greater and greater debts, they are saving less and less for retirement. The CIBC estimates that nearly six million are facing a drop-off of 20% or more in their standard of living by retirement.

The Conservatives love tackling crime until it comes to Conservative MPs and senators. They appreciate our natural resources but do not provide good stewardship for our environment. They embrace a few pocketbook issues but do not deliver on creating jobs that put money in people's pockets. They are enthusiastic about patriotism but not very good at nation-building and bringing Canadians together.

New Democrats believe that Canadians deserve better. Canadians need a government that works with them, not against them. At a minimum, we need an employment insurance system that helps working people adjust to the calamity of unemployment. We need Canada and Quebec pension plans that offer better retirement security for more Canadians. We have also proposed a range of measures, from youth job creation and small business hiring tax credits to developing a pan-Canadian energy strategy.

Government Orders

Rather than cutting government services and throwing more Canadians out of work, we need a government that invests in cutting-edge and badly needed infrastructure to prepare our economy for the future and also to create good quality jobs. Rather than silencing our scientists and environmentalists, we support science-based decisions that keep in mind both our short-term and especially our long-term interests. We owe the next generation at least that much.

I see that my time is almost up, but let me say in closing that the vision we were presented with yesterday in the throne speech was very puny. It really was not much of a vision for Canada. Here, on the New Democratic side of the House, we believe that together we can meet the challenges of Canadians head on and reverse and lift the staggering burden of household debt weighing on Canadian families.

We can build an economy that is fairer, greener, cleaner, and more prosperous for all. Give us the chance and we will deliver for all Canadians.

• (1355)

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is no denying that Canada's energy sector plays an important role in the growth of Canada's economy. My colleague spoke about the balance of trade, which of course is the difference between the monetary value of exports and imports of a country measured in the currency of that country. If we want to talk about that, we have to recognize that right now, Canada's heavy oil is being sold at a discount to other world crude, and that has an impact on our balance of trade.

I wonder if my colleague opposite, being seized with this issue, would support the development of energy infrastructure, such as pipelines to the U.S. and the western coast, if done in alignment with our government's responsible resource development package. It includes increased inspections for pipelines; an increased tanker safety regime; a comprehensive greenhouse gas reduction policy, including our coal-fired electricity sector—we are the first country in the world to do that; and the development of greenhouse gas regulations that will see tangible reductions in greenhouse gas emissions while ensuring that our economy continues to grow in the energy sector.

If my colleague is so concerned about the balance of trade, will her party firmly get behind the development of sound and safe energy infrastructure from coast to coast to coast?

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague opposite for her speech/question. I want to congratulate her on her new position. I know she will do well.

Canada's current account deficit of more than \$60 billion is very troubling, because we went from a rather sizable surplus before the Conservatives were elected to, now, this massive current account deficit. I am glad my colleague opposite is also sharing our concern about how badly we are doing on international trade.

Statements by Members

I share the concern about energy security. In talking to Canadians about their energy bills and their desire for energy security, I think there is a way to find common ground.

I will tell the member opposite that I have spoken to many businesses across this country that have said that part of the difficulty with the current government is that it has no credibility in assuring either Canadians or international partners that it has any commitment to a clean environment, and therefore, they do not trust the government to defend environmental interests and protect Canadians.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is somewhat disappointing in the sense that we have seen a lack of leadership on the health care file.

In 2004, a health care accord was achieved by working in cooperation with provinces. That health care accord is going to expire in 2014. There is a need for leadership from Ottawa to develop another health care accord. This is something Canadians all across our land are concerned about. Liberals are very concerned that the government has dropped the ball on what is one of the most important issues Canadians want answers on.

Does the member not agree that the government could be doing so much more, specifically in regard to the issue of the need for a health care accord?

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, there is so much that could be done in the field of health care. The area of mental health especially is one the present and previous governments have fallen down on.

In order to get any kind of health care accord, certainly one would need to be consulting with the provinces. That does not seem to be happening under the watch of the government.

I notice that it was in the 1990s, under the Liberal government, that there were some of the most massive cuts to social spending in the history of our country. We saw the downloading of debt from the federal government to the provinces, which cut federal participation in spending on health care. It is sad that we have been trying to play catch-up ever since.

However, I completely agree that we need to work hand in hand with the provinces to have the kind of health care, including physical health, mental health, dental health, and seniors' health, the country wants.

• (1400)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The time for government orders is concluded at this time. The hon. member for Parkdale—High Park will have five minutes remaining in questions and comments after question period.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[Translation]

QUEBEC'S CHEESEMAKERS

Mr. Claude Patry (Jonquière—Alma, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec's cheesemakers had quite a shock today. They found out

that they will be the big losers in the free trade agreement with the European Union.

Rather than defending supply management, as they had promised, the Conservatives have thrown Quebec's cheese makers under the bus. They ignored the Bloc motion that was adopted unanimously in 2005, calling for the full protection of supply management as the minimum starting point for any negotiations.

In short, the government abandoned the big industry players and small producers who have made tremendous efforts over the past two decades to make such outstanding fine cheeses.

It is time to bring the negotiations out from behind closed doors. It is time to submit the text of the agreement to the House of Commons for debate. It is time for the government to be transparent and stop playing with the fate of an entire industry behind the scenes.

* * *

[English]

GLOBAL HEALTH INITIATIVE AWARD

Hon. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I am recognizing my constituent, Michelle Ediger, of Jasper, Alberta, winner of the Canadian Dental Hygienist Association Global Health Initiative Award.

Michelle has been practising in the dental field since 2001. Her first trip to Africa was in 2005, and it changed her world. She knew then that she would be returning on a regular basis to share her skills and to help others smile. This year will mark her sixth trip to Africa. The joy Michelle feels from the people she is able to help makes her realize that the privileged world can learn so much from those who live in poverty.

Michelle is a model volunteer to us all, and I would like to commend her for her selfless gift of her time and her talent in helping those who need it most.

* * *

[Translation]

NOBEL PRIZE IN LITERATURE

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, literature is the reflection of a country's soul. When writers gain international renown, both their work and their country are honoured.

[English]

The Nobel Prize in Literature awarded last week was the first for a Canadian female writer and also the first for truly exceptional, truly Canadian work.

Alice Munro's stories are stories of daily life. They are stories of Ontario, stories of a small town and a long street, stories of Huron County and elsewhere that are told to us by the best short story writer in the world.

My colleague for London—Fanshawe said that Alice Munro shows us essential truths about ourselves, that there are no ordinary lives, no mundane experiences. Every life is an extraordinary and astonishing one. Some lives are lived by those who make exceptional contributions to their country, our society, and the written word.

I rise in the House today to congratulate Alice Munro for her career, her work, her words and a Nobel Prize in Literature.

* * *

HISPANIC CANADIAN AWARDS

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to highlight the accomplishments of one of Canada's fastest growing populations, the Latino community.

Canada's strength is its immigrants. We are a nation of immigrants. We are richer as a people and a country because of the men, women, and children who have chosen Canada as their new home.

Just last week I attended the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce business awards ceremony in Toronto. The Vision Awards are awarded to outstanding members of the Hispanic Canadian community who have achieved success in business, government, and the arts. Their story is Canada's story. As the son of immigrant parents myself, I know the struggles and challenges new immigrants face moving to a new country. Learning a new language, adjusting to a new way of life, making new friends, and just fitting in can be a very daunting challenge.

I am so proud to represent one of the most ethnically diverse ridings in the country, York Centre, home to the world. York Centre residents hail from virtually every country, region, and continent of the global. While proud of their heritage and culture, what unites us all is that we are fierce in our pride for Canada. This is the Canadian advantage.

These successes are just the beginning for Canada's Latino community. Viva Canada.

* * *

[Translation]

CO-OPERATIVES

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is National Co-op Week. Last year, the House recognized the importance of co-operatives by unanimously adopting my motion to create a special committee, which worked hard and achieved positive results, including shifting responsibility for co-operatives to Industry Canada.

● (1405)

[English]

Now we have to keep this going. That is why we announced earlier this week that my colleague, the member for York West, would at the earliest opportunity move a motion to create a subcommittee of the industry committee and that this subcommittee's work would be dedicated to assisting co-operatives across the country. We hope our colleagues from all parties will support this motion.

Statements by Members

I would be remiss if I did not also mention that today is International Credit Union Day and that credit unions also deserve that we pay more attention to them.

[Translation]

I wish to reaffirm my commitment, and that of my party, to do our best to create an environment that helps co-operatives flourish and contributes to their members' well-being.

* * *

[English]

MARIJUANA

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is tragic that the Liberal leader who aspires to lead this country disregarded his oath, flouted the law and used an illegal drug that can cause heart problems, diabetes and possibly cancer, and is a key cause of vehicular and industrial accidents.

He confesses his use of marijuana, not as a youthful experiment, but five or six times, including as a father of two children and a member of Parliament. Marijuana does not do anything for him, he says, but he keeps working on it.

The Liberals and the NDP have certainly claimed that regulation will protect our youth from accessing marijuana, expecting Canadians to believe that no teens consume cigarettes or alcohol because they are legal and regulated. Since the two primary effects of marijuana are apathy and memory loss, it is difficult to get the Liberal leader to care about protecting our youth or even remember why it is important.

The Liberal and NDP leaders are willing to cut loose the drug dealers on our children for votes. It would be a sad day to see Canada led by one of those two Doobie Brothers.

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[Translation]

RAIL SAFETY

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that many municipalities in my riding are worried about rail safety.

The time has come for the federal government, rail companies and experts to work together to make our communities safer. The people of Vaudreuil-Dorion in particular are very concerned. They have collected over 1,000 signatures to reduce train speed in urban environments. As I was knocking on doors in communities near rail lines this summer, it became clear to me just how worried my constituents are.

Rail transportation of petroleum products has increased by 135% over the past four years. The NDP has been calling for stricter regulations for a long time. We can take a giant step forward toward improving rail transportation safety. We just need the government to show some political will. My constituents are still waiting. The NDP is ready to act, but the government is dragging its feet. Canadians deserve better.

*Statements by Members**[English]***SPEECH FROM THE THRONE**

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday's Speech from the Throne marked the beginning of a new session of Parliament. This new beginning also provides the perfect opportunity to reflect on the values and the character qualities that define what it is to be a Canadian.

These qualities were exhibited magnificently this summer in my home town, Calgary, such as staying strong when the going gets tough, pitching in without waiting for someone else to take the lead, lending a hand to total strangers when they need it, listening to and encouraging those in distress, standing shoulder to shoulder through disaster and heartbreak, and building and rebuilding with courage and determination.

These are qualities we as leaders can all represent in the House of Commons.

Where I come from, we call it "The Spirit of the West". It is also the spirit that built Canada and that continues to make our country great today. May these foundational values guide our deliberations and our work in the days ahead.

* * *

MALALA YOUSAFZAI

Ms. Eve Adams (Mississauga—Brampton South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the occasion of Women's History Month, I rise today to pay tribute to an amazing young woman who has warmed our hearts and inspired the world to stand up against violence, oppression and gender inequality.

Malala became internationally recognized as an advocate for the education of young girls in Pakistan.

As is now well known, her passion and determination led her to become the target of a Taliban attack in 2012. Her attackers boarded her bus, singled her out and proceeded to shoot her in plain view. She was shot for the simple fact that she believed girls should have the same basic educational opportunities as boys. This passionate spirit was encouraged by her great dad.

I am so proud that our government has recognized Malala for her love of education and her patient resolve to promote gender equality and that we will bestow her with honorary Canadian citizenship.

Malala's values and tireless determination represent the essence of Canadian citizenship.

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● (1410)

LINCOLN ALEXANDER

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this Saturday marks the one-year anniversary of the passing of one of the greatest Canadians and a proud Hamiltonian, Lincoln Alexander. Linc, as he was affectionately known by all whose lives he touched, was a trailblazer. As Sandra Martin wrote in the *Globe*, he was a man who had the capacity to turn rejections and despicable slurs into a personal challenge to excel, and excel he did.

In 1968, he was the first black Canadian to become an MP and later became the first black cabinet minister. He resigned in 1981 to chair the Ontario Worker's Compensation Board, then went on to serve as Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario and Chancellor of the University of Guelph. He was awarded the Order of Ontario and became a companion of the Order of Canada. Perhaps the biggest tribute is that he was loved by everyone who knew him, right across party lines.

I hope that love will again prevail when, at the request of his widow, I will in the days ahead ask all members of the House to agree to make Linc's birthday, January 21, a national day in his honour. I cannot think of a more fitting tribute for a man whose whole life reflected the highest ideals of service to our country.

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*[Translation]***LAC-MÉGANTIC**

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to extend my sympathies to the people and families affected by the Lac-Mégantic tragedy.

We admire the courage and resilience of the people of Lac-Mégantic, who, despite their suffering, set to work right away to clean up and rebuild their community.

The municipality hopes that such a tragedy and its ramifications never happen again, and so does our government.

That is why we are working with the Province of Quebec in order to ensure that the people of Lac-Mégantic continue to receive the support they need.

We moved quickly to take action to make railways safer, but we will also introduce certain targeted measures regarding the transportation of dangerous goods.

In addition, companies will have to be able to pay the price for their actions.

Our government will require shippers to carry additional insurance so they are held accountable, and we will not hesitate to take tough action against offenders if the investigation confirms that the regulations were breached.

* * *

*[English]***INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY**

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today is International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. This afternoon, alongside several of my NDP colleagues, I had the privilege of joining that hard-working members of Dignity for All in their "Chew on This" campaign. Together, along with participants in 12 other Canadian cities, we took to the streets to distribute apples as well as postcards to the Prime Minister urging the government to create a desperately needed federal food strategy.

*Statements by Members***LAW ENFORCEMENT ANIMALS**

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, recently we were reminded that police officers and their service animals put their lives on the line every day to keep our streets and communities safe. Sadly, Quanto, an Edmonton Police service dog, was killed in the line of duty. In 2006, Brigadier, the Toronto police services horse, was also killed in the line of duty.

Last spring, I tabled Bill C-515, the protection of law enforcement animals act. This legislation contained measures to amend the Criminal Code to both recognize and protect service animals like Quanto and Brigadier. I would like to thank the Minister of Justice who offered his personal support for this legislation.

I would also like to thank the Prime Minister for indicating in the throne speech that the government will soon introduce Quanto's law in honour of all law enforcement animals. I wish the opposition parties would come to their senses, cease coddling criminals and finally focus on victims, whether they have four legs or two.

* * *

[Translation]

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we were treated to an attempt by the Conservatives to draw attention away from the multitude of scandals in which they are mired. They promised a new direction, but instead we heard an interminable speech full of empty words that could have been a speech given by the Liberal leader.

The Conservatives promised to help consumers, but they did not include any measures to deal with the price of gas, to help merchants with the credit card companies' racket or to put a stop to the abuses of airline companies, which leave passengers stranded on the tarmac for hours.

This speech will not make us forget how some senators, Conservative cronies, lined their own pockets at taxpayers' expense.

Even worse, after proroguing Parliament for one month in order to avoid answering questions, the Prime Minister still does not have the courage to show his face in the House today. Let him eat cheese in Europe as he pleases; the NDP will be ready and waiting for him next Monday. The Conservatives will have to answer for their partisan appointments that have gone awry and for the ensuing cover-up.

Food security is a basic human right, not a privilege. Almost 900,000 Canadians access food banks each month and a further 3.8 million struggle to afford enough food to feed their families. The UN has called on Canada to adopt a federal poverty strategy. The National Council of Welfare gave an estimate of \$12 billion to address poverty and a cost of \$24 billion to do nothing.

Therefore, today I ask you, Mr. Speaker, and all members of the House to join Dignity for All, and chew on that.

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CANADIAN FORCES

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on October 11, I had the privilege to be on the tarmac in Edmonton to greet 16 troops returning from their deployment in Afghanistan.

Alongside Brigadier-General Juneau, we welcomed our brave soldiers back home. I thanked them for their valiant service abroad defending and promoting the freedoms and values we as Canadians hold so dearly. I was humbled in their presence. It was a good reminder of the dangers they willingly face every day. It is also a reminder of the esteem in which our service men and women are held here at home and around the world for the superior job they do when called upon.

In this season between thanksgiving and remembrance let us all remind ourselves that freedom has never been free. For the blessings of freedom, peace and security, which we inherited from yesterday, we give thanks to our veterans and fallen. For the freedom, peace and prosperity we will enjoy tomorrow, we give thanks to our soldiers.

We welcome home brave sons and daughters of Canada. We are so proud of them.

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● (1415)

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as has been stated, today is the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. Though we consider ourselves a rich country, Canada's poverty rate ranks 24th out of 34 in the OECD countries. More than 3.5 million Canadians and more than 1 in 7 children live in poverty everyday, a fact that no Canadian can be proud of.

Poverty has real effects on Canadian lives. Canadians living in poverty suffer from much worse health and are less able to find stable employment. Children unlucky enough to be born into poverty are much more likely to end up in the criminal justice system, more so than their wealthier friends.

It used to be that a job would lift people out of poverty or provide a guarantee against it. Unfortunately, more working Canadians are now joining the ranks of the working poor. Poverty is a cycle that can and must be broken.

Today, I call on the government to develop a national anti-poverty strategy as recommended by all-party committees of both the House of Commons and the Senate so we can put an end to poverty in Canada.

Oral Questions

[English]

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have a rare opportunity to build on our immense natural wealth, our stable democracy, our sound finances, our expanding network of trade relationships around the world and the ingenuity of Canadians.

Yesterday, our government laid out its priorities: creating jobs and opportunities for Canadians; supporting and protecting families; and putting Canadians first.

What are the opposition parties' priorities? The NDP is anti-trade, anti-business and pro-tax. It would raise billions of dollars in new taxes on top of its \$20 billion carbon tax. The Liberal leader admits he has no economic policies. In fact, the only topic that seems to interest him is legalizing marijuana, which would make it easier for children to access.

We can only assume that the Liberal leader agrees with Chrystia Freeland, the person he hand-picked to co-chair his economic advisory council. She is the one who told MSNBC "amen to raising taxes".

ORAL QUESTIONS

● (1420)

[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, an astonishing 600 aboriginal women have been murdered or reported missing across Canada. The National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Shawn Atleo, has called for a national inquiry. The UN rapporteur has called for a national inquiry.

If, in a city the size of Ottawa, 600 women were murdered or missing, there would not have to be protests in the streets to get a national inquiry; one would have been called a very long time ago. Why is the Prime Minister still refusing to hold a national inquiry into the national tragedy of 600 murdered and missing aboriginal women?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have in fact been very focused on taking action with respect to support for the aboriginal community and specifically on this tragic issue of murdered and missing aboriginal women. For example, we recently passed legislation giving women living on first nations the same matrimonial rights as all Canadians, including emergency protections and protection orders for those living in violent situations.

That is real action. There has been massive consultation, and that will continue.

* * *

GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday's throne speech talked about victims; well, victims' families are demanding a national inquiry, nothing less.

[Translation]

In the past 160 days, the Prime Minister has shown up to work exactly five times, in spite of the corruption in the Senate, the corruption within his own party, the corruption within his own caucus and even the corruption within his own office.

The Prime Minister went so far as to hide on the other side of the Atlantic to avoid speaking today. What is he afraid of—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of State for Democratic Reform.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we all know why the Prime Minister is not here today. He is in Europe to secure access to 500 million new consumers for our businesses.

[English]

That would be 500 million new customers for Canadian businesses. That means 80,000 jobs for Canadians and a \$1,000 increase in average family income. This is a government that is on the side of workers and consumers.

The Speaker: Order, please. I want to caution both sides of the House not to inadvertently point out the presence or absence of any member during debate.

* * *

ETHICS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, five senators appointed by the Prime Minister are accused of corruption. The Prime Minister's former parliamentary secretary, his former director of communications, and his former chief of staff are all either under investigation or already charged. These are chosen members of the Prime Minister's own inner circle who are implicated in scandal.

The Prime Minister needs to take responsibility for the climate of corruption that he created. Instead, the Prime Minister flies off to Brussels on *Con Air*.

When will the Prime Minister stand in the House and tell the truth to Canadians?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the Leader of the Opposition attacks our Prime Minister for travelling abroad to conclude the biggest trade agreement since NAFTA. The NDP would simply like to build a big brick wall around Canada, a brick wall that would keep out 80,000 jobs, would keep away 500 million customers, would keep away \$1,000 in increased income for the average family.

The Conservative Party supports free trade; the NDP supports no trade, and the Liberals support the drug trade.

[Translation]

VETERANS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the throne speech suggests that the Conservatives want to symbolically honour our veterans, but it is not propaganda that they need. They need meaningful action.

Today, veterans are protesting the closure of nine service centres. These men and women risked their lives for their country.

Instead of insulting them and using them, why do the Conservatives not help them by keeping these service centres open?

• (1425)

[English]

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadian veterans who are injured in the service of Canada do not drive to visit government offices. We meet them at a place of their choosing. Canadian veterans need a nurse in the privacy of their own home or a doctor in the privacy of their own doctor's office. Only the opposition is calling for veterans to drive to a district office in the first place. We on this side of the House are working to make life easier for veterans while respecting their privacy.

* * *

JUSTICE

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is truly pathetic. The government thinks that closing nine service centres is somehow providing more service to veterans. We will keep them open when we form government in 2015.

If the Conservatives are sincere in their promises from yesterday's throne speech, here is a chance to prove it. In the last session, after the tragic death of Rehtaeh Parsons, my colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour proposed a bill on cyberbullying. In yesterday's throne speech, Conservatives promised action on exactly that issue. Well, we can act today.

I have a simple question for the Conservatives, who are all talk and no action. If they are serious, if they want to keep that promise, will they pass the bill today at all stages by unanimous consent?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin answering this question by expressing condolences again to the family of Rehtaeh Parsons, to the Todd family, and to all families who have suffered as a result of cyberbullying and victimization.

With respect to legislation, it is our intention to bring a bill before the House of Commons. There will be opportunity to debate the bill and to make it pass through the House very quickly. If the Leader of the Opposition is expressing his support for this legislation when the government produces it, then we will hold him to that promise to pass it quickly through the House.

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GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, these past months I have travelled across this vast country, in particular

Oral Questions

spending a lot of time in Manitoba. Nobody has forgotten about Mike Duffy, Nigel Wright, and the scandal that has engulfed the Prime Minister, but the Conservatives obviously still do not think they did anything wrong.

Why was there not a single measure in the throne speech to raise the bar on openness and accountability?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously the Liberal leader should have read the throne speech, because he would have seen very clearly listed there our plan to ask the Supreme Court for a legal instruction manual on reforming the Senate or eventually abolishing it if reform does not occur.

We have already brought in 12 tough new rules on Senate spending. We have invited the Auditor General to investigate that spending. We are seeking ways that we can transform that upper chamber into a democratic body that serves the Canadian people.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have been claiming for close to eight years that economic growth is their priority, but they have the worst economic record since R. B. Bennett during the depths of the Great Depression.

It does not take a rocket scientist to understand that their approach is not working.

Why then did they not propose any concrete solutions to deal with the debt or jobs in the Speech from the Throne?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we now know that the hon. member certainly did not read the Speech from the Throne.

The throne speech clearly includes improvements for consumers to give them more options regarding their cellphone plans. It also highlights the tax cuts that our government has already brought in.

Today, the Prime Minister is in the process of concluding a free trade agreement that will create 80,000 jobs for Canadians. That is an impressive achievement. That is a huge gain for taxpayers, workers and families.

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[English]

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in places like Brandon and Steinbach I hear Canadians' frustration that they elected MPs to be their voice in Ottawa but instead received only the Prime Minister's voice in their communities.

Canadians, and I am sure many members of the Conservative caucus, want us to raise the bar on openness and transparency. It is a question of control versus trust.

Oral Questions

Will the government allow its caucus members to join us in proactively disclosing their hospitality and travel expenses?

• (1430)

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are willing to work with our colleagues from all parties to develop improved reporting that applies to all parliamentarians. We believe that all parties should support measures to improve transparency. Until such a system is in place, Conservative parliamentarians will do it themselves.

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ETHICS

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, over the summer, documents filed in court by the RCMP completely contradicted claims made by the Prime Minister in the House. On June 5, the Prime Minister told the House of Commons and Canadians that the only person in his office who knew about the secret payoff deal to Mike Duffy was his chief of staff, Nigel Wright.

Therefore, does the minister now want to stand and correct that statement?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister said on a number of occasions, this was a matter that was handled directly by Mr. Wright, and the Prime Minister had no knowledge of this payment until after May 15.

What is truly clear and what we have heard over the summer is how important it is that the government continues to focus on jobs and the economy. That is why the Prime Minister today is en route to Europe to sign a new trade agreement that will see 80,000 new jobs created.

Again we are seeing that the NDP and the Liberals will be voting against new job creation measures. They vote against the small, medium, and large job creators in this country because they do not think they have the opportunity or the ability to compete with everybody. We do.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the question was about the unprecedented situation of a police investigation into the very office of the sitting Prime Minister. That was the question. The claims that were made by the Prime Minister in the House on June 5 have been proven false by RCMP investigation witness statements, so I will give the new member in his new portfolio a second chance.

Does he still maintain on behalf of the shy Prime Minister that Nigel Wright was the only one in the Prime Minister's Office who knew about the hush money that was paid out, the \$90,000? Is that the position he is going to continue to stand by?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I just said and as the Prime Minister has said on a number of occasions, and he has been very clear on this matter, Mr. Wright handled this file on his own. He had no knowledge of the payment until May 15.

Why does the opposition not start thinking about some of the things that were in the throne speech, some of those things that they

have consistently voted against as we continue to talk about reducing taxes for Canadian families and making our communities safer?

Opposition members have no ideas. They have no plan. When it comes to economic growth, when it comes to keeping our communities safe, Canadians know one thing: they can trust Conservatives on both sides of the House to stand up for them and to stand up for the values that have made this country great, and this Prime Minister will continue to do that for a long time to come.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, from what I can see, the parliamentary lockout decreed by the Conservatives did not prevent them from going back to their old ways. They keep spouting nonsense, instead of doing the honourable thing and telling the truth.

When he talked to the RCMP, Nigel Wright clearly contradicted what the Prime Minister said in the House. Does the government continue to deny that David van Hemmen, Benjamin Perrin and Chris Woodcock were aware of the Wright-Duffy agreement?

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will repeat it again for the hon. member, because he is not listening.

Nigel Wright handled this on his own. The Prime Minister knew nothing about the payment until after May 15. Only the NDP would think it is nonsense to talk about creating jobs, only the NDP would think it is nonsense to talk about keeping our communities safe, and only the NDP would think it is nonsense that a Prime Minister and a government would focus on opening up a market of 500 million people to Canadian manufacturers and small, medium, and large business creators. Only New Democrats would say that is nonsense. Canadians understand that we will stand up for them and we will stand up for jobs.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, have they assigned me a new friend? He does not seem as fun as the last one.

Nigel Wright knew that some of his colleagues were aware of the agreement with Mike Duffy. That is what he told the police officers investigating the Conservatives' scheme. In fact, he handed over hundreds of pages of emails relating to this matter.

Why did the Prime Minister say the opposite on June 5? On the basis of what information did the Prime Minister answer our questions?

• (1435)

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was going to give the member a break. I did not think he wanted me to talk about the 29 separate donations that he made to separatist parties.

If he wants to continue to talk about the fact that he continues to donate to parties that are bent on ruining this country, we will continue to talk about creating jobs, we will continue to talk about reducing taxes, we will continue to focus on consumers and their rights in this country, and we will continue to make our communities safe. We will continue to do all of those things that Canadians sent us here to do, because that is our responsibility: to build a bigger, better, stronger, safer Canada.

* * *

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 584 days ago, the government agreed to act on an NDP proposal to strengthen Canada's electoral laws to prevent election fraud.

Last April, the former minister finally acted to table a bill but, lo and behold, he met with the Conservative caucus and he was shut down.

In yesterday's throne speech, the government again had the gall to promise this long-delayed bill. I have a question for the new minister, a very simple question. When will we see this bill?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, it will be in time for it to be implemented before the next election.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada's dairy and cheese industry provides good, high-paying, middle-class jobs.

Dairy farmers and cheesemakers are central to many rural communities across this country. These farmers produce high-quality products at affordable prices without receiving one cent in government subsidy.

Why are Conservatives going to jeopardize the livelihood of dairy farmers and cheesemakers across this country?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, all three pillars of supply management are protected, but more than that, farmers from across Canada, who are the best in the world, will now have access to over half a billion new hungry customers.

That is the advantage of the free trade agreement the Prime Minister is working on. It means we will be creating 80,000 new jobs for Canadians, \$12 billion in additional GDP; that is \$1,000 for every family in this country, each and every year.

The NDP wants to build a big brick wall around Canada. We want to build a bridge to jobs.

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let me remind the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food of this, and I will quote:

Canada's position is always that we will protect and promote all our sectors—including our supply management system....

Who said that? It was the Prime Minister.

Can the minister now assure Canadians, especially dairy farmers across this country, that he will not sell them out for a deal?

Oral Questions

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are three pillars to supply management. We know what they are: imports, price and production. All three of those pillars are protected by this arrangement.

Once again, we are ensuring that Canadian farmers, who are the best in the world, will have access to over 500 million new customers with this free trade agreement. This is the biggest free trade agreement since NAFTA. It triples the number of countries with whom we have free trade. It ensures that we create 80,000 net new jobs, \$12 billion in additional annual wealth for our economy.

This is jobs; this is hope; this is opportunity.

[Translation]

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since they are so disconnected from what is important to Quebec, I will tell them. Quebec's cheese industry is booming. It creates good jobs, often in rural areas that need these economic drivers, in addition to providing delicious cheese to Canadians.

Will the Prime Minister confirm that he will keep his promise of maintaining the supply management system as it currently exists?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the three pillars of supply management are protected by this agreement. At the same time we will give Canadian agricultural producers and farmers access to 500 million new consumers. This is a growth opportunity for our farmers and an opportunity for Canada to add \$12 billion and 80,000 jobs to our economy. This is a great victory for consumers, taxpayers and our farmers.

● (1440)

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do not think he really understood my question.

When the Prime Minister took office, he promised to support Canadian farmers and rural communities, but since he has been in power for too long, he now takes them for granted.

How much did the Conservatives get by breaking their promise to protect our producers and supply management?

[English]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me quote the Canadian Agri-Food Trade Alliance, which said that the trade agreement:

...offers tremendous potential for Canadian producers and food processors to grow exports to the EU. Current agri-food exports to the EU are \$2.4 billion a year. When completely implemented, we expect...[this agreement] to eliminate tariffs on virtually all of Canada's agriculture and food products.

This is 500 million hungry customers waiting to buy Canadian agricultural products. It is an enormous victory for our farmers.

* * *

[Translation]

ETHICS

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the RCMP affidavits published this summer contradict the Conservative ministers on the Wright-Duffy affair.

Oral Questions

Contrary to what they have been telling us for months, we know that Mr. Wright was not the only person who knew the details of the agreement and that he had hundreds of pages of documents. Let us see whether the Conservative ministers can be honest for once. We know that Mr. Duffy had a meeting at the Prime Minister's Office on February 11 of this year.

Whom did Mike Duffy meet at the Langevin Building on that occasion?

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister was very clear on this matter. Nigel Wright handled this on his own. He did not know anything about the payment until May 15.

In the meantime, our government will continue to focus on jobs and economic growth. We are faced with two opposition parties, one that wants to create a \$21 billion carbon tax and raise taxes by over \$20 billion on our small, medium and large producers, and another one whose only economic policy after months and months is to reorganize crime so that it can extract taxes from drugs. How pathetic is that?

Let us start to think about what Canadians really want, which is jobs and growth.

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this spring the Prime Minister and his ministers repeatedly claimed that it was Nigel Wright, only, who knew about the deal with Mike Duffy and the PMO. Unfortunately, even the Minister of Industry said the same thing repeatedly. He said that right after the loan; however, sworn affidavits in court by the RCMP point out that at least three other key staffers in the PMO and Senator Gerstein knew about the deal.

Why are the Conservatives misleading Canadians, and when will they finally get the truth?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Nigel Wright has taken sole responsibility for this matter. He has said that he handled the file all on his own.

The deal that Canadians really want to know about is the new deal with Europe that is going to see some 500 million new people accessing Canadian products. By this one measure alone, 80,000 net new jobs will be created. We know that the NDP and the Liberals are both against that because they do not think our producers measure up to others.

Our throne speech is quite clear. We will seize the advantages of seven years of Conservative government rule. We will unleash the potential of our producers and create jobs across this country.

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians find it hard to believe anything the government has said. Conservative ministers also tried to play dumb with the February 20 email that summarized the deal and claimed that no written records existed.

In court records, the RCMP revealed that Wright provided investigators hundreds of pages of emails as well as a binder labelled "Confidential —Senator Mike Duffy — Schedules...".

Why did the government mislead the House and claim that no written records existed, when clearly they did? When will it publicly release the email and the binders and come clean on everything else it is trying to hide?

• (1445)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Wright handled this file on his own. The Prime Minister was not aware of any payment on this file until May 15.

In the meantime, this government will continue to focus on Canadians and what Canadians want us to focus on; that is, keeping our communities safe, creating new jobs and unleashing the potential of our small, medium and large job creators across this country.

We are very excited that we are about to sign a new trade agreement that would open up a 500-million-person market to Canadian producers and more jobs.

The only thing the Liberals can come up with is legalizing marijuana for our kids. They even went to my former university saying, "Sign up to be a Liberal member—"

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Sudbury.

* * *

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while I am happy the Conservatives decided to steal some of the NDP's good consumer protection ideas, unfortunately they missed some of our best stuff.

Canadians are being gouged by credit card companies, banks often charge excessive fees and air passengers are often left unprotected, yet the Conservatives ignored all those consumers.

Will they act now to tighten regulations and better protect Canadian families, or are the Conservatives still too scared to stand up to banks, credit card companies and airline lobbyists?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his quiet tone and approach on the subject.

Of course we regulate our banks. All federal financial institutions, and there are more than 400 of them, are regulated, inspected and audited. We brought in the code of conduct with respect to credit cards a long time ago, and it is supported by the Retail Council of Canada and by the consumer groups in Canada.

A great deal has been done. There is more to do, as outlined in the Speech from the Throne.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, those are more hollow words for consumers. If they are looking for some more good ideas on how to protect consumers, they should check out www.ndp.ca and the affordability campaign.

The Conservatives' lack of commitment has been made very clear by seven years of talk and no action. Canadians are working hard to make ends meet, and they are tired of being squeezed out of every last cent. Conservatives even voted against the motion to protect consumers from abuse by credit card companies.

Why are Conservatives cherry-picking which Canadian consumer they will help?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, well, we protect all Canadian consumers, of course. It is vitally important, through the Financial Consumer Agency, the federal literacy program and the federal financial literacy co-leader, that Canadians have the best information available, which is available not on that particular website, but on the consumer agency website, so that they can inform themselves of what the best rates are to make good decisions for their families.

[Translation]

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have finally listened to the voice of reason in deciding to adopt certain consumer protection measures advanced by the NDP. However, we can see that these are not their ideas because they are proposing half measures. They have completely abandoned our proposed air passenger bill of rights, the purpose of which was to ensure that travellers were treated with respect.

What exactly are they offering for airline customers?

[English]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know what information the member opposite has, but as we have always said, one should never speculate what will be in the Speech from the Throne. Indeed, one waits for the speech and reads it at that point in time.

What I can tell the House is this. We have great connections with both airlines and airports, and I do hear from consumers across the country. We have constructive dialogues on all of these issues. At the end of the day, the consumer can turn to the Canadian Transportation Agency with individual complaints regarding the airlines.

[Translation]

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is what you get when you prorogue Parliament. The members opposite have had a month of vacation too many because they are finding it hard to wake up.

If the Conservatives really wanted to help Canadian consumers, they would have included measures in the throne speech concerning the price of oil, excessive credit card fees and ATM fees. However, there is none of that in this speech.

Yesterday the government acknowledged that action had to be taken to protect consumers. Why then is it bowing to the airlines and credit card companies?

• (1450)

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, we work with all of those groups and all of those entities, including the credit card issuers, the consumer groups and the retail groups in Canada, to develop the voluntary code of conduct. It is

working, and they tell us it is working. I have told them, time and time again, if there is evidence that it is not working, it will no longer be voluntary; it will be mandatory.

Mr. Joe Daniel (Don Valley East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadian families should not have to pay for TV shows they do not ever watch. The big cable giants may support bundling television channels because it increases their profits. My constituents want an à la carte service.

What is the Minister of Canadian Heritage doing to unbundle television services?

Hon. Shelly Glover (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would also like to thank the member for Don Valley East for that important question. Canadian families work hard to make ends meet, and every dollar counts. While companies will look out for their bottom line, our government is looking out for Canadian families. Our government believes Canadian families should be able to choose the combination of television channels they want, and we will require channels to be unbundled, while protecting Canadian jobs.

We are standing up for TV channel unbundling. Will the opposition members remain silent or stand with us for consumers?

* * *

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the NDP has long called for action on rail safety, including informing municipalities of dangerous goods being transported and implementing a dozen outstanding safety board recommendations. Three months have passed since the tragic Lac-Mégantic disaster, and yet the throne speech only contained vague commitments. Testing crude oil and putting it back in the same old, dangerous rail cars will not improve rail safety.

My question to the minister is simple: when will she phase out these dangerous, outdated tanker cars, DOT-111? When will she get it done?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, since it has been brought up in the House, we have to reiterate again that our thoughts and prayers are with the families of those 47 victims of the incidents in Lac-Mégantic. We think about them every day when we are talking about rail safety.

Since that time, I have talked to rail companies, to the municipalities and, indeed, to other stakeholders with respect to the transportation of dangerous goods. We have heard from the TSB as well. That is why I am happy to indicate that effective today I have asked the Department of Transport to issue a protective directive that will ensure that all crude oil being transported be properly tested and classified and the results sent to the Transportation Safety Board.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, testing crude oil and putting it in the same old cars will not solve the safety problem.

Three months have gone by since the tragedy in Lac-Mégantic and all the government has done is put temporary measures in place.

When will the municipalities finally receive information on the hazardous materials transiting through their areas, and exactly what targeted measures will the government bring forward to inform those municipalities?

[English]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have a very good and constructive working relationship with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the railways on this issue.

We all agree that first responders need to have the information that is important to them with respect to ensuring they can respond to incidents that may happen. As such, I encourage the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to continue to work with us and with the rail companies to get to a resolution in the matter.

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*[Translation]***THE ENVIRONMENT**

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome the new Minister of the Environment and ask her a very simple question.

Can the minister tell us, with a simple yes or no answer, whether she believes the scientific information about climate change contained in the IPCC report?

[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, it is very clear that the science has been very clear supporting climate change. That is why I am a very strong advocate for taking actions against climate change and I am proud to be part of a government that is getting things done.

We have a sector-by-sector regulatory approach which allows us to project forth our environment and the economy.

Under the Liberals' watch, emissions increased by almost 30%. The NDP wants a \$20 billion carbon tax. Our government is reducing greenhouse gas emissions and standing up for Canadian jobs.

● (1455)

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it sounds as if the hon. minister is confused about what action on climate change really is. Canadians were understandably confused after the minister said, "there's always a debate around science and what's changing".

Actually, that debate is over. Climate change is real. It is impacting Canadians and it is time for the government to take action.

Will the minister agree that with all the evidence before us about climate change the time to take immediate action is now?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of the Environment, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is a world leader when it comes to taking action on greenhouse gases. We have actually reduced our projected emissions by 130 megatonnes. Compare that to what they would have been under the Liberals. Under the Liberals, greenhouse emissions increased by almost 30%. Also, the NDP wants a \$20 billion carbon tax. Our government is reducing greenhouse gases and standing up for Canadian jobs.

* * *

*[Translation]***INTERNATIONAL TRADE**

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, Canada's dairy farmers indicated that they are concerned about the free trade agreement with the European Union and its effect on supply management.

In the throne speech, the government made a commitment to continue protecting supply management, but it did not provide details.

Can the government explain how this agreement will affect our country's dairy farmers?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the three pillars of supply management will be protected in the agreement in question.

The Liberals and the NDP tried the same fearmongering tactics during NAFTA talks. However, 20 years later, we can see that Canadians have been very successful thanks to that Conservative feat.

This is no different. There will be a new market of 500 million consumers for our farmers. We are confident that our farmers will succeed.

[English]

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government has not provided any details on what the CETA deal means to Parliament and to Canadians during the past four years. In fact, the Conservatives did not mention it in the throne speech in terms of getting us any further details. All we have heard has been through leaks in the media.

I would like to ask the government what information it has shared with the provinces, because obviously the provinces have to sign on. Would the Conservatives share that with the rest of Parliament, please?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, he wants details. Let me give him some details: 80,000 net new jobs; 500 million new consumers for Canadian businesses to reach; a cornucopia of new products to which Canadian consumers will now have access. This is a deal that will triple the number of countries with which we have free trade. It is the biggest trade agreement since NAFTA. In fact, it makes us one of the only countries in the world to have free trade with both Europe and the United States.

The NDP wants to build a giant brick wall around Canada. Where do the Liberals stand?

* * *

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, victims of rape in war and child brides are left in tragic circumstances. They should have choices including access to abortion services. It is wrong for Conservatives to refuse to fund access for safe abortion services to these survivors.

Will the minister now do the right thing, put ideology aside for a moment, think about these survivors and for the sake of these victims reverse the Conservative government's policy?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of International Development and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government will continue to deliver where Canada can make a difference. It is deplorable to hear the opposition trying to divide over such a debate.

As members know, Canada, under the leadership of the Prime Minister, is recognized around the world as a leader in defending the health and safety of mothers and children, particularly girls.

Therefore, instead of dividing, the opposition parties should be proud of the tangible results that we are accomplishing around the world.

• (1500)

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of International Development says that he condemns rape as a weapon of war. Then he turns around and tells women who become pregnant as a result of such a barbaric act that unfortunately, they have to deal with it on their own.

Does the minister sleep well at night?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of International Development and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I sleep very well at night. To date, 1.3 million children under the age of five have survived thanks to the Canadian government's measures under the Muskoka initiative. In addition, 64,000 more mothers are alive today thanks to the Canadian government's initiatives.

It is deplorable that opposition members are trying to turn international aid into a divisive debate when we have achieved results. Canada is recognized around the world as a leader. That is where we will make a difference; that is where we will share our knowledge and expertise, in areas where it really matters.

* * *

[English]

JUSTICE

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for too long the voices of victims have been silenced while the system, and yes, that includes the Liberals and the NDP, coddled criminals. The opposition even opposed us repealing Pierre Trudeau's faint hope clause which gave murderers a shot at an early parole.

Oral Questions

Will the minister explain our upcoming agenda to support and protect Canadian families?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, like my friend, I am proud to be part of a government that puts victims and the protection of Canadians first.

Since becoming justice minister, I have had the opportunity to travel and consult broadly with victims and stakeholders about how we can work with them and the justice system to improve the safety and protection for victims across the country. In fact, this fall I am proud to say that we will bring forward the first national victims bill of rights that will do just that. It will allow us to ensure that victims have a voice, protection, inclusion and respect in our justice system. I know that all members opposite will want to support that important legislation.

[Translation]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, people in Quebec and across Canada cannot understand why one of our Supreme Court justices will not be allowed to sit for months or perhaps even years. Canada needs all of its judges at a time when some very important cases are before the court.

To resolve the legal mess that the Minister of Justice and the Prime Minister have created themselves, will the minister act on the Barreau du Québec's proposal and refer the matter directly to the Supreme Court in order to get a quick decision?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me be perfectly clear: we will defend the rights of Quebecers appointed to the Federal Court to also sit on Canada's highest court.

[English]

The eligibility and the opinion that we have received from Mr. Justice Ian Binnie, which has also been endorsed by Supreme Court Justice Louise Charron, as well as a noted constitutional expert Peter Hogg, is very clear. In fact, we believe that Justice Nadon is eminently qualified. We are certain that he will serve the court and the country with distinction and will receive the clearance he needs to join his colleagues on the Supreme Court of Canada.

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ETHICS

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the RCMP has confirmed that Nigel Wright did not act alone but in fact others in the Prime Minister's Office were involved. Is the Prime Minister's latest parliamentary secretary actually accusing the RCMP of lying?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member, of course, will sink to no depths in order to try and make a ridiculous point in the House. Nigel Wright has taken sole responsibility for this. The Prime Minister has said that on a number of occasions.

The NDP members are just an angry lot. It bothers them that a million Canadians are working today who were not before. It bothers them that 80,000 net new jobs are about to be created in the country because of the policies of our government and our Prime Minister.

Routine Proceedings

When it comes to standing up for law enforcement, including the RCMP, they know and Canadians know that our government will always stand up for them, including—

The Speaker: The hon. member for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country.

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● (1505)

THE ECONOMY

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has delivered on its promises to Canadians. Under the leadership of our Prime Minister, Canada has sailed through the troubled waters of the global economic recession and come out better than any other G7 country.

Yesterday's Speech from the Throne was an opportunity to inform Canadians that we intend to keep delivering results. Could the Minister of Immigration inform the House of our next step?

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to thank the hard-working and fast-running member of Parliament for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country for his excellent question.

Anyone who read yesterday's Speech from the Throne or who heard it can conclude that this is a government focused on the priorities that matter to Canadians, on creating jobs and opportunities, on supporting and protecting Canadian families and on putting Canada first.

[Translation]

We plan to introduce new legislation to ensure that our streets and communities are safe, to protect Canadian consumers, to ensure a balanced budget and to—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Brome—Missisquoi.

* * *

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 80 cars from MMA are at a standstill on tracks in Farnham, unmonitored, close to a main road, a park and homes. These cars carry the same type of oil that was involved in the Lac-Mégantic tragedy. The Conservatives talked about targeted measures for railway safety. DOT-111 cars in Farnham, now that is quite the target.

What is preventing the Minister of Transport from having these cars moved quickly and safely?

[English]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I share the concern of the member opposite with respect to this matter. The reality is these cars have to be moved safely. Transport Canada has indicated these cars cannot move at this point in time. We want to ensure they can be safely moved. It is working with MMA with respect to obtaining the appropriate permissions needed for them to be moved. When it has those, we expect MMA will move them out.

[Translation]

INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday's Speech from the Throne does nothing to address Quebec's expectations. The federal government would rather pursue its headstrong approach and refuse to consider Quebec's requests. It is also continuing with its disastrous employment insurance and manpower training reforms, which will hit Quebec families hard.

How can the government justify ignoring Quebec's legitimate requests and persist in stirring up pointless squabbles?

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, yesterday's Speech from the Throne includes initiatives for the whole country. Of course, the Bloc member wants to take Quebec out of Canada, but we do not. The sovereignty proposed by this member has nothing to do with what I want for Quebec. I want a very strong province of Quebec in a united Canada. With the Speech from the Throne, we are going to continue to ensure that Quebec becomes stronger in this great country called Canada.

[English]

The Speaker: That concludes question period for today.

Pursuant to an order made earlier today, the House will now proceed to statements by ministers.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

LAC-MÉGANTIC

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of International Development and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to ask the members of the House to reflect on what happened in Lac-Mégantic.

Those who are familiar with Lac-Mégantic will agree that it is a magnificent and unique part of the country, where lakes and mountains meet. As they do whenever a situation arises that requires them to pull together, the people who live there—people I know very well—have shown extraordinary courage since the terrible ordeal of July 6, when a train destroyed Lac-Mégantic's downtown and took the lives of 47 residents.

The resilience that the people of Lac-Mégantic have shown since this tragic event will certainly serve as an example to the country for generations to come. Nevertheless, they are still mourning their lost loved ones. That is why we must remember and support Lac-Mégantic.

I am therefore asking all my colleagues in the House to remember the people of Lac-Mégantic who lost their lives and keep the families and loved ones of those who died in their thoughts and prayers.

• (1510)

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize the work of the Minister of International Development and member for Mégantic—L'Érable and commend him for his presence and his support for his constituents. I was there. I saw him. He was there. I commend him and thank him once again.

I too would like to join with the millions of Canadians who, on the morning of July 6, 2013, quickly learned about the great tragedy that was occurring in downtown Lac-Mégantic. The people of Quebec and Canada joined in solidarity to express their shock at the magnitude of the tragedy and to demonstrate their generosity and compassion for this community.

[English]

We lost brothers and sisters, and nothing we can do will bring them back. It is our duty as elected members at the local, provincial, or federal level to make sure that this will never happen again.

[Translation]

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the premier of Quebec and all the local elected officials for their dignity and the active role they played in providing support in the days following the disaster.

I would also like to commend all the groups and people who gave of their time and money to offer sympathy and support to the individuals and families who suffered such great hardship. I would like to make particular mention of the great contribution of Mayor Colette Roy-Laroche, who took on the role of mother of the town, gathering and protecting her children in order to make sure that no one else was lost.

The short-, medium- and long-term impact and collateral damage will have to be monitored for many years to come. With the loss of its downtown, Lac-Mégantic lost its soul and all of its history and its roots. It is now time to build, to look toward the future and take action for the common good.

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, three months ago a railway explosion and fire devastated Lac-Mégantic. Many people are still in shock over this tragic event. I went to Lac-Mégantic twice after the catastrophe and my heart goes out to the many families who had to deal with the loss of loved ones and the resulting distress. The entire country is in mourning with you.

The very soul of this town, known for its beauty and liveliness, was shattered. For that reason, we continue to feel profound sadness. Forty-seven Canadians were taken from us and as many families were devastated. Thousands of people had their lives turned upside down by this tragic event. I know very well that it is difficult to put into words the anguish and grief that accompany the loss of a loved one. The pain that many people still feel today will always be a part of our history.

[English]

What we must continue to do now is help the families, friends, and neighbours. The healing and rebuilding must go on, and we must aid in their efforts to find renewal in this senseless tragedy. We must bring hope to those who continue on. We must help those who are grappling with loss. Their courage has been truly inspirational, as

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has been the valiant efforts of all those emergency personnel who responded to this disaster.

[Translation]

It is incumbent upon all of us to guarantee the present and future safety of our communities. It is a collective responsibility that we all must share. We can never let a tragedy such as this happen again.

The federal government must be proactive in reaching out to the provincial and municipal governments. We must ensure that they get all the help they need, and we cannot let them shoulder this burden alone.

I would like all the people of Lac-Mégantic to know that, from coast to coast, Canadians are with them. We are thinking of you. We stand in solidarity with you in these difficult times. We will continue to do so, day after day.

• (1515)

The Speaker: I understand there is agreement among all parties to give the floor to the hon. member for Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia.

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I rise to pay tribute to the 47 victims of the Lac-Mégantic disaster. I would also like to extend our condolences to their families and loved ones, and to the entire community left suffering because of this human, social, economic and environmental tragedy.

This rail disaster affected the entire Lac-Mégantic community, and in one night, we saw the entire Quebec population stand behind and rally around that community, whether it was through the outstanding work of the first responders, fire departments and health and safety workers; the work of all the volunteers who joined local authorities to help those affected by this disaster; or the thousands of people, all the municipalities and the many organizations that donated to offer some support. Their dedication deserves our recognition.

That night of July 5 to 6, the date of this terrible tragedy that is beyond comprehension, will remain etched in our memories forever. While it is important to commemorate such a traumatic event, it is even more important to take action to ensure that such a disaster never happens again and to provide assistance to those who were affected. We urge the federal government to do everything it can to help the entire Lac-Mégantic community.

[English]

The Speaker: I now invite hon. members to rise and observe a moment of silence.

[A moment of silence observed]

The Speaker: It being Thursday, I understand that the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley would like to ask the traditional Thursday question.

*Business of the House***BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, before I get to my question, I want to congratulate the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons. We have been here for almost a full day, and he has not used once one of his favourite standing orders, Standing Order 78(3), the motion to invoke closure on a debate, so hope springs eternal that time allocation may be a thing of the past.

[Translation]

I have three simple questions for the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

When will we see the long-awaited bill regarding the Canada Elections Act? This legislation promises to tighten regulations to keep other Conservatives from cheating to win a seat in the House of Commons. There is already a long list of Conservatives who are facing or have faced charges from Elections Canada. Are they just ragging the puck so they can do whatever they want during the next election? That is an important question for the opposition.

[English]

We heard yesterday in the throne speech that “The Senate must be reformed or, as with its provincial counterparts, vanish”.

Reform has been an abject failure for the current government so far. It could have done better with a “do no harm” policy when it comes to the Senate. We, along with most Canadians, are ready for that vanishing act. Is there a cut-off for the government's patience when it comes to the Senate, or will there be more rhetoric from the government? When will we see the legislation to actually make this thing a reality?

Finally, on government Motion No. 2, on which there has been some debate in this House, the government leader asked for some suggestions at the end of his intervention. This is the motion in which we are seeking to divide it into its coherent parts. I am prepared to move all of the necessary motions to pass the component parts of the government's motion to allow the MPs in this place to vote with a free and fair conscience, if my colleague across the way believes what he says and was looking for actual recommendations.

Those are my three questions for him today. To all members, welcome back from the extended summer recess.

• (1520)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with regard to election reform legislation, I think it is clear that there has been a continuing stream of submissions from important panels, including the Chief Electoral Officer. I know the minister is taking all of this into account and wants to make sure that all the considerations are taken into account so we have the best possible legislation in place for the next election. I look forward to that being introduced in the House and hopefully being supported by all sides of the House.

Second, on the question of the Senate, we are awaiting a decision from the Supreme Court on the reference on our legislation, which has been in the House and which was opposed by the opposition parties, to allow for Canadians to have a say in who represents them in the Senate and to establish term limits. All Canadians who have

been elected to the Senate have been appointed by the Prime Minister thus far. There have been a number of them and we hope there will be more in the future. We look forward to the Supreme Court's decision on the Senate, at which time we will act in that regard.

[Translation]

It is great to see you and all other members of Parliament here today. I know that the Conservatives had a hard-working and productive summer in their ridings and are anxious to get back to work here in Ottawa.

As we begin a new parliamentary session, I take pride in the fact that already this year—between January and June—we have passed 37 new laws, already matching our government's most productive year in office.

[English]

In fact, since we formed a majority government in the past session of Parliament, 61 government bills have reached royal assent. It is a very productive and orderly approach. I plan to continue what has been a productive, orderly and hard-working Parliament and to build upon this success through the many exciting initiatives that have been outlined in the throne speech.

In a moment the House will start debating government Motion No. 2, about which my friend asked, a motion to facilitate business here in the House this fall, including our principle-based proposal for reinstating all business where it left off in June.

[Translation]

Tomorrow, we will start the second reading debate on Bill C-2, an act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, which was introduced this morning.

On Monday, before question period, we will start second reading on a bill to be introduced tomorrow. Hon. members will note that the long title as printed on today's Order Paper is identical to the one borne by the previous session's Bill C-57.

[English]

Monday afternoon the House will consider a ways and means motion, notice of which will be tabled, related to budget measures. Following that, the House will resume consideration of government Motion No. 2, should debate not continue today.

On Wednesday, the House will first consider a ways and means motion, the notice of which will also be tabled, in relation to certain housekeeping amendments found in last session's Bill C-61, the offshore health and safety act. After that vote we will debate the budget implementation legislation flowing from Monday's ways and means vote. That debate will continue for the balance of the week.

Finally, Tuesday, October 22, shall be the first allotted day.

[Translation]

POINTS OF ORDER

MOTION NO. 2—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the point of order raised by the hon. House leader of the official opposition regarding government Motion No. 2 that is standing on the Order Paper in the name of the hon. Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

[English]

I would like to thank the hon. House leader of the official opposition for raising this matter and the hon. government House leader for his contribution to the discussion.

The opposition House leader argued that the motion, in calling for the House to reinstate government bills and re-adopt several orders of reference, with or without changes, from the previous session, and in calling for the adoption of new orders of reference with regard to the management of business in the current session, both in the House and in committee, constitutes a series of distinct proposals that require separate debates and separate votes. He then asked the Chair to divide the motion to allow for this.

For his part, the government House leader stated that in his view the motion represented a balanced attempt to ensure that everyone's business from the last session could be preserved, but he stressed that the motion's broad purpose was also to more generally arrange business in the House and its committees this autumn.

[Translation]

As has been alluded to, this is not the first time the House is confronted with a situation of this kind.

O'Brien and Bosc, at pages 562-3, explains that:

When a complicated motion comes before the House (for example, a motion containing two or more parts each capable of standing on its own), the Speaker has the authority to modify it in order to facilitate decision-making in the House. When any member objects to a motion containing two or more distinct propositions, he or she may request that the motion be divided and that each proposition be debated and voted on separately. The final decision, however, rests with the Chair.

• (1525)

[English]

While previous speakers have been faced with similar requests to divide motions, they have seldom done so, something Speaker Milliken, on October 4, 2002, at page 299 of *Debates*, remarked upon when he stated that “the Chair must exercise every caution before intervening in the deliberations of the House”. In that instance, Speaker Milliken did in fact determine that a motion contained three different proposals. In that case, the broad purpose of the motion was the “resumption and continuation of the business of the House begun in the previous Session of Parliament”. Accordingly, Speaker Milliken took the view that the first two proposals, which dealt with the reinstatement of business from a previous session, should be debated together but each get a separate vote. The third proposal, which concerned travel by the Standing Committee on Finance and was not found to be “strictly speaking, a matter of reinstating unfinished business”, became a separate motion. In making this decision to allow a separate debate, Speaker Milliken

Privilege

also stated, “Our usual practice is to adopt travel motions on a case-by-case basis.”

While government Motion No. 2 is similar to the 2002 motion, it is not identical. In adjudicating cases of this kind, the Chair must always be mindful to approach each new case with a fresh eye, taking into account the particular circumstances of the situation at hand. Often, there is little in the way of guidance for the speaker and a strict compliance with precedent is not always appropriate.

[Translation]

In this case, the Chair is acutely aware, as is stated at page 562 of O'Brien and Bosc, that to divide a motion is rare and that “only in exceptional circumstances should the Chair make this decision on its own initiative.”

[English]

At the same time, the Chair has listened very carefully to the interventions made on the nature of government Motion No. 2 and on the particular parts of it that have given rise to objections on the part of the opposition House leader. I have noted that he reserved his strongest objections for part (a) of the motion, which deals with the reinstatement of government bills, and indeed indicated that his party “supports” the other aspects of the motion.

In view of this unique set of circumstances, the Chair does not feel the very high threshold required for dividing the motion has been met and accordingly, I will allow the motion to be debated as a whole. However, the Chair understands the arguments raised by the opposition House leader as they relate to the very broad blanket provisions contained in part (a) of the motion. In that regard, I am directing that a separate vote be held on that part of government Motion No. 2. In proceeding in this manner, I trust that members will have satisfactory and practical means to express their views through debate, amendment and voting on the propositions contained in government Motion No. 2.

[Translation]

I thank all members for their attention.

[English]

I wish to inform the House that because of the ministerial statement, government orders will be extended by nine minutes.

The Chair has notice of a question of privilege raised by the hon. member for Toronto—Danforth.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

ELECTIONS CANADA

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be brief. I am rising on this question of privilege at the earliest opportunity.

Privilege

Shortly before the summer adjournment this past June, you, Mr. Speaker, had been asked to rule on whether or not a prima facie breach of privilege existed surrounding the finding by Elections Canada that members of the House had contravened certain sections of the Canada Elections Act. This finding had been followed by a letter from Elections Canada asserting that members in question should therefore be suspended from the House and prevented from sitting and voting until the matter was resolved.

I and a number of colleagues made submissions on this matter. On June 18, 2013, you, Mr. Speaker, noted a serious gap in our procedures in the House in cases where an impasse of this sort is reached in a dispute between a member and Elections Canada. You thereupon ruled that the situation did warrant further study and allowed for the House to be seized with a motion that would refer the matter to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. The House adjourned for the summer recess later that day, and the motion unfortunately died with prorogation of the session.

I ask, Mr. Speaker, that you today take as given the arguments that were made in June, as well as the ruling that you rendered then. Accordingly, in order to save time, I adopt by reference the exact words of my own intervention on the question of privilege found in *Hansard* for the first session of the 41st Parliament, on June 10, 2013, pages 17994-18001.

If I could be indulged for about a minute, I would like to reference key passages from the Speaker's ruling of June 18, 2013.

The current situation—and the various interventions on the matter—points to a serious gap in our procedures here in the House in cases where an impasse is reached in a dispute between a member and Elections Canada....

Therefore, in the absence of statutory guidance, should a Standing Order mechanism be developed to guide the Chair in such cases?

To answer that question, I believe it would be helpful to the whole House, and to me as Speaker, if the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs were to examine the issue with a view to incorporating in our Standing Orders provisions on how the Chair and the House ought to deal with such matters in the future.

Then you went on to say:

For his part, in remarking that he had a certain appreciation of the Speaker's position in the absence of any guidance at all, either from the statute or from the Standing Orders, as to how to execute the provisions of subsection 463(2) of the act, the member for Toronto—Danforth came to a conclusion with which I can entirely agree, namely:

"this honourable House cannot function without the Speaker and the House as a whole working in concert..."

It seems evident to me that the lack of a clear process is not satisfying the needs of the House nor indeed of the individual members concerned....

However, the Chair is faced with the fact that some have argued that it is just and prudent to continue to await the conclusion of legal proceedings, while others have maintained that the two members ought, even now, not to be sitting in the House.

I believe that the House must have an opportunity to consider these complex issues. This approach is founded on an ancient practice summarized in a section of *Bourinot's*, fourth edition, found at pages 161 and 162 of that work, where it states:

"In the Canadian as in the English House of Commons, 'whenever any question is raised affecting the seat of a member, and involving matters of doubt, either in law or fact, it is customary to refer it to the consideration of a committee'."

Accordingly, the Chair has concluded that there is a prima facie case of privilege here....

In summary, then, to bring clarity to the situation at hand and to give the House a voice on the matter and to seek its guidance, the Chair has concluded that immediate consideration of the matter by the House is warranted.

I am prepared to move that this matter be dealt with by the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, and will move

a motion to that effect upon your invitation should you, Mr. Speaker, rule again that there has been a prima facie breach of privilege in this case.

● (1530)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the time that has passed since the events originally spoken of, much has changed. For example, the situation of the member for Saint Boniface with respect to Elections Canada is entirely resolved and is now behind us, so there is no issue there that remains. I think that is a matter of public record and of which everyone is aware.

Of course, there has been significant further information provided to Elections Canada by the member for Selkirk—Interlake, all of which I think renders the matters that were not procedurally fulfilled, which was the issue at the time, procedurally fulfilled at this time. I do think the circumstances are very different than what they were in June, but I would be prepared to return it to you, Mr. Speaker, to consider this more fully.

● (1535)

The Speaker: I would like to thank the hon. member for Toronto—Danforth and the government House leader for their interventions on this.

The Chair has not been officially contacted or been made aware of a resolution of the matter with regard to the member for Selkirk—Interlake. When the hon. member for Avalon raised this matter in the previous session, in a ruling I delivered on June 18, as the member for Toronto—Danforth cited, I did find it to be a prima facie question of privilege.

Accordingly, a motion was moved to have the matter referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, and the House began to debate that motion. As hon. members know, that debate was adjourned, and later that day, the House was adjourned for the summer recess. There has since been a prorogation, which put an end to all proceedings on the question before the House. For the same reasons given in my ruling last session, in my view, the matter remains a prima facie question of privilege, and accordingly, I now invite the hon. member for Toronto—Danforth to move his motion.

Mr. Craig Scott: Mr. Speaker, based on your ruling of a prima facie case of privilege, I move:

That the matter of the question of privilege related to the dispute between Elections Canada and the member for Selkirk—Interlake be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

The Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

● (1540)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your indulgence. I rise on a point of order as it relates to a matter brought up at question period and in the throne speech. It has to do with an issue covered by a private member's bill I sponsored in the spring session, known locally as the bill with respect to Rehtaeh Parsons. It deals with the non-consensual distribution of intimate images. It is about making a change to the Criminal Code, which we think will protect many people from being punished and being bullied by the distribution of intimate images.

The Minister of Justice has indicated his support for the principle of this issue.

The concern I raised and that other advocates, including the family, have raised is that if this issue gets bundled in a major piece of legislation, it may be delayed and it may be lost.

In the spirit of acceptance of this principle, I would like to seek unanimous consent that, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, Bill C-540, an act to amend the Criminal Code (non-consensual making or distributing of intimate images), be deemed read a second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: There is no consent.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE AND ITS COMMITTEES

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC) moved:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, for the purposes of facilitating and organizing the business of the House and its committees in the autumn of 2013,

(a) during the thirty sitting days following the adoption of this Order, whenever a Minister of the Crown, when proposing a motion for first reading of a public bill, states that the said bill is in the same form as a bill introduced by a Minister of the Crown in the previous Session, or that it is in the same form as a bill which had originated in the Senate and stood in the name of a Minister of the Crown in this House in the previous Session, if the Speaker is satisfied that the said bill is in the same form as at prorogation, notwithstanding Standing Order 71, the said bill shall be deemed in the current Session to have been considered and approved at all stages completed at the time of prorogation of the previous Session;

(b) in order to bring full transparency and accountability to House of Commons spending, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be instructed to: (i) conduct open and public hearings with a view to replace the Board of Internal Economy with an independent oversight body, (ii) invite the Auditor General, the Clerk and the Chief Financial Officer of the House of Commons to participate fully in these hearings, (iii) study the practices of provincial and territorial legislatures, as well as other jurisdictions and Westminster-style Parliaments in order to compare and contrast their administrative oversight, (iv) propose modifications to the Parliament of Canada Act, the Financial Administration Act, the Auditor General Act and any other acts as deemed necessary, (v) propose any necessary modifications to the administrative policies and practices of the House of Commons, (vi) examine the subject-matter of the

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motions, which had stood in the name of the Member for Papineau, placed on the Order Paper for the previous Session on June 10, 2013, and (vii) report its findings to the House no later than Monday, December 2, 2013, in order to have any proposed changes to expense disclosure and reporting in place for the beginning of the next fiscal year;

(c) when the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs meets pursuant to the order of reference set out in paragraph (b) of this Order, one Member who is not a member of a recognized party be allowed to participate in the hearings as a temporary, non-voting member of that Committee;

(d) the Clerk be authorized, if necessary, to convene a meeting of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs within 24 hours of the adoption of this Order;

(e) the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be instructed to study the Standing Orders and procedures of the House and its committees, including the proceedings on the debate held on Friday, February 17, 2012, pursuant to Standing Order 51;

(f) the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights be the committee designated for the purposes of section 533.1 of the Criminal Code;

(g) the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics be the committee designated for the purposes of section 67 of the Conflict of Interest Act;

(h) the order of reference to the Standing Committee on Finance, adopted in the previous Session as Private Member's Motion M-315, shall be renewed, provided that the Committee shall report its findings to the House no later than Wednesday, December 11, 2013;

(i) a special committee be appointed, with the mandate to conduct hearings on the critical matter of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada, and to propose solutions to address the root causes of violence against Indigenous women across the country, and that, with respect to the committee, (i) it consist of twelve members which shall include seven members from the government party, four members from the Official Opposition and one member from the Liberal Party, (ii) the Chair and the Vice-Chairs shall be the same Chair and Vice-Chairs elected by the previous Session's Special Committee on Violence Against Indigenous Women, (iii) the routine motions respecting committee business adopted on March 26 and April 18, 2013, by the previous Session's Special Committee on Violence Against Indigenous Women shall be deemed adopted, provided that it may, by motion, vary or rescind their provisions at a later date, (iv) it have all of the powers of a Standing Committee as provided in the Standing Orders, as well as the power to travel, accompanied by the necessary staff, inside and outside of Canada, subject to the usual authorization from the House, (v) the members serving on the said committee be appointed by the Whip of each party depositing with the Clerk of the House a list of his or her party's members of the committee within ten sitting days of the adoption of this Order, (vi) the quorum be seven members for any proceedings, provided that at least a member of the opposition and of the government party be present, (vii) membership substitutions be permitted to be made from time to time, if required, in the manner provided for in Standing Order 114(2), and (viii) it report its recommendations to the House no later than February 14, 2014;

(j) with respect to any order of reference created as a consequence of this Order, any evidence adduced by a committee in the previous Session shall be deemed to have been laid upon the Table in the present Session and referred to the appropriate committee;

(k) the reference to "September 30" in Standing Order 28(2)(b) shall be deemed, for the calendar year 2013, to read "November 8";

(l) the reference to "the tenth sitting day before the last normal sitting day in December" in Standing Order 83.1 shall be deemed, for the calendar year 2013, to read "Wednesday, December 11, 2013"; and

(m) on Thursday, October 31, 2013, the hours of sitting and order of business of the House shall be that of a Friday, provided that (i) the time for filing of any notice be no later than 6:00 p.m., (ii) when the House adjourns it shall stand adjourned until Monday, November 4, 2013, and (iii) any recorded division in respect of a debatable motion requested on, or deferred to, October 31, 2013, shall be deemed to be deferred or further deferred, as the case may be, to the ordinary hour of daily adjournment on November 4, 2013.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in support of government Motion No. 2, and I look forward to the continuation of what has proven to be a productive, hard-working, and orderly Parliament.

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This year alone, from the end of January until the end of June, Parliament passed 37 new laws, matching our government's most productive year in office. This, of course, included a budget that will help fuel job creation, grow our economy, and increase Canada's long-term prosperity. Since the last election and the 2011 throne speech, we have witnessed 61 government bills become law. On top of that, an unprecedented 19 private members' bills received royal assent, heralding a renewed empowerment of individual members of Parliament to bring forward initiatives important to them and their constituents. It is a long way from the days when a Prime Minister derisively described backbenchers as "nobodies", 50 yards off the Hill.

Yesterday's Speech from the Throne has outlined the government's objectives as being those that matter to Canadians. As a new parliamentary session begins, we remain squarely focused on jobs, the economy, and protecting families, while taking pride in the history and institutions that make Canada the best country in the world. Here in the House, these policy objectives will be given legislative expression in the form of bills that will be introduced over the coming weeks, months, and years. As we look forward to implementing the new initiatives outlined yesterday, we also want to ensure that important, unfinished work from the previous session, whether it be bills or committee business, is not forgotten.

Government Motion No. 2 would seek to facilitate and organize House and committee business for the autumn in view of our calendar and circumstances. Government Motion No. 2 proposes that June's unfinished work, in which all parties have an interest, carry on where we left off. I stand here today asking that all opposition parties join me in taking a balanced, principles-based approach to getting Parliament back to work. The bills and committee work I am today proposing be reinstated are those that have received support and praise from members opposite. It is also work that matters to Canadians.

We are not asking that only items proposed originally by the government be reinstated; we are proposing on behalf of all parties that everybody's proposals and initiatives be restored. It is a fair approach. It is a non-partisan approach. In respect of government legislation, paragraph (a) of the motion sets out a procedure for the reintroduction of government bills that advanced in the House in the previous session. In total, up to seven bills from the first session could fall into that category.

What sorts of bills are we talking about here? They are the type of legislation the New Democrats say they are keen to debate all over again. What are they? Let us consider some examples.

[Translation]

As pointed out in the Speech from the Throne, we are deeply committed to standing up for victims of crime and making our streets safer for Canadians. The former Bill C-54, Not Criminally Responsible Reform Act, was designed to make sure that public safety comes first in the decision-making process regarding persons found not criminally responsible on account of mental disorder. It would provide additional security for victims and would enhance their involvement in the Criminal Code mental disorder regime.

During the previous session, the NDP and the Bloc agreed with the government and supported the bill. We hope that they will continue to support this important initiative.

In order to protect families and communities, we must also eradicate contraband tobacco from our streets to ensure that children are not exposed to the dangers of smoking through access to cheap packs of illegal cigarettes. That was the goal of the former Bill S-16, Tackling Contraband Tobacco Act, through the creation of mandatory prison sentences for repeat offenders in the trafficking of contraband tobacco. The bill will not only protect children against the dangers of tobacco, but it will also address the more general issue of contraband tobacco trafficking driven by organized crime groups.

A look at the debates at second reading in the *Hansard* shows that members of the NDP, the Liberal Party and the Bloc spoke in favour of sending the bill to committee. We are counting on their continued support of this initiative and we will adopt a non-partisan approach as Parliament resumes its work.

•(1545)

[English]

Former Bill S-10, the prohibiting cluster munitions act, would implement our government's commitments under the Convention on Cluster Munitions, a significant achievement. Over time, the enactment of this convention will save the lives of many thousands of people around the world and will help put an end to the use of a weapon that has shattered the lives of too many innocent civilians.

In the previous session, support for this bill came from the Bloc and the hon. members for Saanich—Gulf Islands, Thunder Bay—Superior North, and Edmonton—St. Albert. We look forward to renewed support from them on this bill as part of our balanced, principle-based approach.

Our government believes in our national museums and we recognize the tremendous value they hold for all Canadians. As we approach Canada's 150th birthday, former Bill C-49, the Canadian museum of history act, offers an unprecedented opportunity to celebrate our history and those achievements that define who we are as Canadians. The Canadian museum of history would provide the public with the opportunity to appreciate how Canada's identity has been shaped over the course of our history. Canadians deserve a national museum that tells our stories and presents our country's treasures to the world.

This bill received support from the hon. members for Saanich—Gulf Islands, Thunder Bay—Superior North, and Edmonton—St. Albert. We look forward again to their continued support.

Our commitment to improving the lives of Canadians from coast to coast continues. In the case of aboriginals, former Bill S-6, the first nations elections act, would provide a robust election system that individual first nations can opt into. The act will help to create a framework that fosters healthier, more prosperous, and self-sufficient aboriginal communities through stronger and more stable and effective first nations governments.

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The bill is the product of recommendations developed by the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs and the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs and a lengthy national engagement campaign with first nations leaders across the country. As we see from *Hansard*, that bill passed second reading without the opposition even asking for a recorded vote.

The new parliamentary session will see our government stand up for Canadian families and consumers. This includes ensuring they do not fall victim to counterfeit goods. Counterfeit goods hurt our economy, undermine innovation, and undermine the integrity of Canadian brands, and they threaten the health and safety of Canadians on occasion. This is why I am asking that the NDP and Liberal MPs who stood in the House and spoke in favour of former Bill C-56, the combating counterfeit products act, going to committee will agree to allow that to happen again.

By allowing these bills that received varying degrees of support from across the aisle an opportunity to be reinstated, our intention is to finish where we left off on key pieces of legislation important to Canadians—not to enter into partisan gridlock, not to re-debate legislation that has already received support from parliamentarians, but to reinstate and pass bills so that we can move on to new initiatives and deliver results for Canadians.

As I made clear, government Motion No. 2 is about restoring everyone's business. That includes bills and motions that are important to everyone here and, more importantly, to Canadians.

Many of the Canadians I speak with want their elected politicians to work, make decisions, and get on with the important work we were sent to Ottawa to do. I can only imagine the reaction I would get if I told them we had to spend over a dozen days to have the exact same debates we had already had, to make the same decisions we had already taken, to have the same votes we had already voted on, in many of these cases on bills that we all supported.

It would be a remarkable waste. It would seem absurd to anyone in the real world, where efficiency and productivity count for something, but believe it or not, that is what the official opposition wants to do: play partisan games, hold debates that we have already had, and enter into the kind of unproductive and unsavoury political deadlock just witnessed south of the border.

A news article on Tuesday noted that “the NDP is fundamentally opposed” to the legislative component of our balanced approach to restoring the work of all members of Parliament, yet just a few short paragraphs later in the same article, the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley is reported to have said he is “not opposed to bringing back some of the legislation”. Which is it? Are New Democrats fundamentally opposed, or are they actually in favour? Is this a matter of principle, or is it really just a matter of partisan gamesmanship? Is it just that some people like to stand and grab attention? I think the answer is obvious.

Our approach to restoring the work of all members also includes the important work that is being done in our committees. This means continuing our commitment to ensuring that taxpayers' dollars are spent efficiently and in a transparent manner.

●(1550)

That is why we are taking action to reinstate the mandate for the procedure and House affairs committee's study on members' expenses, including a special provision for independent members to participate at the meetings of the committee on this issue. We ask all members of the House to support this mandate so that we can increase accountability and transparency in MP disclosures.

Our balanced, principle-based approach to making Parliament work this session will also mean the reappointment of the special committee on missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. There is no question that the deaths and abductions of these women are a tragedy that has caused deep pain for many families. By reinstating this committee's work, we are ensuring that this tragedy receives the careful attention it deserves.

Other uncompleted committee mandates flowing from House orders include a private member's motion that would also be revived.

Finally, some scheduling adjustments are proposed. They include items to reconcile some deadlines to our calendar as well as the usual indulgence granted by the House to allow members from a recognized party to attend their party's national convention.

What I have just outlined to you, Mr. Speaker, is a fair and balanced proposal to get Parliament back in the swing of hard work. Government Motion No. 2 is balanced. It is based on a principle, a principle that we will be back where we were in June and that nobody is prejudiced by our prorogation. It is a non-partisan approach, one that would restore everyone's business regardless of their partisan affiliation and regardless of which side of the House they sit on.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I heard the comments from the government House leader, but I have a very clear question for him.

What we have is a long list. It is like an omnibus resolution that was brought forward. The House leader for the official opposition brought this concern forward in expressing broad concerns about the government throwing everything into one motion.

One of them is the get-out-of-prorogation free card that the Conservatives have put into the motion, which basically says they prorogued Parliament for a month so they could do some photo ops, but they do not want any consequences stemming from it.

More disturbingly, the Conservatives incorporated into the very partisan omnibus motion a special motion dealing with the special committee with the mandate to conduct hearings on the matter of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. We are talking about 600 Canadian aboriginal women and girls who have been missing or murdered since 1980.

My question for the government House leader, and I say this with some sadness, is simply this. On an issue on which I think all of us in the House of Commons agree, why would he try to mix it in with what is clearly a partisan attempt on the part of the government to remove prorogation when it installed it? Why did he mix those two issues together in such an unfortunate way?

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● (1555)

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is approaching the question from the wrong end of the horse.

The usual motion that we see after a prorogation is a motion that seeks to allow the government to introduce bills in the next period of time, typically 30 days. They would be restored at the stage they were at. That was the starting point of our preparation of a motion. That is the usual practice, but we thought that this time we should perhaps go farther than that.

We thought there were things we would ask for as government initiatives, but there were a whole series of things being done in Parliament that mattered, some of which were agreed on very late in the last Parliament. There were a whole series of things that went beyond just government legislation. Rather than having the usual motion that dealt only with restoring government bills, we wanted to be fair to everybody and have everybody's interests reflected. We wanted to go beyond the usual motion that just deals with legislation to look at restoring some committee mandates as well, because we knew that some of them mattered a lot to opposition members.

An example was the committee mandate to deal with MP's expenses and the like. We had done something extraordinary there to allow for the participation of independents. We thought we should give them the right that was negotiated late in the last Parliament, which they asked for and received. We thought we should not just have the traditional motion that only deals with bills but that everybody's business should be put back where it was and treated in a fair and non-partisan fashion so that nobody would find themselves left behind. That was why.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are so many things I would like to be able to pose in a question to the government House leader.

I would like to start off with a very basic one about the need to prorogue when, I would argue, there was no justification. Why did the government choose to prorogue? What was in the throne speech that could not have been incorporated into a budget or that could not have been done in some sort of mini-economic update to Canadians?

I believe that most Canadians are fair in their thinking, and if we provided the facts to them, what we would find is that it looks as though the Prime Minister was scared to come back in September.

My question for the government House leader is this: why did the government choose to prorogue when it did not have to? The only advantage to doing that was that it meant the government did not have to come back in September, so it would get a few more days during which there would be no accountability coming out of the House of Commons.

A great many Canadians, I being one of them, believe that it just was not necessary to prorogue the session. Would the government House leader explain to Canadians clearly and concisely why the government had to prorogue?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, in the little more than the 140 years that Parliament has been operating in Canada, there have been over 100 occasions of prorogation. It is the normal pacing of a Parliament that one has, in a four-year term of government, two or

maybe three throne speeches, so in that sense it reflects the normal process.

I suppose the question he asked would be more appropriately directed to the Ontario Liberal government, which has made much more extensive use of that process with far less reason or understanding, from my perspective; however, I will leave that for the people in that chamber to deal with.

Here in this chamber, I would say that we now have a throne speech that deals with all the important priorities of Canadians while taking the next step in moving to the next level on the major thrusts that matter to us: job creation, economic growth, and long-term prosperity.

However, I also want to say to the hon. member for Winnipeg North that we appreciate the very constructive and positive approach that the Liberal Party took in dealing with this motion in its recognition that it was indeed a non-partisan motion that was designed on a principled basis to allow everybody's business to be restored to where it was before. We thank the Liberal Party for its support of that principle.

[Translation]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I may have a few questions.

I am actually looking at Motion No. 2 and specifically focusing on the special committee that is to conduct hearings on the critical matter of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. Obviously, everyone here will understand that we are nowhere near the national public inquiry that the victims' families have been requesting for several years. That being said, the committee is an improvement. However, the committee's report is still due on February 14, 2014.

Did prorogation not give the committee less time for the work it has to do? Does the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons not think that this loss of a month's work could well have a negative impact on the committee's work?

● (1600)

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member has raised a very interesting point. This is something that we pondered throughout our discussions. Had her party constructively engaged in those discussions, perhaps we would have been able to take its views into account.

However, what we did take into account was the request that came from the Liberal Party regarding the date and the restoration from the hon. member for St. Paul's, which was to accommodate the original date. It was on that basis that we did change the motion from what was originally circulated in our original draft to the final version. It was a product of negotiation, a product of discussion. That is what happens when people decide they want to work together rather than simply create gridlock and shut things down.

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Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government House leader seems to have awakened to some new reality, a fiction in his own mind. Coming from the government that has broken the 140-year record of all governments in all situations in Canadian history of invoking closure and shutting down debate in Parliament, the suggestion that it is somehow open to negotiations now and that there is a consensus-building kind of culture over on that side is a revelation for me.

I deal with the current government often. I deal often with ministers on various things. It is remarkable to me how many times backbenchers from the Conservative side approach me and some of my colleagues here in the official opposition to ask, “Is there any chance that you can move the Conservative side along here?” or “Can we see some progress on issue X for my constituents?”

If the government House leader is suggesting that he is into consensus-building and is into incorporating the ideas of the opposition—of which we tried two today, and he said no, by the way—if he is now into that sort of procedure in this place, then we in the official opposition absolutely welcome the idea so that we can turn his words of productivity and orderliness into a lot more than what they have meant in the past, which was shutting down debate and consistently using bull tactics in Canada's Parliament.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, again, I will return to what the objective was here.

The normal practice when one prorogues is to deal with a motion that simply seeks to restore the government bills, that allows that to be done. However, we thought it was more sensible to go beyond that, to consider interests that others had put forward to also put in place committee mandates that others elsewhere in the House had sought, essentially to ensure everybody's interests were protected. We asked if there was anything that we had missed, or anything that was happening, that was unfolding at committee or a committee mandate that should be in this motion that was not there. We did not get any suggestions of anything that was happening before.

The principled approach of continuing with what exactly was happening before was reflected in the motion. This is the approach we took and I put it that it is because the motion did take into account everybody's interests, every committee mandate that mattered that had to continue. Those were all reflected in the motion. I look forward to the support of all parties for a principle that is designed to defend and protect the interests of all parties.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to emphasize that these are not mere procedural issues. Opposition members clearly do not agree with all the bills the government would like to restore to the stage of debate where they were prior to prorogation.

Prorogation by the government is not a procedural tactic. It is a tool enabling Parliament to restart debate and to resume consideration of the bills the government wants to introduce. It is a process that is normally available to the government to enable it really to resume debate when it has reached the point where a new start is necessary once it has achieved the objectives set out in the previous throne speech. The tool is there, it is available, and it can be used by the government.

Unfortunately, this government always uses this tool as a hammer to hit opposition members. We have a lot of debates, we have a lot of ideas about the bills we have before us, and we should have the opportunity to present them. The fact that the government merely wants the benefits of prorogation and does not at all want to suffer its harmful effects clearly shows it does not understand the procedural process of the House of Commons. It wants to reinvent it and reinterpret it in its own way. This is not the first time it has done so. Members will recall, for example, that this government used prorogation to prevent a coalition of members of this House from forming a government.

The government used this tool as a hammer. However, this tool should only be used with considerable reservation. This government has shown itself incapable of reservation. Although we agree with some bills, it wants us to accept the bills with which we do not agree. This is not a negotiation. This is not an effective way to conduct the business of the House. It is a method of legislating that the majority of Canadians probably do not support. However, the Conservatives want to have these bills passed without the debate necessary to expose their deficiencies. The members here present must have the opportunity to state their opinions.

We want to state our opinions about the striking of a committee to study violence against aboriginal women in Canada. We definitely want to do that. We want to let the Conservatives hold their convention at what they consider the appropriate time. In exchange, however, we are not prepared to allow all the bad bills they introduced in the last session of Parliament to be reintroduced in the House without debate or to resume consideration at the stage where they were without members having the opportunity to debate them.

The problem we have here is that the government insists on having the benefits for itself alone. This is not a mere procedural issue here. This is an opportunity for the representatives of the people to state their opinions on the bills and to assert the views of all Canadians in this House.

The government would have us believe that this is just about failed negotiations and that the opposition is delaying proceedings in this House. This is not just about procedure. It is about democracy and being able to speak our minds, as we are supposed to do. We are the representatives of the people. We are not here to rubber-stamp the Conservative government's bills. Even Conservative members should be able to speak to their own bills. Unfortunately, even they will not have the opportunity to do so. Every member of this House, regardless of political party, should have the right to speak out.

● (1605)

The motion the government has set before us today was presented following negotiations over a matter of weeks. Unfortunately, the negotiations went nowhere. It was absolutely necessary to request that the Speaker intervene to look for House customs and precedents.

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The government seems to believe that its motion should be adopted merely because it has set it before the House and that it automatically falls within the procedures and traditions of the House.

Time and again, these days, the government has been unable to proceed with its motions, because the Speaker has had the simple common sense to look at House customs and precedents and take into consideration the very foundation of Canadian democracy as represented by House procedures. However, the government seems to be trying to set them aside, to the detriment of both opposition members and those on the government side.

Members must have an opportunity to debate bills in order to express themselves with regard to those they agree with and those they disagree with. In response to the motions the government proposes, it is not possible to express oneself clearly. That is the danger with omnibus bills. Sadly, this is not the first time the government has offered us doorstop-sized omnibus bills. Now it is moving omnibus motions. We know what the result is: they are poorly constructed. This often leads to harmful consequences that impact the Canadian people.

For example, omnibus Bill C-38, which was imposed on the people, is spreading suffering across Canada. Unfortunately, it was passed. Members will recall that it amended 70 statutes at one stroke. We are unable to debate efficiently in the House when a single bill amends 70 statutes. It is downright inefficient.

When the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons tells us that the opposition is generating inefficiencies in the House, we really have to wonder what sort of inefficiency he is referring to.

In my view, the inefficiency is to be found in bills and motions that are badly drafted and put together and require such devices as raising questions of privilege and points of order to the Speaker. That takes time. Normally, what is presented in the House should have been resolved and negotiated.

We wanted to negotiate in good faith on motions and bills that could benefit all Canadians in a full and comprehensive House of Commons debate, but unfortunately, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons insisted on an omnibus motion.

We are now debating that issue, whereas we should instead be debating issues that are of more interest to Canadians, such as a commission of inquiry on violence against aboriginal women or a request that the Standing Committee on Finance initiate a study on income inequality in Canada.

There are many bills we could genuinely begin to debate in full. To do that, however, the government insists that we accept its opinions and its interpretation of prorogation, whereby we should ignore the very outcome of prorogation.

Let me remind you that prorogation terminates government bills. The government knew this. It is not as though the effect of prorogation was something hidden. It was known. Then the government insisted on changing tack and saying that prorogation does not mean that but means an opportunity to spend millions of dollars on a new throne speech in the other chamber. It makes no sense! It is an absolute waste.

Generally speaking, the Senate is quite definitely a waste. We saw that well enough in the debates and in question period today. There is an absolute need for the government to stop trying to convince us that its interpretation is the only valid one. The traditions of the House have been formed precisely to enable full and comprehensive debate, a discussion that sheds light on shortcomings that may exist in the government's bills and motions.

●(1610)

It is to the government's advantage to allow a debate. It is in no way detrimental to the government to allow Canadians to express their opinions on its bills and motions. That is precisely why we have a parliament rather than a dictatorship.

There is an absolute need for the government to consider enacting legislation with some flexibility and working with those other Canadians who are not represented by members who are also ministers. I would also like Conservative members to have an opportunity to express themselves on the government's bills and motions.

We have seen the result of a lack of transparency on the part of this government: it is losing its own members, who have to sit as independents, because they are not able to express themselves fully and completely. It is difficult for people who voted for someone who no longer represents the banner under which they were elected. We are ashamed of this procedure, and these problems in the House of Commons. I do not understand why the government cannot see that a full and comprehensive debate benefits all Canadians.

From the start, we told the government that we were prepared to allow this debate without opposition, provided that the motions were split. We suggested it yesterday, as soon as Parliament reopened after the prorogation that was forced upon us. We suggested that by unanimous consent of the House, the members concerned be allowed to attend the Conservative party convention.

I do not understand why Conservative members did not find this a realistic offer. Unfortunately, since the government refused to negotiate with the opposition parties, we had to waste an entire day just to see whether the motion for consideration could be split. It is now split—or at least, the vote is split.

This shows that the opposition is frequently right. Opposition members looked into the matter and genuinely considered the consequences of the motions the government proposed, whereas the government seemed to want to act like a bulldozer and break down walls, completely ignoring the will of Canadians, as represented here by the members. It is a fairly dire problem for the government. Its members are unable to let the light of House debate illuminate their bills and motions.

I hope the Conservatives will start seeing this House more positively and will start debating in good faith, or at least in better faith. The Conservatives seem to find this very hard to do. The Conservatives say they are here to protect Canadians, but it is the opposition, frankly, that plays this role. In fact, Canadians unfortunately have no voice in this House, given the way the government treats us. The Conservatives cannot have a clear idea of what Canadians want if they do not allow their representatives to express themselves at the appropriate time and in the appropriate place. The appropriate time and place is here, now, in this House.

We should have been able to resolve this during the negotiations held before the House resumed. Concurrence in some of the motions that were put forward yesterday would have allowed for full discussion and debate. Now we are still having debates on omnibus motions. We are still trying to deal with this problem.

In view of recent history with bills C-38 and C-45 and the 2008 prorogation, after such a close call, the Conservatives were afraid of what Canadians wanted. They hid behind prorogation. For the Conservatives, prorogation is not an opportunity to start the parliamentary cycle over again and allow for full debate on new bills and a new vision for Canada.

• (1615)

For the Conservatives, prorogation is a hammer with which to beat Canadians and force them to accept its will and its view of government. The Conservatives really should have held a lot more consultations than they did. Obviously, they do not want to consult the House of Commons. The Conservatives are trying as hard as they can to subvert the will of Parliament. They are trying as hard as they can to sabotage parliamentary procedure, which exists specifically in order to safeguard our democracy. The Conservatives do not want to have full and broad consultations with Canadians.

I will give some recent examples. The government wants to reform Canada Post services and may get rid of home delivery. For two months, there was only one website where people could express their opinions. There was no publicity about it. If people stumbled upon the website by chance, they could click a button and give their opinion, but unfortunately no one was informed that this consultation was going on. Now the consultation has ended. There was no notice. All of a sudden the website disappeared. I called Canada Post, while the consultation was going on, and I asked how long proposals could be submitted. I was told that the website would always be up and would never be closed. Nonetheless, about three weeks later, the website no longer existed.

The government seems to be afraid of consulting people. It avoids consulting with Canadians. When consultations are to be held, there is no publicity. The government does not want to consult members of Parliament.

I want to know where the Conservatives get their ideas from. How can they think that their bills are going to be worthwhile if they do not listen to ideas that come up during debates or to expressions of the will of the people?

There are other situations. The Commissioner of Official Languages recently issued reports that said that the Maurice Lamontagne Institute library should not have been closed because

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there was no consultation about it. Take the employment insurance reform. In the House, the Conservative government admitted that it had conducted no studies and had not consulted Canadians. Then it put forward a huge reform package that coincidentally created a surplus of a few billion dollars in the employment insurance fund. Coincidentally, that money, taken from the least fortunate Canadians, will help pay down the deficit, a problem the Conservatives are bragging about solving. Congratulations to the Conservative government for taking money from the Canadians who are least able to afford it to pay down the deficit. In my view, it is a disgrace.

Once again, if the Conservatives had consulted Canadians, Canadians would have been able to tell them that the way to get rid of the deficit is to increase taxes on the wealthiest companies in Canada. They did not consult Canadians. There is no consultation. The Conservatives do not want to consult Canadians or their representatives in the House. We have seen this time and time again, and the motion before us today is proof of that fact.

I want to see a government that is able to conduct consultations and that is not afraid of its own people. This is not true of the Conservative government, nor was it true of the Liberal government. The Liberals also had fun proroguing whenever they wanted to.

It is about time we had a government that was prepared to accept the will of the people, prepared to consult with others and prepared to pass bills that address the needs of ordinary Canadians, less fortunate Canadians. It is about time we had a government whose work in the House of Commons would benefit Canadians, who should not be afraid and always wondering what other surprise the government is going to bring in without any consultation.

The government has to trust the Canadian people. This government does not want to consult Canadians because it is afraid of what Canadians want.

We know what happens to governments that are afraid of the will of the people. Usually they do not last very long. This is what I hope to see in two years' time, the next time Canadians are consulted.

I would remind the House that the Constitution does not allow the Conservatives to govern after 2016, because they only have five years, under the Constitution. I would not be surprised if they wanted to stay in power longer. Luckily, the Constitution has fixed the maximum life of a government. At that point they will not have any choice and will have to consult the people. I think perhaps they are probably right to be afraid of consulting the people. The next election will show that the people no longer support this government.

• (1620)

If the people were consulted today about the bills and the motions before us, we would see that Canadians also have a great deal of difficulty with what we are being asked to do.

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In the throne speech, instead of finding out that they would be allowed to take beer and spirits across provincial boundaries, Canadians would rather have learned that they could stay in their home region and be supported by a government that would bring wealth to their communities. Instead of this, the government creates situations where the remote communities in Canada are not consulted. The government does not know how to help these places. Unfortunately, that can lead to a situation where remote communities will have no choice but to disappear. The people will have to move to other areas of Canada. This is no way to treat people. This is no way to ensure that families in this country are healthy and people can reach their full potential.

The government did not consult communities and imposed rather substantial changes with regard to wealth in Canada.

Then we saw the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans telling people not to worry, if they were in difficulty during the winter because, for example, their employment insurance was cut off, all they had to do was move to Alberta.

It is truly shameful to say this sort of thing without having consulted Canadians about the type of reform there should be to employment insurance. The Conservatives pushed through a radical reform without consulting, without considering the consequences and without doing any studies. Now they are telling people it is too bad for them and they can always move.

Canadians deserve better than this. The Canadian government should have more confidence in the Canadian people and should consult them.

I return to today's motion. This is not consultation of the Canadian people; it is the imposition of Conservative tactics to force the passage of government bills and the adoption of the government's vision of Canada.

If we had had the chance, we would have wanted to get a resolution passed fairly quickly to have the standing finance committee conduct a study on income inequality in Canada and the growth of that inequality. Unfortunately, such a resolution cannot be passed quickly because the government has put a price on it. We will have to allow all bills that did not get to third reading and were not passed in the House to be picked up where they were left off prior to prorogation.

It was not possible to quickly strike a committee to study the violence being done to aboriginal women in Canada.

It was not possible to allow the Conservatives to go ahead with their plan to hold a convention. It is fine to move forward and consult their members, but this might have been an opportunity to consult Canadians at the same time on the issues of real concern to them, including financial issues: how are they going to pay their rent? What kind of job will they get?

We heard in the House today that half the people in Toronto do not have permanent full-time employment. That is truly shameful. One can understand the stress that can affect a person who does not know whether he will have a job next year. That is the situation of half the population of Toronto. Clearly, they are going through a very difficult time.

I am hearing this sort of thing from many parts of Canada. People feel abandoned by this government, which is afraid of Canadians, which is afraid of consulting the people. Perhaps it is right to be afraid.

In recent months and years I have met with many Canadians who have lost a great deal of confidence in both the Conservative Party and the Conservative government. The Conservative government might have been able to keep that confidence if it had consulted them. It would be good if it could prove here, in the House, that it is prepared to consult the people's representatives. Unfortunately, once again, the government seems to be incapable of this.

Today we are debating an immense omnibus motion.

• (1625)

We have seen it so many times: omnibus bills and motions can only lead to disaster. Often they are poorly drafted and they do not get the benefit of thorough debate.

I also want to point out that in this bill the government also wanted to allow the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to proceed with its study on the Standing Orders. That way the government will have the opportunity to closely examine the Standing Orders, to explore House practices, and to see why and how the rules are in place. This might give the government occasion to read with attention the practices and procedure in O'Brien and Bosc.

I sometimes wonder whether the Conservatives know their way around the Standing Orders. Not everyone does. Sometimes even a good parliamentarian will not be fully knowledgeable about the rules of this House. That is a fact. That is why we have to consult the clerks of the House, the experts and their assistants. Do the Conservatives do this? It seems to me they do not.

The result tells me that they have not had the benefit of consulting their own employees. If they did, we would have seen the evidence. The motion would have been divided right from the outset today. After the good-faith negotiations we had with the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, one would have thought that common sense would pay off and win the day.

Unfortunately, it is clear that the government seems incapable of seeing common sense when it confronts it. It is capable only of going on with its wrong-headed way of proceeding; this has been proven in the House of Commons. That way of proceeding runs counter to the Standing Orders of this place. Has this been done deliberately? One dare not think so. However, I think that the government sometimes considers itself shrewder than other people. It believes itself capable of going ahead and creating new practices and procedures in the House, without ever thinking that other people may realize that something is not quite right.

Unfortunately, we could have had this debate here a month ago, but the government decided, once again without consultation, that prorogation was the way to go and that it was more important to avoid question period for a month.

As the Senate scandal continued to simmer, boil, then overflow, the government decided that Parliament should not sit while it was negotiating a free trade agreement with Europe, failing to consider the fact that Canadian farmers would suffer rather extreme and adverse consequences under that agreement.

If the government had taken the time to explain to the House, and thus to Canadians, the scope of this free trade agreement with Europe, people might not be stressed and worried today at the thought of possibly losing their farm. Would it not have been possible for Canadian farmers to unite to assert that there is a big problem with the fact that the government wants to proceed with a free trade agreement with Europe without adequately consulting them?

All of this might have taken place had there been no prorogation. We would have had a month for debate and a month for the government to explain its intentions and the direction it wants to take. We have not had that opportunity, which is most unfortunate.

The government is running around in all directions. During prorogation, before the Speech from the Throne, it announced that it would put forward a bill to allow people to select the television channels they want through the cable companies.

I want to point out that back home, in the Gaspé and the Magdalen Islands, we were forced to get cable services. Until last year, we had free access to CBC television, like all other Canadians.

• (1630)

That is no longer the case. CBC television is no longer available in the Gaspé or on the islands. The only way to get it is through cable packages. Now the government is saying that it is helping us save money by allowing us to get pick-and-pay channels. I want to make it clear that before we did not have to pay anything. Should we thank the government for saving us money after imposing a fee on us? This really shows a lack of common sense and, once again, it is the result of a lack of consultation.

This summer we heard that the government wanted to increase civil liability for companies engaged in offshore oil development. Currently, these companies are liable up to \$30 million. The government arbitrarily decided to raise that limit to \$1 billion. This bill would have been a worthwhile piece of legislation if the government had taken the time to table it. If Parliament had not been prorogued for a month, we might have soon been debating this legislation.

People living in eastern Canada, on the Atlantic coast or the Gulf of St. Lawrence, in the Arctic or even on the west coast of British Columbia would really like to know the ins and outs of this bill. Unfortunately, this will not happen for a while because Parliament was prorogued for a month. We lost all this time and we still cannot figure out the government's vision.

Those who listened to the Speech from the Throne yesterday did not get a better understanding of the direction taken by the government. The speech had many words but very little content. The government said it will allow the movement of wine and beer for people living in various regions. That is fine, but these people are concerned about the fact that they and their families must move to

other areas to find jobs—and the government is bragging about creating jobs.

If we look at immigration levels in Canada, we realize there is nothing to brag about when it comes to employment, the percentage of the population and job creation. Despite what we hear repeatedly from the other side of the House, we are far from being the best among the G7 or G8 countries. We may in fact be one of the worst.

The government simply did not explain its vision. This government failed to show up and even face Canadians to explain its vision. It is afraid of its people and of Parliament. It is afraid to follow Parliament's procedures in a manner respectful of all parties in the House. It wants to impose its will, but that is why we have rules.

When the government brags about being the law and order party, it should remember that it is also subject to law and order, which also ensures equality among all Canadians. It is a reminder that everyone enjoys the same rights and that the government is not above the law. The government cannot think that it will simply do what it wants and that Canadians will say that it did a good job, even though their income is lower than it was in the previous year, they no longer know whether they will have a job, or whether they are paying for scientists who have been muzzled and whose views they can no longer know because they cannot have access to their reports. That is all true.

However, the government seems unable to face its own population and allow a full and comprehensive debate. Whether it is in the House or anywhere in Canada, the government is simply not there. It does consult, but on the Internet and it is quiet about it. No one knows about it. If one happens to stumble on the appropriate website, that is fine. Otherwise, it is too bad for those who were not consulted. This is no way to hold consultations.

Allowing debates in the House is another way to consult. Unfortunately, there are closures and gag orders. The government does not allow full and comprehensive debates. It does not give all committee members the right to propose motions without going in camera. Parliamentary committees are the ideal place to debate the details of bills and to allow Canadians to come and express their views on federal legislation.

• (1635)

All committee proceedings now happen in camera. It is very unfortunate. Once again, committees should be able to express themselves fully and completely.

What is happening in the House of Commons is also happening in parliamentary committees. Everything is done by stealth, under the watchful eye of the office of a Prime Minister who thinks he is omnipotent. The evidence shows, of course, that he is not. A government should be able to debate fully and completely, both with its allies and with the opposition. This government seems to have a very hard time understanding that.

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Omnibus motions have no place in Parliament. Omnibus bills do not allow for a full and thorough debate. The government should allow such debates, as almost all other parliaments do. Here, unfortunately, it is really hard to get the time needed for a proper debate. When members have something to say, they often do not get the time needed to express themselves. The debate is already over, because the government has imposed a gag order.

Today we could have easily gone through three-quarters of this motion very quickly if the government had had a bit more common sense. It could have allowed the parliamentary housekeeping matters to pass unanimously and the committees to be formed quickly and easily, since everyone agrees on that. Unfortunately, in order to do so, we absolutely had to swallow the government's pill and allow all the bad bills that did not pass last time to be reinstated in this new session, without debate, without the opportunity to clarify the bills and without a full and thorough debate.

I find it very difficult to acknowledge that a government seems incapable of taking the time to listen and believing that it does not necessarily have all the answers. A government must have a certain sense of humility. It cannot be better than the people it represents. The people's humility is often impressive. First of all, the people are always right. They should have the opportunity to express their opinions about all bills put before them. They must be able to make suggestions that could improve the bills and motions. Unfortunately, the government does not seem to want the people to have a say. Consultation every five years is fine, but bills brought forward one at a time benefit from evidence, the viewpoint of experts and the representation afforded by members of Parliament.

Unfortunately, bills do not seem to benefit from being sent to the Senate where the people's will is often not well represented. We know that senators are appointed by the Prime Minister's Office and are not given a direct mandate by the people. However, senators take the liberty of slowing down and even destroying bills from this House with a nod from the government.

Where was the government when the bill on transgendered rights was slowed down and killed in the Senate? If the bill was passed by the House of Commons, why did the government not criticize the Senate for defeating it? The Conservative government is now saying that it is very green and that it is controlling greenhouse gas emissions. Where was the government when the bill to control greenhouse gases introduced by the NDP and passed by this House went to the Senate and was defeated? The will of the people was not represented. I repeat, the government seems to have a great deal of difficulty understanding the will of the people.

The government may even be very pleased to manipulate the people's will.

• (1640)

However, I do not think the government would be prepared to accept the will of the people if there were a real consultation on employment insurance reform, on not moving forward with Kyoto, or on the issues that concern people the most. People are generally concerned about jobs, being able to feed their families, being able to pay their rent and being able to send their children to school the following year. That is what people are really concerned about.

I do not see anything in yesterday's throne speech that tells me everything is fine. The government said that it would establish a job creation program. This is the same program that all the provinces have already rejected. I do not see how the government will be able to move forward with this idea.

If the Conservatives are consulting the provinces, perhaps they could give the House an idea of how the consultations are going.

In the throne speech the Conservatives said that they wanted to move forward with a job creation program. However, the negotiations with the provinces show that things are not going well, and it seems as though the program will not happen. If that is the case, why not say so? Why would the government announce in the throne speech that it will move forward with a proposal when it knows very well that it will not be able to? If that is the case, it should be honest and explain to the House where things stand.

Today we learned that, once again, the government is moving forward with European free trade negotiations. It appears to be a done deal, if we are to believe what has been said in the House.

There is a lack of consultation. How is that possible? The Conservatives claim that the agreement will create jobs and stimulate investment. They say that farmers should not be afraid because they will have a huge market in which to sell their products. Did it ever occur to anyone that it might not be possible for a farmer from the Lower St. Lawrence, in Quebec, to take his goods and send them to Europe?

The Conservatives are saying that is what will happen. How will they do it? What makes the government think this will happen? How will it happen? I do not want to be pessimistic. I think it would be wonderful if it happened. However, farmers also want to know how it will happen. The government wants to make them believe that everything is fine, that there is no cause for concern and that their products will find a market.

I am quite happy. I think that farmers would be quite happy to know that their products will be sold at a good price on a foreign market. Everyone would be happy. However, the question is how that will happen.

That is where consultation yields results. Consultations give Canadians the opportunity to understand that the government is there to help them and how it will do so; to understand how they can use the tools that the government offers them; and to understand how they can use those tools to make money, to be able to pay their rent and to send their children to school.

How is the government proposing to do that? We have no idea. It is not saying. The government is not saying anything in the House about the actual details of its bills and its intentions during the free trade negotiations. The Conservatives do not consult. Canadians have not been consulted. It is disgraceful.

Something as important as free trade with Europe cannot be negotiated without Canadians knowing the ins and outs. The Conservatives cannot scrap agreements with the Americans that affect jobs in the automobile industry without consulting Canadians.

They cannot move forward with major changes to employment insurance rules without consulting Canadians. Canadians are the ones who pay employment insurance premiums in their entirety. How can the government think it is so smart, changing employment insurance rules without paying a cent into the employment insurance fund? The government is going ahead with a major reform that will benefit the government, so that at the end of the year, it can say that it did well, that it balanced the budget and that everything is fine.

Unfortunately, the government is doing so at the expense of the poor. For me, that is what it always comes down to when the Conservatives say the government is there to help consumers. That is great, but let us not forget that consumers are ordinary Canadians. Nobody consults them. They are poor.

● (1645)

Canadians are getting poorer and deeper into debt. If the government consulted Canadians, it would realize that the latest tools it has given them are not good enough to help them get out of debt, nor are they good enough to make people believe they will still have a job a year from now. It is just not good enough.

The government has a golden opportunity here in the House to clarify and justify its actions to Quebeckers, Maritimers, Acadians and all Canadians, but it is not taking that opportunity. I wonder why. What is it afraid of here in the House? Why is it afraid of Canadians? It is afraid to trust them.

It is high time Canadians had a federal government that can show them a long-term vision, a government they can trust, a government that says it will help them and that is there for them. It is more than a promise; it is a fact: Parliament exists for the people. We are here for them.

We are not here to make the rich companies richer. We are here to ensure that Canadians have faith in their future. They need to know that they will have the money they need to pay their bills and send their children to school, and that Canada will continue to be rich and develop our natural resources in a sound fashion.

However, Canadians are concerned right now, because they have not been consulted. They do not get the vision, because the Conservatives seem unable to explain their vision that keeps changing from day to day. Canadians need a government that can clearly express its vision and demonstrate that its goal is to help the people and stand up for the less fortunate.

For decades, the Conservatives and the Liberals formed successive governments. At this point in time, Canadians are carrying more debt than ever before and today's generation is poorer than the preceding generation. We are going the wrong way. A country as rich as Canada is unable to build up the wealth of its people. Where is all the wealth going? What happened to the wealth of Canada? Who does it belong to these days?

It seems that wealth has not been distributed very equally these last 20 years under the Conservative and Liberal governments. We keep losing track of the Canadian vision that we are here to help each other and to help people abroad. Canada is a peaceful country whose vision is to provide assistance and to help people achieve their full potential.

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For instance, the Interparliamentary Union provides a great opportunity for parliamentarians to travel abroad and share ideas in order to discover what is working or not working elsewhere and to understand what we have done right or wrong. We no longer have as many opportunities to connect with people at the international level to share ideas. The Conservative government wants to get rid of the Interparliamentary Union once and for all. Why? They seem to be afraid to talk about issues and to have people abroad figure out where things stand right now in Canada. They are afraid we are going to tell people things that will make them wonder what is going on in Canada.

We should be able to feel proud of what we have done and be certain that the next generation will be in a better position than the one before it. That was the case for many years. In general, since Confederation, things have steadily improved. Recently, in the past 20 years, we have changed course, and things are getting worse. I blame this government and the previous government. It is under their governance that so much has been lost and that tactics like prorogation have been used repeatedly.

● (1650)

The Conservative government went as far as using prorogation as a political tool rather than a procedural tool, as it is supposed to be used. It was afraid of the will of the people and of losing control. Therefore, it decided to prorogue.

Again today, the Conservatives are afraid of the Senate scandal. They are afraid that people will see that the police are investigating Nigel Wright and that things will come out in the House. They do not want us to talk about it. They do not want us to talk about the Senate scandal, even though Senator Brazeau has messed up so many times that I do not even know where to begin. They are afraid that the misdeeds of senators will be discovered by the House and that people will find out what happened. This does not just apply to the Conservatives. The Liberals do not want to talk about it either, considering Senator Harb's situation.

The government appointed senators to the Upper Chamber without any debate and without consulting Canadians about what they expect of the Senate. What kind of Senate would they like? Do they even want a Senate? That debate has not happened yet. We should have a debate but it is not happening. Why? Because Parliament was on leave for an extra month. Or it could be because this government is simply scared of debate. Some will say prorogation is just a procedural tactic meant to get a fresh start and a new Speech from the Throne.

If that were true, the government would not be restoring all the bills that remained unfinished during the last session. Prorogation is supposed to mean a fresh start, but that is not what the government wants; it is just a strategy to keep the House from finding out what wicked tricks its friends have been up to. Conservatives have no interest in the discussions and consultations that would occur if Parliament were sitting.

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We lost one month, and it is unacceptable. We are supposed to represent our constituents. Members were elected to represent citizens here, in the House. Every time someone shuts down the House of commons, that keeps us from doing our work. The government does not want members to do their work. It just wants to act freely. That is unacceptable. The government cannot act as it pleases. It is accountable to the House, which means it is supposed to respect the House's rules and will. How is that possible when the government does not consult the House? Of course, no consultation occurs when Parliament is shut down.

Thankfully, Parliament is now sitting again, but only until early December. We will have a very short session. As I said before, I think that the Conservatives want the session to be as short as possible, mainly because they fear the Senate scandal.

Serious mistakes have been made in Ottawa in recent years. Ottawa functions very poorly, and this has happened under this government's administration. Canadians have increasingly lost confidence in the federal government since this government came to power. Canadians, Quebecers and all peoples of Canada must be able to look at Parliament and say they are proud of it. They must know that Parliament is there to protect and help them with the powerful, invaluable tools it uses to help people. Unfortunately, the government is managing during a time when people are falling into indebtedness and poverty. It seems to disregard these problems rather than address them directly. It spends hundreds of millions of dollars on advertising. It sets up websites without telling people they are there to permit consultation.

It has really mismanaged the Canadian people's involvement in government, and it is time the Conservative government went back to square one. It should take some time to reflect. I would have liked this government to take time this past summer to look at what it has done right and wrong. I do not believe it did that.

● (1655)

I believe it simply wondered how it could make sure Parliament stayed shut down for as long as possible and how long it would be possible to keep it shut down without people really starting to complain. Matters had gotten to that point.

We see that people are not happy with what goes on here in the Commons or in the other house. It is time the government addressed the problem, allowed debate and allowed people to speak their minds and tell Parliament what they like and what they do not like. People want to make themselves heard.

The consultation conducted on Canada Post is an example that perfectly illustrates the extent to which the government does not want to consult people. A website is set up, but how does anyone know that, by osmosis or clairvoyance? I do not know. A website is simply available, and people are apparently supposed to know that the public consultation is being conducted there.

Even if people do not speak out, we already know the outcome. The government has already announced it conducted a study indicating that home delivery should be eliminated in Canada. That is a very big change. It may be the right decision. It may also be the wrong one. We would have known if we had had the opportunity to

debate it. However, we did not have that opportunity; we only had a website.

I also want to emphasize that this happened at the same time the government cancelled the community access program. Two years ago, the poorest people in the regional communities were provided with reliable Internet access that was unavailable except as part of that program. That service has been cancelled.

However, the government says it wants to consult those people and has created a website for that purpose. I do not know how people are supposed to take part in those consultations if they do not even have access to a website. They do not know the website is available, for two reasons: first, there is no advertising stating the fact, and second, they have no Internet access. How will they take part in the consultations?

No, instead of announcing an online consultation, the government spends millions of dollars announcing a job creation program which does not exist. The government claims it is creating jobs, but all provinces are saying they do not accept its program. It is a waste of money.

The program is so inefficient that one wonders if the government is competent at all. When the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons tells us that we are the ones creating inefficiencies, I say to myself that he should take a look in the mirror and let good old common sense guide him. If he had consulted anyone, he would know that the program does not make sense. He would know that money is being wasted and that people do not like being treated like a bunch of idiots.

It is time for the government to have an open mind, to quit making decisions based on ideology and to start thinking about ways to really serve the Canadian people and to use its powerful resources.

This is the most powerful institution in Canada. What do we see? The government acts as if it did not have a duty to represent the people. The Speech from the Throne is very wordy but very short on content. The reasoning looks good at first, but the government never really explains how it will proceed. Job creation programs are announced, but the government knows full well that the programs it wants to put forward have already been rejected by provinces and other partners in this process.

It seems like consulting is awfully difficult for the government, not only to find out the views of the Parliament, but also to listen to its provincial partners. When did the Prime Minister last meet his provincial counterparts? When? It has been such a long time since the Prime Minister took the time to consult his provincial counterparts that he cannot even remember when. However, we can all remember the last time the government prorogued Parliament. It happened just a few months ago. We also remember the way it was done the time before that.

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● (1700)

The government was close to its last breath, and then it tried to revive itself using prorogation. The Liberal government used that same strategy in the past. It also tried to avoid consultations and to bring back bills without consulting or negotiating with members of Parliament. This institution is fraught with problems. There is only one party willing to improve the House of Commons so that Canadians are really represented here. That party is the NDP.

The time is right for a government focused on meeting Canadians' needs. The time is right for a government focused on listening, a government that will introduce legislation and be open to discussions and improvements. The time is right for a New Democratic government.

● (1705)

[English]

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague go on ad infinitum about the government not consulting. I am not sure what my colleague did over the summer, but I took advantage of the opportunity to consult with my constituents on a regular basis. I sent out 2,500 surveys to businesses in the area and close to 5,000 surveys to constituents in my area. I have here, just by chance, a handful of the hundreds and hundreds of responses I received from my constituents.

I have a constituent by the name of Charles Sequeira, who wrote, "You keep us updated and communicate via local media on many of the bills or policies passed in the House of Commons. You communicate and seek our input."

Donna Conroy from Aurora, when asked if our government was on the right track, said, "Yes. There is still more work to be done."

Mr. Fagan wrote, "I believe that the government is going in the right direction with its policies. The Liberal Party is weak and the NDP is a dangerous option."

Another of my constituents, John Norquay, wrote, "Overall, Mr. Harper and the Conservative government have led us—"

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. I have two points.

First, I know we have been away from this place for many weeks, but I would remind all hon. members that they cannot use the names of other members while speaking in the House.

Second, while the member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine had unlimited time to make his speech, members do not have unlimited time to pose questions. If there is a question, I would ask the parliamentary secretary to put it quickly.

Ms. Lois Brown: Mr. Speaker, my constituent concluded by saying, "Please stay the course".

My question for my hon. colleague is this. Why does he feel the comments of the constituents of Newmarket—Aurora are irrelevant to these discussions?

[Translation]

Mr. Philip Toone: Quite the opposite, Mr. Speaker: the comments of every Canadian citizen are equally valuable. It is for this very reason that the government should give them all equal weight.

Being the good parliamentary secretary that she is, the member surely knows that the government has valuable and powerful means of consulting Canadians. It is good that she consults her constituents in her capacity as an MP. I am very proud of her. I think that all members here consult their constituents. I know my colleague from Gatineau has done so many times, as have I. Contrary to the member's experience, however, I never hear from my constituents that we should "stay the course"; rather, I hear that we are heading straight for disaster. Every Canadian citizen has his or her own set of views and positions. The important thing is that they are able to express them.

When the government wants to pass a bill, it is its job to consult the people. It is good that members work within their constituencies, but the issue remains that we should bring the debate back to the question of citizens' ability to be heard by the House of Commons. That is not happening.

The member is free to use her props to try to prove that actual consultations took place. The problem is that this government's consultations are always arbitrary. They are never full and meaningful. The government is never willing to bring people before parliamentary committees. It is never willing to allow open and public Web consultations. It is not even willing to pay for a dependable Web service that would allow people to take part in advertised consultations.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I did have the opportunity to ask the government House leader the question of whether it was really necessary for the government to prorogue the session.

I was interested in the government House leader's response, which was quite simple. He responded that it was the process and that it was just the way in which things happened, as if there was nothing outside the norm. It is pretty tough to sell that this is in fact the reason why it was prorogued.

Many individuals, including me, believe that the Conservatives, and particularly the Prime Minister, did not want to come back to the floor of the House of Commons to be questioned about the PMO and how it was engaged with the whole \$90,000 with Nigel Wright and Mr. Duffy and all the allegations that were out there. Therefore, in order to avoid having to come back in September, the Prime Minister prorogued the session. It is interesting that he picks a date on which he is in Europe, again avoiding accountability on what is a very important issue.

Could the member provide his thoughts or some of his comments in terms of the real need? Was there a need to even prorogue the session?

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● (1710)

Mr. Philip Toone: Mr. Speaker, I have a certain degree of agreement with the member. We on this side of the House as well have a hard time understanding why the Conservatives felt it was important to stop debate for an entire month and why they felt it necessary for their representatives including, as the member said, the Prime Minister, to go to Europe and not be here to be accountable, to not permit a full and entire debate on the very agreement that he has left Canada to go to Europe for, which is to sign a free trade agreement with Europe, which the members of the House have not had occasion to look over. As representatives of the people, we have not had an occasion to actually put in our two cents, feelings, worries and suggestions for improvement. None of that has happened. The government insists on doing things its own way and forcing that point of view down the throats of Canadians.

It is a government that seems out of control, quite frankly, and it is a government that lacks accountability. We need a government that is actually going to answer to the needs of the people and that government is represented by the members of Parliament who are sitting on this side of the House.

[Translation]

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do not quite agree with my colleague, and I will explain to him why.

It is not really about fear. I think it is more about denial. It is like a teenager who will not let anyone contradict his opinions and who absolutely refuses to own up to his mistakes. It is really more about denial than fear. That is why the Conservatives are hiding: they are afraid of facing the facts, of being proven wrong.

I will move on to my question. Generally, a government prorogues Parliament because it wants a new beginning, a clean slate. How strange then, that according to its 24-page throne speech—a very long one compared to other throne speeches—the Conservative government is actually bringing back all of the old bills that arose from the previous throne speech. I find that very strange.

Does that mean the government wants to backtrack? Does it simply not have the will to move forward? I am sorry, but the victims' bill of rights is something they have been talking about for a long time. It is nothing new. Cyberbullying and all that was on the agenda long before this throne speech.

I would like my colleague to comment on what I just said.

Mr. Philip Toone: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her interesting comments. I would like to commend the work she has done in her riding. I know that she consults her constituents frequently and that she does a good job of representing their views. We would all benefit from having more members who do that kind of work, work we can all be proud of.

We all know that the government keeps saying it will do something, but it never actually does anything. We really have a lot of issues with this government. It is not exactly confidence-inspiring.

For example, the government has once again announced a plan to create jobs. All of the provinces have already rejected the plan, but the government keeps saying it intends to go ahead. How can it do that when this is an issue that falls under provincial jurisdiction? The

provinces have to buy in. The government knows it needs them as partners, but it conveniently forgets that.

Sometimes the Conservatives are mistrustful and fearful. They do not understand. I do not know what the problem is. I am fully aware that the government talks and talks, but unfortunately, it does not have much to say.

● (1715)

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I would just like to inform members that we have added nine minutes to government orders, so it will be extended until 5:39 p.m. In that context, the hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso will have the opportunity for his entire 20 minutes.

The hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Winnipeg North as we enter into this debate.

If I could be allowed a bit of latitude outside of the realm of the motion, I want to do something that is not that common in the House and pay a compliment to the government.

Upon assuming his new duties as the Minister of Justice, my colleague from Nova Scotia announced that the government would be undertaking a review of the federal action on the Fenwick MacIntosh issue, which many in the House are familiar with. It devastated a number of constituents in my riding. The Minister of Justice was very much aware of this case long before he took on this responsibility. One of the first times I had an opportunity to talk about the case was with the minister, who was in opposition at the time. This was the first file that he asked for upon coming to his new portfolio as justice minister. After a review of that file, he directed the department to go forward with the review of the federal responsibility in the case. I want to acknowledge him here on the floor of the House for that, and that is where I will stop flattering the government.

The essence of the motion is really about trying to split off aspects of the omnibus bill and unbundling some of the bill as it goes forward. The government announced in the throne speech yesterday that it was going to move forward to unbundle cable packages, and it is only fair that it come into the chamber with that same kind of spirit and unbundle some of the aspects of this omnibus bill.

We hoped that the Speech from the Throne yesterday would articulate a clear vision of what the government wants to accomplish over the next couple of years. We thought the vision would be obvious, but it would really only allow us the opportunity to maybe delete Vision television from our cable package. What we witnessed here yesterday with the Speech from the Throne was a really strange undertaking.

We in the Liberal Party are comfortable and supportive of many aspects identified in the motion. Our leader has gone on record on a number of occasions, speaking in favour of aspects of the motion: the oversight on the economy and the portion of the motion that identifies the oversight we want to see. We have taken initiatives already, and our leader has led the charge on that with full disclosure and proactive disclosure. We are comfortable with the aspects of the motion that identify that and we think they are worthy of going forward.

With respect to the initiative on the study of murdered or missing first nations women, we had hoped the throne speech would be the occasion to call for a full public enquiry. It is something with which we would be comfortable.

● (1720)

My former colleague from Winnipeg, Anita Neville, has long been an advocate and has on numerous occasions spoken passionately on the issue in this chamber. I was always inspired by how passionate she was when she would speak on the issue. Unfortunately, we have not seen any action on that particular issue from the government. That is an obvious disappointment, and this is one aspect of the motion that our leader and our entire party support.

Having listened to Shawn Atleo speak recently about this, I know it is an issue that grips not only first nations communities. All Canadians are aware of the horror of the issue. Therefore, I hope the government will go forward with a full inquiry. As the motion is written here, we are very supportive of that aspect.

With regard to the reconstitution of the committees, one of the most frustrating aspects since coming to the chamber and serving as an opposition member in a majority government is that I am only one member on a committee. What happens a lot of times is that a committee will embark on a particular project with the greatest of intentions, but we really do not get to a lot of the tough, core issues that are of most concern to Canadians in many of the 18 committees that grow from the House, because anything that could reflect in a somewhat negative light on the government is not allowed to go forward. Therefore, we are doing work that, yes, has purpose and is of benefit, but there are other things we could do that would be more beneficial for a greater number of Canadians and for Canadians who are really finding it difficult out there.

In my own human resources and skills development committee, certainly the issues around employment insurance and the changes that have been made would have been very worthwhile. However, we are not getting the opportunity. Then when we do undertake a study and witnesses come forward and offer testimony that is brought forward and reaffirmed by witness after witness, if it does not fit into the government's narrative we do not see it in the final report. I talk to people on other committees, and they say time after time that when they get to the essence of an issue that testimony is missing from the final report. We can put in a dissenting report, but if we want to move forward and do the best we can for Canadians, we need to come together and work around the political stripes and the ideologies. That is when this place functions at its best.

Therefore, in reconstituting the committees, unless there is that spirit of doing the best work we can to represent the greatest number of Canadians—those Canadians who are facing hardship, those who

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do not have a voice—then we should be compelled as lawmakers to do just that. There are many Canadians out there who are having a tough time of it. When we see the unemployment rate for young Canadians at twice the level of the national average, that has to be of concern. When we see the underemployment rate of young Canadians at almost 25%, that has to be of concern.

● (1725)

If I could, I will wrap up with this. The most recent statistics state that the number of Canadians working for minimum wage has doubled since the Prime Minister has taken over. We see more and more Canadians who have become a whole new category of the working poor. I think that is troubling.

I would hope that, once we get the committees reconstituted, we can look at some of these important issues. There are many aspects of this motion that we are very excited about and want to support.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I really think that my hon. colleague pointed out a lot of the concerns about yesterday. It is the lack of content. For all of that pomp and circumstance that went on yesterday, I would like to have an idea of what it cost the taxpayers. There was the prorogation and all of the other things and having a day when people were brought together to celebrate all of this. However, there was nothing in the throne speech that could not have been delivered under ministerial statements or one thing or another. This might be disturbing to some people over there, evidently, but I think cost is important. I wonder if my colleagues have any idea what kind of money was spent yesterday for all of that pomp and circumstance.

Then there is the issue of jobs, the issue that really matters. There was the spending of \$41 million on advertising a Canada jobs grant that nobody seems to want to partner on. We spent \$41 million and there are still no jobs.

I would like to hear some comments from my hon. colleague about what he thinks of that.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, I looked at some of the comments posted by pundits on the throne speech yesterday. They said that it was timid, tepid and unambitious.

I remember in 1999, as we came into the new millennium, there was a lot of hype around the Y2K bug and about how it was going to devastate the country and, if we were not careful, the world was going to end. There was all this anticipation and anxiety around Y2K, and nothing happened.

That is sort of like the throne speech yesterday. There was a great deal of hoopla and anticipation, but it was pretty thin gruel. I agree wholeheartedly with my colleague that anything that was announced yesterday could have easily been addressed through a ministerial statement.

Maybe in a later question I can address the jobs grant.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I hope my colleague on the other side can explain to this side of the House why the Liberals are so confused about prorogation.

Government Orders

Let me just go through it. The 37th Parliament, which was a majority with Chrétien and Martin, had three sessions and two prorogations. The 36th Parliament, which was a majority with Chrétien, had two sessions and one prorogation. The 35th Parliament, which was a majority with Chrétien, had two sessions and one prorogation.

Let us go to Trudeau. The 32nd Parliament, the Trudeau-Turner majority, had two sessions and one prorogation. The 30th Parliament, with a Trudeau majority, had four sessions and three prorogations.

I could go on and on. It is a process that has happened year after year in this House. Why is the Liberal Party claiming we did something that is not normal? Do the Liberals not understand Canada's history? Do they not understand how it works around here?

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, I think for Canadians this was probably the least offensive of the Conservative prorogations.

However, I think Canadians would have been very comfortable with it had Conservatives come with a throne speech that had a little bit of direction.

In a throne speech after one of those prorogations of the government of former prime minister Chrétien, there was a surplus to deal with. One third of the surplus would go toward tax relief, one third would go to reinvestment in programs, and one third would go to paying down the debt.

I guess the good old days are long gone now. It will be a long time, at least three years anyway, before we see another day like that.

• (1730)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Winnipeg North was going to speak, but he is on a panel doing important opposition business, so I will take a few moments to talk about this omnibus bill, which would bring in previous legislation. Some is government legislation and some is private members' bills.

I think my colleague from Cape Breton—Canso, who spoke earlier, really hit on a serious point that we hoped it would be different in this Parliament. That is especially how the chamber works and how committees work.

As I have said in some of my responses to the throne speech and in talking with people in my riding today, I have been a member of this place for somewhere close to 20 years. It will be 20 years next week. I have seen about a dozen speeches from the throne, and I have never seen one with less vision, more misrepresentation of the historical facts, and such a small-minded strategy moving forward as we have seen in this one. I would hope that this chamber has bigger ideas than we have seen in the throne speech. Some of them can come from other bills coming forward. Some can come forward from committees, if we are allowed to operate the way we should.

I would like to talk a little bit about committees in the last session. What we saw was opposition members putting forward amendments that were voted down. Opposition members would put forward a motion to do a study. I do not know about all committees, but I attended four different committees, and in all of them, government members sitting on the committee asked the committee to go in camera, and the motion, surprisingly, was voted down. I guess I

cannot say in this place who voted which way, but I think the House can detect that. The government members put the meeting in camera and there was a vote, and the motion was lost. That issue was not discussed, even though it was an issue Canadians were concerned about.

I would actually plead with the backbench members on the government side to change that in this Parliament. Allow Parliament to work the way it is supposed to, where we have pros and cons to ideas, where we debate the ideas, and where we take things that one does not agree with but that we allow to come forward for debate. That is how this place is supposed to work. I think a lot of the members opposite on the government side would like to see that happen.

The parliamentary secretary on the trade committee I was on last session challenged me, just like the member for Burlington did earlier. He challenged me and said that was the way the Liberals used to do it. No, it is not. The parliamentary secretary of trade in the last session was an opposition member when I happened to chair the fisheries committee. I went back and looked at the record. There were 32 motions put to committee. None of them were debated in camera, not one. Of those, 21 motions were from opposition members. They were critical of government policy, and the government of the day allowed the debate to occur. In fact, many of them passed. That is what this place is supposed to be. It is supposed to be a place of debate, ideas, and big vision.

The government opposite just wants to manage it a little bit. Look at the throne speech again. As my colleague said, it is going to unbundle some of the TV channels. Whether they are Vision TV or whatever they might be, the government is going to unbundle them.

I have to say something that one of my constituents said to me today. My constituent has an unemployed youth, 23 years old, who should be out in the workforce.

• (1735)

The government is not doing anything about the highest rate of unemployment among youth we have ever seen in this country, but by golly, as my constituent said, it would give us a little cheaper TV and a little cheaper cellphone so that he can stay home and sit on the couch, and we lose the potential of that youth out there working. The government should be working on the big issues, not trying to sell a new little consumer product for some cellphone company. That is not a vision.

I bring those points up because I am worried. I am worried that what we are going to get in the second session of this Parliament is more of the same, where the government limits debate. It votes down motions coming from citizens, motions that would build a better Canada. They at least should be discussed. If today's performance in question period is how we are going to continue, it was a continuation of the same. I quite honestly sat here pretty disgusted. I can see why Canadians are disgusted. We never had an answer to one question put to the government.

We know that the Prime Minister kind of chickened out and left the country. Obviously, he does not want to be here to answer questions on the Senate scandal, so he used the excuse of going over to sign the CETA deal. He could have signed that tomorrow or Friday. He could have stayed here and answered questions in the first session of this Parliament. He could have done that. He is going to talk about 80,000 jobs created by CETA, but Conservatives cannot prove it. Let them talk. Their record on trade is that they are the first government in 30 years that has had a deficit in trade on an annual basis. Let us look at the numbers. Since December 2011, the government that fails to answer questions every day in the House of Commons has had a deficit every month since December 2011.

In the throne speech, the Conservatives talked about bringing in prosperity through trade. They have been an absolute and utter failure every step of the way on trade thus far. My colleague, the trade critic, said earlier in question period that we know that they are going to sell out the dairy industry. We do not know what they are going to do in terms of adding extra costs for all Canadians on pharmaceutical products. We know that the Europeans are going to have two years of extra patent time for drugs. Is the deal good for Canadians? We do not know. As everything else the government does, it has done it in secret.

Conservatives now lock committees down in secret. They are negotiating the CETA agreement in secret, and we have a whole cabinet that fails to answer questions. They operate like the opposition is supposed to. They fail to answer questions, and in the process, they undermine democracy. This omnibus bill is certainly not going to do anything to—

The Deputy Speaker: The time for debate has expired. The member for Malpeque will have one minute when the debate resumes, if he wishes to continue.

It being 5:39 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business, as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

● (1740)

[English]

OBESITY

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should continue to: (a) recognize the long-term health risks and costs of obesity in Canada; (b) support, promote and fund organizations and individuals who are involved in the physical well-being of Canadians; and (c) make the reduction of obesity of Canadians a public health priority.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure this evening to rise to speak to my motion, Motion No. 425, regarding obesity, and the issue that is facing this country.

I want to first thank the member for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country for his work on the issue of health and fitness, trying to make Canada the fittest country in the world, and on initiating a national fitness day, which I believe next year will be June 7. He is doing great work, and I really appreciate his support.

Private Members' Business

In this House we are usually talking about policy or legislation. Tonight I am going to take the opportunity to talk about something that has personally affected me and why I brought this motion forward—it is not a bill, but a motion—to bring light to the issue and to have some discussion among our colleagues about what could be happening with our health care in terms of the issue of obesity and looking after one's health.

I thought I would start by telling members a personal story.

I have known four great-grandparents. I have two grandmothers still alive; they are both 96. I have known my grandfathers; they lived into their late eighties. I have a picture of myself, my daughter, my father, his mother, and her mother. It is a five-generation picture.

I have very good genes for long life. We have no heart disease in the family. One grandmother, who is 96, did survive cancer at age 40, a long time ago. Other than that, we have been very lucky with our health.

A year and a half ago, I was having some difficulty, so I went to my doctor. I thought there was something wrong with my prostate; however, I found out that I had diabetes, which was a bit of a shock to me. I thought that I was virtually indestructible because of my genes.

However, my lifestyle included drinking five or six Coca-Colas a day, eating improperly, and not keeping proper hours, in the sense that these are long days. It is a really interesting career one chooses in federal politics, and travelling back and forth, not eating breakfast, and just not doing things correctly, I gained weight here, as I know some of us all have. I was about 225 pounds at one point. I hid it well with big suits.

Things changed for me. I went to the doctor; I was having some difficulty. Lo and behold, they claimed that I had diabetes. Of course, my first reaction was to say, “No way. That is not possible. How is that possible when I have no diabetes in my family, when I have no heart disease?” My blood pressure was excellent. It still is excellent. However, my sugar levels were through the roof.

The doctor indicated that if I continued, I had a chance of my pancreas getting worse. I would have to take insulin, and so on and so forth. The doctor diagnosed me with type 2 diabetes—not type 1, of course, which is juvenile diabetes—and put me on a pill, Metformin, which is the standard thing they start a diabetes patient on. I told the doctor I did not want to take pharmaceuticals if I did not have to and asked if there was a way for me to do something about it.

He indicated that it was possible—not likely, but possible—that if I lost weight and exercised regularly, I might be able to get off Metformin.

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I took his advice. I started exercising again. I set a goal for myself to run a marathon in every province; I have run six. I just ran one this past weekend, in Victoria, British Columbia. I do not advise everyone that they have to run marathons to get healthy, but I have taken on that task. I eat better, I have lost weight, and I am not on Metformin anymore. It has been about a year.

● (1745)

What woke me up to this issue is that I really did not pay attention. I have two daughters who are athletes. One is on a sports scholarship at a university in the United States. The other plays competitive volleyball. They are both in very good shape. Obesity and diabetes were never an issue around our house. All of a sudden there was something there.

I started thinking that if it could happen to me, what about everybody else? I started looking around and talking to different individuals and organizations about what is happening. In that time frame, even the United States had announced that obesity was actually a disease and that if it did not get on top of it, it would become a real health care issue for them.

Based on the motion, I have broken it down into three pieces. This is just to get people to think about where we are going from a health perspective.

The first part of the motion is to recognize the long-term health risks and costs of obesity. I can put a lot of statistics out there and talk about the costs of obesity and the like. However, it is just common sense. If people are not healthy, they will be using the system. There is no magic to it or statistician's formula. I am always a little nervous about statisticians. If I give my friend a dollar today and a dollar tomorrow, there is a 100% increase yet it is still only a dollar, so one has to be careful with that.

The reality is that if we look around at what we are eating and what we are doing in terms of being healthy, there will be a long-term cost to our health care system. Members may not like the way I put this but at the federal level health care is writing cheques to the provinces that deliver the actual health care. That is a lot of pressure, not necessarily on the federal system but on the provincial system. In general, we need to worry about the costs with respect to health care.

We also need to worry about the health risks. It is claimed, and I hope it is not true, that we might be the last generation with the ability to outlive our children. Imagine a generation that is unable to outlive its children. That is just not right and not what I think should happen. However, if we do not do something in terms of looking after our health, that is an actual and real possibility. I do not think that is something we want.

The second part of the motion is about supporting the promotion of health and healthy living, not just financially but in other ways. There are a number of great organizations. Some are not for profit and others are for profit. I have no issue with that. I just want to highlight a couple.

There are organizations that are oriented toward health issues. For me, the Diabetes Association has been fantastic. It provided me with a lot of information about what diabetes was, what I could do about it and the two different types. There is the Heart and Stroke

Foundation and the lung associations. There are a number of organizations that do great work.

My motion asks that all levels of government, federal, provincial and municipal, continue to support those organizations in their efforts. That does not necessarily mean we have to write them a cheque. Rather, it means going to their events and supporting their efforts in the communities. If one has a neighbour or friend who is running in a marathon, which I do, in support of diabetes, support that individual. Those groups are doing great work in their areas of expertise and are important in terms of not only helping those with the disease or health issue they are dealing with but at promoting awareness and education and they need to do that.

Another organization, which I am very excited about and which the Government of Canada has supported, is ParticipACTION. I am a keen supporter of organizations that get people moving and healthy. It does not have to be running. It can be karate. It can be whatever activity one wants to do. I want to encourage people to take advantage of what these organizations do. We do not have to be experts at whatever we are doing.

● (1750)

I ran my marathon this weekend in four hours and 42 minutes. The gentleman sitting beside me in the plane coming back ran it in two hours and 19 minutes. I was exactly halfway when he was finished. We have to just get out there and get involved. If members could, I want them to encourage neighbours, friends and communities. Whatever is happening in a community, if members of Parliament could, they should help support those organizations.

There are for-profit organizations that are helpful, and I'll use the Weight Watchers organization as an example. I think it is an excellent organization. I have not personally used it. I lost my 25 or 30 pounds basically by eating less and not drinking Coke, which I miss. However, people do need help and there are organizations that will help and they are doing a great job.

Another organization in my community that has recognized this issue is Big Brothers Big Sisters. It has a program for the clients they serve, the young people, because youth is a big issue. If we do not convince youth to take care of themselves both by eating healthily and keeping physically fit, there will be a problem. Big Brothers Big Sisters has a program for those young people to make sure they understand what good health is, what good fitness is and what good eating is. I applaud its efforts.

As I mentioned before, one of my daughters goes to school in Indiana and she is in an education program. It was interesting to hear this past week that in one of the courses she takes, which talks about introducing healthy eating and activity into the classroom, it used Canada as an example of how it is done well. I am very supportive of our education system, and I think it does a good job, but we need to continue to support it to make sure physical activity does not leave the curriculum of our Canadian school children, particularly those at a young age, and ensure that other things do not ease it out, being more of a priority. Health is a priority and we need to teach young folks that piece.

The last piece I have to talk about is the public health priority. I think it is fair to say that the public health policy here at the federal level has been somewhat lacking in the obesity and fitness area over the last number of years. It just has not made it to the top as a priority piece. I am hopeful that will change under our government and with the support of all members.

If members look at the throne speech from yesterday, under safeguarding families and communities, they will see that the government will also work with provinces, territories and not-for-profit sectors to encourage young Canadians to be more physically active. I did not know that would be in the speech. I have had this motion in front of the House for a while, because it kept getting bumped for other private members' motions that I felt were of higher priority in terms of timing, so this was a very pleasant surprise for me, and as a member of Parliament, I am going to use it to encourage my government to be proactive in making sure we meet the mandate we have put in this throne speech over the next number of years.

I thank members for their attention and for their attention to their own health and their family's health. I would be happy to answer any questions.

• (1755)

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I read the motion. I understand the intent behind it, but I do not see how this constitutes any real action to address obesity. I am a nurse and I know that when a patient is given a treatment plan, the objectives have to be concrete, specific, measurable and realistic. We have to be able to assess them. The motion talks about recognizing the long-term risks and costs. We all recognize that. All health care professionals, all Canadians already know the costs. I do not see how we could recognize them any more. The motion talks of supporting, promoting and funding organizations and individuals involved in Canadians' well-being, but there is no specific amount, demand or funding allocated. We have absolutely no idea how the government will go about it. They give a beautiful line, but there is no specific proposal to back it up.

The motion talks about making the reduction of obesity of Canadians a public health priority. I am sorry, but this has been a top priority for health care professionals for quite some time already. Everyone knows that and we have been taking action for quite some time. I do not think the member is adding anything new here. We are already working on it.

I would like the member to explain to me what concrete changes will occur as a result of this motion and what will change in the

government's plans. Otherwise, it is nothing but a beautiful line with nothing concrete behind it.

[English]

Mr. Mike Wallace: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question. I would agree that the motion is not intended to give specifics. That is what motions, in my view, in the House of Commons are for, which is to generate discussion about particular policies or topics.

There is an area where I disagree with the member. I agree that other jurisdictions, industries and health care providers have identified obesity as an issue, but I am not convinced that the Public Health Agency of Canada has made it a priority. The purpose of my motion is to say that we are thinking about this in the House of Commons and we would like to see some action. I am very happy that in the Speech from the Throne there is actually a line regarding obesity and the security of families and children in the future. It is moving up on the ladder of priorities and I am very supportive of our government moving forward with it.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we need to recognize that we have to take a holistic approach in dealing with this issue. In talking about long-term policy best interest, school divisions, municipalities and provincial governments all need to be part of a process. I will give a specific example of a high school initiative where students are recognizing the importance of eating healthier. There is a movement to get rid of the gravy and fries and have more salads put into cafeterias. There are many different ideas.

To what degree does the member believe the federal government, being a national government, has a leadership role in bringing stakeholders together and actually having a proactive Minister of Health who shows she is genuinely concerned about the issue and starts talking about it not just inside but outside the House of Commons with the different stakeholders?

Mr. Mike Wallace: Mr. Speaker, I believe the federal government, through the Public Health Agency, should be taking a leadership role in working with others at all levels, whether it is at the municipal or provincial levels, with education organizations and the other organizations I discussed that may be oriented to certain health issues. It is a holistic approach. We cannot do one thing and solve all of the problems. A number of things have to be done. I would agree with that as I have experienced it myself.

I am hoping that through the throne speech and our discussions on this motion that it will take a higher role in terms of a priority for the Public Health Agency and the minister herself.

• (1800)

[Translation]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Motion No. 425 on preventing obesity.

First, I want to assure my Conservative colleague that the NDP will support this motion, which states:

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That, in the opinion of the House, the government should continue to: (a) recognize the long-term health risks and costs of obesity in Canada; (b) support, promote and fund organizations and individuals who are involved in the physical well-being of Canadians; and (c) make the reduction of obesity of Canadians a public health priority.

No one is against virtue. The NDP cares about the health of all Canadians. That is why we focus a lot on the social determinants of health at the Standing Committee on Health.

We are always disappointed when the Conservative members refuse to allow the Standing Committee on Health to examine the social determinants of health. However, that is not what I want to talk about today.

Obesity rates have reached alarming levels in Canada. I am not sure if members are aware, but in the past 30 years, the obesity rate has nearly doubled. The Public Health Agency of Canada has provided the following statistics: in 2011, 25% to 35% of Canadian adults and nearly 10% of Canadian children were obese. That is very sad and we must take this seriously, since we are jeopardizing the lives and the health of young and not-so-young Canadians.

What the NDP finds even more despicable is that opposition members—particularly New Democrats—have introduced a number of meaningful bills to combat obesity in Canada, to improve health and to enhance the lives of Canadians, but the government systematically shut them down.

That is disgraceful. We are, however, pleased to see that the government appears to be taking this seriously. This motion's weakness is that it does not contain anything concrete. I will explain our issues with this motion a little later.

The NDP has repeatedly asked that levels of trans fats and sodium in food be regulated to improve Canadians' diets and fight obesity.

In 2004, my colleague and good friend, the member for Winnipeg Centre, moved a private member's motion to regulate trans fats in food. While the motion was adopted unanimously, the federal government, be it Liberal or Conservative, has not proposed any measures since then, which we find utterly deplorable.

That same member also introduced Bill C-303, which aims to amend the Food and Drugs Act to limit trans fats in food to a maximum of 2 g per 100 g. That clearly shows that the NDP is making meaningful proposals to improve the health of Canadians.

In 2011, the member for Vancouver East, who is also the official opposition's health critic, introduced Bill C-460, which, if passed—and I hope that the Conservatives will walk the talk and support this worthwhile bill—will implement the Sodium Reduction Strategy for Canada, along with other specific measures to improve the health of Canadians.

That same member regularly questioned the health minister about processed food regulations in Canada. She asked why the minister cancelled the plan to reduce levels of trans fats in food and why she ignored those who were calling for limits on sodium levels in food.

I encourage the motion's sponsor to raise his concerns with the Minister of Health. This new minister took over the reins this summer. We hope that she will collaborate more than the previous health minister did.

It is clear that the NDP promotes healthy living and that it is truly a priority for this party.

Another NDP colleague, the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, introduced Bill C-252, which would allow Canadians to deduct from their taxable income all fees paid to participate in a physical activity or amateur sport. That is nothing to scoff at.

In 2005, barely 28% of Canadians over the age of 15 were involved in a sport. This figure comes from Statistics Canada. The rate of participation in a sports activity is especially low among low-income youth and adults. That is why it is important to help families, whether they are members of the middle class or less well off, to be physically active and to improve their health. Ultimately, they will not be a burden to society in terms of health care costs.

● (1805)

What we find to be unfortunate is that barely 7% of Canadians get 60 minutes of physical activity a day according to the 2012 Canada Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth.

The government must do more to ensure that our young people are active and expend energy. Our youth must also eat properly. I was hoping that this motion would have more teeth. I was convinced that because this is a Conservative motion, they would have put their heads together to find a bill that all Conservative members would approve.

As I pointed out a little earlier, the NDP is walking the talk whereas the Conservatives are dragging their feet and are even slashing health transfers to the provinces by \$31 billion. I will be quite honest with them. The provincial and territorial governments will not have any more money to invest in prevention with this \$31 billion cut in health transfers. I find that absurd.

Coming back to my Conservative colleague's motion, in recent decades the prevalence of obesity has drastically increased in Canada. In addition to compromising the health of millions of Canadians, obesity costs Canadians between \$4.6 billion and \$7.1 billion every year. The Conservatives have not established any services to deal with this growing health problem.

What is more, some Canadian health experts estimate that 40,000 obesity-related deaths could be avoided each year if a national obesity prevention strategy were in place to support prevention programs.

The federal government needs to invest more in obesity awareness and prevention services and programs. The NDP has proposed concrete measures to improve the nutritional value of food and promote an active lifestyle. Those are two key factors in preventing obesity.

Unfortunately, the Conservatives, apart from the motion's sponsor, do not care very much about the health of Canadians. Whether it is a question of healthy food choices, promoting an active lifestyle or improving access to timely care, the Conservatives are not living up to the public's expectations.

By cutting funding to programs that facilitate access to adequate housing, a decent income, social inclusion and education, they have exacerbated the risk factors for obesity.

The Conservatives have made unilateral decisions about health that undermine the all-party approach needed to curtail a problem as complex as obesity. That is harming the people who need support to fight the disease and remain healthy.

What we want is clear. Canada's obesity rate is skyrocketing, putting the health of a growing number of Canadians in jeopardy. In recent years, the Conservatives have not stepped up to improve Canadians' health and to provide meaningful, sustained funding for prevention strategies. Instead of moving a motion that only touches on the issue of obesity, why does the government not create a national strategy to actively target this problem that affects the lives of millions of Canadians?

The NDP has always believed in the importance of taking meaningful action to address the health issues affecting Canadians. Although we support Motion No. 425, we believe that it does not do enough to lower the obesity rate in this country, which I think is unfortunate.

NDP members have worked tirelessly to propose meaningful measures to curb obesity. For example, we have suggested limiting the amounts of trans fat and sodium in foods to improve Canadians' diets.

The NDP has been critical of the government's reluctance to regulate processed foods. We also promote an active lifestyle and highlight the importance of prevention.

My speech is nearly done. I think it is truly unfortunate that the government is not doing more overall to promote prevention and to improve Canadians' health. We will support my Conservative colleague's motion. However, when I read the following in the motion: "That, in the opinion of the House, the government should continue to..." I can see that at the end of the day, everything will remain the same.

We are calling on the government to do more and to stop letting the food industry regulate itself. That does not work. We are also calling on the government to create tax credits for physical activity for the least fortunate members of our society. They need it. I hope that the government will take this into consideration.

• (1810)

[English]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, indeed, I am pleased to speak to this motion from the member for Burlington. I welcome and congratulate the member on the motion, or at least most of it. There is one part I want to talk about for a moment. Also, I congratulate him. We all listened to his remarks earlier. I congratulate him on his personal journey getting off the pill, so to speak.

The motion states, "That...the government should continue to". I would agree with my colleague who just spoke that it is really a misrepresentation of the facts to say that "the government...continue to". We see that in a lot of the motions coming forward to committees. The government's record on this issue is pretty dire, so I would say that the government should at least start. However, the points are valid. The motion states:

...(a) recognize the long-term health risks and costs of obesity in Canada; (b) support, promote and fund organizations and individuals who are involved in the

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physical well-being of Canadians; and (c) make the reduction of obesity of Canadians a public health priority.

It is certainly absolutely essential for that to happen.

It is kind of significant that today is called International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, and some would ask why I would say it is important to mention International Day for the Eradication of Poverty in my remarks on a bill that is trying to make the reduction of obesity a public health priority. It is extremely important, because it is a known fact that people who are in poverty tend to buy unhealthy foods. They buy them because they are cheap. They are not as nutritious. There is certainly a connection between poverty and the food choices families make that actually lead to obesity, either at a young age or down the road.

We know that on the issue of poverty, the government is actually increasing poverty in Canada, if the truth be known. We see it in my region with the changes the Conservatives made to employment insurance and so on. However, I would digress if I got into that particular issue. However, I want to make the point that there is a serious connection between poverty and the choice of unhealthy foods that lead to obesity. We should recognize that, and the government should recognize it as well.

This motion is calling on the federal government to make the issue of obesity a public health priority, which we have always supported as a party, as a preventive public health measure. We will support this motion in the hope that the government will take this seriously and move forward on issues such as a sodium reduction plan, which my colleague from Vancouver Centre has talked about many times, and that it will also impose regulations on trans fats and energy drinks, all of which, to date, the Conservatives have refused to act on. They are important issues in terms of a health strategy on foods and obesity.

We all know that obesity is a risk factor for many chronic illnesses, particularly heart disease and diabetes. The member for Burlington spoke substantially about diabetes.

• (1815)

Although a variety of factors contribute to obesity, physical activity and dietary practices help prevent it. I think that is the major thrust of the member's bill and it is certainly a good idea.

We need to look at some of the facts. Obesity rates in Canada have been rising steadily over the last two decades. The rate is now at 25.3%. The north and maritime provinces have the highest obesity rates. British Columbia has the lowest. Children aged 2 to 17 have an obesity rate of 26%, up from 15% in 1979. Youth aged 12 to 17 have a higher rate of 29%. First nations children and youth on and off reserve have a combined obesity rate of 41%.

Those are serious numbers. What I am trying to do is make the point that the member for Burlington's bill is necessary. It is absolutely necessary that the government take this motion very seriously.

Private Members' Business

Obesity has economic costs, including lost productivity and increased costs to our health care system. In our analysis, Canada has an estimated \$15 billion sports, physical activity and recreational infrastructure gap which has prevented the repair or replacement of needed facilities for youth and has contributed to low levels of physical activities among Canadian youth.

I will admit that I am not great at going to the gym or doing physical exercise, but I do walk from the justice building to here which gives me some exercise, and I get some on the farm. I look at my son. When he went through the school system, going to the gym and physical exercise was the thing to do in that time frame, whereas I see going to the gym as a waste of time in mind, which is wrong. However, if my son did not go the gym, it would not be a productive day for him.

That is what we have to instill in young people, that kind of attitude where physical activity is part of their daily life. In that way, it will prevent more costs to our health care system.

Estimates show that obesity results in economic costs of approximately \$7.1 billion annually. That is according to the research we have done. That is lost productivity and further costs to our health care system.

The government should look at this proposal as an investment, not a cost. If we can bring that \$7.1 billion annual cost as a result of obesity down, then that is money well spent. It could be spent in other ways.

I believe the member for Burlington is sincere when he makes the point about the throne speech, this piece of fiction that was read yesterday, about how the government intends to work with the provinces and territories. We will actually believe it when we see it. The federal government has failed to work with the provinces and territories on anything yet, especially on health care issues.

We would hope that with a backbench Conservative member putting forward this motion, the government will take the issue seriously, will move on the obesity question, will support physical exercise and will do something about the other health issues and poverty that I mentioned previously in my remarks.

• (1820)

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague, the marathon-running member for Burlington, has vigorously moved a motion today that goes deep and far in helping Canadians find a way to go from where we are today to becoming the fittest nation on earth. In my remarks I will reinforce what he has told us about the crisis in which we find ourselves today as a nation in terms of the health consequences of the obesity epidemic, and then touch on the economic consequences. Most importantly, I address three audiences today who can unite to reverse the current trend and make us what we can and should be: the fittest nation on earth. Those audiences are fellow parliamentarians, mayors and councillors of our local governments, and most importantly the 35 million people of Canada.

The rates of obesity continue to be high. The most recent Statistics Canada data show that 67% of Canadian men and 54% of Canadian women, ages 18 to 79, are either overweight or obese. Even more concerning is that nearly one in three Canadian youth between the

ages of 5 and 17 fall into these categories. These frightening statistics ought to make us all wake up. Put simply, the root causes of obesity are issues that we Canadians must acknowledge, challenge and defeat. We are not talking about fatness; we are talking about fitness. This is not about cosmetic and subjective commentary about how fashionable we Canadians look. This is about when BMI, body mass index, issues lead to chronic diseases.

Obesity is associated with the increased risk of many chronic diseases, including diabetes and cardiovascular problems. Other related problems are sleep apnea, hypertension, osteoarthritis and certain types of cancers, and these diseases are killers. Every year in Canada 67% of all deaths are caused by four major chronic diseases related sometimes to obesity: cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular problems and chronic respiratory diseases. Afflicted by these things, children are increasingly hit by chronic health problems that used to be confined to adults. Our current youth are likely to be the first generation in history to die of natural causes at an age younger than the age at which their parents died.

The obesity epidemic raised by the member for Burlington today is not just a health peril. It is an economic peril, a major factor in balancing our national budget, in being competitive economically and in being a prosperous nation. We Canadians know instinctively that poor health saps our creativity and productivity. However, we would agree that the numbers deliver a staggering message. Canada's public health agency has put a \$7 billion annual price tag on health care for cardiovascular problems and diabetes arising from obesity. Canadians are concerned about these spiralling health costs, and we must respond. Indirect costs relating to lack of productivity in the workplace could be even larger.

In a comprehensive approach to making Canada the fittest nation on earth, we should not ignore the harmful role of illegal drugs, prescription drugs that are misused and the misuse of legal drugs such as alcohol and tobacco. Canadians were therefore delighted yesterday to hear the Governor General express support in the throne speech for taking significant steps against the misuse of prescription drugs. In conjunction with Michel Perron of the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, the Canadian association of police chiefs and the B.C. association of police chiefs, I have pressed for a national prescription drug drop-off day. Our ministers of public safety and health responded and last year, on May 11, we had our first ever such day to highlight the misuse of prescription drugs. Over three tonnes of unused prescription drugs were collected.

I take great pride in the Orchard Recovery Center from my riding, which spearheaded recovery day in B.C., a day on which brave people publicly highlight their attempts to overcome substance abuse. On its second anniversary, September 8, recovery day had already spread to 18 cities in Canada. I encourage all Canadians to take note and support those in recovery.

We have reached a pivotal moment in our history. In large numbers, we Canadians have lost the way in taking care of ourselves. We must each take that responsibility seriously and encourage others to do the same. While a key to a fit nation starts with personal responsibility, government does have a big role to play and our government has taken strong steps to make a difference.

• (1825)

For example, it was our Conservative government that introduced the children's fitness tax credit, making it easier and more affordable for children to go out and stay active. We built on this success further in budget 2013 through our elimination of tariffs on sports and athletic equipment. Yesterday's throne speech signalled a continuing commitment to turn the tide of obesity in our nation. Standing beside the Minister of Health yesterday, I witnessed first-hand her commitment as she applauded the government's commitment to continue to "work with the provinces and territories and with the private and not-for-profit sectors to encourage young Canadians to be more physically active".

I applaud the health minister's energetic commitment, but she cannot do it alone. It is my dream that each member of Parliament and senator comes to Parliament Hill believing that the promotion of health and fitness is an integral part of our role. As public figures, we may not be athletic and we may not even be fit, but we can demonstrate our commitment to act as role models to improve our own levels of fitness and to encourage our constituents to do the same.

That is why parliamentarians regularly receive a joint invitation from the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, the member for Etobicoke North and me, three members of different parties who together invite parliamentarians to join together to put our stickers in the window for fitness. Come join us for a walk or run each Wednesday at 12:15 at the Centennial Flame or a swim on Thursdays at 6:45 a.m. at the Chateau Laurier. We are privileged that Pierre Lafontaine, CEO of Canadian Interuniversity Sport, and Phil Marsh, senior manager of the Running Room, come out regularly to rally us, totally committed to the concept of making Canada the fittest nation on earth.

In addition to these weekly events, I encourage parliamentarians to help me take to new heights of participation some events that I have introduced, to make a statement to the nation. The third annual Bike Day on the Hill will be May 12 and the third annual National Life Jacket and Swim Day will take place on May 25, events produced with the help of Canadian Tire Jumpstart foundation, Canadian Red Cross, Cycling Canada, the Ottawa Bicycle Club and others.

Parliamentarians, we need to start in our own House first, literally: the House of Commons and the Senate. Each of us is a mini-minister of health, there to support the minister herself. In this Olympic year and following the legacy of 2010, I invite every member to join me

and our colleagues on Wednesdays and Thursdays to help make Canada the fittest nation on earth.

Our Conservative government has developed a pattern of investing in community projects like sports arenas and fitness centres to encourage healthy living and active lifestyles, including many in the riding I represent. I now ask the mayors and town councillors across the nation how we can, as parliamentarians, work with them to leverage their marvellous community facilities to work together to make Canada the fittest nation on earth.

It is local governments that own and maintain many of the key infrastructures. It is local governments that create programs to involve people in their communities to participate together to become more physically active. We chose the first Saturday in June to be National Health and Fitness Day, when many local governments are already committed to opening their summer facilities for the first time.

I invite all of my colleagues, in both houses, to join with Canadians and approach mayors and councillors across Canada to take part in this growing movement. Ask the communities to mark the day in some way, be it reduced-cost admission to a recreation centre, two-for-one swim time, a demonstration of nutritional cooking or a walk or bike ride for seniors. There is no need for NHFD to be a cost centre. It can be a marketing campaign that produces revenue for each participating municipality.

His Excellency the Governor General participated in National Health and Fitness Day, offering kick-off remarks for Ottawa events and demonstrating considerable prowess on his bicycle.

I have tabled a private member's bill, Bill C-443, to formalize National Health and Fitness Day. I am please to say it has support from 20 members of all parties.

As I bring my remarks to a close, I ask all of our fellow countrymen and countrywomen what we can do to respond to the obesity epidemic. First, we must recognize the key aspect played by the root causes of obesity and that is the lack of participation in healthy physical activity. Second, we need to join together to encourage each other, to encourage our mayors and councillors. Why not set that lofty goal to go on to become the fittest nation on earth?

• (1830)

[Translation]

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my distinct honour to embark on this delayed return to the House in keeping with the guiding principles that have directed my interventions since I first entered federal politics.

Private Members' Business

There is an underlying theme to my interventions in the House. I make a point of lifting the veil of secrecy that shrouds the lifestyle and realities of Canada's northern communities. Since I myself hail from a community north of the 52nd parallel, I am in a position to make known a host of variables and realities that are too often hidden from public view.

Given all that, in the context of this motion on preventing obesity, I will shed light on many issues related to the overabundance of processed foods in northern regions.

It takes me 14 hours to get home from Ottawa. Powerful lobby groups can afford to sell products at a loss in communities. The distance means that extra costs are associated with transportation, hence the loss. I am thinking of pop and chips, which are abundant in communities that are otherwise quite poor both economically and nutritionally.

In other words, people in many of these communities, such as Pakuashipi and Saint-Augustin, have no choice but to buy their food at convenience stores. There are aboriginal communities, but the same is true for the coasters and non-aboriginals who live in these communities. Often the convenience store is the only store in the community.

Most of us have been in convenience stores, and we have probably noticed that processed foods are usually displayed at children's eye level. Three-year-olds who go to convenience stores or bigger stores with their parents get an eyeful of chips, pop and chocolate bars. That is marketing. That is all business. Future consumers are being trained early. Companies make sure that children develop addictions to sugar and processed foods.

The motion before us focuses on the social costs of Canada's alarming obesity rate. One of my colleagues mentioned that health care costs amount to \$7 billion per year. Obesity costs us billions of dollars—\$7 billion according to my colleague.

Obesity increases the risk of developing a number of chronic diseases, including cardiovascular, liver and gall bladder disease. Liver and gall bladder disease are very prevalent among northerners.

I will speak to this point right away. Many children in these communities are confronted by this reality at a very young age. The number of people who die as a result of cirrhosis of the liver, which is a rather violent and slow death, is ongoing, visible and part of daily life. Cirrhosis of the liver is often related to the overconsumption of alcoholic products. I spoke about the processed foods lobby, but the alcoholic beverage lobby is very present in these communities. In short, when we talk about the cost of obesity, we must not overlook this aspect.

For members' information, when a person dies of cirrhosis of the liver, the mattress is collected along with the body. Children are exposed to adversity at a very young age and it becomes routine. I do not want to use the word "mundane", but that is what it boils down to. It is part of the reality of these remote communities, which are in a vacuum.

Obesity can result in cardiovascular, liver and gall bladder diseases, strokes, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, certain

cancers—such as endometrial, breast and colon cancer—sleep apnea and respiratory difficulties.

Diabetes is another very worrisome problem in these communities. It results in a gradual and slow death. I often talk about children because they are confronted by this reality. For example, they may have a family member who has a number of amputations, starting first with a leg. We know once amputation is required, death soon follows. In fact, I have not seen many cases where a person with diabetes undergoes an amputation and then lives for many years afterwards.

● (1835)

It is a matter of months after the amputation. In short, this is related to products high in sodium, sugar and carbohydrates, as well as processed foods.

When I was talking about overabundance, these lobbies and the processed food industry, the junk food industry, all make sure they are everywhere in remote communities. In fact, this is clearly reflected in the garbage and empty chip bags in these communities.

Children enjoy considerable freedom in some communities. When they have a few dollars, their first impulse is obviously to get a bag of chips. We can easily calculate the sodium and calories involved. Just as an alcoholic can simply drink to live and give up solid food, it is also possible to live almost exclusively on chips and soft drinks and have an almost balanced diet. This is not quite the case, but some children with little or no supervision can turn to a diet based almost exclusively on fast food.

When I talk about fast food, I am also including TV dinners, which can be put in the microwave for 3.3 minutes and are very high in sodium and trans fats.

Given these facts, we can only welcome any initiative aiming to educate Canadians on this issue, while at the same time encouraging a dialogue to curb obesity in our country.

For the members' information, I will provide the ugly statistics. In Canada, obesity rates are particularly high among aboriginal populations. It is estimated that 26.4% of aboriginal youth and 36% of aboriginal adults living on reserve are obese. These figures are applicable to all the people in Canada's far north, or at least north of the 50th parallel. As I mentioned earlier, for example among coasters, the convenience store is often the only place to buy food for the family. However, what they find is an overabundance of chips and soft drinks.

This is a shame. When I was going door to door during the summer, my experience and my life in remote communities taught me that the two-litre Pepsi or two-litre bottle of pop, not to name any companies, is still on every table. The choice is very simple. A community at the 52nd parallel has to choose between paying sometimes \$6 for a two-litre carton of milk—it must be much more expensive at the 55th—or 99 cents for a two-litre bottle of pop in July. That is a problem.

Private Members' Business

When the UN rapporteur, Mr. De Schutter, came here to Ottawa last year, I made sure I gave him a certain photograph. For any of my colleagues who wish to see it, I still have it on my phone. The photograph shows that in July, in Uashat, a community that is very far away, two litres of pop cost 99¢. Other products, like two litres of Perrier, are a lot more expensive, so the choice is pretty simple.

This brings about certain questions and some very legitimate concerns regarding the pervasive nature and real power of those lobby groups. This government also needs to examine its conscience. Clearly, some of these powerful lobby groups have an attentive ear, and it is appalling that the Canadian government is willing to put economic interests first rather than improve the health and well-being of all Canadians, especially considering the social costs associated with poor nutrition.

Implementing the Conservative corporatist agenda and the government's gradual withdrawal of programs promoting access to

adequate housing, social inclusion and education have exacerbated the risk factors that lead to obesity.

Now, there is a lack of political will to regulate industrial practices. I am talking about industrial practices in the broad sense, but it is more obvious in the case of prepared foods. The government has a laissez-faire attitude. The entire industry pretty much has free will, but the costs associated with our health care system having to take care of people with serious health problems related to poor nutrition must be reassessed and that requires a collective awareness.

I submit this respectfully.

● (1840)

The Deputy Speaker: As it is now 6:39 p.m., this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:39 p.m.)

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