



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

# House of Commons Debates

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OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)

**Thursday, September 27, 2012**

—

**Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer**

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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, September 27, 2012

The House met at 10 a.m.

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*Prayers*

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

### HOUSE OF COMMONS

**The Speaker:** I have the honour to lay upon the table the report, “Strategic Outlook for the 41st Parliament”, of the House of Commons administration.

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### CRIMINAL CODE

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-444, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (personating peace officer or public officer).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce a bill to amend the Criminal Code, which would establish personating a peace officer for the purpose of committing another offence to be considered by a court to be an aggravating circumstance. I introduced this bill in the previous Parliament and received support from all parties, but Parliament dissolved before it could be read a third time. I am confident that members of this House will also see the merit of this important amendment.

My bill seeks to preserve the trust and respect for authority that we have for police officers and to increase penalties for those who breach this trust to cause harm.

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

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### PETITIONS

#### PENSIONS

**Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of the constituents of Random—Burin—St. George's. They are calling on the government to reverse a decision to raise the age for receipt of OAS from 65 to 67 years. I hear repeatedly everywhere I go in my riding and throughout the province that this is not acceptable. It is going to impose a hardship on our seniors. Those who have given so

much to all of us are asking that the government consider that and reverse this decision.

#### CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

**Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the members of my riding of Davenport in Toronto who continue to express concern over Bill C-31. This petition calls for the reversal of some of the more egregious elements of that bill.

#### THE ENVIRONMENT

**Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have another petition on behalf of Canadians from coast to coast to coast who have grave concerns over the cutting of Canada's Experimental Lakes Area. There are hundreds upon hundreds of signatures on this one petition.

#### ABORTION

**Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am proud to present a petition on behalf of constituents who note that Canada is the only country in the western world, in the company of China and North Korea, without laws restricting abortion. My constituents call on Parliament to do as the Supreme Court suggested be done many years ago, which is to enact abortion legislation that restricts abortion to the greatest extent possible.

#### KATIMAVIK

**Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have petitions from coast to coast to coast, from Halifax, Toronto, Calgary, all the way through to the west coast and into the north. The petitioners are calling upon the Government of Canada to reverse the ill-timed and shortsighted decision to cut funding to the Katimavik youth program that had helped unite Canadian youth from right across the country in a spirit of great pride for Canada. The government's decision to cut this \$11 million program seems more out of spite than out of reason, as the petitioners note.

#### CANADA-EUROPEAN UNION FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

**Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed mostly by my constituents who are concerned about the effect of the Canada-European comprehensive economic and trade agreement on farmers. They are concerned that it might force them to use genetically modified seed. They are concerned about the dangers inherent in genetically modified foods. They are also worried about multinationals that are using CETA to take control of our food supply.

*Government Orders*

## THE ENVIRONMENT

**Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by many residents of my riding of Winnipeg Centre. They call upon the Government of Canada to save the Experimental Lakes Area, Canada's leading freshwater research station. Many of the signatories actually work at the ELA and live in my riding. They are calling upon the government to recognize the importance of the ELA and the Government of Canada's mandate to study, preserve and protect its aquatic ecosystems, to reverse the decision to close the ELA research station and continue to staff and provide financial resources to the ELA at the current or higher level of commitment.

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**QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER**

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

**The Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[English]***HELPING FAMILIES IN NEED ACT**

The House resumed from September 26 consideration of the motion that Bill C-44, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code and the Employment Insurance Act and to make consequential amendments to the Income Tax Act and the Income Tax Regulations, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

**Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-44. This is a bill that we support at second reading because obviously this is an issue of helping families. It is not a question of ideology or partisan politics; it is about helping families in their time of need.

As members well know, Bill C-44 would amend the Canada Labour Code, the Employment Insurance Act, the Income Tax Act and the income tax regulations to allow workers to take leave and draw EI in the event of their child's serious illness, disappearance or death due to crime. These are all very serious and challenging circumstances which unfortunately too many Canadian families are dealing with.

It goes without saying that we agree with supporting families in their time of exceptional need and at a time when there is suffering and trauma going on in a family. However, I do want to remind the House that during the 2011 election campaign the Conservatives campaigned on a promise to fund this measure from general revenue and not the EI fund.

We note that the grant for the parents of murdered and missing children would be paid from general revenue. That is what is being proposed here. However, it appears that the Conservatives have ignored their own campaign promise, in that the benefits to be paid to the parents of critically ill children will not be paid through general revenue but will be paid through EI.

This is by far the more costly of the benefits because of the number of people involved. This is at a time when the cumulative deficit for the EI fund is at \$9 billion. This is at a time when we have a sluggish economy, persistent exceptionally high unemployment in Canada, and sadly at a time when the government has been attacking and rolling back the benefits to which Canadian families can have access. That is extremely problematic.

The Conservatives are making this proposal at a time when more than half of Canadians who are unemployed cannot access EI benefits. That is simply unacceptable. New Democrats will continue to fight for an EI system that is fair, accessible and available to Canadians right across this country in their time of need.

I do remember some years back when the Conservatives also agreed with that. At one point in time they had called unemployment insurance, as it was called at that time, the best adjustment program that we have in this country. It is an adjustment program that is necessary during periods of downturn in the economy, but also during periods of great economic change in our society.

New Democrats have spoken many times in this House about the deindustrialization that is taking place under the watch of the current government and the previous government. We have seen hundreds of thousands of good-paying manufacturing jobs leave this country. Far too many people ultimately do not get access to EI benefits. They end up in jobs that are very low paying, contract or temporary positions, and face a dramatic decline in their standard of living.

The EI system was designed to help working people during these periods of adjustment in a changing economy. What has been so grossly unfair is that the current government and the previous Liberal government plundered tens of billions of dollars out of the EI fund to balance the books. The money in the EI fund was paid by workers and employers across the country and ought to have been available to people in their time of need when they faced unemployment.

● (1010)

Today we are left with this legacy of more than half of unemployed workers not being able to access benefits. We have a deficit in the fund, and benefits have been reduced. I want to make the point that further tapping into this fund for a new benefit, which is in complete contradiction to the Conservatives' campaign pledge, is simply not acceptable. Of course we do support the principle of helping Canadian families in their time of need.

There are many tragic stories of Canadian families that have been affected by the critical illness of a child or children who have been victims of very serious crimes, including murder.

*Government Orders*

Recently I spoke with a constituent in my riding of Parkdale—High Park in Toronto, a mother who is a strong community activist. She lives in Toronto community housing, so it is a family of limited means. This woman is a single parent and her only child, her son, was walking in broad daylight on a Saturday afternoon and was the victim of a drive-by shooting. Fortunately for all concerned, this 15-year-old man survived, but the bullet went through his abdomen. He was severely injured. He remains at home. He has been completely traumatized by this incident. He will have a permanent disability as a result of his injuries. This is through no fault of his own. By all accounts from people in the community, he is a good kid who does well in school and helps out in the neighbourhood, but he was the victim of a random crime in his neighbourhood.

It is frightening. I am a parent of three sons, and I imagine that could happen to children anywhere in this country. The woman said that because her son has been so traumatized, he has not been able to return to school. They are being forced to move not only out of the Toronto community housing building, but they are looking to move out of Toronto because her son has been so traumatized. He does not want to go out of their apartment. He is afraid to go to the window because he fears for his life.

This is one example. We get a sense of what some families are dealing with because, through no fault of their own, they have been victims of crime. We support the goal of assisting families in their time of need, whether it is a child who has been a victim of crime or whether it is a child who is critically ill. This means parents have to take time off work. In some cases they have to travel some distance to deal with the crisis they are facing.

We have difficulty with imposing more costs on the EI system at a time when this fund is already stressed, at a time when more than half of unemployed workers cannot claim the benefits for which they have paid and to which they ought to be entitled.

I hope that we can have a good debate about the best way to implement this goal of helping Canadian families. I hope the government will take the opportunity to consider constructive proposals to make the bill better so that it serves the needs of families in crisis, but also does not negatively impact the far too many Canadian workers, more than one million, who are unemployed.

● (1015)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her excellent speech, which was very interesting.

Everyone here today agrees that this bill can help families who have been the victims of various tragic situations. That is why it is important to support this bill at second reading.

However, as the hon. member also mentioned, several aspects of it are less attractive. Specifically, when the Conservatives promised to introduce this measure, it was supposed to be paid for out of general revenue. But now we see that the money will be taken from the employment insurance fund.

Does the hon. member believe that this is the right thing to do? Employees and employers pay into the employment insurance fund, although the government stopped paying into it around 1995; the

government no longer invests a single cent in that fund. Does the member believe that taking money from the EI fund is the right way to go about this?

[*English*]

**Ms. Peggy Nash:** Mr. Speaker, I share the member's goal of wanting to help families in need. Right now, fewer than 4 in 10 unemployed Canadians are getting EI benefits. This is an historic low in this country at a time of tremendous economic transition. We see massive deindustrialization of the manufacturing heartland in this country. It is a disgrace that we are losing our manufacturing and economic powerhouse in central Canada. Yet, as working people go through this transition, they are losing one of the anchors of benefits to help them transition to other kinds of employment.

So, while I share his agreement with the goal of the bill, the measures, as they are proposed, do not coincide with an election promise of the government. We believe they would be problematic, not just for the families for whom these benefits are intended, but for all Canadians who today or in future hope to get employment insurance.

● (1020)

**Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am glad that a bill has been introduced in this House to support families in their time of need.

I have been hearing about a bigger issue from my constituents over the last number of months. A number of cases have come into my office where the constituents are having difficulty getting their EI cheques on time. This is a bridging time for them. When they lose a job, they need that money in order to bridge to the next job.

Would the member for Parkdale—High Park talk about the constituents in her riding who have had difficulty getting their EI cheques?

**Ms. Peggy Nash:** Mr. Speaker, to dig down a bit deeper into these statistics, there are more than 870,000 unemployed Canadians who are not getting EI. Even those who qualify for EI are having a terrible time trying to get access to benefits, just as he said.

I had people in my office, in tears, before the holidays last December, because they kept getting this awful voice mail system and no one ever got back to them. They could never get to speak to a real person. There were people whose claims were refused pro forma. If they had had the chance to speak to a real person and to clarify their claim, we know that, in the majority of cases, they would have received their benefits right away. It was a terribly stressful time for people.

And it still exists today. We have seen cutbacks of the staff who process EI claims. Increasingly, people are forced into an automated system that they are not familiar with, resulting in people who ought to be entitled to benefits not getting those benefits.

*Government Orders*

We agree with helping families who are in traumatic circumstances because of their children. However, we also believe in an employment insurance system that works for all Canadians who are unemployed and need that bridging benefit.

**Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Labour, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am very happy today to rise in the House and express my strong support for Bill C-44, the helping families in need act.

As Canada's Minister of Labour, my focus is on the Canadian workplace. I think and I hope this act would be welcomed by both workers and employers because it brings support to families at a time when they need it most. As members know, supporting working families is a priority for this federal government. There is no more important time to do that than when parents are grieving the loss of their child, dealing with the disappearance of their child, or caring for their critically ill child. That is why this bill intends to amend the Canada Labour Code to create a new unpaid leave to address the needs of parents who are faced with this kind of unthinkable hardship.

Working parents face a lot of pressures. Parenthood can be a challenging time. Careful planning and organizing can certainly help, but a bit of bad luck can throw all that careful planning and organizing out the window. Some scenarios for parents are predictable and can be handled with ease. If someone has a common cold, that affects the whole family; a school can close because of a snowstorm; or there may be an injury requiring basic medical care. These situations can pretty much be expected by parents. I am sure most of us have dealt with these things and can relate.

However, there are scenarios that parents cannot foresee or even imagine. Heaven forbid the doctor telling parents that their child has something much more serious than a cold or the flu. Suddenly, they find themselves in the hospital keeping vigil over a little person who has been hooked up to tubes and wires. At a time like that, do they think about the emails they have not answered or the deadlines they have missed at work? They do not. Unfortunately, though, the world does not stop while they are dealing with their child's illness. The bills keep coming in even if they have taken a leave of absence from work. They still need to eat, heat their house, and put gas in their car. Indeed, they may likely have extra expenses to cover because their child is in the hospital.

Then there is the anguish that parents feel when a child is missing, possibly the victim of crime. What if the unthinkable happens and the parents' worst fears are confirmed and they are told that their child will never be coming home? As a mother, I cannot even imagine the pain that a parent can feel at that time and my heart goes out to those in these terrible situations.

These are situations that, as parents, we never want to be faced with.

I am glad that our government can offer these families more than just sympathy. We can also give them financial help. Canadians told our government that existing EI benefits are inadequate for the parents of critically ill children and we listened. They told us that parents of missing or murdered children need more assistance and we saw that they were right. We were also told that people on parental leave sometimes fall ill and they need to be able to access EI

sickness benefits so we took action. That is why in Bill C-44 the federal government has launched important new initiatives.

I will give a brief overview of the initiatives in general and then I will focus on the impact that these changes would have on the Canada Labour Code.

On April 20, 2012, the Prime Minister announced our government's intent to offer a federal income support for parents of murdered and missing children. Every year, approximately 100 children in Canada die as the result of a Criminal Code offence such as homicide or aggravated assault, and 1,100 children are reported missing as a result of abduction. Parents who lose a child to illness or injury must make many end-of-life decisions, including arranging a funeral. However, parents of murdered or missing children must also deal with uncertainty, sometimes for an extended period of time. They are involved with the police and with the courts. These are not quick processes. Currently, parents of murdered or missing children have access to limited financial assistance. The victims fund reimburses expenses incurred by Canadians who are victims of crime abroad. In addition, the RCMP's travel/reunification program provides free transportation to reunite a parent with a child who was abducted by the other parent.

● (1025)

Parents who are sick due to the emotional trauma related to the death or disappearance of their child and are unable to work for this reason may also be entitled to up to 15 weeks of employment insurance sickness benefits.

However, once implemented, the new federal income support will be a substantial improvement. It will provide payments of \$350 per week for up to 35 weeks in a one year period to parents of children under 18 who have gone missing or have died as a result of a suspected Criminal Code offence. This income support program is expected to be operational by January 1, 2013.

I have a few words to say about the provincial benefits. Parents whose child has died or is missing as a result of a suspected Criminal Code offence have varying levels of support across the country when they take time off work. All provinces, except Newfoundland and Labrador and the territories, provide varying degrees of compensation and financial assistance for victims of crime, which may include parents of murdered or missing children. For example, Nova Scotia provides a maximum of \$4,000 for counselling expenses, whereas Manitoba has a more comprehensive program with no maximum amount. This new federal income support will complement these initiatives and will help lessen the burden on parents.

*Government Orders*

Parents of critically ill children will also get more help. Under the existing legislation, working parents may be eligible under some circumstances for up to six weeks of EI compassionate care benefits if their child is so sick that he or she is in danger of dying in the following 26 weeks. However, the current criteria for medical eligibility excludes many parents from qualifying for support under this compassionate care benefit, even though their child may be critically ill and in significant need of care. Therefore, on August 7, 2012, the Prime Minister announced our government's intention to bring forward legislative changes to the Employment Insurance Act to address this issue.

Through this bill, we are making these changes and we are creating a new EI benefit for parents of critically ill children. This new benefit will provide up to 35 weeks of temporary income support to eligible parents who take leave from work to care for a critically ill or injured child. This income supplement is expected to be available to claimants in June 2013.

In the face of overwhelming difficulties, such as a child who is missing or critically ill, I think employers understand that employees may need to take time off work. Employers recognize that workers who are simply exhausted or are under stress because of these personal challenges are a lot less likely to be attentive and certainly less productive. I am sure most employers would be relieved if they knew that their employees were getting a basic income while they lived through such challenging times and that at least some of the financial stress was lessened.

Workers who can get the time they need to recover from a crisis are more likely to return to work and to return in a better state of mind. Therefore, parents who take leave from their job to care for a critically ill child or to deal with the murder or disappearance of a child often have two additional worries on top of their pressing crisis: first, they worry that their money will run out; and second, they worry that their job will disappear while they are away from work and focused on their child.

Our government's position is clear: No employee should have to worry about losing his or her job when dealing with a traumatic experience like the death, disappearance or serious illness of a child. That is why we have proposed through Bill C-44 to amend part III of the Canada Labour Code to give employees in federally-regulated workplaces the right to take unpaid leave if they find themselves in one of those unfortunate situations.

For parents of a critically ill child, the Canada Labour Code will be amended to provide job protection for up to 37 weeks, for parents of murdered children the amendments will provide job protection for up to 104 weeks, and for parents of a missing child for 52 weeks.

For employees in other jurisdictions, the Canada Labour Code protection may vary. Therefore, I do hope that other provincial and territorial governments will follow our lead and amend their respective labour laws to protect the jobs of parents of murdered or missing children and critically ill children. That way these parents will also be able to benefit from these new Government of Canada income support measures while knowing that their jobs are protected by their specific jurisdiction.

● (1030)

Employees would not be required or expected to take the maximum time allowed but it will be there if they need it. These measures will support federally regulated employees to take time off work in various scenarios. Should they require time to grieve, to address the severe psychological impact of the death of their child, to attend judicial proceedings or just to deal with psychological shock, the provisions will be available in the Canada Labour Code.

This legislation can only have a positive impact on workers in a great time of need. The measures in the bill will give Canadians a greater sense of security. We need to do everything we can to treat workers facing a personal crisis with compassion. I know employers will support these measures because they will be of crucial importance to the workers who need them.

I thank hon. members for their support of the bill. I trust that we will do the right thing and we will support the bill.

● (1035)

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, one of my concerns is a little outside this particular bill but it is still relevant in terms of the need to look at employment insurance and how we support individuals who might need some form of compassionate care. I am thinking of parents, siblings or a spouse who need to have a family member at their side, especially in terminal care cases.

To what degree is the government prepared to expand those types of compassionate benefits to those individuals? It is something that I and many members of the Liberal caucus talked a great deal about in the last campaign. To what degree is the government prepared to entertain those types of progressive moves?

**Hon. Lisa Raitt:** Mr. Speaker, we are focusing on supporting families and helping them balance their work and their family responsibilities. We are narrowing in on these very difficult circumstances that parents face much to their surprise and much to their sadness.

These amendments would allow us to offer new support measures to Canadian families at a time when they need them the most, and we have identified these periods of time: when a child is missing because of a Criminal Code offence, when a child has died because of a Criminal Code offence and if a child is critically ill. Those things are there to supplement what we currently have in place. We are very proud of the legislation that we have brought forward.

However, we always end up listening to our stakeholders and the Canadian public because we do extensive consultations. I am sure many people have indicated to the minister improvements that could be made, but at this point in time this is exactly what we are delivering on and this is what we said we would do for parents and families. That is exactly why we brought the bill to the House.

*Government Orders*

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the one thing that probably unites everyone in the House is that we have all met the mother who has told us about her child who is suffering from cancer treatments and that her EI will not cover her expenses. We have all had to deal with the bureaucracy. We have all had to deal with the fact that mothers like this have been falling through a black hole. I am glad that all members of the House recognize the need to provide that bridging.

The original promise had been to take the money out of general revenues. I am not opposing the principle but with the pressure on EI right now, with over 1.3 million unemployed, should we be looking at another way to augment this so that the EI fund that is already in deficit is not put in a worse position?

**Hon. Lisa Raitt:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's support on the matter because it is the right thing for us to do.

With respect to the technicalities of the general revenue fund versus the EI fund, the reality is that we are here to support families. We have various tools that enable us to do so. It is appropriate that we look to the workplace because that is exactly what we are dealing with. We are dealing with a workplace issue. We want to ensure we protect an employee's ability to go back to work and that his or her job is secure. We want to ensure we provide employees with a basic level of income so they can continue to do what they should be doing and that is looking after their child or helping with respect to murdered or missing children.

**Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this is a good bill in a way but it is only a baby step.

The minister said that the Conservative government was listening to groups and to people. However, I previously introduced a bill in the House that dealt with individuals with cancer and changing the weeks for EI from 15 weeks to 50 weeks. Many times it takes that long for an individual on chemotherapy to be cured.

If the government had been listening to these groups, whether it is the Canadian Cancer Society, Heart and Stroke Foundation or the Diabetes Association, it would know that these people need more than 15 weeks. We need to give them 50 weeks. Time and time again it has been shown in other countries that if we help people through that bridge, they become more productive citizens and do not fall through the cracks.

I would like the minister to comment on my bill. If she is listening to these groups of people, is she hearing what I am hearing?

• (1040)

**Hon. Lisa Raitt:** Mr. Speaker, being a parent of a critically ill child there are all kinds of different timing issues. There are all kinds of different illnesses that could happen, quite frankly.

I am very pleased today with respect to Bill C-44 because in this place we have agreed that this is something we should do. I am very happy that as parliamentarians we are moving in the right direction.

I hear the member when he says that he would like to see more. The EI special benefits for parents of critically ill children is a new 35-week benefit that will be on top of the 6 weeks that are already available under the EI compassionate care benefit. That is approximately 41 weeks available to parents in cases where the

child is critically ill. It is certainly better than what they currently have. The reality is that we have listened to what is needed out there and this is the appropriate measure that we are introducing today.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am almost moved by the minister's comments, because I know what she is talking about. I had a child who was lying in a hospital bed, hooked up to tubes. I understand her intention, but I have to wonder if the minister realizes that it is still employment insurance, which has been compromised by cuts, that is supposed to handle these files, which, by definition, are extremely complex.

People who go through these terrible experiences have no desire to confide in a voice mail system or go online to fill out a bunch of forms. I wonder how people will react when they have to go through 12 steps in an automated menu just to be told to leave a message.

That is the only aspect about this bill that worries me.

[*English*]

**Hon. Lisa Raitt:** Mr. Speaker, the men and women who work for Service Canada are professionals who do an excellent job of delivering the benefits, answering questions and helping people with the forms. As a result, I have great confidence in their ability to administer and deliver this program in a compassionate way.

We were all children once. Whether we are all parents is irrelevant. We all certainly want what is best for kids and parents who are struggling at that point in time.

With respect to EI itself, as I stated in my remarks, this is a measure, I believe, as Minister of Labour, and having great contact with the federal private sector workplace, that employers and workers will embrace and appreciate. Those are the ones who pay into the EI fund. I have great confidence that they know it is the right thing to do and it is the right place to deal with it.

**Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, could the hon. minister clarify something I am still not clear about after the technical briefing last night.

I understand that, in the amending statute, the Canada Labour Code will reflect the fact that jobs are protected in the case of missing or murdered children. However, I was told last night that the grant itself is not in the amending bill and will not appear in the statute. It will be a grant.

I am wondering if she happens to know where in the system that grant would come from. Will there be regulations. Is it simply a policy of some sort? I am just wondering about tracing the trail of the money on this.

**Hon. Lisa Raitt:** Mr. Speaker, as indicated already, the new grant is a taxable income support grant. It would be available January 1, 2013, and provide \$350 per week for up to 35 weeks for parents of murdered or missing children.



*Government Orders*

We estimate, because of the thousand families who are expected to benefit from this new measure, a yearly cost of approximately \$10 million. The grant would be funded through general revenues.

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Newton—North Delta.

New Democrats will be supporting Bill C-44, an act to amend the Canada Labour Code and the Employment Insurance Act and to make consequential amendments to the Income Tax Act and the income tax regulations. In part, what Bill C-44 would do is make a number of amendments to the Canada Labour Code to expand leaves of absence available to parents. The bill would allow for the extension of maternity and parental leave by the number of weeks that a child is hospitalized during a leave. It would allow for the extension of parental leave by the amount of sick leave taken during a parental leave, as well as for participation in the Canadian Reserve Forces. It would grant an unpaid leave of absence of up to 37 weeks for parents of critically ill children, 104 weeks for parents whose children have been murdered as a result of a crime, and 52 weeks for parents of children who have disappeared as a result of a crime. It would extend the period of unpaid absence due to illness or injury up to 17 weeks, without fear of layoff.

These changes would apply to workers in federally regulated industries only, but it is hoped that the provinces would make similar changes to their own labour code as happened when compassionate care benefits were introduced.

New Democrats are supporting the bill, but hopefully at committee there will be an opportunity for some exchange about how the bill could be enhanced.

One of the pieces that came up when the member for Hamilton Mountain spoke in the House about the bill was the fact that the Conservatives actually changed their approach to this. I want to quote from her speech. She said:

While support for these parents is important, and frankly, long overdue, I am concerned that parents are only eligible if they worked a minimum of 600 insurable hours over the past year. More than anything, this raises a question for me of whether the EI program is the best vehicle for delivering this parental support.

I would point out that at one time the government agreed with me. As recently as 2011 the Conservative Party platform read, "Funding for this measure will come from general revenue, not EI premiums". The Conservatives were right to adopt that approach.

Whether one is a waged worker, a senior manager, a professional, or a stay-at-home parent, the devastation of a critically ill child is the same. All Canadians who find themselves caring for their seriously ill child are incurring a myriad of expenses that go beyond lost wages, and they all deserve our support.

That is a very important point, because we all know that sometimes family members are not in the waged economy. A child may become ill and there is very little support for families who are not in paid employment. Therefore, although this measure is a good step, it does not look at the larger picture.

I heard the Minister of Labour talk about the fact that there is an expectation, a hope, a wish that provincial governments would line up and make amendments to their labour codes because this only deals with federally regulated workers. I would like to quote from an article in *Moneyville*, entitled "New EI benefits for parents of sick kids won't protect jobs". It highlights the challenges that we have,

and I will talk a bit more about jurisdiction issues on another matter. It states:

Prime Minister Harper's recent announcement of up to 35 weeks of Employment Insurance benefits for parents of critically ill children beginning in June 2013 is laudable. However, unless parallel changes to provincial labour standards are made, parents who are off work to care for sick children may not have a job to go back to.

Since 2004, Canadians have had access to up to six weeks of Compassionate Care Benefits from EI after a two-week waiting period if they have to be away from work temporarily to provide care or support to a family member who is gravely ill...

However, few employees have applied for EI Compassionate Care Benefits and Ontario's Family Medical Leave because to be eligible for both, claimants need a doctor's certificate that the patient they are caring for has a specified, serious medical condition with a significant risk of death occurring within six months. This has been a particular problem for parents with seriously ill children.

On that point, there has actually been very little uptake on that six weeks of compassionate leave because of a very complicated set of reasons. Part of it has been this almost requirement that families give up hope that their loved one will recover. For many people, at one time when a diagnosis was given it may well have been a death sentence. With improvements in medical care that are now available, people do recover.

• (1045)

Part of the challenge with the uptake on that compassionate leave piece was the fact that it was acknowledging that the person or the child was going to die. Therefore, there is a need for more latitude and discretion around what serious illness is. Hopefully that will also be clarified.

The article goes on to say:

It is also important to recognize that [the government's] recent announcement does nothing to correct the fatal flaw in the EI Compassionate Care Benefits program as it applies to non-parents who need time to care for ailing loved ones. If the federal government is serious about offering support to family caregivers, the requirement for medical certification of imminent death should also be eliminated so non-parents can more readily claim up to the six weeks of compassionate care benefits currently available.

Mr. Speaker, I know that you have done a tremendous amount of work around the issue of palliative care and recognize how important it is sometimes for non-parents to provide support for somebody who is seriously ill.

Many of us in the House have aging parents. I am blessed that my mother is very healthy, but a few years ago my father was diagnosed with terminal cancer. There was no way for family members to support him other than to take unpaid time off work.

It is very important with our aging population and other changes happening in our society that we recognize that non-parents are often caregivers and need to be recognized in this legislation.

*Government Orders*

I want to briefly touch on the jurisdictional issue. Again, we have heard that the government is hopeful the provinces will step up and be part of this granting of leave for compassionate reasons and to care for somebody who is seriously ill.

A number of years ago I was fortunate enough to introduce Jordan's principle in the House, which was a direct result of a critically ill child and jurisdictional issues. I want to quote from this article on Jordan's principle:

Very often it is the harmless innocents that get caught in these jurisdictional black holes and in this case it was a baby from Norway House, Man., named Jordan. He was born in 1999 with a serious genetic and medical condition. It soon became apparent that he would have to be placed in long-term care. After two years the medical staff determined he could be released from the hospital and sent to a special foster-care home. Unfortunately he got caught between competing bureaucracies. The provincial and federal governments quarrelled over who should pay for his care. The tragic outcome was that Jordan spent two more years in hospital and died before there was any resolution. Following Jordan's tragic life and death there was an outcry from the First Nations community and front-line health workers. The result was the drafting of a statement of principle that put the child first when it comes to funding and jurisdictional disputes. It's called "Jordan's principle" in his honour.

In the case of critically ill children, I would argue that at times it could be a stretch to hope that the provincial governments will come to the table with what the federal government has offered. In Ontario there has been some movement around the granting of compassionate leave, but just to assume that all provinces will come to the table and grant this leave under their own labour codes so that non-federally regulated workers are included might be a bit of a pipe dream.

Jordan's principle was passed in the House five or six years ago but we have still not seen the present federal government moving to take leadership and make sure that children and their families actually do come first. I remain to be convinced that this is going to work.

We have seen the Conservative government tinker with parts of the Employment Insurance Act and disregard some of the very serious deficiencies. I heard a member talk about the lack of resources. This is not about the good front-line workers in employment insurance. They are doing what they can, but they cannot cope with the volume. This is not about the fact that only 40% of workers actually qualify to collect employment insurance. It is not about the fact that there has not been significant changes in the amount of money that people are being paid as our economy has continued to stagger.

Although we welcome this bill and think that it is an appropriate thing to do, I urge the government to take a look at why it is that Canadians who have paid into this fund simply cannot collect benefits in this day and age.

• (1055)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my colleague's speech, and I would like to congratulate her.

She spoke about caregivers. In my riding, there is a group of caregivers. They are very concerned by the fact that they have to take time off work, because taking care of a sick family member is really a full-time job. They are often looking after a spouse or parents.

I know that the NDP has thought long and hard about this issue. Therefore, I would like to ask my colleague to explain to the House how the NDP proposes to help this portion of the population, which still does not have the support needed to take care of a family member.

I am pleased with this bill because it will actually help the parents of sick children and children who, unfortunately, are the victims of crime. However, we must also consider this other portion of the population, and I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about that.

[*English*]

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Mr. Speaker, part of the reason the NDP is supporting this bill is that we agree there need to be measures in place to work with families who need to take compassionate leave or other leaves of absence.

What we need is a program that actually deals with not only people who are in the waged economy but also people who are not in the waged economy. We need to take a broader look at whether it is just parents and family members who are caregivers. We need a much broader perspective.

As I pointed out earlier, we need to deal with some of the underlying problems that do not allow Canadians who have paid into the system to actually collect. Again, there is the whole issue about this only being applicable to federally regulated workers. This is a really big problem because there are a lot of Canadians out there who are not federally regulated. How do we develop a system that is actually going to deal with those families as they go through these kinds of crises?

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is an interesting door that the member opens, to have people receive some benefits from employment insurance even if they or their employers have not necessarily contributed to it. It would be great to actually have a good, fulsome debate on that particular issue.

One of the concerns we have in the Liberal caucus is that this particular bill is somewhat limited and that we could, in fact, be doing more. We appreciate and recognize the valuable change it is going to make, and we will support the bill going to committee and ultimately passing.

I am wondering if the member recognizes, as we have been talking about for the last number of years in Liberal Party, that we should be looking at how we could be expanding services, particularly for those people who have terminal illnesses, to allow family members, spouses, siblings or a child to receive a benefit so that they could stay home with their loved one in their time of need, and that there is a role that employment insurance could play to help facilitate that.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely correct. What we need to do is take a broader view of who can collect employment insurance benefits and who is not eligible.

The member briefly mentioned resources. It is not just about resources for Canadians who are on employment insurance for sickness, maternity, parental or compassionate leave, it is also about the workers who are there for regular benefits.

*Government Orders*

We need to take a comprehensive look at what is happening with the employment insurance fund. I know one of the members opposite talked about how Service Canada employees are doing a great job, and they absolutely are. This is another look at resources.

What is happening, though, is that cuts to the department have meant that Canadians who have paid into the fund, whether for sickness, maternity, parental or regular benefits, and are trying to collect benefits cannot get answers from the department. This is not because people are not working hard but because they do not have the resources to answer the phone calls and to deal with people.

I have had people come into my office simply because they have tried for two days to get through to the department and have not been able to talk to a live person. When we are talking about these benefits, it is fine to talk about putting these benefits in place, but we actually need to make sure the department has the resources to ensure that people get paid and get the answers they need.

●(1100)

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to rise today in support of this bill at second reading. New Democrats support this bill. This is not about partisan politics. This is about doing the right thing. It is about assisting families who are going through some horrendous times, whether it be the loss of a loved one or the serious illness of a young child.

As I look at this and the most humane way to approach this whole area, the thing that comes to mind is how much we need to change our EI system and the way we look at serious illness or the loss of loved ones. There is no one in this room who does not know of someone whose child or family member has been seriously ill or who has lost someone under tragic circumstances or after a lengthy illness. Each and every one of us knows what that loss means to the families involved.

When people are struggling with an illness in the family or a loss, we also know the pressures those families are under and the very last thing families need to worry about are finances. It is about paying their bills, putting food on the table and feeling the pressure of having to work because they may not keep their jobs or spending time with their loved one who may not have long to live.

I have had the privilege of working in a cancer institute, reading stories to patients. It was a very pleasurable activity, in one way, to read to young children, but when dealing with the children and families of very young children as they struggle with a terminal illness, one sees the toll it takes on the families. It is because of those personal experiences, both as a volunteer in my early work experience and then later as a teacher, that I can absolutely say without any reservation that I am pleased to see us moving in this direction.

Does it go far enough? We have to take baby steps at the beginning and this is the beginning of the baby steps. One thing that hit me when my colleague from Nanaimo—Cowichan made her eloquent presentation was when she talked about this only applying to federal jurisdictions and that the provinces would have to make similar changes. It reminded me of how haphazard that is going to be and how diverse and disparate the treatment is going to be across Canada.

I arrived in Canada in 1975. My daughter was born in 1977 and I was shocked at the time that there was no paid maternity leave but women could collect some weeks of EI. I had come here from England where there was full paid maternity leave for a very lengthy time. It took Canada a long time to recognize and implement fully paid maternity leave and that, again, was haphazard. I am hopeful that the provinces will follow suit and I want to acknowledge the very comprehensive support that the Government of Manitoba provides for its citizens.

●(1105)

EI is a tool we are going to use to recognize and support the suffering of families who lose loved ones. I am reminded of a commitment of the Conservative government, which promised that funding for this measure will come from general revenues, not EI premiums. That is a critical point we have to take a look at here. This is a measure we need to implement. At the end of the day we have to think it is more important to do this, but this is going to place extra pressure on a fund that is already operating with a \$9 billion deficit, a fund that many people cannot seem to access right now. They cannot get the assistance they need because of the closure of offices or because of the way the rules are being changed.

Right now about half of all unemployed Canadians are receiving EI benefits. That is a very concerning number, less than half of people who are eligible are receiving EI benefits. We need to reform our EI system so that it is fair, accessible and effective for all unemployed Canadians.

At the same time, I have to say that this benefit is very much needed, so I will focus on that and urge the government to live up to its promise of finding that money out of general revenues instead of placing extra pressure on a fund that is already stretched to the limit.

A number of people have spoken in support of the bill. The Canadian Cancer Society welcomes the government's announcement, and it talks about approximately 1,310 children who are diagnosed with cancer every year in Canada. It is a very specific number. The word "cancer" has an impact on all of us. We all know either a friend or a family member who have been touched by this very unforgiving disease. In my family we have been touched by this disease on more than one occasion.

We also know that, before this change that is proposed, the only benefit available to family and caregivers of sick children allows for only eight weeks of leave, six of which are paid at 55% of average insurable earnings if there is a significant risk of death for a family member. However, parents of critically ill children were less likely to submit claims for financial support because they did not wish to acknowledge that their child had a significant risk of dying. That is where the bill is the humane thing to do. It is the right direction for us to go.

I cannot imagine, if I had a child who was diagnosed with cancer and I knew he or she had a very short time to live, that at that time I would even care or know about the additional financial pressures. But having this kind of security would relieve families of a financial worry that would place extra stress on those families and could lead to further long-term absences and long-term periods of depression, which I also have seen time and time again, and therefore being out of the workforce for a very long time.

*Government Orders*

• (1110)

**Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for her impassioned speech. This is an issue that touches many broader issues around how we support parents who are looking after sick children and who are going through a variety of traumas, and so that is why we think this bill is going in the right direction.

However, we do have concerns, one of them being that over half of unemployed Canadians cannot access EI in the first place.

Many of us have seen the real struggles that families go through. I have seen them when I go through my own riding, meeting parents who are looking after sick children, or when we are in the hospital, as I have been with one of my children.

Would my hon. colleague speak to some of these larger issues and why we are interested in seeing the bill go in the right direction? There is much more work to be done on this file.

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims:** Mr. Speaker, I am not going to limit my answer to the Conservatives. Even before the Conservatives formed government and got a majority, the Liberals also attacked EI, unemployment insurance. They changed the qualification system from weeks to hours, chopped the duration of benefits, dropped the maximum benefit and lowered the income level for the 30% clawback of benefits to \$47,000 a year. The Liberals made such changes that in the 1970s and 1980s between 70% and 90% of the unemployed qualified for UI benefits, but after 1996 between 40% and 50% qualified.

Under the Conservatives, now, we have seen more changes. Day in and day out in this House, and even yesterday during question period, we have heard the opposition raise stories about single mothers who are working hard to try to make ends meet and are having their benefits clawed back by the current government.

As much as we applaud this step in the right direction to address the needs of those who have young children and family members who are critically ill, we are just as adamant that the current government needs to address the major issues and problems that both the Liberals and now the Conservatives have compounded in the area of employment insurance.

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend from Newton—North Delta for her presentation. It is the first chance I have had to speak to the bill and I am looking forward to voting for it. I am looking forward to seeing it go from second reading to committee.

There are aspects of the bill that I think we need to pay some attention to, in committee, amending it to make sure it applies appropriately to children who are critically ill and children who are missing and to further refine those circumstances.

However, I take the points of the hon. member for Newton—North Delta on the chiseling away of EI benefit rights. I am particularly concerned about what we did in Bill C-38, with taking seasonal workers and placing them in a circumstance where they are almost treated as if they were recidivists in a criminal justice system instead of workers in Canada who happen to be in industries that require of them that they are not working year round.

I wonder if my hon. friend has any comments on that.

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims:** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her very thoughtful comment and question.

All of us, right across Canada, know the impact of the EI changes. As I said, we are hearing about them here. Particularly hard-struck are seasonal workers.

Whether it is on the west coast, whether we are talking about agricultural workers in the Niagara Peninsula, whether we are talking about seasonal workers in the north or on the west coast, I will say that those groups of workers are beginning to feel as if they have done something terribly wrong, simply because their particular area of work is seasonal due to climate. It is not something they control. We live in a country that has a huge geography, and the workers are being punished because their employment is seasonal.

• (1115)

**Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member of Parliament for Leeds—Grenville.

I am pleased to rise today in the House to speak to Bill C-44, the helping families in need act, and I thank the opposition for its support of this bill.

As a pediatric surgeon who has taken care of many families of critically ill children, whether it be from trauma or disease, I can personally attest to the need for this legislation to be passed as quickly as possible. This bill is about supporting families who are going through some of the most difficult times in their lives, both emotionally and financially. This legislation introduces new employment insurance benefits for parents of critically ill children, as was announced earlier this summer by the Prime Minister.

It also contains modifications to the Canada Labour Code to protect the jobs of parents who work for federally regulated companies, who are on leave to take care of their critically ill child or to cope with the death or disappearance of their child as the result of a suspected Criminal Code offence. In the latter case, parents would be eligible to receive a new federal income support for parents of murdered or missing children, announced by the Prime Minister last April.

Finally, it contains amendments to the Employment Insurance Act to allow parents enhanced access to EI sickness benefits if they fall ill while receiving EI parental benefits.

*Government Orders*

I will take a moment to focus on how this bill would help families who have a child under the age of 18 who is critically ill. Each year, approximately 19,000 families end up with a child in an intensive care unit. I encourage all members to think about this situation if they have a child. They get up in the morning and have breakfast with their child and their child goes to school, and they get a terrible telephone call at 2:00 in the afternoon that their child is being taken to the emergency department. The parents arrive at the emergency department to meet someone like me, with whom they have a conversation about their child being in a coma in the intensive care unit and we physicians not knowing when their child will waken.

The children have special needs in those circumstances but so do their parents. In addition to worrying about their child's health, parents are often faced with having to take unprecedented unpaid absences from work or even quit their jobs to take care of their ill child. Medical, travel and accommodation expenses only add to this burden.

Our government and, I think, all members of this House recognize the vital role parents play in comforting and caring for their children. As a surgeon, I have seen the impact parents have on the recovery rates of their children. That is why this bill introduces new 35-week EI benefits to support parents who leave work to take care of their critically ill children. As with EI parental and compassionate care benefits, parents would be able to share this benefit. The definition of a critically ill child includes those children who have life-threatening illnesses, as was mentioned by my colleague with respect to cancer-care children, or injury like those I take care of, who may be involved in various phases of their illness and need continued parental support.

This benefit would fill a gap that existed in the EI system, when parents have children who are so seriously ill they need full-time parental care but, fortunately, when their children are not at immediate risk of dying.

From my medical practice, I saw first-hand the agony this caused parents as they tried to balance their financial obligations, their work and taking care of their children. In the unfortunate situation that a child's condition deteriorates, parents or family members may also be eligible for an additional six weeks of EI compassionate care benefits, if the children are at significant risk of death within the next six months. Hopefully members would never have to utilize that benefit.

The Canada Labour Code would also be amended to allow unpaid leave for employees under the federal jurisdiction, to ensure their jobs are protected while they care for their critically ill children.

Our government has also continually championed the cause of victims of crime. In 2007, we provided \$52 million for four years to enhance the federal victim strategy.

• (1120)

[*Translation*]

As announced by the Prime Minister in April of this year, we will provide financial support to parents who are coping with the disappearance or death of a child as a result of a Criminal Code offence. This will come into effect in January of 2013.

[*English*]

As announced by the Prime Minister in April, we will provide financial support to parents who are coping with the disappearance or death of a child as a result of a criminal act. It is important to know that the agony parents go through in these most difficult situations is overwhelming. While there is no way to make this situation right, we as parliamentarians can provide support to these parents so they do not need to worry about missing a mortgage payment while figuring out how to cope with this horrible situation.

To qualify for this \$350 grant, parents can apply for up to 35 weeks. Applicants will be required to have earned a minimum level of income and have taken time away from work.

Workers who take a leave of absence from a federally regulated job for such an event will have their jobs protected, as will parents of critically ill children, thanks to amendments to the Canada Labour Code.

The third aspect that we are introducing in this legislation is greater access to illness benefits for parents themselves.

[*Translation*]

With this bill, parents will be able to access employment insurance sickness benefits if they fall ill while receiving parental benefits.

[*English*]

Currently, EI claimants cannot access sickness benefits during a claim for parental benefits because of the requirements that they be otherwise available for work or, in the case of self-employed persons, that they be otherwise working but have stopped because of illness.

The bill would amend the EI Act to waive those requirements for claimants receiving EI parental benefits.

The combination of these new measures in Bill C-44 is an example of the common sense measures that our government is taking to help parents balance work and family responsibilities. As the Prime Minister has previously stated, families are the building blocks of our society. Family and its importance is a fundamental value that truly connects all of us as Canadians.

[*Translation*]

It is time to work together and provide support for families in this country, when they need it the most.

*Government Orders*

[English]

It is time to stand together. Once again, I appreciate and acknowledge the support of the opposition for the bill as we stand together in support of families in this country when they need it the most.

[Translation]

**Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her speech. I can assure her that I will support this bill at second reading because its goals are laudable. She can count on my assistance and that of my colleagues in thoroughly reviewing this bill and improving it if possible.

Still, I must say that I am a little annoyed by what I see as inconsistency among the government's employment insurance measures. Having collected employment insurance benefits at various time in my life, including during a time when I was a single father, I have to say that excluding a significant number of employment insurance claimants also has consequences, such as making it difficult for a parent to pay for housing and decent food in order to provide adequately for his or her family.

How can my colleague tolerate that kind of contradiction? Will she try to improve the entire employment insurance program to bring it in line with this bill?

[English]

**Ms. Kellie Leitch:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague opposite for his support for this bill. It is greatly appreciated.

The bill is focused on making sure that families and parents are supported in their time of greatest need. I encourage all of us to focus on exactly that. That is what this is about. It is about making sure that we help parents who have a critically ill child, such as the child I mentioned, who may have been hit while running onto the street because he or she left the schoolyard, or a missing child. That is what we need to focus on here.

I agree with the member. We want to make sure that this bill is as good as possible to benefit those families who are in their time of greatest need.

• (1125)

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments by the member and recognize that there has been a great deal of concern recently about other issues related to employment insurance, and for good reason.

This morning I asked about the need to look at other areas where we can extend that compassionate hand. There is no doubt that no one in the House of Commons today would vote against this particular bill, because we recognize its value and want to support parents the best way we can.

To what degree does the member believe the government has a responsibility to look at the entirety of employment insurance and its benefits and at how government decisions are impacting people currently on EI, and to consider additional compassionate grounds and ways of getting money into the hands of people who need the money?

**Ms. Kellie Leitch:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite and his colleagues for supporting this legislation.

We held significant consultations with people to find out exactly what they needed and desired. It was very evident that families with a critically ill child need help, whether that child be suffering from cancer, as my colleague from the NDP mentioned, or another serious illness. Indeed, the parents I meet in the emergency department are in need. It is a very tough time for them and we want to make sure that they are well supported. This is a specific and targeted bill to make sure that those families are supported in their time of greatest need. This legislation would benefit over 6,000 families with critically ill children and over 1,000 families with murdered or missing children.

I appreciate that everyone in the House has been supportive of this measure.

**Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am absolutely delighted to rise in the House today to speak to the helping families in need act.

When first elected back in 2004, I began to champion this cause. I introduced a private member's bill, Bill C-542, in the 39th and 40th Parliaments, and once again introduced that same bill in the current parliament, Bill C-371.

I am absolutely delighted to see the government moving on this. It embodies what I was trying to accomplish in Bill C-371, and therefore at this time I plan on withdrawing that bill. I am delighted to see all of this hard work coming to fruition in this exceptional piece of legislation.

However, it is not just me. I have to thank a constituent of mine, Sharon Ruth, for her tireless efforts in helping families who are truly in need and have gone through the tragedy of having a critically ill child. I will tell the House a little more about Sharon's story later.

Not only had we been advocating for this, but it also fulfills our Conservative Party's platform commitment to support the families of murdered, missing and critically ill children. Dan Demers of the Canadian Cancer Society so eloquently sums up the commitment of our government in this quote:

[I]t's critically important that we acknowledge that in the last election, this government made a commitment to parents and families who are caring for children in the most difficult situations we can imagine and today, we're not only seeing the government take action to fulfill this commitment, but they're moving in this town at lightning speed....

I am encouraged by what I have heard from the opposition today, because it is very important that we move quickly. This much needed legislation will support the implementation of three initiatives: the new federal income support for parents of murdered or missing children, a new EI benefit for parents of critically ill children, and a measure to enhance flexibility for parents who fall ill while receiving EI parental benefits.

Since our government was first elected back in 2006, we have been working tirelessly to implement policies that help Canadian families. We Conservatives know that the success of our nation is built upon the foundation of healthy families, which is why we remain committed to supporting policies that benefit hardworking Canadian families.

*Government Orders*

The measures in the bill demonstrate our government's commitment to providing families with the flexibility to balance the obligations of work with the duty to family. I am confident that with thoughtful consideration of the text of this legislation, all members will support it. As I said, I am encouraged that everyone who has spoken today supports moving this as quickly as possible. The bill is about providing financial support to families when it is needed most desperately.

The case I am most familiar with personally is that of Sharon Ruth, her family and her daughter Colleen. I met Sharon during the election campaign in 2004 and she told me what her family had been dealing with.

Her daughter, Colleen, was just six years old when, without warning, she was suddenly diagnosed with stage one Hodgkins lymphoma. Within hours of that diagnosis she was admitted to hospital and doctors started working tirelessly to treat her.

The result for Sharon's family was that they spiralled into a financial abyss as they made the choice that every parent would make to help treat their daughter and save her life. It meant that at least one parent left work and gave up a salary.

She was in the midst of this chaos when she first spoke to me, and since then she has been a tireless advocate for compassionate care leave, spreading her message across Canada and joining others who seek the same assistance that she so desperately required. She chronicled her family's struggles in a book called *The Guinea Kid*. The good news is that her daughter Colleen, now 16, is in remission.

I have to commend Sharon's stamina on this issue as she watched bills die on the order paper, election after election, but stuck to her fight for these changes.

We are now meeting our commitment to introduce a new EI benefit to support parents of critically ill children. Starting next June, eligible parents in this situation would receive up to 35 weeks of temporary income support through the EI system.

This measure is expected to help an estimated 6,000 families each year who are going through the most trying times in their lives. This support is in addition to the EI compassionate care benefit, and parents of the most seriously ill children may apply for the compassionate care benefit if, after claiming 35 weeks of the new benefit, their child is in danger of dying in the next 26 weeks.

When their child is critically ill, many parents have to make what seems like impossible choices: continue to work and be away from their child or endure the financial hardship that can result from leaving work to provide ongoing care.

● (1130)

Caring for such an ill child is not only emotionally trying, it can also be financially crippling. Between 40% and 63% of families who have children with cancer lose income because they work less while caring for their ill child. The added expense of travel, accommodation, often near the hospital, and medical supplies can consume 25% of their total disposable income.

To alleviate some of the worry parents have about being away from work, we would also amend the Canada Labour Code. This

would allow for unpaid leave for employees under federal jurisdiction to ensure that their jobs are protected while caring for a critically ill child. This means that parents would not have to quit their jobs to care for their critically ill child.

We have heard from Canadians that this legislation is desperately needed and long overdue. We know that roughly 250,000 children are hospitalized each year. Of these, approximately 19,000 are critically ill and are confined to intensive care units for extended periods of time. It is no surprise that these children need their parents' care and support to recover and in some cases to even survive.

Since our Conservative government was elected, we have been committed to supporting Canadian families and helping them balance work and family responsibilities. With this legislation, we show Canadian parents that we recognize the vital role they play in the lives of their children and that we value what they do.

This legislation would now allow us to offer new financial support measures to ensure that parents have support when they need it the most. I cannot help but reiterate how encouraged I am to hear that all parties and all members seem to be supporting this important legislation. This bill is not about politics, it is about helping Canadian families when they need it the most.

I would like to talk about a situation I learned about in a discussion with another constituent of mine. I just recently became aware of the situation of the family of Nicole and Craig Tobias, and their son Sam. Their son is critically ill. They brought their plight to me. I explained what was happening, and how, if we move this along, families like the Tobias family and the Ruth family will not have to face what so many families have had to face in the past number of years.

I am going to close with a quote from Sharon at the announcement of this bill by the minister last week. She said:

I want to thank the minister who has genuine concern for families and their suffering, for receiving myself and Colleen and Edwina Eddie last November, listening to what we had to say. She believed that changes needed to be made and worked toward making this day happen.

I thank the minister and the Prime Minister for showing us that everyday people like Sharon can make a difference in the lives of Canadians. I thank all members. I look forward to seeing all members agree that these are the very reasons that all of us came to this Parliament and why we became involved in serving the Canadian public.

● (1135)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have one concern with respect to the part about leave in the case of a death or disappearance, where the bill clearly specifies that this applies only if a crime occurred, defined as "an offence under the Criminal Code, other than one that is excluded by the regulations". Parents will be eligible for this program only if their child has disappeared as the result of a crime under the Criminal Code.

*Government Orders*

I am concerned about parents who lose a child under other circumstances. Their child may have drowned in a river or disappeared in some other way not associated with a crime; in other words, the child may not have been killed. The child may also have committed suicide. Bill C-44 is about children under the age of 18. Such parents will be just as sad, but they will not be eligible for this program if the death or disappearance of their child is not the result of a crime.

[*English*]

**Mr. Gordon Brown:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's question. I also appreciate the member's support for this bill.

The member has an excellent point. There are many situations that families have to deal with. In this particular bill, we are focusing on those whose death or disappearance is a result of a suspected Criminal Code offence. That does not in any way lessen what families who are dealing with other situations are going through.

**Mr. John Carmichael (Don Valley West, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, clearly this bill demonstrates the compassion in the House. I applaud all that I am hearing this morning. There appears to be cross-party agreement that this is a good bill. I also want to applaud my colleague for his vision, work, and persistence in the development of this bill, something I know he has had in his heart for a long time. I applaud him for seeing it through.

I would like to ask the hon. member a question with regard to the 35 weeks of EI benefits. Would he speak in a little more depth about the help it would provide to parents of critically ill children in balancing their family and employment obligations?

**Mr. Gordon Brown:** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Don Valley West for all of his efforts on this bill. I have received significant encouragement from my colleagues to continue doing what I have been doing to work toward having Bill C-44 here today.

To answer the member's question, we know that when parents can be with a critically ill child in the hospital, it can actually save the child's life. We hope that through this legislation, parents will not be having to make the choice between being with the child and paying the mortgage or car or even putting food on the table. This would help many families and that is why there is support from all sides of the House today for this very important legislation.

• (1140)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech.

I have a concern. As hon. members know, all of our suggestions in the more general area of employment insurance have been systematically rejected despite appeals to the government.

I would like to check with my colleague to see whether the government will be open enough to seriously examine and potentially accept any suggestions or amendments we might have to improve Bill C-44, a bill that is full of good intentions and that we recognize and support.

[*English*]

**Mr. Gordon Brown:** Mr. Speaker, I am encouraged by the support for this bill and the fact that so many people have had input

into it. When we send this to committee, hopefully very soon, I hope we will hear from people and members of the committee to see if improvements can be made. As the bill stands right now, I think it is a very good bill. It is well thought out and there has been input from many groups and people across the country. I look forward to seeing it in committee as soon as possible and then back in the House for another vote.

**Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, this is the first time I have had a chance to stand in the House since you were elected and I want to congratulate you. I know the House will benefit from your knowledge and your wisdom. I have benefited, as have many newer members in the House. I look forward to working with you.

I will be splitting my time with my fellow British Columbian, the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

I rise today to speak to Bill C-44, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code and the Employment Insurance Act. My colleagues in the NDP support the bill. It is not a question about ideology. It is not a question about partisan politics. It is about assisting families in times when they need the help most. It goes without saying that we support these changes that would help ease the suffering of parents who need the help.

Parents who have children who are ill and parents of children who are victims of crime deserve our support so that they do not need to worry about financial support when they are struggling to cope with very difficult situations. In situations where children are in a hospital the parents need to do the parenting and not worry about financial decisions that need to be made.

It is a good bill in that sense. We also support the new right to combine EI benefits so that if people get sick or injured while on parental leave, it does not take time away from their children. The bill is definitely a step in the right direction but I do have some concerns.

My understanding is that the Conservatives promised in their campaign literature in 2011 to provide enhanced EI benefits to parents of murdered or missing children and parents of gravely ill children. This was their promise. However, the Conservatives also promised that the funding for this measure would come from general revenues, not EI premiums. The grant for parents of murdered and missing children would be paid from general revenues and not through EI. However, it appears that the Conservatives have ignored their promise that benefits for critically ill children would be paid from general revenues.

I am curious as to why they have made this choice and gone back on their promise that this would not come out of EI. We have an accumulated deficit of \$9 billion in the EI fund and that deficit has occurred under the current government.



*Government Orders*

A few years ago we had a surplus of \$50 billion in the EI fund that was paid by the workers and employers so that when the fund was needed it was there. However, we have seen the government take that money out of the EI fund and put it in general revenues. The money that was there for people to use EI has been taken away by the government and now we have a deficit of \$9 billion in the fund.

On top of that, we have seen the government increase EI premiums both for the employer and for working people. That happened this year and that is not fair.

We in the NDP have been very clear. We want comprehensive EI reforms. We want to make EI accessible and effective for all Canadians when they need this insurance policy. These measures also do not address the greatest challenge with EI, the lack of access for unemployed Canadians. I am concerned that the government is avoiding the biggest problems with EI. For example, fewer than half of all unemployed Canadians are receiving EI benefits.

• (1145)

As of July 2012, about 500,000 Canadians receive regular EI benefits. We have 1.3 million unemployed Canadians looking for work. This means that we have over 870,000 or 40% of unemployed Canadians who are without EI benefits. I would remind the House that is an all-time historic low. That is why the NDP will continue to fight for an EI system that is fair, accessible and effective for unemployed Canadians.

Over the last number of months, we have seen changes to the EI program itself as well as service cuts brought through the omnibus Bill C-38. The effects of those changes are trickling into every corner of this country. I have seen this firsthand in my constituency. People who have come into my office are struggling to access their benefits because of the maze that has been created. They are having difficulty resolving issues, getting through on phone lines and even talking to a live person over the phone because of the service cuts.

On top of that, we have seen the changes brought in by the Conservatives through Bill C-38 strip away the benefits from workers who have contributed into this fund. They are not able to receive the benefits that they should be receiving. I have had many cases where people have waited months to receive their first cheque. People pay into the EI program to collect the benefit when they are laid-off. It is a bridging for them until they find another job.

We know that Canadians are burdened with high consumer debt and living from cheque to cheque. When people lose their job and apply for EI, one would think they would get their cheque as soon as possible. However, under the Conservative government, people are waiting for months. One gentleman who came into my office waited two and a half months for his cheque. He had paid into the EI system for decades and had never collected EI benefits before but, unfortunately, he lost his job. He was literally on his last box of macaroni and cheese. In fact, he had to go to the food bank to get food for his family. After two and half months, one would expect his cheque to be there. When he phoned EI, there was nobody live to talk to. In fact, there was a small administrative issue that could have been dealt with many weeks earlier. However, this fellow was getting nowhere. We were able to help him, but, again, a person who paid into the system should not have to wait that long to receive EI benefits.

I could go on because I have seen first-hand how these types of changes are affecting everyday families in my constituency and right across this country.

This is a small change but a good initiative that will help Canadian families throughout the country, and we welcome that. As we have said, we would like to discuss the changes made in Bill C-38 in committee so that we can get to the bottom of the bigger issues, which is the broken EI system that has been put in place by the Conservatives.

• (1150)

**Mr. Tarik Brahmi (Saint-Jean, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, concerning the 35 stackable weeks of special benefits, my concern is that it is not 35 extra weeks. It is a maximum of 35 extra weeks up to 55 weeks. A parent of a critically ill child has 40 regular weeks so the extra weeks for caring for that child could not be more than 12 weeks.

I wonder if my colleague could comment on the fact that this technical aspect has not been clearly presented in the bill, that it is not 35 extra weeks but is in fact up to 35 extra weeks.

**Mr. Jasbir Sandhu:** Mr. Speaker, as I have said before, the overall direction is the right direction to help families in need when their child is sick or their child has been a victim of a crime. The bill would provide critical benefits to families in their time of need.

There are a number of technical aspects to the bill that need to be clarified and we hope to do that at the committee stage when we look into the details of the bill.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to come back to what I asked a government member earlier.

I have some concerns about the provision of this bill that deals with leave related to death or disappearance. The provision clearly specifies that the death or disappearance must result from a crime, which is defined as “an offence under the Criminal Code”.

Thus, parents who lose a child in some way other than as a result of a crime, for example by drowning or suicide, will not have access to this program. The bill talks about leave but only if the death or disappearance of the child is the result of a crime under the Criminal Code.

In his response, the hon. member said that he wanted to focus only on cases resulting from crime. Does he not think that this provision could be expanded to include all parents who have lost a child?

*Government Orders**[English]*

**Mr. Jasbir Sandhu:** Mr. Speaker, I think Canadians are compassionate enough to provide support to families who have a sick child or who have lost a child, whether as a result of a criminal act or a natural act such as drowning. In times of need, be it financial or otherwise, parents need to spend time with their child or time with family members who are in difficult situations. It is critical that we look at these issues and that we in the House provide support to Canadian families who are dealing with tragedies.

• (1155)

**Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill C-44, a bill that has some very good ideas to help families who are in very critical situations. All Canadians have compassion for parents of critically ill children and, of course, for families who have lost a child.

The bill looks at provisions in both the Canada Labour Code and the Employment Insurance Act to try to help out those families in crisis. These include extending 35 weeks of EI benefits for parents caring for a critically ill child, plus a number of amendments that would allow for the stacking of benefits. Stacking sounds like a negative thing but in this case it is a very positive thing because it would mean allowing for the extension of benefits, like parental and sickness benefits, if they happen to coincide with care for a critically ill child. Obviously, on this side of the House, that is a concept that we believe is worthy of support.

There are also amendments to the Canada Labour Code that would remove some of the worry about job losses when one is caring for a critically ill child. It does so by extending parental leave and allowing extensions of unpaid leaves of absence so parents, if they are forced to take time off to care for their child, do not need to worry that their job will be gone when they return.

I am not only looking forward to the debate in committee on these positive ideas but I am also looking forward to considering a couple of other points in committee. Those will be the limitation on these new benefits to those in paid employment. There are lots of other families in similar situations to those who would be receiving these benefits but who are not presently in paid employment. I would like to hear ideas from the government, as we will be looking for ideas ourselves, as to how those kinds of families could also be assisted.

A second point, and an important one always, is how we will pay for this benefit. In their campaign, the Conservatives said that these new benefits would be paid for out of general revenues. Instead, we find in the bill that the benefits for parents of critically ill children would actually be paid for out of employment insurance premiums. I am looking forward to some discussion with the government about its previous promises on that.

I will now turn to the title of the bill for just a minute. The Conservatives like to give catchy titles to their bills and, in this case, it is called “helping families in need act”. While it does help families in very critical situations, in my riding there are many other families who struggle quietly every day to make ends meet. I am concerned that, while these are good measures, the policies of the government, in general, are putting further stress on those other families who may not have a critically ill child but who may have trouble putting food on the table or a roof over their heads to take care of their children.

How do we ensure that the government keeps its responsibility to do something about the economy that would help those kinds of families, as well as those with these more tragic circumstances?

Last weekend, when I was at home, I was at a community event where I met a family of two parents, one of whom is self-employed and the other was in waged employment. They have one small child who, I think, just had his second birthday. The mother, who is self-employed, is expecting her second child within the month. Her partner was just laid off. They were renting a house, which they could no longer afford, so, being responsible and trying to take care of themselves, they moved to a basement suite. However, there is very real fear in that family about where they go next if they cannot find more employment for the one partner who has been in waged employment. As he is working only one day a week, they can barely afford the rent on their basement suite. It is very easy for those of us in more fortunate circumstances to forget that some people fear every day that they will end up out of work, with kids and eventually be among those who are homeless.

At a time when unemployment is rising, Parliament needs to pay attention and the government needs to pay attention to all those families who are struggling every day to make ends meet.

In my community, since 2008, food bank use has increased by 15.5%. It means that during the last year over 19,000 people in greater Victoria accessed the food bank and, among those, according to the food bank's annual report, were 5,500 children. When we are talking about families in need, there are many more families in need every day in my community.

• (1200)

Forty-nine per cent of those people who visit the food bank are families with children. Many of those people have jobs, but they are working in minimum wage jobs and it is becoming impossible to make ends meet. I just saw statistics that in greater Victoria, one in six workers has two or more jobs to try to support his or her family.

Since 2010, we have the very unfortunate circumstance in my community that by March the food bank begins to run out of food. Looking at statistics across B.C., 38% of the food banks have been forced at some time to reduce the size of their hampers. The majority of food banks limit visits to one per month and provide hampers which will provide food for five days or less.

Yes, the bill goes in the right direction for a very limited number of families, but I want to see some action from the government in trying to find measures to help all those families in need across the country.

*Government Orders*

In particular, my concern about funding these measures goes back to the EI fund. I want to ensure that with what we are doing here we are not taking away with one hand what we have given with the other. We are taking money out of that EI fund to fund these new benefits, but at the same time, we see the government restricting the income of part-time workers by clawing back their income. When they finally find a job to supplement their EI benefits to try to keep a roof over their heads, the government is reaching into their pockets and taking money back.

We have to ensure there is not a contradiction in the way we finance this new benefit and in the needs of all those other families in times of rising unemployment. We are still awaiting action from the government as the recession deepens. We are still waiting for the government to provide some relief to those families who are facing unemployment.

In my community, unemployment rates this year have been steadily rising. We have seen a rise of more than .1% a month, starting last spring through the month of August. If this trend continues through the winter, we are going to have a lot more families in need in my community in particular, because in greater Victoria costs are very high.

I want to cite a report that was just published by the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness. It is called the "Quiet Crisis: Homelessness and At Risk in Greater Victoria".

On any given night in my community, over 1,000 people are in temporary accommodation. During the last year in my community, shelters ran at 111% capacity, meaning people were actually sleeping on a mat on the floor. They did not have a bed in the shelter. During the year, 1,617 unique individuals use the shelters in my community.

What does that have to do with this bill? This is about helping families in need. Unfortunately, a lot of people who use the shelters in my community are families with kids. Why is that? On average, rents have increased more than 20% in my community in the last five years, yet the benefits that are available to people have not kept pace. People must earn significantly above the minimum wage in greater Victoria to be able to afford to keep a roof over their heads.

The Community Social Planning Council estimates it takes \$18.07 an hour working 35 hours a week for a single parent with a child to keep a roof over their heads. That is almost double the minimum wage in Victoria, and that is if one is lucky enough to have a job.

Some 12.8% of households in my community have been evaluated as being in poor housing, meaning they are living in overcrowded housing or housing that is in disrepair, or they are spending more than 30% of their income on housing.

Again, I think the benefits in Bill C-44 are worthy of support by all members of Parliament. I think all Canadians have compassion for parents who are having to care for a critically ill child or who have lost a child through violence. There is no doubt about our willingness to support those things.

However, when we are having this kind of debate and taking these measures, I am asking that we keep in mind those many more families who struggle quietly every day to make ends meet, to take up their responsibilities by finding a job and ensuring that job will

actually pay enough so that they can support their families in the long term.

● (1205)

**Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the opposition parties for their support of this very important piece of legislation.

One thing we all have to keep in mind is that a substantive portion of the bill is about critically ill children. It is about ensuring that those families are well supported when they absolutely need it the most.

I do not know if any members in the House have experienced receiving a telephone call, asking them to come to the hospital to see their child or grandchild, but it is a horrible circumstance, I am sure.

I would like to ask the member opposite why he wants to mix all the messages here. I think we are all in common agreement. We all believe this is something that should be moved forward expeditiously. Why is there all the mixed messages when we should be focused on ensuring that this happens as expeditiously as possible?

**Mr. Randall Garrison:** Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the hon. member that I am not trying to give a mixed message on the benefits. As I have said, all Canadians have the compassion to want to assist families that are in the most dire crisis.

I am trying to point out that in my community there are many parents who worry every day about their ability to put food on the table and provide shelter for their kids. For them that is a crisis. They want to make sure they can actually make that happen. I do not think any of us here would diminish the angst they feel at the end of every month when the food starts to run out and they have to go to food banks, or when they wonder whether they are going to have enough money to pay the rent or end up in a shelter.

When we talk about families in need, I agree with providing benefits to this narrow range of families in severe crisis, but let us not forget the other families in need in all of our communities.

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague. This is not a partisan issue. All parliamentarians have been pushing for many years to provide benefits for families who have critically ill children. In terms of jurisdiction, there are very few areas where the federal government does anything directly for children, except first nations.

Yesterday the United Nations issued a scathing report on the government's attitude toward children in crisis and children in care. A lot of what was contained in that report came from first nations children themselves. Before Shannen Koostachin died, she told the government she was going to go to the United Nations and challenge it on its failure to read the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. After Shannen's death, first nations youth rose up and went to Geneva last February and explained to the world the abusive, negligent conditions in which first nation children live day after day in terms of substandard education and the failure in child welfare. Yet we see the government continue to spy on the people who are speaking out, like Cindy Blackstock, and continue to try to deny court cases.

*Government Orders*

I would like to ask my hon. colleague why it is that in 2012 we are still having to fight for basic fair rights for first nation children so they are not treated as second or third class citizens in this country.

**Mr. Randall Garrison:** Mr. Speaker, the member's dedication to making progress on aboriginal issues in this country is well known. I certainly thank him for his hard work.

I do not have the answer to his general question of why we failed so badly as a Parliament to address the needs of aboriginal people. When I look at those in my own community who use the food banks, only about 5% of the population of greater Victoria is aboriginal, but 15% of those who use the food banks are aboriginal. When we look at families that are in danger of becoming homeless, 12% of them are in danger, but aboriginal households make up a far higher percentage of those who are in substandard housing and are in danger of becoming homeless.

I come back to my point. Yes, let us help the families in critical need, but let us also go on to help the broad range of families, including aboriginal families, who through no fault of their own have trouble making ends meet and taking care of their children every day.

• (1210)

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to support Bill C-44, which amends the Canada Labour Code to provide an employee with the right to take leave when a child of the employee is critically ill, passes away or disappears as the result of a crime. While this bill is a step in the right direction, it does not go nearly far enough to help thousands of Canadian families, many, for example, that must face chronic conditions or diseases day in and day out for life.

Perhaps the bill does not go far enough because key questions need to be asked about our nation's children. What is the state of childhood in Canada, and does anyone care? How much do federal and provincial governments spend on children in Canada, and does anyone know? How does Canada compare to other countries, and do we have the data? Who speaks for children and ensures that every child matters? Are children asked and listened to? Do we have the right government structure and policy agenda to ensure effective advocacy for children? Has there been enough serious public and political debate in Canada on the results of two key reports: UNICEF's "Child Poverty in Perspective: An overview of child well-being in rich countries" and the OECD's "Doing Better for Children"? Do decision makers really know what it is like to be young today? Is all well with services to support children's needs? Are children's rights taken seriously? Are children valued sufficiently?

Our children are the most precious resource of any nation. Ensuring every child is able to develop her or his full potential should be everyone's concern. We need change for children. We must put children at the centre of our policy. Nurture demands political advocacy for children's best interests starting with the basics of love and care and seeing through the eyes of children. That is why we so desperately need a children's commissioner in Canada, as the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie is advocating, who is independent and can speak for the most vulnerable in society.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is an international treaty, and governments give promises to children for protection, provision and participation through its 42 articles. Moreover, every government that signs the convention is held to account in a five-year periodic review process conducted by the UN. Canada is being reviewed right now. United Nations officials say they are concerned that vulnerable Canadian children may be falling through the cracks of a fractious federal system that lacks accountability and a clear strategy. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child said that Canada needs to raise the bar on how it protects the rights of children, especially when it comes to aboriginal, disabled and immigrant children.

I will provide two concrete examples of conditions that affect children for life, namely autism spectrum disorder, ASD, and fetal alcohol syndrome disorder, FASD, and what might be done to help these children and their families.

ASDs are pervasive disorders which affect one person in 110. They are characterized by social and communication challenges and a pattern of repetitive behaviours and interests. ASD is lifelong, profoundly affects development and life experience and exerts immense emotional and financial pressures on families. I have worked with children with ASD my whole life. I love my children but their families often struggle to get needed therapy, struggle for schools to understand and often fight tooth and nail for the help they need. In my riding, ASD is so prevalent among the Somali community that we have two Somali autism organizations. When I attend their summer picnic, there are over 100 teenagers. Most of them are non-verbal because their families who are newcomers to Canada cannot afford the tens of thousands of dollars for therapy each year. We have single moms with two and three children with ASD.

• (1215)

A bill such as this one would not help these families. It would do nothing to help one of our families whose son has broken his mother's nose three times because the family could not afford treatment. It does nothing to help a young woman who has finished high school and who has waited three years at home for a spot in college. It does nothing for a young teenager who has been shuttled from one school to the next or for the single mom who must stay at home to care for him.

Why the failure to act for these families? More importantly, what would help them? First and foremost, the Minister of Health should establish, in collaboration with the provinces and territories and relevant stakeholders, a comprehensive pan-Canadian ASD strategy based on the best available evidence, including awareness and education campaigns; child, adolescent and adult intervention; and innovative funding arrangements for the purpose of financing therapy, surveillance, respite care, community initiatives and research.

*Government Orders*

I have worked with practitioners and researchers across this country to develop ASD motions 375 to 380. Bill C-219 also calls for the establishment of a national strategy for ASD.

A second concrete example of a condition that affects children for life is fetal alcohol syndrome disorder, FASD. To the child who was exposed to alcohol in utero, the mother's drinking during pregnancy can cause miscarriage, stillbirth or, worse yet, a range of lifelong disorders known as FASD. When a pregnant woman drinks alcohol, so does her unborn baby. Children with FASD might have the following behavioural problems: poor coordination, hyperactive behaviour, difficulty paying attention, poor memory, learning disabilities, poor reasoning and judgment skills.

The government should recognize that FASD is a complex biomedical and social problem and that adequate support is required for families, communities and within caregiver and education systems. Most important, it should recognize that children born with FASD should be afforded supports that will give them the best chance at a life equal to those of other Canadian citizens.

Should the government be interested in learning more about what could be done to help these children, who suffer through no fault of their own, I have worked with practitioners and researchers across this country to develop motions 343 to 350 and would ask that the government study them.

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states:

Children have the right to say what they think should happen, when adults are making decisions that affect them, and to have their opinions taken into account.

This means participation and not consultation. Participation means that children and young people are seriously engaged in making decisions that affect their lives. Consultation implies that adults merely ask questions and adults decide.

How many bills have children and young people participated in? Perhaps I should ask, for how many have they even been consulted? Merely asking children and young people, and ticking a box is simply not good enough. What, if any, feedback has been provided to them on how their views have been considered, let alone the impact they have had in changing policy or practice?

In closing, I wonder if children and young people are being meaningfully consulted by the government and what they would be asking for. Perhaps it is time we put the right structure in place so we can meaningfully consult.

We need federal and provincial concerted advocacy, effective advocacy, for children: a cabinet-level minister for children and young people, a cross-government policy agenda, a commissioner with clout and power, a clinical director in government responsible for children's health, and appropriate financial underpinning.

Is it not time we listened to the voice of the child in Canada?

• (1220)

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I was very interested in my hon. colleagues call for action for children. The only question I would have for her is this.

We already have the standards. Canada is a signatory to the rights of the child convention, just as every other country in the world is. Yet Canada has systematically ignored the rights of the child convention, systematically ignored the basic needs of children on isolated first nation communities and has left children in negligent systemic abuse decade after decade. This is not just the present government. This is going back over the course of the last century.

We see a court case before us now where the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society is challenging the government on the systemic apartheid that exists when it comes to child welfare, where first nations children are given much lower funding than children in provincial systems. It is the same in education. Yet instead of working with the children, we see the government opposing them and undermining them using spin doctors.

Yesterday the United Nations hammered Canada for its failure to live up to the rights of the child convention, as a direct result of the voices of first nation children who had to go all the way to Geneva to plead their case.

Therefore, I ask my hon. colleague this. Why does she think it is that our children are having to go to Europe to ask that Canada represent the rights of children, while the government continues to stand in their way and refuses to act?

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** Mr. Speaker, we must respect that convention. It is unconscionable that in a country like Canada our first nations children and hundreds of thousands of Canadians go to school hungry. It is unconscionable that in a country like Canada we have tuberculosis rates on first nation reserves that are equal to that of sub-Saharan Africa. Canada must do better.

I will just talk a bit about FASD, which is also a huge issue. It is estimated that one in a hundred children are born with FASD. This is likely a conservative estimate as most people are never diagnosed. When a child is born with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder the bills pile up: extra visits to the doctor, psychiatric care, special education fees, foster care, prisons and policing, damaged property, lost wages.

According to one study, Canadian taxpayers and families shoulder a burden of \$5.3 billion each year just for the health care, education and social service needs of people living with FASD. It is the leading cause of developmental and cognitive disabilities in Canada.

It is entirely preventable. If children are assessed and diagnosed early in life, it is also potentially treatable.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as usual, I appreciate the caring attitude the member has toward the children of our country.

*Government Orders*

As for whether the Liberal Party will be supporting the legislation, I would ask her if she could provide further comment on the lost opportunities of not being more aggressive in looking for other ways to enhance employment insurance so it takes into consideration, for example, people who are terminally ill in a home environment, and how that should have been incorporated into the legislation.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** Mr. Speaker, this bill is important. It is about changes to the Labour Code, the Employment Insurance Act and the Income Tax Act, which is an important step. However, we need to be addressing wider issues.

The UN has been clear that children with disabilities are falling through the cracks, so I would like to provide a third example, that being cerebral palsy, which is a group of disorders affecting body movement and muscle coordination due to an insult to the developing brain.

At its most severe, CP results in virtually no muscle control and profoundly affects movement and speech. These effects may cause associated problems such as difficulties in feeding, poor bladder and bowel control, breathing problems and pressure sores. People with CP have a normal life expectancy and their families need real help.

• (1225)

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform you that I will be sharing my time with the member for Scarborough—Rouge River.

I am pleased to speak today to debate Bill C-44, which proposes changes to the Canada Labour Code and the Employment Insurance Act. I am even more pleased that this government has finally proposed some real solutions that will help improve the living conditions of many families and will ease the burden on other families.

These new measures will finally give a bit of respite to families and will enable workers to take a break and receive employment insurance benefits if their children are seriously ill, disappear or are killed as a result of a crime. In this specific case, support for this bill goes far beyond differing ideologies and partisan politics. It is a matter of helping the families who need help, which should always be at the heart of the concerns and actions of every politician.

When it comes to supporting Canadian families in an economically responsible way, especially when these families are struggling, the NDP is always there to support these measures. However, after having examined the bill we are currently debating, I believe that certain proposals could be slightly amended or improved. I will use my time today to share my thoughts with the government.

First, let us look at what has been proposed. More specifically, Bill C-44 proposes a series of amendments to the Canada Labour Code to increase leave for parents. For example, it would allow parents to extend maternity and parental leave for the weeks during which a child is hospitalized. It would allow parents to extend parental leave by the number of weeks of sick leave taken during the parental leave, as well as during participation in the Canadian Forces Reserves. It would allow for unpaid leave of up to 37 weeks for parents of children with serious illnesses. It would allow unpaid leave for parents of children who are killed as a result of a crime—104 weeks

—or who disappear as a result of a crime—52 weeks. Lastly, it would allow parents to extend, by 17 weeks, the unpaid leave period that may be taken as a result of illness and injury, without worrying about losing their job.

The NDP will always be the party that sides with Canadian families. Therefore, we are in favour of what has been proposed by the Conservatives today. It is also important to note that some of these measures, or similar measures, were already presented during previous parliaments in private members' bills from NDP members, who saw some flagrant injustices in the current system.

Before I address the concerns I have regarding this bill, I would also like to commend this initiative for the support it provides to the families of missing and murdered children. The Canadian Police Information Centre reported that, in 2011, 25 kidnappings were committed by strangers and 145 were committed by parents. This is completely unacceptable and I hope this measure will be able to provide some relief.

Another aspect of this bill needs to be discussed at length. Bill C-44 also makes changes to the Employment Insurance Act, which will allow claimants to combine only special benefits. We know that maternity, parental and sick benefits together form a special category of employment insurance benefits, and that the benefits paid out when someone loses their job are considered regular benefits.

In the past, EI claimants were not allowed to combine both kinds of benefits. Bill C-44 creates a new benefit that can be combined with other special benefits in the system, but only in the case of the parents of gravely ill children.

This initiative is, in itself, good news, but I think we need to ask ourselves why the government did not go further in its proposal by offering protection to women who lose their jobs after returning from parental leave.

There is a real legislative black hole in that regard, which is negatively affecting many Canadian families. I was made aware of this problem in recent months after hearing some very sad stories about women who returned to work only to be told that they were being laid off because their position had been eliminated or because the company underwent restructuring.

This terrible situation has happened to many women, including some residents of my riding of Charlesbourg, who feel they have been treated unfairly by a system they have paid into their entire working lives, before taking a break in order to start a family.

*Government Orders*

•(1230)

Why do the Conservatives not extend coverage to new mothers? It is obvious that the government is missing out on a good opportunity to support mothers who are working hard for fair access to employment insurance.

Why does Bill C-44 only apply to special benefits? Why does it not allow women returning from parental or maternity leave to receive regular benefits if they return to work and discover that they have been laid off or that their job has been eliminated?

The government should answer all these questions. This measure will not cost a lot. This does not happen often, but it has serious consequences for those families affected.

In short, the NDP believes that this bill does not go far enough and does not permit special and regular benefits to be combined.

The NDP will continue to fight for a woman's right to access employment insurance benefits if she loses her job immediately after her parental leave has ended.

Another thing we should discuss is the fact that, in their 2011 platform, the Conservatives promised that funding for this measure would come from general revenues and not employment insurance premiums. From what I understand, the benefits for murdered and missing children will be funded by general revenues and not employment insurance. However, it seems that the Conservatives have ignored their promise to pay benefits to parents of seriously ill children out of general revenues.

This measure would be covered by the employment insurance fund to which employees and employers contribute. This is completely different from what the Conservative's proposed in their platform.

In my opinion, this broken promise raises concerns. It is by far the most costly measure in the bill, and the Conservatives' proposal comes at a time when the employment insurance fund has a cumulative deficit of \$9 billion.

We will have to give some thought to how to fund the excellent initiative that this bill proposes. I think that the money should come from the general revenue fund, which is what the Conservatives promised in their election platform.

I think it is also worth mentioning what a shame it is that, despite having introduced this bill, the government has so far avoided giving any thought to the greater problems facing the employment insurance system as a whole.

Currently, less than half of all unemployed Canadians receive employment insurance benefits, even though everyone contributes to the fund. In July 2012, 508,000 Canadians received regular employment insurance benefits. There were 1,377,000 unemployed Canadians during that same month. That means that 870,000 unemployed Canadians did not have access to employment insurance benefits even though they contributed to the fund.

A comprehensive reform of our shared employment insurance plan is therefore long overdue. EI is a social safety net that all workers and employers contribute to, and they have the right to

expect support when they are in need at some point in their lives. The NDP will continue to fight for a fair, accessible and effective employment insurance system for unemployed Canadians.

In closing, I would like to reiterate my support for this bill, but I hope that the Conservatives will be open to true dialogue and the constructive exchange of ideas in the interest of refining the proposals made here today so that Canadians can have the best possible system.

**Mr. Tarik Brahmi (Saint-Jean, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague highlighted the fact that the Conservatives promised, in their 2011 platform, not to take part of the money already in the employment insurance fund and transfer it to another benefit, but to take the money from the general fund. They must not dip into the employment insurance fund yet again.

The Conservatives estimate this new benefit, which we support, at \$30 million a year. I would like to hear my colleague's comments on that.

Does she think the government intended to keep its promises by using the money of the employees and employers who contributed to this fund?

•(1235)

**Mrs. Anne-Marie Day:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent question. During the last election campaign, the Conservatives promised that the employment insurance fund would be financed out of the general fund and not by the contributions. As the member said, the fund is financed by employers and employees. It must not be used to finance all of the programs that are implemented. There are programs that must be financed by the general fund, and that is the case here.

[*English*]

**Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is important to know that we on this side of the House support these changes to the Employment Insurance Act. They will help Canadian families at a time when they need the benefits the most.

Many people have come to my riding office who have told me they are not getting their benefit in time and cannot get access by phone. There are many cases of people waiting months to receive their first EI benefit cheque, and this from a fund they have paid into and unfortunately have to access after losing their job.

I wonder if my colleague could tell me about her experience in her riding. How are people being affected by these drastic changes to EI and the service cuts that were part of omnibus Bill C-38?

*Government Orders*

[Translation]

**Ms. Anne-Marie Day:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his excellent question. This is unprecedented. Canada is currently experiencing a disastrous situation. No one is answering the phones at Service Canada anymore. There have been so many cuts to staff that sometimes there is only one employee left for an entire region, and that person is wondering how he or she is going to meet the demand. One employee can see nine people over the course of a day. This includes all those who have difficulty filling out their applications, those who have a disability and those who cannot read. We are seeing this more and more in our ridings. Employees will be under the same pressure to respond to the needs of Canadians across the country. It is false to say that everyone is able to use the Internet effectively.

Since I have time, I am going to talk about a woman in my riding. She has a doctorate and is thus extremely intelligent. She has a young daughter under the age of two who has scoliosis. This woman constantly has to leave the labour force and then try to find another job. She does what she can, but this is a black hole for her. She completed a doctorate so that she can teach one day. She wants to work, but she is in the difficult position of having a child that is sick.

I hope that this bill, for which I must congratulate the Conservatives, will be able to meet some of this woman's needs. However, it does not go far enough because every eight months she has to return to the hospital with her child, who has setbacks.

[English]

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-44, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code and the Employment Insurance Act and to make consequential amendments to the Income Tax Act and the Income Tax Regulations and to express my support for this bill at second reading.

New Democrats have long been calling for changes to the current EI system, as well as support for families who find themselves in the situations that are identified in the bill. The NDP is the only party that calls for extending EI stimulus measures until unemployment falls to pre-recession levels. We called for eliminating the two-week waiting period for people to qualify for EI benefits, returning the qualifying period to a minimum of 360 hours of work regardless of the regional rate of unemployment, raising the rate of benefits to 60% rather than what it is today and improving the quality and monitoring of training and retraining across the country, so that individuals have the ability to improve their skills while they are on EI benefits.

Though I am going to be speaking in support of the bill today, what I do find somewhat troubling is that the government is still choosing to ignore the largest problem with our current EI system. As of July 2012, four in ten unemployed Canadians are actually eligible for EI, which means 60% of the people who are unemployed are not receiving EI benefits because they do not qualify. They are part-time and temporary workers, people who are forced into many precarious forms of employment.

Further to this, the funding used to provide the support promised in this legislation to these families is actually going to be coming from EI premiums rather than the general revenue fund, which is

exactly what the Conservatives promised in their 2011 election platform. They said it would come from the general revenue fund rather than the EI fund. Not only is this an example of the government breaking yet another election promise, but this is by far the most expensive option and comes at a time when the EI account has a cumulative deficit of \$9 billion.

With that in mind, I must also add that the EI program is not one that the government has been paying into. It is one that only employees and employers pay into, and yet the government has decided to have these special benefits come from the EI fund rather than the general revenue fund, as it promised.

Keeping in mind what I just mentioned, I do not think it is appropriate that the funding for this comes from the EI program or that EI is the appropriate vehicle to deliver these special funds. It leaves out a large portion of Canadians who will not have worked the 600 hours that are required to make them eligible for the program. Once again, EI is not a fund that the government pays into. Only employers and employees pay into it.

While this bill addresses some of the issues with the current EI system, it leaves out a large proportion that could be easily changed and would further help parents and families. This bill does not address layoffs during parental or maternity leave. If a woman is laid off by her employer during the time she is on maternity leave, it does not address that situation. Largely it does affect women. Only women are eligible for maternity leave. Women generally take parental leave after the initial maternity leave is complete, so it also does not address the issue of being able to stack any EI regular and special benefits. If I, as a young woman, am on maternity leave and my child becomes critically ill, the bill allows for the stacking of special benefits but does not allow for the stacking of special benefits on top of regular benefits.

New Democrats will continue to fight for an EI system that is fair, accessible and effective for all Canadians. That being said, the changes to this legislation, it goes without saying, will help ease the burden on some of the suffering parents and families who need help.

● (1240)

Across the country, we hear far too many stories of families struggling to make ends meet. With the suffering and emotional burden of a critically ill child or a child killed or missing through an act of violence, finances are the furthest thing from the minds of family members. This is when they need the support of family, friends and the community to come together. These families also need the support of the government to help them through this trying time.



*Government Orders*

While Bill C-44 does take a step in the right direction, it does not go far enough to support these families. I already mentioned that a large number of families would be left out, as they may not reach the required minimum 600 hours to qualify for EI, and the bill does not include any other support for these families. Also, EI benefits still amount to only 55% of a claimant's income up to a maximum of a certain amount. Furthermore, the bill will not help with the cost of drugs or child care services for other children who may not be ill.

These families also need a pharmacare plan and a catastrophic drug plan to help them through this difficult time, especially with a child who is going through multiple rounds of chemotherapy. Some catastrophic drugs are not covered under provincial drug plans.

Also somewhat problematic is that the bill does not address the concerns about the very black and white definition of critically ill or injured. As it stands, to qualify for these benefits a critically ill or injured child is one who faces significant risk of death within 26 weeks. While this keeps the number of parents eligible to use the program down, it also leaves out many families who are suffering through chemotherapy treatments or organ transplant programs. It also forces parents to make the very difficult admission that their child is likely to die within the next 26 weeks.

It is very unlikely that a parent would reach the stage where they would be able to make such an admission. We know that doctors are hesitant to make such a categorical statement. Families always want to remain hopeful that their child will turn the tide and do better. With the advancements in our medical system, it is completely reasonable that they would hold onto hope.

We have seen many illnesses that a decade ago were considered terminal become more and more treatable, and maybe even curable today. To force families into a position where they must make this categorical statement is quite unfair.

The bill includes a change to the Income Tax Act that would allow for a direct grant to the parents of a child missing on account of a suspected breach of the Criminal Code. While I am supportive of the creation of this much needed support for these families, I am left wondering why it would only be available to parents of children who go missing on account of a suspected breach of the Criminal Code. Why not all parents of missing children?

Regardless of why or how one's child went missing, the child is still missing. Do not all parents deserve and need government support during this trying time when they are frantically searching for their missing child?

I was happy to see the inclusion of changes to the Income Tax Act to allow for a direct grant to the parents of a murdered child. Members may know that this summer we saw alarming incidents of violence in communities in Scarborough, where I am from, and in the greater Toronto area.

One example was the Danzig mass shooting, which saw 23 people injured and two young people lose their lives, 14-year-old Shyanne Charles and 23-year-old Josh Yasay. This shooting and other acts of violence committed in our community are tragic. They have left the entire community and the city mourning the senseless loss of two bright young lives.

The families of these children need support that, unfortunately, was not available to them until now. I am happy that families in the future would have the ability to receive it.

I spent my summer talking to people in the area and the community. I heard time and time again that they wanted to see federal leadership to address violence in our communities and the root causes of crime.

• (1245)

While we know this is a great initiative by the government in taking steps to help the parents of murdered children, parents never want to have to bury their child in the first place. They want preventive measures so their child is not murdered through crime.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the New Democratic Party, the Liberal Party and all members of the House of Commons have seen the value of this legislation's specifics and ultimately want to see it pass. Having said that, there is some disappointment because there is good reason to do a lot more in looking at ways we can provide assistance on compassionate grounds.

For a good while the Liberal Party has advocated looking at seniors and people who are ill and who need family support and, ultimately, allowing people in the workforce the opportunity to provide care, maybe including some form of palliative care, by giving them access to employment benefits.

Could the member comment on that issue? Would she support providing employment benefits for a longer time to those who want to care for a sibling or parent who is terminally ill?

• (1250)

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** Mr. Speaker, we have seen some improvements in Bill C-44, and as my hon. colleague pointed out, we would like to see further changes that would help families in very difficult situations provide support for an elder in the family. As boomers age, we will see many more people in the sandwich generation taking care of their children as well as their elderly parents.

It would be a very welcome addition to see these type of changes to the EI system that would allow people who are taking care of their children as well as their elders to have these kinds of support.

**Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, these are good changes that will help families in time of need and we fully support them. However, I want to highlight the bigger problem with the EI program. We have seen the gutting of the EI program by the Conservative government. Bill C-38 not only gutted the benefits paid to Canadians but also cut services for people who want to access these benefits.

*Government Orders*

I have seen this in Surrey North, where hundreds of people have come to my office. They struggle with the maze that is in place when phoning and getting either no answer or no live person answering. Not only that, but people are also having difficulty accessing the EI benefits they paid for. After two and a half months they have not received their first cheque. Under the Conservative government we have seen the highest personal consumer debt rate among all Canadians, so people who lose their jobs need the money to bridge that gap.

Has my colleague heard these sorts of complaints in her constituency?

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** Mr. Speaker, I have heard very similar stories in my constituency of Scarborough—Rouge River, but I must go one step further. We have extremely high levels of unemployment among adults and youth. My constituency has the highest youth to population ratio in all of the GTA and we know that youth unemployment is skyrocketing. It is the highest in our history and continues to skyrocket.

We know that 4 out of every 10 unemployed workers have not qualified for EI benefits as a result of the continued cuts and clawbacks and changes to the EI legislation from the omnibus Bill C-38, along with other changes that the Conservative government continues to make. These will continue to erode the benefits that employers and employees have paid for.

Finally, we have to remember that the EI benefits fund is one that only employers and employees have paid into, and if the government is not paying into it—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Resuming debate, the hon. member for Toronto—Danforth.

• (1255)

**Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak in support of the bill, although I would say it is critical support. I say this because in many respects the bill is inconsistent, as some of my colleagues have already indicated, in terms of what benefits are covered for what people. I will speak to that concern a little bit.

I first want to acknowledge some of the very important aspects of the bill that we should celebrate and thank the government for moving on. Currently it is the case that employment insurance claimants can access sickness benefits and subsequently access parental benefits. However, at the moment, those same claimants cannot access sickness benefits during or right after they claim parental benefits, because of a technical problem with how the law works. Bill C-44 would amend this. It is extremely welcome and I thank the minister for moving on that.

The Canada Labour Code code changes that will protect the jobs of people who have taken time off work because a child has gone missing or, worse, been murdered as a result of a Criminal Code offence, or a suspected Criminal Code offence, are also welcome. We can all understand the deep trauma and debilitating effects on parents when a child is lost in that way. Therefore, making sure that they are not penalized in the workplace is very humane. The fact that it is 2012 and this is coming into effect only now suggests that many elements of good sense do, unfortunately, take a bit too long to make

their way into our legal system. Nonetheless, I thank the minister for her earlier speech outlining this change in the law.

I would like to talk a bit about some of the problems. I mentioned inconsistencies in how this is being approached. Some of the inconsistencies stem from a general problem with our employment insurance and federal benefit system of approaching things in far too ad hoc, piecemeal a fashion, not looking at the overall picture and structural dimensions of unemployment and other related or similar causes for people needing assistance. Instead, we are ending up more and more with an employment insurance system that looks a bit like the tax code, which we are all so keen to attack for it being unprincipled and full of all kinds of piecemeal provisions, without any overarching coherence. Our employment insurance system is approaching that point, and although the benefits in Bill C-44 are very welcome, they add to this piecemeal, ad hoc approach.

Let me give a couple of examples of why we are concerned that something is being moved on but in an inconsistent way that speaks to the rather limited ad hoc approach the bill feeds into.

It is great that once the bill is passed, the labour code will protect the jobs of those who are employed. Obviously I am talking about parents who lose their children, where a child goes missing or is killed through a criminal offence. The labour code in these cases will protect the parents' jobs, and that is great. That should be the case. However, there is no good reason to tie the benefit itself, the grant to the parents, to the fact of someone being employed, especially when the funding is coming from general revenue and is not considered an employment insurance benefit. We do have a problem with the fact that not all the funding for the bill will come from general revenue, but at least this benefit, the benefit to parents who have a missing or murdered child, will come from general revenue. Therefore, there is no technical reason not to be consistent in who receives the benefit. Yet it is being treated as if it is somehow an employment insurance benefit, because it is being linked and limited to those who received \$6,500 a year of earned income in the previous year before the benefit.

• (1300)

There is no logical reason why parents who lose children in the way this bill is contemplating merit the benefit if they have been employed in the past to a certain threshold level, while parents with lower incomes, who are unemployed or otherwise, would not qualify by this standard if they also lose a child in the exact same way. The trauma is no different. The debilitating effects are no different. The undermining of their responsibilities, even if they are not responsibilities in the workplace, is no different. Others have responsibilities in their lives, whether they are employed or not, that would be undermined, indeed made impossible to fulfill, if a child is abducted or worse, murdered.

*Government Orders*

Here are two examples that anybody could recognize as valid. There are stay-at-home parents who are not earning a formal income in the workplace. They are working and in this day and age we all recognize the fact that this is work. Many of us would hope that the system would eventually evolve to the point that this work would be recognized as a form of employment but at the moment that is not the case. There are stay-at-home parents who have other children they are taking care of or an elderly parent or they are trying to hold things together in the house, and they lose a child in the same circumstances as somebody who is employed or had been employed to the \$6,500 rate.

The second example is of an unemployed parent who, according to our system and our cultural values, has to spend a lot of time looking for work. That is what we expect somebody to be doing. That person would be undermined by the same event in their life as somebody who is employed. Somebody who is employed would be affected by losing a child and the ability to get back into the job market would also be affected. That inconsistency is something I would love to see looked at in committee, especially because this would be funded from general revenue.

I forgot to mention at the beginning that, if possible, I would like to split my time with the member for Pontiac.

Here is another example of this inconsistency. Precisely why is the benefit to parents who lose a child limited to parents whose children are missing or killed only as a result of a suspected breach of the Criminal Code? Is there something quite arbitrary in drawing the line there? We all have no problem understanding the debilitating effects of crime. There is indeed something hard-wired in all human beings to perhaps react a bit worse when a crime has befallen our family; it is not just the loss of the child but how the child has been lost and I accept that distinction. Yet we can have as much trauma and debilitating effect when children go missing or are killed in other ways.

I draw on the very good speech of my colleague, the hon. member for Hamilton Mountain. In her reply speech to the minister's introduction of the bill she put it so well when she said:

If I am understanding this right, if a family were to go wilderness camping, say, and their toddler wandered away from the campsite and ended up missing, the parents would not be eligible for any support during their time of frantically searching for their child. Why is that?

She went on to say:

Did the government's need to feed the rhetoric of its law and order agenda take precedence over good public policy here? I am simply not understanding why the Criminal Code caveat was deemed necessary to add in this bill.

I echo this concern. As the minister said in the House yesterday, it is not adequate to say that it was judged to be a good public policy because of response to consultations with Canadians. Surely Canadians, upon reflection, would not begrudge extending the benefit to analogous circumstances. Are Canadians so fixated on a crime agenda that they would not see the inconsistency? I very much doubt it.

I end here because I want to hear what my colleague from Pontiac has to say after I take a few questions.

● (1305)

**Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the NDP members for their support for this important piece of legislation. However, I do want to point out perhaps some of the falsehoods that I keep hearing in some of their speeches. They keep claiming that only 40% of workers are eligible for EI. This is clearly wrong; 84% of Canadians are eligible for EI and those who are receive EI benefits. I just want to state that for the record.

Could the member opposite comment on how important these benefits are for families who truly need them?

**Mr. Craig Scott:** Mr. Speaker, I cannot help but agree and echo the fact that for the families receiving these benefits, they are absolutely important.

My only point, made with some considerable emphasis in my speech, was that other families in directly analogous circumstances would equally benefit from and welcome the same benefits. That was my only point.

**Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, this is a small step in the right direction. However, the Conservatives have taken giant steps backwards when it comes to Canadians getting benefits and how they qualify. During the time Canadians are getting benefits, if they want to work part-time or earn extra income, the Conservatives are cutting back on the take-home pay people are able to make.

I have watched Conservatives in this House as they constantly play with the numbers. We are seeing that right now. In fact, 40% of unemployed Canadians receive benefits. The other 60% are not receiving any EI benefits at all.

Bill C-38 and the cuts Conservatives brought in to services and benefits are a big issue.

Would my colleague agree that this is a small step in the right direction to help families, yet the Conservatives have taken large steps backwards in providing benefits to the unemployed?

**Mr. Craig Scott:** Mr. Speaker, I would have to agree that that is generally the case.

On behalf of my party, I would ask that, as we continue with question period, we get some straight answers from the minister on what the latest changes in the EI system actually mean. We have heard some backing away from her earlier statements to make it look like the new system is 100% good with respect to receiving income while on employment insurance, only to have some fudging in the last question period.

This is an example of why Canadians are losing trust in our political system. We are getting answers that appear to be inaccurate, and then we are not hearing a straightforward acknowledgement when a mistake has been made. If the minister continues to mislead Canadians, I think we are going to have a problem.

**Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member has to update his information. He alluded to the fact that there was some discrepancy between what he said and what the minister said this morning. I quote, "People on parental leave from their employer are not considered to be available for work, so they do not qualify for sickness benefits."

*Government Orders*

That is old information. Under this bill, the government is waiving, and taking out, in other words, this requirement for parents receiving EI parental benefits so that they can qualify for sickness benefits if they fall ill subject to remaining qualification criteria. The new data is here. It is noteworthy and should be on the record.

**Mr. Craig Scott:** Mr. Speaker, there is no need to correct the record. I was actually complimenting the government for that exact change. What I was speaking about at the beginning of my speech was the current law. Until this bill is passed, it is not the current law. I was saying the current law is as the member described but that the law will change, and I was thanking the minister.

There is no need to correct the record, because I was completely accurate.

• (1310)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Mathieu Ravnat (Pontiac, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to contribute to a very important debate and to express my support at second reading for Bill C-44, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code and the Employment Insurance Act and to make consequential amendments to the Income Tax Act and the Income Tax Regulations. This bill is important because it can help all parents who are in a very difficult situation through no fault of their own.

Members may know that I am the proud father of two young girls, Sophia and Gabriella, and even though they are in very good health, thank God, as a father, I am very concerned about this issue. It is not always easy to be a parent nowadays, and it must be much harder when one's children are critically ill.

I believe that this bill can alleviate the suffering of parents who are in need because their child is critically ill or has disappeared or, worse still, died as the result of a crime. It is important to implement measures that can alleviate parents' suffering at such times. That is our duty as compassionate human beings. It simply makes no sense for parents and families not to have access to reasonable government support so that they can take care of their children during very difficult times.

More and more, the sad reality is that informal caregivers are being abandoned and yet are becoming the backbone, albeit invisible, of our health care system. They must take on various crucial roles, including the care of children, aging parents or other family members who need support as a result of injuries, chronic illness or serious disability. They are even more important in the current context, since investments in health care are clearly insufficient and are being increasingly challenged by this government.

For instance, the Canadian Caregiver Coalition estimates that over 5 million Canadians are currently providing unpaid care to loved ones, many of whom are children and family members.

As an elected official, I am here to say that we absolutely must do more for these people. They deserve to have an accessible employment insurance system that addresses the various problems I just mentioned.

The facts are astonishing. Serious unintentional injuries are not only a significant cause of death for Canadian children, but also the leading causes of morbidity and disability for children and youth in Canada. Many people do not know this. They account for 15% of the hospitalizations of children under the age of 12.

Furthermore, many of the issues of ill health and disease that children live with, although not fatal, are of serious concern. Some are of concern specifically in the childhood years, while others can have serious repercussions for these children when they reach adulthood. Consider, for instance, asthma, diabetes and cancer, which are all becoming more common among children. Every year, an average of 800 children under 15 are diagnosed with cancer, and 150 of them will die from the disease. Cancer is the second leading cause of death among Canadian children.

Fortunately, however, there is hope. Over the past 30 years, the survival rate for young cancer patients has improved significantly, increasing from 71% in the late 1980s to 82% in the early 2000s. Fortunately, the five-year survival rate has increased for many types of childhood cancers.

• (1315)

However, even if I support this bill at second reading, I do not believe that it goes far enough in addressing all the problems we have with our employment insurance system, which must be reformed no matter what it takes.

For example, women who lose their jobs immediately after their parental leave ends should have the right to obtain employment insurance benefits. This bill does not go far enough in this regard. Why do we not allow women to receive regular employment insurance benefits and why do we not allow the stacking of special and regular benefits? That would make sense.

It seems to me that the government also missed a good opportunity to help hard-working mothers obtain more justice with regard to eligibility for employment insurance.

I am also disappointed that Bill C-44 is limited to special benefits. It seems that the government is avoiding addressing recurrent problems with the employment insurance system.

The sad reality is that, of the 1,370,000 unemployed workers in Canada in July 2012, only 508,000 received regular employment insurance benefits. That means that 870,000 unemployed Canadians did not receive employment insurance benefits. In fact, fewer than four in 10 unemployed workers are receiving employment insurance benefits, a historically low level in this country. That is completely unacceptable. Basically, it means that there is hidden poverty and that this type of poverty is on the rise in our society.

Clearly, we must continue to fight for an employment insurance system that is fairer and more accessible and effective for all unemployed Canadians.

*Government Orders*

However, this bill does go ahead with significant reforms that I support, for example, the reforms related to families of murdered or missing children. I support this bill so that families do not have to worry about money when confronted with such difficult situations that are almost impossible for us to imagine.

For parents of young children who are not lucky enough to be in good health as mine are, I support the initiative to extend parental leave and provide financial benefits to parents whose children are sick and whose priority must be parenting. They should not have to worry about money at a time like that, but should be able to focus on being a parent.

I also support the measure to combine special employment insurance benefits if a parent becomes ill or is injured while on parental leave. This would mean that parents would not have less time to spend with their children at the very moment when parents and children need to spend more time together.

[English]

Although the bill would not do everything that perhaps myself or my party would like, it would do some key things on a fundamental humanitarian basis.

As a father of two young girls, I cannot imagine being in a situation where one of them falls terminally ill or is victimized by a violent crime. I cannot imagine being in that situation but I know a number of my own constituents who are. They expect their elected officials to be compassionate and to make changes in laws and regulations so that they could be supported financially by the state at such a difficult time. That is the fundamental motivator behind the bill and that is the reason I am proud to stand up for my constituents to support it at second reading.

**Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, would my hon. colleague from Pontiac comment a bit on the structural situation we find ourselves in financially with employment insurance?

We have talked a lot about inconsistencies and about the need to have a broader federal approach that is humane, but it is the case that we lost a huge amount of money from the employment insurance fund under previous governments, Liberal and Conservative. It was only in 2010 that the employment insurance fund went back to a separate operating fund. A surplus of \$57 billion was drawn down and not put back in before the Conservative government created a new, slightly better system than the Liberals had left.

I wonder if the hon. member could comment on our ability to make employment insurance work in terms of—

**Ms. Judy Foote:** It was done under the advice of the Auditor General. You should get the facts straight.

**Mr. Craig Scott:** I will end my question because I was trying to catch what the peanut gallery behind me was saying.

• (1320)

**Mr. Mathieu Ravignat:** Mr. Speaker, the principle here is simple: Who pays into employment insurance? Who owns that money? The reality is that the workers of this country own that money. To have governments pull workers' investment in employment insurance is tantamount to theft. The reality is that this began a long time ago

with the Liberals. The two traditional parties are not blameless in this situation.

We in the NDP start with the principle that the EI fund is Canadians' money, that it is up to Canadians to draw on it when they need it and that they do draw on it most of the time when they need it, which is absolutely normal.

I would like to answer my colleague's question a bit more. The other change with regard to employment insurance that frustrates me is how it attacks the possibility for seasonal workers to make their living. Seasonal workers in my riding are essential, whether they be in the forestry industry, the food industry or the agricultural industry. Those seasonal workers need to be able to work within their expertise.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, at times, the holier-than-thou attitude that the New Democrats have on social programs is, unfortunately, not well grounded. While the member chooses to criticize the Liberal Party, he should also be aware that it was the Liberal Party that created the program. If he wants to talk about criticizing the worker and the average individual, he should take a look at workers' compensation, for which the provinces are responsible, and he will see the abuse that the New Democratic government of Manitoba has inflicted on the workers in Manitoba by cutting them off from those funds.

I would suggest that the member not throw stones in glass houses because he will find that the windows will break and cave in on the New Democratic Party.

This bill deserves the support of all political parties inside this chamber because it expresses compassion to those who need it. The real issue is whether we should be looking at ways to extend that compassion. We in the Liberal Party believe the answer to that is yes.

**Mr. Mathieu Ravignat:** Mr. Speaker, the assumption by the hon. member in his question is that we in the NDP live in a glass house, but we do not. Our house is solid. We have always supported social programs that are robust and help reduce income inequality in this country. We are not the party that took \$57 billion out of the EI fund. The only party that did that is the Liberal Party. That is why we are \$9 billion in debt.

The thing about the Liberals is, as the old saying goes, they put signal left but they turn right. There is a complete inconsistency fundamentally in their ideology because they have none. It would be nice for a Liberal on that side of the House to stand up for something for once.

[Translation]

**Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I will start by saying that I will be sharing my time with the member for Timmins—James Bay.

*Government Orders*

I will begin by stating that I will be supporting Bill C-44. Perhaps some of my colleagues have children, and they know as well as I do that the most difficult thing in the world is to watch their child suffer or to learn that their child has suffered. I do not even want to imagine what a parent goes through when their child disappears or dies as a result of a crime. It is far too painful. A mother or father never recovers from such a blow, and it must take a long time for the pain to subside even a little. I still think of my grandparents, who died 25 or 30 years ago, and that is nothing compared to the loss of a child.

Bill C-44 will allow parents who go through such turmoil and grief to take the time to heal a little before returning to work. It will also prevent them from suffering serious financial difficulties in the meantime. Parents of a seriously ill child will be able to take the time to be with their child during that difficult period. When my children were young, one of them played baseball with a young boy whose younger brother had a serious illness. The little brother was about five years old. He was being treated and often stayed in hospital. You do not leave a five-year-old child alone in the hospital. Both parents had used up their holidays and other leave, but the illness obviously did not go away by the time they had exhausted their leave. They had to ask for unpaid leave. Their finances suffered and they were afraid of losing their jobs. That is exactly the kind of family that could have benefited from leave with benefits.

Helping parents in such a way is an excellent initiative. However, I find it somewhat maddening that the Conservative government is prepared to amend the Canada Labour Code to help one group of parents but not another. When the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie wanted to bring changes to the same code to protect pregnant or nursing women, the Conservatives slammed the door in his face. This really smacks of partisanship and cynicism. The purpose of his bill was to prevent miscarriages and health problems in newborns by ensuring that pregnant and nursing women whose jobs fall under Canada Labour Code jurisdiction were not subject to dangerous situations at work.

Why show kindness and common sense to one group of parents, but not to another, when in both cases, we are talking about the life of a child or unborn child? The trauma is similar. It makes absolutely no sense. The only plausible answer to my question is that Bill C-44, which we are discussing today, was introduced by a Conservative minister, while Bill C-307, which sought to compensate and protect pregnant women and their unborn children, came from an NDP member. Is that what the Conservatives call democracy now that they have a majority? The public will remember that come 2015.

There is another problem. Just a year ago, when the Conservatives promised the public that it would help parents of murdered, missing or seriously ill children, they also promised to do so out of general revenues. That is what Bill C-44 proposes in the first two cases, but not in the third. Benefits for parents of sick children will be taken from the employment insurance fund. Why do I see a problem with that? There are many reasons.

First, the employment insurance fund has a deficit of \$9 billion. Second, employment insurance money is supposed to be a safety net for unemployed workers. Third, once again, the Conservatives did not do what they said they would do.

Let us talk about my first point: the employment insurance fund has a deficit of \$9 billion. The anthropologist in me would like to give a quick history lesson. In the 1990s, under a Liberal government, the state stopped funding employment insurance. Instead of having three contributors to the fund—the worker, the employer and the state—there were only two contributors, the worker and the employer. So the pot was already shrinking.

In the late 1990s, the Liberals took money that had been set aside for workers and rolled it into the general revenue fund to balance the budget. That money did not belong to the government because, as I just said, it had been contributed to the fund by workers and employers.

● (1325)

When the Conservatives came to power, they continued to chip away at the employment insurance fund. What a surprise it was when recently, there was no more money in the fund to pay claimants. The government had to increase workers' and employers' premiums. That is not fair. People paid for that insurance for years, and then they were told there was no more money and they would have to pay more if they wanted the benefits to which they were entitled.

If a private investor takes off with our savings, we call foul, but is it any different when the government does the same thing?

Second, I mentioned that the employment insurance fund is supposed to be a safety net for workers who lose their jobs. That is why it is called “insurance”. Maybe we should stop calling it “employment insurance” and start calling it “unemployment insurance” like in the old days because it is insurance against unemployment, not for or against employment.

The money in the fund comes from workers and employers and should be used when a person loses his job and has a hard time finding another one, or when the nature of his work does not make it possible for him to work all year long. Everyone knows what I am referring to because we have been talking about seasonal workers a lot lately.

This fund could be used to address a number of other problems directly related to employment. For example, over the years, my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst, who was the NDP employment insurance critic, made dozens of proposals to expand the scope of the program. Less than four out of 10 unemployed people receive employment insurance benefits. This shows that there is a fundamental problem with the system. The money in the fund should be used to address these problems.

Benefits for parents of sick children should come from general revenues—as per the Conservatives' election promise—and not the employment insurance fund.

All the money pillaged from the employment insurance fund—\$54 billion—could and should be used today to help workers affected by the latest economic crisis, those workers who recently lost their jobs as a result of all the Conservative government cuts. There are 300,000 more unemployed people today than before the 2008 crash.

*Government Orders*

To conclude, I support Bill C-44 because it supports parents going through painful times, and who should not have to add financial problems to their stress. However, I would like to ask the minister to keep the promises made by her party to use general revenues and not the employment insurance fund to cover these measures. I would also like to ask her to consult Canadians in order to learn about the real problems faced by thousands of unemployed people, in order to make reforms to the system that will make it fair for everyone. I can assure her that she will have the complete co-operation of the NDP for such a project.

Finally, I would also like to ask the government to show as much compassion for the parents of children who have disappeared in circumstances that are not related to a crime and also to caregivers who find it difficult to survive on the meagre resources currently provided by governments, as requested by the Canadian Palliative Care Association.

• (1330)

**Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I actually noticed more or less the same thing. Earlier, I spoke about a problem with the bill on missing or deceased children where no crime has been committed. I feel as though there is a vacuum here. The answer that I got earlier from the Conservatives was that the today's bill focuses on missing or deceased children where a crime has been committed. However, it is just as dramatic for a family when a child commits suicide, for example. No crime has been committed, but a child has died nevertheless. This program would not apply in such a case, because we are only talking about cases involving the Criminal Code, cases where a crime has been committed.

Does the member agree with me that the bill could be more inclusive and provide relief to grieving families?

**Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

Yes, I obviously agree with him when he says that there are gaps in the legislation. I support the bill, but I have already indicated that it has problems. In fact, that is precisely why I cannot understand why there are so few Conservatives rising to speak about the bill and support it. Is it because they are in the majority and they think that the bill will be adopted regardless, or is it because they think the bill is so perfect that there is no need to discuss it?

In my opinion, their way of thinking smacks curiously of 16th century colonialism where certain nations believed that their way of thinking was the only right way to think. I feel that history has proven that this was not a particularly enlightened way of thinking. One only need ask the first nations, for example.

• (1335)

[*English*]

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her very excellent speech, including the experiences of her constituents and her anthropological expertise.

My question to her is about some of the gaps I have identified as well. New Democrats will be supporting this bill because it is a welcome change from the constant cuts we see the government

make. It is implementing some changes that some members on this side of the House have been proposing for many years. The specific question I have is about the inability to stack benefits. Even though we see the proposition in this bill of the ability to stack special benefits, such as maternity leave with the new grant or, if a child becomes ill, being able to stack those up to a maximum of 104 weeks, what will happen if somebody who is on regular EI benefits has a child who becomes ill?

The government seems to be very unclear and, in this bill, does not articulate whether a person who is already on regular EI benefits would be able to take time off to support his or her child. Would she like to see that type of broader change brought in to ensure that all families with children are included in this change in legislation?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her excellent question.

As I mentioned earlier, this bill favours certain groups, but unfortunately other groups have been forgotten. There is a distinction made between various groups of people. However, it would be really unfortunate if one particular group of people, a group of parents, for example, were forgotten when it would be so easy to make amendments to this bill.

The NDP is in favour of referring this bill to committee. I hope that the committee will consider all the issues raised by the NDP, including this one, and others raised by the Liberals. The committee will be able to make key amendments to ensure that all parents faced with difficult situations such as these might benefit from this legislation.

[*English*]

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, as always, it is a great honour to rise in the House representing the people of the region of Timmins—James Bay. This debate is on Bill C-44, which would amend the Canada Labour Code, the Employment Insurance Act, the Income Tax Act and income tax regulations, to allow workers to take leave and draw EI at times of serious illness of their children or of a child who has disappeared or been killed as a result of a horrific crime.

This is the kind of debate that is instructive for Canadians, because they look more and more on this Parliament as an increasingly dysfunctional place, where people are trained like seals to speak through a little message box, to bark when they are told to bark and to stand when they are told to stand. Yet in this debate we see that this is where our expertise as members of Parliament really comes together, because there is not a member in the House who has not dealt with one of these instances or who has not sat down with a family member or a young mother whose child is going to CHEO in Ottawa or SickKids in Toronto, whose need for EI benefits is so obvious. They come to us. All of us across party lines have experienced a situation where we see the system and we see that people are falling through the cracks.

Therefore, I am glad that within this Parliament, which sometimes seems so fractious, we can show Canadians that this is the kind of work that gets done outside of the House within our offices and that we can come together and try to find some good solutions.

*Government Orders*

I think of the young people whom I have dealt with in my office. As the years go by I seem to have a little shrine for the little ones we have lost along the way, like Sylvain Noël, a wonderful young boy. I have a picture of him with us and the Timmins firefighters as they made him an honorary member just before he passed.

I think of young Trianna Martin, age four, who died in a house fire in Kashechewan when there was not a single firefighting unit in the community to save her. I have her picture.

I keep a picture of Charlie Hunter who died in a residential school and nobody even bothered to tell his parents. For 40 years his family worked to get that little boy's body home. I was so proud to be there when Charlie Hunter did come home.

I think if Courtney Koostachin from Attawapiskat, one of the many young people from the James Bay coast whom we see suffering with cancer. I have her picture.

Of course I have a picture of young Shannen Koostachin, who was the great youth leader from Attawapiskat.

I know each of their families and each of their stories. I think of the other young people who fortunately did get treatment and lived, but I also know the struggles the families went through, so this bill touches all of us.

The bill also speaks to a need to look at how the economy is structured in this country, because I have heard it said by some of my Conservative friends that technically there is no unemployment, rather there is just a gap between the market and services, as though people are just widgets and digits that we can move around: if we have a high level of unemployment in the Maritimes, just ship them to Fort McMurray and everything will be fine. However, we know that this blind belief in the market, to paraphrase G.K. Chesterton, is really about being blinded by the horrible mysticism of money, that it is not just widgets and digits, that there are people and communities.

Employment insurance was part of the fundamental driver to build a sustainable economy in Canada. It is not a honey pot to be raided, as it was raided during the Paul Martin years to the tune of \$50-something billion to be used elsewhere. It is not something to be seen by some, such as the present Conservative minister, as a disincentive wherein easy access to EI benefits allows people to stay on their couches. That is a misunderstanding of what insurance is. People have a right to free public health insurance. People have house insurance because they need insurance in times of need. Therefore, employment insurance, just like car insurance or house insurance, provides people access to it in time of need.

Why is that important for the economy? At the present time, we are suffering through a long-drawn-out economic downturn. We have 1,377,000 Canadians out of work at this time. We must think of the effects of that on those families.

• (1340)

Up until the 1990s, if they paid into EI, or unemployment insurance as it was called then, which most of them would have done, 70% to 80% of those people would have been eligible for benefits. As the crash hit them, their families would have been cushioned until they managed to get a bit of breathing room and they moved, found other employment, or were retrained. However, of the

1.37 million unemployed Canadians right now, there are 870,000 who are not eligible at all.

When these people are not eligible, what happens is their savings are eaten up right away, and if they are still not working, they lose their other assets. That has a long-term impact on the economy because people are going from being contributing members to society to watching whatever security they have being eaten away. That is why EI is so important. It is to get people through that period so they can get back on their feet.

Bill C-44 plays a small but very crucial role for the families who at the time when they are receiving benefits, and again, only 40% of the people who are eligible are getting them right now, their child gets sick. We have seen this, where their benefits suddenly are not able to help.

With this bill we are seeing the recognition by all parties that within the statistics there are times when the role of government is to ensure that we are there for individuals. It is a basic principle of what good government is about. Good government is about setting policy that ensures we see the value of the individual citizens of the country. The government cannot do everything. That is understandable. It cannot serve all needs. In every one of our offices we meet people who would like government to do this, that or the other thing. It is simply not possible. However, we can set the terms to ensure that at specific times of crisis and need, the program will be there.

I cannot think of a situation harder for any family than the death or sickness of a child and the stress that it puts on the larger family. Not just looking at it from a social point of view, or from a moral point of view, but it has an impact as an economic driver. When a family is in crisis like that and more and more relatives are having to be drawn out of the workforce to help a young single mother or the family, it has an impact. The overall effect of the bill would not be large, but for the families affected, it could have a huge impact.

We have a number of questions about taking this bill to committee. We need to do due diligence with the bill. One concern the New Democrats have is the promise that the funding was going to come out of general revenues. Why is that important? The problem is that since the EI fund has been raided over the years and since we are in a major economic downturn, we are seeing a deficit in the employment insurance account. We want to make sure that it is sustainable. It has to be sustainable. Programs need to sustain themselves. We are concerned that if we are adding more draw on EI we are going to find ourselves with a greater deficit, and we are going to see the government turn around, tighten the screws and make eligibility requirements even more difficult. When only 40% of the people right now in a time of great economic distress are receiving EI benefits, we do not want a situation where the government comes back to us and says that the deficit is getting worse and we now have to deal with a new EI problem.



*Government Orders*

Within the House there should be the goodwill to ask how we ensure that employment insurance remains sustainable, how we keep it from being raided in the future and how we ensure that we have the programs in place to help the parents of sick children, or children who have been victimized, missing or murdered, that allows the family the space to grieve and to deal with that. How do we do that and sustain the program? That is our job as parliamentarians.

I look forward to the bill going to committee, hearing the witnesses and coming back with a final version of the bill that we can all look at.

• (1345)

**Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I think members of the House all agree that this is a small step in the right direction to help parents of young children who may be sick or victims of crime.

We are seeing the effects of Bill C-38, the omnibus crime bill, in our communities right now. In my constituency of Surrey North, I have seen people who are struggling to get their cheques on time. People are trying to speak to a live person on the other end of the phone line. People are struggling to qualify for these benefits that they have paid into. I heard from one of my constituents who has paid into the EI program for decades.

Is my colleague hearing that people are having trouble getting someone live on the phone? Is he hearing these sorts of complaints from his constituents?

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Mr. Speaker, it is fascinating to hear of that experience in a densely urban riding. My riding is larger than Great Britain. For the folks back home, it is cheaper for someone in Toronto to fly to Paris for the weekend than for a resident in Kashechewan to fly down to see me at my office. That shows the extent we are dealing with in our regions and we have no government services. The Conservatives pulled government services out. The MP's office is often becoming the point of contact in a vast region. We do our outreach clinics and we do what we can, but we are finding it is like one of those carnival huckster games. They say to people that all they need to do is call them, but good luck getting through, or go to the website and good luck getting an answer. We have seen people in desperate situations who actually are losing their houses because they are waiting to hear back and no one is calling them.

That is not part of the social contract that should exist between citizens and their government. If people have a right to a service, they should be able to receive it. Unfortunately, it has become a dead letter office for many people who need to access the services.

• (1350)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have introduced several bills which, in their opinion, will help victims. On this side of the House, we have trouble believing that these bills will help victims, especially Bill C-10. Of course, the bill contained a number of measures, but it did not seem to directly help victims. Finally, we have a bill that is going to do exactly that.

What distinction does my colleague see in the way that the Conservatives have tried to make people believe that they are really helping victims and what is actually going to help victims? Can the member do a better job of explaining this contrast?

[*English*]

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question. We see a very politicized and dumbed down approach to crime. I have never seen people who want to hug thugs as much as that group does. The Conservatives hold them up and cannot get enough of them and yet their solutions seem to be so poorly thought out.

What is nice about this is for a change we see the meek and mild-mannered Conservatives are not even standing to speak to one of their few good pieces of legislation in the last six years. It is as though they are confused. They have come forward with a really good bill and something very reasonable, but they cannot froth at the mouth about it so they are all sitting there. They do not know what to do because they want to jump up and down.

I would invite them to work with us, get a more progressive and positive attitude, get some better bills and get away from the crazy claptrap of the Conservative backbenches.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I stand to speak to this bill and perhaps bring a different perspective to it.

First and foremost, we recognize a good thing when we see it. What we see here is the government bringing in legislation which, for compassionate reasons, would allow individuals to receive employment insurance benefits in certain situations, such as if they have a very sick child, or a crime has been committed and the child has disappeared. There is a valid argument to be made, and I think no one inside the House of Commons needs to be convinced that we need to provide that sort of compassion when reforming our employment insurance system. To that degree, the government deserves some credit.

However, the bill does fall short. Ultimately, the bill will go to committee, will get third reading and will pass. We do not know whether or not there will be amendments brought forward. However, it is important to note that it does fall short in a number of ways.

What is somewhat ironic is that for the last while, members of our caucus from the Atlantic have been talking about their frustration in the minister responsible for employment insurance not recognizing the negative impact her decisions would have on individuals who are receiving employment insurance. Virtually every day we have been trying to explain that to the minister with the hope she will understand the profound impact it would have on those individuals.

The government of the day is offering a very attractive carrot and yes, we will take it. We will pass the bill. However, we want the government to do more. We want the government to revisit some of the decisions that are negatively affecting tens of thousands of Canadians from coast to coast.

I applaud the efforts in particular of my Atlantic colleagues who have been holding the minister's feet to the coals on this particular issue. They are asking her to try, in her very best way, to get a better understanding of that issue.

*Statements by Members*

I have had the opportunity to ask questions during this debate. I have been asking why we are not looking at this in a more comprehensive way. There are many different ways in which we can ultimately argue on compassionate grounds that employment insurance benefits could be given to others.

Throughout time ideas are generated and talked about, but at some point in time we need to act on them.

If we look at the history of employment insurance, we would find that it evolved to what it is today after a lot of healthy debate and discussion both inside and outside this chamber. People might not realize that at one point it was actually under provincial jurisdiction, until Mackenzie King said that we needed a national program. He was prepared to open up a constitutional dialogue so that we could get that authority from the provinces. It went through the 1930s, but it did not work in terms of ultimately acquiring that power. It required that constitutional change and through the efforts of Mackenzie King, we were able to have an employment insurance program.

During the Trudeau years the employment insurance program was expanded. Not only was it meant to provide  $x$  number of dollars for an individual who is unemployed, but back in the 1970s, we in the Liberal Party recognized that we needed to play a role in training and retraining to ensure that individuals who lost their jobs were also being provided some assistance in acquiring skills to enable them to get a better job, or at least some form of employment so that they could provide for themselves and their family.

• (1355)

These are the types of things that have been evolving over the years and, yes, there have been some changes that maybe have not worked in everyone's favour. However, for the most part it has evolved into the relatively healthy program that it is today. It is one of those fundamental social programs that Canadians expect the government to maintain and move forward on.

Even the Auditor General of Canada has recognized what the Chrétien and the Paul Martin governments did in the 1990s in ensuring that it is all-in-one in terms of the general revenues. Many of the surpluses that the NDP members refer to actually went toward the funding of health care transfers, equalization payments and other programs that assisted real people, but the Auditor General of Canada recognized that this is something that should be all together.

We have seen governments, at least in the past, show that while we want the employers and the employees to be able to contribute, at times there is a need for the government to also go into the general revenues and provide the funds needed for future programs and potential further employment insurance benefits.

That is why we have had leaders of the Liberal Party, particularly Mr. Ignatieff, talk about extending on compassionate grounds the opportunity for a sibling or a spouse to provide firsthand care and to be with loved ones in their dying days. It was costed out at somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$1 billion but it would be money well spent because Canadians expect their government to be there. It is one of the things that distinguish us from most, if not all, other countries around the world. We have demonstrated through our

social programming that we can make a difference and we can make a difference through employment insurance programs.

Liberals have consistently articulated it, whether Mackenzie King as a Liberal prime minister during the 1940s or the Trudeau era of the 1970s that expanded the program to incorporate retraining or the idea of pooling resources to ensure the longevity of the program during the Paul Martin and Jean Chrétien years. We have done so because we believe that employment insurance is an obligation that we have to citizens, to all workers and to those who have the misfortune of being laid off or are unable to be employed for whatever reasons. People need to know that the government is going to ensure that their money, as my colleague points out, is being well distributed in a compassionate, caring way—

• (1400)

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

I must interrupt the hon. member for Winnipeg North at this point. He will have 12 minutes when the House returns to this matter, possibly later today.

Statements by members, the hon. member for Don Valley East.

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## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

### BOYS AND GIRLS CLUBS OF CANADA

**Mr. Joe Daniel (Don Valley East, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada has been a leading provider of after school and critical hours programs since its inception in 1900. This organization is recognized for significantly contributing to the healthy development of young people, an effort I fully support.

In 2008, the Boys and Girls Club introduced a new program promoting physical activity and healthy eating, an initiative supported by the Public Health Agency of Canada. This initiative known as “get busy” has grown from 10 participating club communities to a current 22 communities across Canada.

Today the Public Health Agency is partnering with the private sector to provide even more funding opportunities for the get busy program. Sun Life Financial is one such company and will be matching the Public Health Agency of Canada's funding.

As the member of Parliament for Don Valley East, home to the Boys and Girls Clubs headquarters, I congratulate the Boys and Girls Clubs for the great work they have been doing and the funding opportunity being presented to them today.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

### BOSCOVILLE 2000

**Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to salute Boscoville 2000, an organization dedicated to supporting youth development and social participation in innovative and challenging ways.

*Statements by Members*

Yesterday the organization launched its Web radio project. This initiative arose from consultations with various members of the community, including students at Jean Grou high school, business people and community leaders in the borough of Rivière-des-Prairies. This project will create a stimulating environment within which young people can grow, express themselves and work together.

I wish them every success in their mission to support our youth and promote participation and freedom of expression. Young people are essential to our society. We need them, and we need their dreams. Thank you, and may Boscoville 2000 continue to flourish.

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[English]

**PENSIONS**

**Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party has been calling for a bill to reform MP pensions. This seems odd, considering it was the Liberals who brought in the existing MP pension plan.

In economic action plan 2012, our government proposed changes to MP and civil servant pensions to better reflect fairness for taxpayers. The proposal will bring MP and civil servant pension contributions to a 50% level, equal to the contributions by taxpayers. Other aspects of the pensions are being reviewed in light of sustainability and fairness to the taxpayer.

Our government listens to those we serve and we will take action on pension reform.

In 2006, there was a transition in this place from a government of “we are entitled to our entitlements” to one of “fairness to Canadians we serve”. I am proud to be a member of the latter.

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**KITSILANO COAST GUARD STATION**

**Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I make a plea to the NDP and Conservative members of the House to put aside political partisanship and join me and other Vancouverites at a non-partisan rally this Saturday, September 29 at Kits Point.

For the sake of our constituents' safety, we must ask the government to rescind its decision to close the Kitsilano Coast Guard base.

I echo the B.C. provincial government, Vancouver City Council, police and firefighter first responders, experts in marine safety, port traffic controllers and the people of Vancouver who all say the decision was made without consultation and that the closure will cost lives. Vancouver City Council says that it will create a “significant gap” that they have neither the authority nor the resources to fill.

Thousands of Vancouverites signed petitions to the government to rescind the closure. I ask the House to put aside politics and go to bat for their safety.

**LONDON PARALYMPIC GAMES**

**Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honour an incredible person, entrepreneur and athlete, Mr. Robert Hudson.

Robert was involved in a tragic snowmobile accident that left him a paraplegic. He decided to utilize his passion for archery and began training competitively three hours a day to compete in the Paralympics. He is now a medal winning champion and ranked fifteenth in the world.

Robert has competed in multiple world championships, including: Italy in 2005 and 2011, Korea in 2007, the Czech Republic in 2009, the Pan American Games in 2011 and most recently the Paralympics in London in 2012.

Outside of competing, he owns a mechanical shop, is involved in the local archery club, and enjoys hunting and especially spending time with his son.

Robert demonstrates dedication and perseverance in his pursuits. I am personally humbled by the dedication that Robert displays and the passion he has in representing his country.

On behalf of Canada and Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, I wish him the greatest success in his future endeavours.

\* \* \*

● (1405)

**CHILDREN'S RIGHTS**

**Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, according to yesterday's Canadian Press story, the Canadian government was “hailed on the carpet” by the United Nations for its poor record on child rights.

It is a shame that things have come to this as Canada once was considered a leader on child rights, but not anymore, not with the Conservatives.

According to the OECD, Canada ranks very low in terms of access, quality and funding of early childhood development and care. On average developed countries spend twice what Canada does in these same areas. In Canada, 50% of children with disabilities lack access to the aids they need simply because they cannot afford them. Finally, out of 30 countries, Canada has been ranked 20th in terms of child poverty.

How can the government stand up in the House, as it often does, declaring to the Canadian people that it adequately cares for our most vulnerable children when the actual record so clearly demonstrates otherwise?

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**PEEL REGIONAL POLICE**

**Mr. Parm Gill (Brampton—Springdale, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am thrilled to announce that this past Tuesday, the Peel Police Services Board announced the appointment of Chief Designate Jennifer Evans as the new chief of the Peel police.

The Peel police force is the second largest in Ontario and the third largest in Canada, consisting of 1,900 officers and 800 civilians.

*Statements by Members*

On October 12, she will be sworn in as the first female police chief in the history of the Peel police. Chief Designate Evans has served our community for the past 29 years, and her appointment to this post is the crowning achievement in an already decorated career dedicated to the service and protection of the region.

I would also like to applaud the Peel Police Services Board for this historic appointment. I offer my sincerest congratulations to Chief Designate Evans on this astounding appointment, and I look forward to working with her for many years to come.

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**FRANCO-ONTARIAN CELEBRATION**

**Mr. Jay Aspin (Nipissing—Timiskaming, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, French language and culture play a significant and irreplaceable role in Canada's identity. They are part of our heritage.

In Ontario we have, for the last 40 years, recognized and celebrated our vibrant Francophone communities and the value French continues to add to our society.

This week the citizens of my home town of North Bay celebrated by banding together for a parade through the streets before raising the Franco-Ontarian flag at city hall. The two flowers depicted on the flag are significant. The white lily represents the French-speaking community worldwide, while the green trillium represents the floral emblem of Ontario.

It was our first prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, who said:

Let us be English or let us be French...and above all let us be Canadians.

I know that sometimes differences can create conflict but in Canada we strive to have our differences provide us with the diversity to build a stronger and more prosperous nation.

I am Canadian. *Je suis Canadien.*

\* \* \*

**ONTARIO NORTHLAND RAILWAY**

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the men and women of the Ontario Northland Railway.

The train opened up the north and for over 100 years it has been the backbone of economic development, spreading into bus service, train service, telecommunications and ferries.

Tomorrow, the McGuinty Liberals will kill public transit in the north, and in doing so break faith with the people of northern Ontario. The move comes just before Thanksgiving, the busiest weekend of the year when families and students are coming home.

The response from one Liberal cabinet minister said it all. She said they should tell their kids to buy cars.

That is a world view that says there are two Ontarios, one that counts and one that does not. They see this other Ontario as a colony to take out the wealth, the hydro, the ring of fire.

The New Democrats disagree. We believe in the people of the north. We believe in sustainable communities. We believe that public transit and the train is worth fighting for.

● (1410)

**PROSTATE CANCER AWARENESS WEEK**

**Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this moment to recognize national Prostate Cancer Awareness Week. Prostate cancer is the most common cancer among men in Canada.

Our government's goal is to reduce the burden of cancer across this country. That is why we support cancer and prevention efforts through our joint work with provincial and territorial governments, as well as stakeholders from across this great country.

Funding has been renewed over the next five years for the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer so it can continue its work. We have also invested over \$1 billion for cancer research since we formed government in 2006.

Early detection and leading a healthy, active lifestyle can decrease the risk of developing prostate cancer. We urge men over the age of 50 to talk to their doctors about their risk of prostate cancer, as well as the signs and symptoms of prostate disease.

Through the combined efforts of both the government and Canadians, we can make a difference and save lives. Please join me in recognizing national Prostate Cancer Awareness Week.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is time for the Conservative government to show some leadership on the issue of reducing greenhouse gases and to explore the technologies of the future.

I am extremely proud of some of the truly innovative companies in my riding of Brossard—La Prairie that are finding ways to strike a balance between economic and environmental interests.

Phostech Lithium, which specializes in batteries for electric and hybrid vehicles, invested \$78 million in the construction of a new plant in Candiac.

Distech Controls, a global leader in energy efficiency in buildings, invested over \$6 million in the construction of a new head office in Brossard.

Our future and the Canadian economy are, for the most part, in our own hands. The government can and should play a role in this sustainable development. There is no shortage of skills or willingness among Canadian companies. The bigger problem is the Conservative government's lack of vision.

*Statements by Members*

[English]

**CHILDREN'S RIGHTS**

**Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians can be proud of the efforts our government makes to promote the rights of children and the concrete steps we have taken to protect our youngest citizens, our most precious resource. Our children are safer, thanks to increased penalties for child predators and the end to house arrest for serious crimes like sex assault and kidnapping. Those who prey on their vulnerability are held responsible.

In economic action plan 2012, our government made additional investments to help first nations students improve education outcomes and participate more fully in Canada's economy, measures the opposition voted against. Our government defends the best interests of children at home and abroad. Under the leadership of the Prime Minister, Canada launched the initiative for maternal, newborn, and child health, which is saving lives around the world.

Our government is standing up for Canada's children and youth. The opposition should join us in our efforts.

\* \* \*

**WORLD TOURISM DAY**

**Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, today is World Tourism Day and an excellent opportunity to celebrate tourism and its importance to our economy, jobs, and communities. The international tourism industry is now worth over \$1 trillion spent by a billion tourists each year.

[Translation]

Last year, tourism contributed \$78 billion to the Canadian economy. It created 600,000 jobs and supported 1.6 million more.

[English]

It is the bread and butter for small businesses, resorts, restaurants, coffee shops, retailers, and tourism operators from coast to coast to coast, but Canada's share of the global market is shrinking. We used to be the seventh most popular destination in the world and now we are the 18th. The number of visitors is dropping. We have a climbing tourism deficit of billions of dollars.

Today, I call on the government to ensure that Canada gets a bigger piece of this important \$1 trillion pie, to strengthen our international tourism marketing, and to support this vital sector of Canada's economy and all of the people in the communities across the country who depend on it.

\* \* \*

●(1415)

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, back in 2008 the NDP member for Edmonton—Strathcona said that the most important thing is to put the right price on carbon. Then in February 2012, the NDP's House leader stated, "I'm more of a cap-and-trade kind of guy...the point of the exercise is putting a price on carbon". In March, the NDP leader even stated that he would have a cap-and-trade program that would produce billions.

The promise of a job-killing carbon tax can also be found on page 4 of the NDP's platform. It wants to raise \$21 billion in revenue from this new tax scheme. This would hurt Canadian families and raise the price of everything. Why does the NDP want to impose a job-killing carbon tax on Canadian families during this fragile economic time?

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA**

**Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Conservatives had what we could call a bad day: 86 of their members, including 10 ministers, voted to strip women of some of their rights.

We would have expected the Minister for Status of Women to support women's rights. Instead, she voted for the motion, as did four Liberal members. It is disgraceful and absurd.

But that is not all: yesterday, the Conservatives invited representatives of Canadian Immigration Report, an organization associated with far-right racists and hate groups, to appear before a parliamentary committee.

On its website, this organization questions hatred for national socialism and writes that there is nothing inherently wrong with it.

[English]

The NDP stands against these sorts of racist groups. We do not invite them to parliamentary committees. We stand unanimously in favour of a woman's right to choose, not like the other parties in the House. That is why we are ready to replace that tired government.

\* \* \*

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday the House was reminded of comments from the NDP's natural resources critic, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster, who supports the NDP leader's job-killing carbon tax.

The NDP member and the party opposite may know that this week is National Forest Week. What is clear is that the only thing the NDP believes about the forest is that money grows on trees, and when it does not that party harvests a carbon tax.

The truth is the NDP cannot see the forest for the trees. With the NDP leader's job-killing carbon tax, there would be no forestry sector left in Canada, there would be no natural resource sector left in Canada. The only good news? Eventually Canadians would ensure that there was no New Democratic Party left in Canada.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS***[Translation]***FOREIGN INVESTMENT**

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday, Canadian oil company executives expressed concerns about the takeover of Nexen by a state-run Chinese company.

Members of the U.S. Congress, both Republicans and Democrats, are also expressing their concerns about the takeover of their resources by China. American elected officials understand what is at stake. Canadians understand what is at stake. The people who do not seem to understand are the Conservatives.

Why have they not yet made public the evaluation criteria that will be used to approve or reject the takeover of Nexen?

**Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, unlike the NDP and its principles, our government understands what is important: encouraging the entire world to do business responsibly. We have not yet made a decision on this issue, but we will always make decisions in the best interests of Canada. We are committed to that. We have the Investment Canada Act, which we use to ensure that the best interests of Canadians are always the primary concern of the Government of Canada.

*[English]*

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, last week the Minister of Natural Resources promised Canadians that new rules for evaluating foreign takeovers were on the way, but he also said the new rules would not be made public until after the decision was made on the Nexen takeover.

Why are the guidelines for evaluating one of the most important foreign takeovers in Canadian history being kept secret from the Canadian public?

**Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what is untrue about the NDP's rhetoric on this subject is the suggestion that our government indeed has not moved on the Investment Canada Act. As a matter of fact, we have.

In 2007, we ensured that state-owned enterprises adhere to Canadian standards of corporate governance and ensured that they operate according to commercial principles. We have made other reforms as well. All the reforms that we put in place are always with the principle that the laws have to serve the best interests of all Canadians, and that is our approach with this.

With regard to this specific file, a decision has not been made, but like other decisions, we will always make decisions that are in the best interests of Canadians.

• (1420)

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, even Conservative MPs have expressed concerns about this deal. The Conservatives are considering allowing a foreign state-owned company to buy a huge slice of Canada's natural resources. Yet the guidelines for evaluating this takeover are being kept secret from the Canadian public. The minister says there are new

guidelines, but will not tell us what they are until after the deal is done.

Why does this Conservative government persist? Why does it have to hide these new rules from the Canadian public?

**Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, no such thing is happening. What is equally true is that it does not, frankly, matter, because the NDP is against any trade deal, any approach to foreign investment that Canada has ever considered. It would not make any difference. It does not matter.

The Leader of the Opposition likes to pretend that he has some sort of nuanced socialist position when it comes to foreign investments. The reality is that the NDP is against every trade deal and every foreign investment or any consideration of any of those things.

Our approach is a Canadian approach that takes into consideration the best interests of Canada's domestic industries and our security, and we will continue to do so.

\* \* \*

**FOOD SAFETY**

**Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, on September 26, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food said, when referring to the XL beef recall, "None of it made it to store shelves. The recall is ongoing". The reality is, the Alberta health authority has confirmed four cases of E. coli from meat that originated from the same processing plants involved in the nationwide recall.

Will the minister continue to deny and contradict officials from CFIA, or will he stand in his place and admit contaminated meat has reached store shelves across this country?

**Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member for Welland is mixing two issues. The one I was referring to was the September 4 recall, where we captured all of that product. Then we moved on and I said, and he said too, "...and the recall continues". He is absolutely right.

There are two different issues here, but I want to assure Canadians that their food supply is safe. We are continuing to work with CFIA, holding its feet to the fire to make sure these recalls are done in a timely way.

**Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I doubt whether the minister knows September 4 from September 16. What we do know is that American inspectors caught that contaminated meat, not Canadian inspectors. That is a failure on the government's part.

The lack of details on this particular recall is disturbing. It is absolutely alarming Canadians, and Canadians are worried.

When will Canadians start getting straight answers, and when will the Conservative government admit its failure in food safety policy because of its draconian cuts to CFIA?

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, of course there are no cuts to CFIA. If Canadians want the straight goods they should not listen to the member for Welland. Last night, on a panel program, he said that there was absolutely no CFIA presence in that facility. He is absolutely wrong. There are 46 inspection staff in that facility, 20% more than there were three years ago. That is some cut.

**Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, perhaps I could ask the government to explain why the Canadian Food Inspection Agency was informed by the American border services on September 4 that there had been an E. coli contamination with respect to products from XL.

I have a simple question for the minister. Why did it take 12 days before a recall notice was put out by the Canadian government?

**Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the government inspectors did indeed do their job and they are continuing to do so because the minister is ensuring that they do what is in the best interests of all Canadians. We will continue to keep up that pressure. The minister is indeed doing his job.

However, it is very important that the opposition members do understand and stop misleading Canadians with regard to both food safety and the government's commitment to food safety. We have increased our investment and have ensured that we have more inspectors. In fact, 700 more inspectors are on the job now than when we formed government. We have done that. We continue to go in the right direction—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. Minister of Canadian Heritage has the floor.

**Hon. James Moore:** Mr. Speaker, we have built up the inspection regime that the Liberals neglected and tore down for 10 years and we will continue to do so.

•(1425)

**Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the gang that brought the Canadian public Walkerton is in no position to lecture the people on this side of the House. I did not hear from the minister an answer to a very simple—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. member for Toronto Centre has the floor. We are barely into question period and we are already encountering trouble.

The hon. member for Toronto Centre has the floor.

**Hon. Bob Rae:** Mr. Speaker, I did not hear an answer to the question. The question is quite simple. On September 3, the American inspection services discovered a problem. On September 4, they informed the Canadian government that there was a problem. On September 16, a recall notice was put out.

My question is for the officials of the Canadian government represented by the cabinet. Why did it take nearly two weeks before there was a recall?

**Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member is right in pointing out that the Americans notified us on September 4, the day we also discovered another interference in a plant in Calgary at the same time. We were able to contain all of that shipment. It was from the same shipment that went to the border and to Calgary. We were predicated on getting that out of the marketplace. What is called “bracketing” is the lot on either side. We also sought to do that. We were able to contain that group, put it right back into storage and get it out from any close call to the store shelves. We then started to work with the plant as to what would be needed ongoing. This was all based on science, not on speculation.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the minister's comments bring no comfort to the four victims of E. coli bacteria, who were discovered well after the Government of Canada was informed of the fact that a problem had affected Canadians.

I will ask the question again: why did it take nearly two weeks before the Canadian government took the necessary action to protect Canadians? That is my question.

[*English*]

**Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Liberals has the same problem the member for Welland had. There are two different streams of product here to be worked on. The first was the product identified in the September 4—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. Minister of Agriculture has the floor and he should be the only one who I can hear up here but, unfortunately, I hear quite a lot of noise. I would ask for a little bit of order.

The hon. Minister of Agriculture.

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** They really do not want an answer, Mr. Speaker. They would rather scare Canadians. I am here to tell Canadians that our food is safe. CFIA is on the job. Members at the plant are on the job and getting the job done.

As I said, there were two streams, the September 4 bracketed by either side, and then, following on where we thought there might be other possibilities, that is when we finally, after scientifically testing all the way through and going back to the records, we followed the proper stream. We do not go willy-nilly after this like the Liberals would have us do. We work with science.

*Oral Questions*

[Translation]

**EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

**Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are making cuts to employment insurance even though the money does not belong to them. This reform is a cause for concern throughout Quebec. In the Lower St. Lawrence area, some family drop-in centres, which encourage the creation of parental support networks, are open only 10 months of the year. Now they risk losing long-time, skilled employees who will no longer be eligible for employment insurance benefits.

Is harming family relationships on the Conservative agenda?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should stop fearmongering. It is not at all fair. Our challenge is to connect workers, particularly unemployed workers, with available jobs. There are many jobs available right now. We are increasing the number of job alerts that we send to unemployed workers, and we are giving them guidance to help them look for, find and keep employment. We are there for unemployed workers.

**Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, we support improved management of the employment insurance program, and we do not invite far-right supporters to committee meetings.

The minister cannot ignore this problem indefinitely. A horticulture technician in Lanoraie often receives employment insurance benefits in the winter. The minister's reform is punishing her for having a seasonal job. She is going to be forced to accept a lower-paying McJob in Trois-Rivières, which is far from her home.

Why does the minister refuse to recognize that seasonal jobs are an economic driver?

• (1430)

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government has supported the forestry industry and other seasonal industries many times, and it will continue to do so.

We recognize that there will always be seasonal workers and that there are employers who need these people's talents and skills during the peak season. We are trying to make these people aware of other jobs available in their field in the region.

**Mr. Claude Patry (Jonquière—Alma, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the NDP supports the employment insurance program, but not the Conservatives' bad management. If the minister had taken the time to visit Jonquière—Alma before planning these changes, she would have witnessed the direct consequences of her decisions. Had she met with seasonal workers who are supposed to make ends meet on just 10 hours of minimum wage work a week in the winter, she would have realized that taking \$40 or \$50 away from them means that they cannot provide the essentials for their families.

The minister is taking food from the mouths of these people, so why does she always refuse to meet them personally?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I just said, we have a new system to let unemployed workers know about jobs available in their geographic area and their range of skills. Many employers are

looking for people to fill vacancies. We want to help them connect, but if people cannot find a job in their range of skills and in their geographic area, employment insurance will be there for them as it has always been.

[English]

**Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the minister responsible for EI is telling us that her new system lets people on a claim keep more money if they find some part-time work. She has been using an example of someone making \$450 a week working part-time.

I would like to tell the House about a woman who called my office. She is getting paid \$150 a week for part-time work. Before the Conservative changes, she kept almost \$110 and now she only gets to keep \$75.

Canadians who have been hard hit by the economy are losing more under the Conservative government. Could the minister tell that woman how she is better?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we know that right across our great country, even in areas of high unemployment, employers are looking for Canadians to fill jobs in their range of skills and in their geographic area. It does not make sense to have people on EI when there are employers looking for those very same skills in the same town. We are working, through increases to our job alerts and enhancements to the job bank, to connect those people who are out of work with the jobs available to them. That makes sense. That is what we are trying to do for Canadians. It is better for them and for their families.

**Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, 300,000 more Canadians are unemployed now than at the start of the recession, so one would think that the working while on claim budget would be going up. Instead, the Conservatives slashed it from \$130 million for one year to \$74 million over two years. However, the parliamentary secretary claimed categorically, "those who work more will be able to keep more".

Does the minister really not understand the changes to her own program or did she give her parliamentary secretary the wrong talking points?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I do have to correct the hon. member. Since the depths of the recession we have created as a country over 770,000 net new jobs. That is good news.

Let us look at Tracie who collects \$264 a week on EI. She works three days at \$12 an hour. Under the old system she would have been able to keep \$106. Under the new system she will be able to keep \$144. That is an improvement for her.



*Oral Questions*

**Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the facts do not lie. There are 300,000 more unemployed Canadians today and it is plainly false to claim that under the new scheme all EI claimants who find part-time work will get to keep more. Many recipients who found work while receiving EI are taking home less. That, too, is a fact.

This situation is being repeated all across the country and it is the poorest claimants who are being hit the hardest. The minister must know this is true.

Will the minister fix the program and ditch her ridiculous talking points?

• (1435)

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our goal is to ensure that when Canadians work they are better off than when they do not. That seems reasonable.

Under the old system, people's EI was clawed back dollar for dollar once they had earned a small portion of their claim. That discouraged people from working. It discouraged people who had the skills and the talents that employers in their areas were looking for. We want to ensure that we are connecting those Canadians with those skills with the jobs that are there for them.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION**

**Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Conservatives invited representatives of Canadian Immigration Report to appear before the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. The NDP opposed the idea of them speaking in committee, considering the hate speech and racist comments that appear on the group's website. After seeing some of it, even the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration was offended and said someone's name was being dragged through the mud.

Why were the Conservatives not aware of the kind of group they had invited to a parliamentary committee? Was it because the group had flattered the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism between two racist remarks?

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Parliamentary Secretary for Multiculturalism is an immigrant to Canada from Taiwan. One of his constituents made a suggestion for a witness who could appear in committee. As soon as he learned of these potential witnesses' completely unacceptable opinions, he demanded that the witnesses be withdrawn and he condemned the comments made on their website.

However, I must add that we are proud to have the most ethnically diverse caucus in Canadian history and to have maintained the highest levels of immigration in our history.

[English]

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, voting to take away women's rights an hour after inviting racists to a parliamentary committee is a new low even for the

Conservatives. The group's website even features a prominent picture and positive statement about the Minister of Immigration. It also defends white supremacism and includes a section called "Chinafication".

The Conservatives defended calling this group to committee. Even a cursory look shows that the group should not have been invited.

How could the Conservatives fail to do even basic due diligence?

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what a fine example of McCarthyite demagoguery from the member opposite.

The member for Willowdale is an immigrant to Canada from Taiwan. He put forward a witness at the suggestion of a constituent. The moment he found out that the witness had expressed totally inappropriate views on the Internet, he condemned those views unequivocally, demanded that the witness be withdrawn and said that if the witness came before the committee he would give the witness a serious condemnation of the witness' outrageous views.

We need to face the fact that this is coming from the NDP whose members hang out with the anarchist group No One Is Illegal that says that Canada is illegal. That is—

**The Speaker:** Order, please The hon. member for Newton—North Delta.

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, we did not invite racists to committee. We did not vote to take away a woman's right to choose. That was the Conservatives, including the Minister for Status of Women.

To quote from the writings of the CIR:

This hate on National Socialism is completely misguided... [T]here is nothing inherently wrong with it at all...

The Conservatives even tried to defend these witnesses. Why are they bringing racists to a parliamentary committee?

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, those comments are below the member who just said them. She knows perfectly well that the member who put forward the suggested witness is an immigrant to Canada from Taiwan. Is she really making this kind of ad hominem remark against that member?

The moment that Conservative members learned about these outrageous views associated with this witness, they insisted that the person not be brought before committee and condemned unequivocally these outrageous remarks.

However, will the member deny that her predecessor, the immigration critic of the NDP, went to rallies for the anarchist organization called No One Is Illegal that says Canada is illegal? That is outrageous.

*Oral Questions*

●(1440)

**EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the minister has done a remarkably poor job in answering questions on the EI file, so I am going to make it really easy today. I am going to go with a true or false question.

Under the old system, people could earn and keep 40% of their EI benefit. So, if they were receiving maximum benefits, they could keep \$193, with zero clawback. True or false?

The minister has a 50% chance of being right on this one. Good luck.

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member can focus on the past, but our government is focused on the future of Canadians.

We are working with them so they can get the skills they need for the jobs of today and tomorrow. We are working with them to make sure that they know what opportunities are available within their skill range, within their regions. We are connecting them with the jobs available, with employers, because we believe it is a good thing for Canadians to be working, and we are here to help them do just that.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, let us try this again. A woman in my riding who works in a seafood plant receives employment insurance benefits when the plant is closed. She managed to find a minimum wage job in Bouctouche, where an employer is looking for someone to work just one night a week. Let us be clear: there are no other jobs in Bouctouche and, no matter what the minister believes, this woman is not lazy.

Why does the minister want to take away half of this woman's earnings?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should know that, under the system that the Liberals themselves created, once claimants earned \$75, they would lose every dollar they earned after that. Our system is going to allow claimants to keep 50¢ of every dollar they earn. So, 50% is much better than nothing at all.

[*English*]

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, now that the government has changed its mind on fleet separation owner-operator policies, fishers are worried that the next thing the government is going to go after is the fishers' employment insurance program.

This program keeps our fishers independent and self-employed and gets them through the winter months when there is no other work in our rural coastal areas. Will the government commit to keeping the fishers' employment insurance program in place, as it has been for the last number of years?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we do recognize the value of our fisheries right across this country. That is why our Minister of Fisheries and Oceans has been working with the fishing sector to ensure that they are viable and strong.

We have been very clear, but perhaps the hon. member did not hear because of his own hecklers, that the fishers' benefits program under EI is there, as it always has been.

\* \* \*

**HEALTH**

**Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, today's PBO report clearly shows that the federal government is balancing its books on the backs of the provinces. The Conservatives did this by shortchanging the Canada health transfer by \$36 billion.

A majority of Canadians believe that health care should be the government's top priority, yet the Conservatives keep backing away from their responsibilities.

Today, New Democrats launched our national campaign to provide real leadership on health care. Will the Conservatives join us to finally provide the leadership that Canadians are asking for?

**Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am not sure where the NDP and the Parliamentary Budget Officer learned their math, but in reality, when funding is increased to \$40 billion, that is an increase. That is our government's record and that is what we have been doing.

Unlike previous governments that balanced their books on the backs of the provinces and territories, we are increasing our transfers to them. We have committed to a long-term stable funding arrangement that will see health transfers reach historic levels by the end of this decade.

Our investments will help preserve Canada's health care system so that it can be there when Canadians need it.

●(1445)

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, we support a strong universal health care system and, unlike the Conservatives, we do not invite far-right supporters to committee meetings.

Canadians think that health should be a priority, but the Conservatives prefer to make budget cuts. Today, the NDP launched its campaign to improve our health care system.

Will the Conservatives join us in finding ways to modernize our health care system?

[*English*]

**Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the NDP plan is to talk about health care for three years, and of course to raise taxes.

Our plan has long-term stable funding arrangement that will see health transfers increase to historic levels of \$40 billion by the end of this decade.

Our plan is to make investments, like the one the Minister of Health is announcing today in Nova Scotia for healthy living and children. We are taking action now because that is what Canadians want and that is what Canadians need.

\* \* \*

#### ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, all summer long Inuit across the north and here in Ottawa have protested the high food prices. Those prices are about to get worse.

On October 1, non-perishable foods will no longer be considered for subsidy under the nutrition north program. This is going to push the prices of already expensive food even higher.

Will the minister admit that this program is not working for people in the north and commit to keeping the current list of foods on the subsidy list?

**Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I can quote a recent letter from an Inuit-owned food retailer, the Stanton Group, which says:

In the first year of the NNC [nutrition north Canada] program, we have seen savings of up to 35 per cent on perishable foods such as fresh fruit, vegetables, milk, meat and eggs: savings that have been passed on to northern residents.

What northern Canadians do not have an appetite for is an NDP carbon tax on everything from soup to nuts, meat and milk, as well as everything else.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have visited these communities, and I can attest to the fact that the Nutrition North Canada program is not working properly.

Local food acquired through hunting is the best option for many families that live in isolated communities. However, the Nutrition North Canada program will only provide funding for meat that comes from a processing plant and has been inspected by a government inspector. There is still no federal inspector nearby to inspect food.

In the last quarter, only \$218 was devoted to the funding of traditional food.

Will the minister make the changes necessary to promote the sharing of local, traditional food among communities?

[English]

**Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we have put in place arrangements whereby the nutrition north program will deal with traditional foods. Yes, there is a break-in period, but there are some good things happening.

We now have a local market that has been set up in Iqaluit through local initiatives. We have some of the retailers now very interested in trying to make some arrangements for traditional foods.

This is going to take a while, but it is something that we have very much promoted.

#### Oral Questions

#### SPORT

**Mr. John Carmichael (Don Valley West, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in 2015 Canada will again play host as Toronto welcomes the Americas to the Pan American and Parapan American Games.

Can the Minister of Natural Resources please tell the House how our government plans to ensure that our world-class athletes have access to state-of-the-art facilities both during and after these games in Toronto?

**Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government is making a significant investment in the 2015 Pan American and Parapan American Games, with facilities that will benefit Canadians for years to come.

Today I am pleased to announce that our government will also provide \$115 million for the construction of the aquatic centre and field house at the University of Toronto campus in Scarborough.

This significant investment will create a lasting legacy and generate economic activity throughout the GTA.

\* \* \*

● (1450)

[Translation]

#### THE ENVIRONMENT

**Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians can no longer follow the Conservative rhetoric on environmental assessments. Even the minister is confused. Yesterday he said that “until the legislation was tabled it would have been inappropriate for us to consult”. Except that he did consult industry last January, to find out how to give priority to the development of pipelines.

Why did the Conservatives consult the oil and gas industry before consulting Canadians?

[English]

**Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, to recap my colleague's talking points fresh off her party leader's mini-lectern, the NDP has disdain for our natural resources sector and love for ineffective government.

What we have been doing over the last year is reviewing our environmental assessment process to ensure that we have a balance between rigour and process efficiencies. We feel we have achieved that balance.

We had a very strong working group on that in our sub-committee, which my colleague rarely attended. We feel that we have this balance right and are doing great things for this country.

**Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I suggest that we get some notes because yesterday the minister told the House one thing and a few months ago told industry something entirely different.

The Conservative budget bill gutted environmental protection and scrapped environmental assessments for 200 pipeline projects. Is that a coincidence?

### Oral Questions

Canadians were not consulted, our committee was kept in the dark, and yet the minister went out of his way to reassure industry that he had its interests at heart before the legislation was even tabled. Why did he tell the House otherwise yesterday?

**Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, during the hours and hours of committee study last year, where both the finance and environment committees looked at our environmental assessment laws, we heard over and over again the need to streamline and make the process more efficient.

The commissioner for the environment himself said that 99% of the environmental assessments conducted in this country have little to no environmental impact and that the resources dedicated to those screenings could be more effectively used for larger screenings.

This is getting things done for Canadians.

\* \* \*

### SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

**Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' disregard for environmental science is hurting Canada's global standing and reputation in science and technology. A new study commissioned by the Conservatives themselves shows that under their watch Canada has moved from leader to laggard in environmental and natural resource sciences.

I know that the government dislikes it when evidence gets in the way of its political agenda, but is the minister really satisfied to play catch-up with the rest of the world on scientific research?

**Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member really needs to read the report. I do not understand why the NDP members are always bashing Canada. The report said that environmental and natural sciences "maintain considerable strength, with Canadian research in Agriculture, Fisheries, and Forestry ranked second in the world...and Earth and Environmental Sciences ranked fourth".

I do not know why the NDP members are constantly bashing Canada and scientists. We are doing very well.

[Translation]

**Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary can say what he likes, but the numbers do not lie.

While other countries are giving priority to environmental science, the Canadian government is closing laboratories, eliminating jobs and taking essential tools away from researchers. For Canada, this means fewer jobs, fewer patents and lower profits. One thing is clear: we are lagging behind other OECD countries.

Will the Conservatives stop using science only when it suits them?

[English]

**Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the members should read the report before they make comments on it.

The fact is that in the last five years this report was done, Canada increased its publications 60%, and it was the only country in the G7 to do that.

We made a decision to support science, which included about \$135 million for environmental research, water research, and climate change research. The NDP members voted against it. They need to get their facts right and get on board with supporting scientists because we are moving in on number one in the world.

• (1455)

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Experimental Lakes Area, Canada's world-renowned facility for freshwater research and education, is in danger of extinction by the Conservative government.

The research conducted at the ELA must continue. It must be public and it must be owned by the public.

Can the government honestly answer the following question for Canadians? Does it plan to mothball or decommission the ELA, or will it ensure its independence?

**Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we did in fact make a decision, and that was to end the Experimental Lakes Area as a federal facility. We made another decision, and that is to fund science and technology in this country like never before in the history of the country, including \$8 billion, in new dollars, since 2006.

What did the Liberals do when they were in power? They cut science and technology. What will the NDP do? It will bring in a carbon tax that will hurt scientists, hurt universities and make it harder on students.

\* \* \*

### ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, nutrition north was supposed to make feeding families in the north cheaper, but it has failed miserably. On Monday, the government will stubbornly persist with the devastating cuts to the list of essentials that will be subsidized.

Will the government listen to the desperate northerners, who never protested before, to the poignant Feeding My Family movement, and go back to the drawing board and work with northerners to fix this international disgrace?

**Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the changes that are being made on October 1 are for products that are stable, non-perishable products that can go by searift instead of by air. That is the reason we are making these changes. That allows for the subsidy to go to perishable products. Those are products like milk, for example. We have a drop of as much as 37% in the price of milk, based on the nutrition north program. The program is working.

*Oral Questions*

[Translation]

**NATIONAL DEFENCE**

**Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, apparently the Canadian Special Operations Forces Command has lost some top secret equipment valued at somewhere between \$8 million and \$10 million.

This equipment is so secret that the department has not even disclosed what kind of equipment it is. We know that the special forces are experts in the art of disappearing, but when the government lets equipment disappear, that is another matter.

How could the Conservatives fail to do something about the disappearance of such important and costly equipment?

[English]

**Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the reality is that three years ago, on their own initiative, the commander of the special forces brought in DND's internal auditor to review their financial management practices and to look to identify areas of improvement. Guess what that audit found? The audit found that appropriate financial controls were in place but that additional work had to be done, particularly when it came to tracing and keeping track of all equipment within the special forces systems, and that other financial statements had to be put in place.

We have taken that audit very seriously. I have assurances from the commander that those steps will be taken.

I want to take the opportunity to acknowledge and thank our special forces for their remarkable work.

**Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is not just the rising costs of the F-35 that the government cannot keep track of. It is also the equipment to be used by the special forces. The chief of review services has said that in one unit alone, between \$8 million and \$10 million in equipment has gone missing. The government has known about this for years, but no action was taken.

Could the minister tell us if this equipment has been found and how many millions of dollars in other equipment has also gone missing?

**Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, ignoring the prattle, the irresponsible remarks from the member's preamble, I will repeat again that in fact the special forces commander brought in the auditor. That was done at their request. The auditor looked at their practices, found in fact that there was a good system but further work had to be done in tracing and tracking all equipment. Those practices are improving, I am assured by the commander.

What we do know is that, given the record and the comments by members opposite from the NDP, if it were up to them they would have no new equipment in the special forces, or the Canadian Forces.

\* \* \*

● (1500)

**SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

**Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government has made historic investments in science and technology to create jobs, strengthen our economy and improve the

quality of life for all Canadians. This commitment has created very positive results in Kitchener—Waterloo and has made Canada a world leader in science and innovation and a destination of choice for the brightest international researchers.

Could the minister of state please update us, once again, on Canada's progress in these important areas?

**Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, you will find it the correct interpretation of scientific results. I thank the Council of Canadian Academies, an expert panel that did indeed determine that Canada's S and T sector is healthy, growing and the fourth-best in the world.

The study is a resounding endorsement of our government's strong commitment for science and technology, and frankly a stinging indictment of the parties opposite who voted against our record support, which has clearly made our country a global science leader.

By the way, fisheries research is number one.

\* \* \*

**CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION**

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday at the citizenship and immigration committee, we saw an appalling display of Conservative ignorance and insensitivity when all six of its members voted down my motion to study the devastating effects of the cuts to refugee health care.

Front-line doctors who treat refugees wrote to the committee members, asking for the opportunity to come to the committee to detail proof of the adverse outcomes of the reckless policy decision.

My question to the minister is: What is the government afraid to hear?

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, apparently the member opposite is afraid to hear common sense.

In fact there are no cuts to refugee health care. Resettled refugees will continue to receive what they have in the past. Bona fide asylum claimants will be landed as permanent residents and receive health care, like all Canadians.

These changes affect asylum claimants about two-thirds of whom turn out not to be well founded, particularly asylum claimants coming from countries in which virtually all claims are rejected.

Of course, the greatest savings are derived from no longer providing taxpayer-funded health insurance to rejected asylum claimants who are no longer welcome to stay in Canada. What does the member not understand about that?

*Points of Order***CHILDREN'S RIGHTS**

**Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Canadian government was hauled on the carpet by a UN committee for its poor record on child rights.

The committee found too many children in Canada were falling through the cracks. Poverty amongst aboriginal, immigrant and disabled children is not just significant but is growing.

The UN is challenging Canada, as one of the top economies in the world, to rise to the occasion. When will the government step up to that challenge? What will it take for the Canadian government to make Canadian children a true priority?

**Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians can be proud of the efforts our government has taken to protect the rights of children.

We are also committed to the promotion of children's rights around the world, and are proud to have been an active co-sponsor and supporter of resolutions before the UN General Assembly and the Human Rights Council.

The sad reality is that Syria is a member of this committee. Syria, a country whose rulers are stealing the innocence of an entire generation of its children, is criticizing Canada. Imagine that. This is no doubt to distract from the atrocities that Syrian children are currently facing every day.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**FORESTRY INDUSTRY**

**Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the forestry industry is the primary economic driver for hundreds of rural Canadian communities. These single-industry towns depend on pulp mills and forestry to survive.

Can the Minister of Natural Resources tell us what the NDP's proposed carbon tax would mean for the forestry industry?

**Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for a good question.

Our forestry sector depends on making our products available at competitive prices. I saw that first-hand during my recent trip to Japan and Korea. A carbon tax would increase the cost of our products and make our industry less competitive.

Unfortunately, the NDP obsession with taxes and spending would kill jobs and hurt communities in Quebec and across Canada. What a tragedy.

\* \* \*

● (1505)

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, while climate change wreaks havoc on the planet, starting with the Canadian North, the Conservatives are working at cross purposes. Their new target is Montreal's Biosphere, the only institution in North America that is conducting research on water and ecosystem protection while offering public awareness activities.

Unfortunately, the Conservatives want to abolish the educational component of the Biosphere.

Is the Conservatives' goal to censor scientists and keep Canadians in the dark?

[English]

**Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, with over two-thirds of the workforce at Environment Canada involved in science and research, our government is investing heavily in research and education when it comes to environmental research.

To echo some of my colleague's comments earlier, our government is supporting science and technology investment across this country at record levels. We see that at universities and institutions across the country. We are starting to see the results, and we are very proud of this record.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**STATUS OF WOMEN**

**Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday we were astonished to watch the Minister for Status of Women vote in favour of the motion to reopen the abortion debate.

The Minister for Status of Women, who is responsible for ensuring respect for and the promotion of women's rights, voted to restrict a woman's right to control her own body. It is no surprise that the Fédération des femmes du Québec is today calling on the minister to resign. The minister has betrayed the trust of women and broken her own party's election promise.

Will the Prime Minister fire her or does he support her? Will she rise and tender her resignation today? We are ready to listen.

[English]

**Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that this is the first question I have received on the status of women file this year. In fact, I think this is the first question I have received since last year as well. Do you know why that is, Mr. Speaker? It is because this government has an incredible track record of standing up for Canadian women and girls. We have increased the funding to status of women to its highest point in Canadian history. So far, in just a couple of years, we have funded more than 550 projects from coast to coast to tackle violence against women and empower women and girls, and we will continue to do just that.

\* \* \*

**POINTS OF ORDER**

## ORAL QUESTIONS

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order and it is fairly straightforward.

*Business of the House*

First, to set the record straight, I went to that committee—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** I will hear the hon. member for Newton—North Delta. I will remind her that setting the record straight is usually considered a matter of debate, but if she has a legitimate point of order, I will certainly hear it now, and I will ask for a little order.

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims:** Mr. Speaker, while I was asking my questions, the Minister of State for Science and Technology was yelling “freedom of speech”. At the same time I heard very clearly from the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism that he does not condone racist white supremacists making presentations before the immigration committee. I want to know what the Conservative position is.

**The Speaker:** If the hon. member has another question, she can raise that during another question period, but it is not a point of order.

The hon. House leader for the official opposition for the Thursday question.

\* \* \*

**BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

**Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, last week on the Thursday question we asked the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons to respond to a sincere offer by the opposition to make Parliament work for Canadians by listing a number of bills on which the opposition was willing to work with the government. In response to that question, the government House leader spent a great deal of his time fabricating New Democratic Party policy rather than doing the job of House leaders, which is to formulate a strategy to make this place function for Canadians.

If the government spent at least 50% of its energy working with the opposition on such bills, it might acknowledge the progress on such bills as Bill C-42, Bill C-21, Bill C-44, Bill C-37, and Bill C-32. They are proof of the opposition's willingness to make this place function for Canadians. They also disprove the myth that the government had to use closure out of necessity rather than its own ideology and perspective of how a democracy ought to run.

The clear question in front of the government is twofold. When will we see the opposition days in the coming calendar for the official opposition? Also, a question which is on the minds of many Canadians with respect to a second budget implementation bill is, will we see a repeat of the one we saw in the spring? Many people called it a Trojan horse bill because it contained many measures that had absolutely nothing to do with the budget.

• (1510)

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the House leader of the official opposition for his kind comments about co-operation. It is true that we have been working together in a co-operative fashion on the bills he mentioned. In fact, without utilizing time allocation, after nine days of co-operative debate on things that everybody agrees on, we have been able to have one vote on one bill at one stage. If members wonder why it is difficult to get things done, that indicates

why: we all agree on something and it still takes nine days to get one bill to one vote at one stage.

[*Translation*]

Anyway, this afternoon, we will continue with our helping families in need week with second reading debate on Bill C-44, which will undertake several steps to help hard-working Canadian parents in times of need.

Based on discussions, I expect that we will finish debating Bill C-44 today. If so, I will then call Bill C-21, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (accountability with respect to political loans), tomorrow.

I understand that there is interest in all corners of the House to see this legislation referred to committee quickly. I hope so, because I believe that all parties want it passed. We may be able to make that happen.

[*English*]

Next week we are going to focus on making our streets and communities even safer. From Wednesday through Friday we will consider second reading of Bill C-43, the faster removal of foreign criminals act, which will firmly show that Parliament does not tolerate criminals and fraudsters abusing Canadian generosity.

On Monday and Tuesday, we shall have the third and fourth allotted days. Both days will go to the official opposition. I am eagerly waiting to see what we debate those days. Perhaps the New Democrats will use the opportunity to lay out their details for a \$21 billion carbon tax which would raise the price of gas, groceries and electricity. Perhaps I should correct the record; it would be a \$21.5 billion carbon tax. I know there are some in the press gallery who want us to be precise about that.

If we have a hard-working, productive and orderly week in the House which sees debates on Bill C-44, Bill C-21 and Bill C-43 finish early, the House will also consider second reading of Bill C-37, the increasing offenders' accountability for victims act, which the official opposition supports, despite debating it for four days last week; Bill C-15, the strengthening military justice in the defence of Canada act; Bill S-2, the family homes on reserves and matrimonial interests or rights act; and Bill S-8, the safe drinking water for first nations act.

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[English]***HELPING FAMILIES IN NEED ACT**

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-44, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code and the Employment Insurance Act and to make consequential amendments to the Income Tax Act and the Income Tax Regulations, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Winnipeg North has 12 minutes left to conclude his remarks.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to continue to speak to the important role employment insurance plays in today's society. Before I do that, it is important to emphasize that we see the value in passing this legislation. I anticipate it could be passed today because there does seem to be widespread support among all political parties in the House. We anticipate it will likely pass today and for good reason. At the end of the day we all want to improve the system. This legislation takes into consideration the whole issue of compassion toward critically ill children. It does that by allowing for 35 weeks of benefits, and beyond 35 weeks in certain situations.

I also appreciate that it provides some protection in terms of unpaid leave. This is very positive. I appreciate that we are referring to jobs within the civil service with respect to that particular requirement.

It also deals with the important and sensitive issue of murdered or missing children.

I am sure that most, if not all, members of Parliament could cite specific examples of constituents or individuals they know who have been in such situations that this legislation would cover. Two occasions come to mind where this particular benefit would have been of great help to individuals I have known. Both of them involved a death.

Based on compassionate grounds, we see the value of extending the benefits through employment insurance. We see that as a positive move.

I want to reinforce something that was raised in the debate prior to question period, which is the whole idea of why, in the opinion of many, including the Liberal caucus, the government has still not recognized the value of extending that same sort of compassion in other situations. I am referring most specifically to individuals who are terminally ill. After explaining the situation to EI, it would be of great assistance to have a spouse, a child, or possibly a sibling afforded the opportunity to be at the bedside of a terminally ill family member.

The Liberal caucus has talked about this for a long time. We are very passionate about that idea, and the time has come for the government to act on it. I would encourage the government to act now. It does not have to wait.

Earlier I talked about how employment insurance has evolved over time. I would like to think that this is yet another example of the

direction in which we should be heading in providing employment insurance benefits to Canadians as a whole.

● (1515)

When EI was first introduced, in terms of recipients, the number was well under 50%. It was not until the 1970s when the number of people who had access to employment insurance was over 90%. It is at a much more acceptable rate now, but we need to look at how we can expand the program so that more people are able to benefit from it. One of the greatest ways of doing that is to recognize the value of compassion in any sort of discussions on this issue. I think the vast majority of Canadians would be very sympathetic and would want the House of Commons to enhance the program so that others could receive benefits on compassionate grounds.

Employment insurance is one of those foundation programs that assists thousands of Canadians every year. If the program were not around, the alternative would be very bleak. There have been some changes that have caused a great deal of concern. I would like to draw attention to that issue. It has been debated significantly here in the House in the last 10 days or so.

The minister responsible for employment insurance has made some significant changes. Members from the opposition, in particular my caucus colleagues, have raised the issue that individuals are not able to receive a maximum benefit from the employment insurance program because of the working environment they have to fit into. As a direct result, they will be receiving less money. It is important to recognize the difficulty people are having in paying their bills and honouring their commitments. Employment insurance benefits do not offer the type of disposable income the average Canadian has because of the very nature of the program. It is at a reduced rate. It is there to ensure that people can afford the necessities of life and maybe even a little more than that.

The government has made some changes that have created a very awkward position. It has made it economically challenging for many people across Canada. Some very specific examples have been brought forward by my Atlantic colleagues to illustrate how Canadians will be losing money. That is why the minister needs to try to get a better understanding of the changes that she has put in place. That is one of the reasons members of our caucus are bringing forward individual cases. The minister could meet with opposition members and get some of the details. If she feels we are misrepresenting the facts, she can state that in the House. However, that is not happening. I believe the reason is the minister knows the changes she has made are causing a great hardship for a good number of Canadians not only in Atlantic Canada but in all regions of Canada.

When we look at this legislation, we have to look at the bigger picture of employment insurance. There is no doubt that the very specifics of this legislation have support. However, in commenting on the bill, it behooves us to send a message to the minister that what she is doing on the other fronts in dealing with employment insurance is not good. She needs to revisit things and make the necessary changes so that individuals are able to receive the money so that they can purchase necessities and be engaged in the economy, so that they can buy food, pay their rent and maybe even buy some luxury items. At the end of the day, the value is there.



*Government Orders*

• (1520)

We are calling on the government to look beyond this particular piece of legislation and reflect on some of the other changes that it has made. The government should reflect on how it could have brought in additional legislation or changed this legislation to incorporate more of what I believe Canadians want us to recognize in a compassionate society and demonstrate in certain situations.

I believe this program needs to be enhanced, particularly for those individuals who are depended upon economically and socially by terminally ill parents, spouses, or siblings.

During the 1970s, we recognized that and we were able to make modifications. Not only would people receive a cheque, but employment insurance had the additional responsibility to look at different types of programs to assist individuals adjust to new working environments.

At the end of the day, I would like to see this debate broadened. Ultimately, the legislation will pass, but we need to continue to have a debate on employment insurance because it affects hundreds of thousands of Canadians across the country. It is of great value and it is a program in which Canadians truly believe.

• (1525)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Winnipeg North for his question. As he is aware, the NDP will support Bill C-44 at second reading.

Nevertheless, we have a number of reservations regarding the bill. I would like to hear the point of view of the member for Winnipeg North regarding a particular issue. There is discussion regarding the creation of a new special employment insurance benefit for the parents of children who were killed or reported missing as a result of a crime.

Does the member not think that limiting these special benefits to parents whose children were the victims of crime—but not providing these benefits to the parents of missing children, for example, who run away or who are involved in something of a non-criminal nature—reflects to some extent the Conservatives' shortsightedness and tendency to see everything through the lens of law and order?

Does my colleague not consider this bill, just like this particular provision, to be a little shortsighted? Should it not be potentially extended to include other parents whose children may have disappeared or even died, albeit not as a result of a crime?

[*English*]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, the member brings up an excellent point. I think a good number of people are very suspicious of why the government is being so selective in extending the compassionate argument on the file of murdered and missing children. It is not to take away from the need for compassion in that situation, but there are other cases where that same sort of compassion, understanding, and proactive approach by government should be encouraged. However, as the member points out, that is where the legislation has fallen short.

There are many types of missing children cases and every year there are hundreds of children who just disappear. How does that affect employment insurance benefits? This has a profound impact on the parents of those children, but what happens in that sort of situation is a bit vague.

That is why we want to take a broader look at how we can make the employment insurance program more relevant to today, with the wealth that Canada currently has and the expectations that Canadians have of that social safety net.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Lise St-Denis (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like my colleague to explain why the New Democrats want to amend the legislation so that beneficiaries who fall ill while receiving employment insurance parental benefits can receive sickness benefits?

[*English*]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, it is an issue of what sorts of benefits parents should receive. We do not want to limit it to the parents of critically ill children, as referred to in this legislation. Members will find that there is an argument to be made, and we have made this argument for the last couple of years, that based on compassionate grounds we need to look at those in that family unit where there is a serious ailment or someone who is terminally ill and how this program of employment insurance might assist our social community and, more specifically, the individual family. There is enormous benefit, not only from a social, moral aspect. It needs to be looked at in terms of the economic benefit.

• (1530)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Guy Caron:** Mr. Speaker, I have another question for the member for Winnipeg North concerning the promise that the Conservatives made during the 2011 election campaign with regards to the funding of this program through the general revenue fund and not the employment insurance fund.

This time, they are turning back the clock. This is an argument that was often made in the previous Parliament. In fact, the employment insurance fund was in deficit and it was not necessarily possible to withdraw additional benefits from the fund. The general revenue fund had to be sourced. However, what we have noticed with this bill, regarding special benefits, is that the employment insurance fund is being sourced rather than the general revenue fund.

I would like to hear the point of view of the member for Winnipeg North regarding this Conservative party promise, and whether or not this bill is an example of the Conservatives walking the talk.

*Government Orders*

[English]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, we need to recognize the valuable role of Canada's Auditor General in this debate in regard to how employment insurance should be financed, especially looking at opportunities of expanding benefits and adding other things, such as the whole compassion argument we have been talking about for the last little while. Is it fair to expect that employers and employees should finance this type of social program well into the future? I am not 100% convinced of that. There could be an argument that the money needs to be there and government should ensure that it is there.

In the past, there have been many occasions where general revenues have supported the fund. Equally there have been occasions where the fund has supported general revenues. I believe the Auditor General of Canada is on position now in regard to the specific issue of how it should be financed. I suggest that we look to what the Auditor General is suggesting and follow that advice. Canadians would do well if we did just that.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, fewer than 50% of unemployed persons receive benefits. We support this bill, but we believe that a number of provisions could be amended.

Are the Conservatives attempting to cover up what they are really trying to do when it comes to employment insurance, and that is cut benefits for the unemployed left, right and centre? I would like my Liberal colleague to speak to this issue.

[English]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, we should have minimum requirements or certain criteria such as number of hours worked in order to be able to qualify for employment insurance. At times, we need to be able to be somewhat flexible. We need to recognize that there is a difference between economic activities in, for example, the province of Alberta and some other provinces.

Sometimes one province might be in more of an economic boom while another province might be more stagnant. We need to recognize those differences across Canada and support all of our workers no matter where they live. The best way to do that is by recognizing those regional differences which means maybe having different criteria for different regions. The purpose of doing that is to ensure that we are providing a program that is viable for all regions of Canada.

We need to have that sort of flexibility. At times when the economy is doing even worse, in a recession for example, we might want to relax the criteria for the entire country. In 2009, that is what the Liberal leader espoused, to reduce the criteria because of the economic times. There needs to be some flexibility and for the most part Canadians would recognize that and appreciate it.

• (1535)

[Translation]

**Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today to Bill C-44, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code and the Employment Insurance Act and to make

consequential amendments to the Income Tax Act and the Income Tax Regulations.

I will be splitting my time with my colleague, the member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

For several years, the NDP has been calling for measures to make the employment insurance program more flexible and thus more accessible for Canadians.

In its present form, Bill C-44 seems to respond to certain concerns we have expressed in the past. It also seems to meet the expectations of organizations like the Canadian Cancer Society, the Canadian Hospice Palliative Care Association and the Canadian Caregiver Coalition.

Bill C-44 takes into consideration the special situation parents are in when a child is hospitalized, is critically ill, is murdered, or has disappeared. As a society, it is crucial that we help ensure that these parents are not doubly penalized: by having to deal with an especially difficult personal situation and by having to worry about their deteriorating financial situation.

This bill introduces flexibility into the administration of the employment insurance program and targets families in need. It also makes useful amendments to the Canada Labour Code. Those amendments allow for leave to be granted or extended for parents of a child who is hospitalized, is critically ill, is murdered or has disappeared. That is why the NDP will be supporting Bill C-44 at second reading. I think we will all benefit by examining it further in committee. That way, we will be able to work together to make it a better bill.

This bill is certainly a step in the right direction, but we must not lose sight of the forest for the trees. Since the Conservatives came to power, they have attacked unemployed people on several fronts. The effect of the most recent employment insurance reform they put through will be to further limit access to this scheme—one to which, we must remember, the government does not contribute. The employment insurance plan is entirely funded by employees and employers.

In the NDP, we will continue to criticize a government that limits access to an insurance program paid for by working people and employers. We will continue to fight for a fair, accessible and effective employment insurance scheme for people who are unemployed. At present, less than 40% of jobless people have access to employment insurance in Canada.

As I said earlier, the NDP will support Bill C-44 at second reading. We believe that the measures in the bill will help to relieve the suffering of some Canadian families in need. Canadians know that when it comes to helping families, the NDP will be there. On this side of the House, we find it very hard to understand why the Conservative government is avoiding tackling the bigger problems connected with employment insurance.

*Government Orders*

Bill C-44 will allow about 6,000 people to benefit from new support measures, and that in itself is very positive. Those 6,000 people will have less to worry about in terms of their financial situation at a time when their priorities are elsewhere. What are the Conservatives going to do about the other 800,000 unemployed people who are being denied access to a program they have paid into?

For the moment, the government's response amounts to limiting access to the scheme, rather than facilitating it. On that point, the Liberals did no better: during the 1970s and 1980s, between 70% and 90% of unemployed people were eligible for the scheme, but no more than between 40% and 50% were in 1996. Canadians would gain by seeing their employment insurance scheme reformed in a way that would allow more people who are unemployed to benefit from it.

• (1540)

On reading the bill, I was struck by elements that do not seem important and by the absence of solutions to certain problems that we identified in the past. For example, I believe that Bill C-44, in its current form, ignores measures that could have helped mothers who return from maternity leave and learn that they have been let go or that their position has been eliminated and who, quite often, must reimburse the employment insurance program.

At present these women cannot access regular benefits after their special benefits run out. Bill C-44 could and should have included a measure allowing these women to combine the two types of benefits.

Similarly, I wonder why the Conservative government decided to make a distinction between parents of a child who has disappeared in circumstances considered to be connected with a crime and other parents of missing children.

I find it more difficult to understand why parents of children who have disappeared in circumstances that are not connected with a crime, for example, are excluded. I could give many examples of parents of missing children who have spent all their time and money to try to find their children. In my opinion, Bill C-44 should include these parents. Do they not suffer just as much as parents in the first category?

I would like the government to explain the logic behind this decision.

I also noticed that the government has decided to not fund part of the benefits proposed in the bill out of general revenue.

In their 2011 election platform, the Conservatives promised:

...we will provide enhanced EI benefits to parents of murdered or missing children...Funding for this measure will come from general revenue, not EI premiums.

Once again, I am curious about the reasons why this government changed its position on this point.

In summary, I would say that Bill C-44 is not perfect, but it is a step in the right direction. I only hope that the government will be open to the changes we will propose in committee. Partisanship must not prevent us from ensuring that our work results in properly constructed bills that serve an ideal of justice.

**Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I really enjoyed the speech by my colleague from Hull—Aylmer. She spoke at length about what the Conservatives have done to the employment insurance program.

While we are in agreement with regard to the bill, what is proposed here is in fact the tree that hides the forest in terms of what the Conservatives have done to the employment insurance program.

A number of questions that I heard from the Conservatives this morning made me cringe, especially when they denied the fact that fewer than four out of 10 people who contributed to employment insurance receive benefits from it. I have figures on this. Out of nearly 1.4 million unemployed people in July 2012, only 508,000 unemployed Canadians were able to receive employment insurance benefits.

I would like to hear some additional comments from my colleague about the Conservatives' employment insurance policies and the reasons why they can deny the figures that come from Statistics Canada.

• (1545)

**Ms. Nycole Turmel:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question about the employment insurance program.

As I mentioned in my presentation, the Conservatives, and the Liberals before them, made drastic changes to the employment insurance program. Among other things, in 1995, the Liberals took the surpluses out of employment insurance rather than investing in the program and helping people. Moreover, they reduced the benefits. The Conservatives did the same thing. They made cuts to the EI program and made changes to a program that helped everyone.

Just think about remote areas and seasonal workers. I lived long enough in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean to know about the difficulties faced by families and workers who should receive employment insurance because the plant where they were employed no longer had enough work for them. These people were hit hard by the reforms to employment insurance.

Right now, the Conservatives are denying the figures and are refusing to acknowledge that the unemployment rate is quite a bit higher than we think. There are some people who do not even apply for employment insurance and who look for help from other quarters because they know they will not be able to receive benefits from the EI program.

[*English*]

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for ably outlining not only why we are supporting Bill C-44 but also outlining some of the concerns with it.

This morning we heard the Minister of Labour say that the changes under the Canada Labour Code would only apply to federally-regulated employees. I think many Canadians, when they first hear about this bill, will think that it will apply to everybody.

I wonder if she would comment on the fact that this would also require changes to the provincial labour codes in order to have non-federally-regulated employees covered as well.

*Government Orders*

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Nycole Turmel:** Mr. Speaker, it is always unfortunate when amendments are made to the Code that do not apply to everyone, even though that would be worthwhile. Through experience, the members in the House know that these changes will hit seasonal workers and women particularly hard. I am thinking about maternity leave for women, and parental leave. Not everyone will be able to benefit, and I find this regrettable. I should not even talk about benefits, but about the right of workers to lead a decent life and to benefit from leave to help their families and their relatives.

I would like to come back to a particular point in the bill. People whose children have disappeared will not be able to benefit from this amendment. I hope that the committee studying the bill will take this item into consideration and make a positive recommendation in this regard.

**Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, as was mentioned earlier, the NDP will support Bill C-44 for a number of reasons. Basically, it responds to a number of the demands that the NDP has traditionally made in order to help parents who are in drastic and often unusual circumstances. With this in mind, one can hardly be opposed to virtue, and this is why we will support the bill. However, there are a number of shortcomings in the bill that I will come back to in my speech.

First and foremost, I would like to go on in the same vein and a little bit further with the question that I just asked, to speak a little bit about what the Conservatives have done to employment insurance since they came to power, particularly with the passage of Bill C-38.

I come from the Lower St. Lawrence area, a region that depends on employment insurance a great deal. It is not that we want to depend on it, but the reality in the Lower St. Lawrence, as in the Gaspé and in a number of other regions in Quebec, is that seasonal work is of major importance to the economy. It is true that there has been greater diversification over the past few years, but there are still many workers in the region who depend on either agriculture or tourism or forestry or the fisheries. These are strictly seasonal types of jobs, and employment insurance helped seasonal workers cover the periods during which they were unable to work.

In light of the provisions put forward in Bill C-38, and that are now in effect, someone who works in a specific field such as tourism can now be forced to work in a store or in a boutique for up to 70% of their salary or they will lose their benefits. They can even be forced to travel to a job location that is at least an hour by car from their home, which in the Lower St. Lawrence means from about 70 to 100 km.

The amendments that were proposed by the Conservatives and that were adopted by this House, which unfortunately had a Conservative majority, are detrimental to a number of regions that, once again, depend on employment insurance, even though of course they might well prefer not to.

There is another element, as my colleague mentioned earlier. It was caused by the Conservatives and also by the Liberals before them. I am referring to the low proportion of people contributing to employment insurance who can actually collect benefits. The Conservatives deny in their answers that this is the case, but this is a fact. Of all of the people who were unemployed and actively

looking for work in July 2012, only 508,000 Canadians were able to receive employment insurance benefits. This means that 870,000 unemployed Canadians were unable to receive benefits. In other words, only four out of 10 unemployed people were able to collect benefits, and this is because of the conditions reducing entitlement to benefits that were brought in by the Liberals and by the Conservatives.

However, Bill C-44 has remedied some specific situations, and that is why we are going to support it at second reading, even though some changes are likely going to be put forward in committee later on.

This bill will make amendments to the Canada Labour Code to enable parents of seriously ill children, or of missing or deceased children as the result of a crime, to obtain leave without pay without fear of losing their jobs. It will enable employment insurance claimants, who fall ill during their parental leave, to also get sickness benefits—in other words, additional benefits. The bill will create another category of special employment insurance benefits for the parents of children who are seriously ill, which will be extended to a maximum of 35 weeks, and be shared by parents over a 52-week period. It will create a new special employment insurance benefit for the parents of children who are murdered or missing as the probable result of a crime. The benefits total \$350 a week for a maximum of 35 weeks, and two weeks will be added in the case of a child located during the benefit period.

Even though these measures are positive and should be supported in order to assist parents who face a particularly difficult and traumatic period in their life, one still has to wonder why the Conservative government has specifically targeted these families, to the exclusion of other families.

For example, children may be reported missing due to circumstances that are not believed to be criminal in nature, for example, when a child runs away. A runaway child may be absent for a long time, in fact, many children run away for several days, or weeks. There is not necessarily a criminal element to what has occurred. However, I can tell you, that the vast majority of parents, if not all parents, find it to be an extremely difficult experience. First and foremost, these parents are concerned about the welfare of the child. They want to be free and able to participate in efforts to actively locate their missing child.

• (1550)

I do not think that it is appropriate to exclude these parents from categories of employment insurance. Yet, the Conservatives have chosen to do so. Why? I would like answers.

Another thing that bothers me is the non-explicit exclusion in the text of special benefits for parents whose child is injured while committing a crime. A crime may be any number of things. It may be a serious offence, but it might also be an act where parents have a key role to play in getting their child back on track.

*Government Orders*

I am the father of two children. I have a boy who will soon be four and a little girl who is not even one. I know what my role as a parent will be later on. My child might be nine or 10 and do something stupid, like shoplift, and my role as a parent will be to get my child back on track. It is important to not criminalize such children because it is clear that they do not have the capacity to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is bad. It is the parent's role to guide them.

Let us take the same child and say they are shoplifting and are struck by a car in the course of the theft. The child is expressly excluded from these special benefits, in plain words. There is no room for interpretation. Here I can see the difference between the Conservative approach and the more progressive approach to parents' role in rearing their children. This Conservative approach is even going to have repercussions on the proposed bills.

This aspect was raised by the member for Saskatoon—Wanuskewin in committee during previous parliaments, where a very similar private member's bill introduced by an opposition member was discussed. At the time, he introduced the bill as a measure to provide support for victims. It is hard to argue that this measure supports victims if the parent or family of a child who is injured falling down stairs, or is struck by a car, or injured some other way while committing a crime, is entitled to claim benefits in this case. It is not the victim who is benefiting. For that reason, I cannot support this bill.

In plain words, that is what the Conservative member who is still here today said in a previous parliament at a committee meeting. That really highlights the difference between the Conservative approach and the progressive approach to education. It is truly unfortunate that we have this in a bill like this one. We have to understand that the parents of children who are run down or seriously injured in whatever circumstances are also affected. This bill has nothing to say about those parents.

We believe it is a real problem to target one particular category, even though, like all members present here, and you, Mr. Speaker, I agree that these parents need help. We are prepared to offer them our support. We consider it unfortunate that Bill C-44 excludes or omits certain categories of parents whose children are touched or seriously affected in non-criminal ways. This is because of the law and order lens that virtually all Conservative initiatives are seen through, not just for issues relating to the justice system, but also for issues relating to human resources and employment insurance, as in this case.

The House as a whole is going to want to debate this bill. I hope the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities is going to do good work. This bill is a step in the right direction, as several of my colleagues have said. We hope to hear the government's justification for the omissions from the categories of people who will be able to claim the special benefits. We are certainly going to propose amendments to try to remedy those omissions. For the moment, we can only express our support, in particular, for parents of children who are victims of crime, and especially who are injured or die, for their terrible tragedy. This bill will give them a way to overcome their situation. This will be a contribution by the members in this House to help them deal with this situation.

• (1555)

**Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I really appreciated my colleague's speech.

He started his speech talking about employment insurance. The Conservatives broke their promise. They said that they would finance this fund with money that did not come from the employment insurance fund, but that is what they will be doing.

In light of all the cuts being made by the Conservatives, what does my colleague think about their attitude?

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

This is a problem for us because it has to do with a Conservative philosophy I have a hard time understanding.

Among the bills that have been previously introduced, there is a very similar bill that the government opposed. A criticism was made in the House on December 10, 2009:

Right now, because of the global economic situation of the past year and because previous governments used EI premiums for non-EI spending...the EI account is under strain. It is estimated that adopting the bill would increase program costs significantly and could result in significant upward pressure on premium rates, something that most people do not want.

That was the Conservatives' story in 2009. Now, in 2012, they have a whole other story, in which they are saying that they will use the employment insurance fund instead of general revenues. That raises some questions. I would like some answers from the Conservatives. I sincerely hope that the question will be seriously asked in committee.

• (1600)

**Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I very much appreciated my colleague's speech. I have a question regarding the notion of crime that my colleague spoke about. I would like to hear more on the subject.

In his own view of the proposed bill, at what point are suspicions justified and who will ultimately be called upon to address the issue?

**Mr. Guy Caron:** Mr. Speaker, when I raised the issue, I pointed out that the Conservative government was specifically excluding such cases from the bill. I can quote verbatim what other members, including the member for Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, said in committee. They used dramatic examples to justify the exclusion and to view victims solely from a law and order perspective.

As a parent, in many of the situations that could put my child in a difficult position—for much less serious crimes, I hope—I have the opportunity to get involved as a guide, as the person responsible for helping my child make good choices. This philosophy is in contrast to the Conservatives', which is to punish not only the child who could be hurt during the incident or under some other circumstance, but also the parent, and to prevent the parents and the people in the situation from fulfilling their role as guides.

*Government Orders*

That is why I have some serious questions that, once again, the Conservatives seem unwilling to answer. I hope that this issue—why this exception is written into the bill—will be raised in committee, because I think it is very important.

**Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to preface my remarks on this bill to help families in need by reiterating that I rely on my legal background every day in carrying out my duties as a member of Parliament.

Early in my career, the time I spent working for legal aid right after passing the bar was a true education. I learned so much working there. My regards to all of my colleagues at the Sept-Îles legal aid office.

Returning to the matter at hand, in 2007, six months after I joined legal aid, one of my first cases involved a young man who had been taken hostage in 1997. Given the relatively small population of Sept-Îles, the incident, which took place in a local high school, received significant media attention. Other young people, including me—I was not very old at the time—were aware of the problem because we knew the young man involved. He was taken hostage in a classroom.

Another young person, not much older than high school age, but who was in CEGEP, went off the deep end—pardon the expression—and decided to go into a high school classroom with two jerry cans of gas, a Rambo-style hunting knife and a pellet gun. He decided to take the entire class hostage and tied the students up with tape. My client decided to intervene and was stabbed and suffered a punctured lung. So it was rather serious.

I remember this event, because I was in CEGEP at the time. When word got out around Sept-Îles, I went to the hospital to see how the young man was doing. That is when I saw how distraught his parents were. They were completely shaken and without any means.

This event came back to me when I began litigating in 2007. The same young man, whom I knew, came to see me in my office. The case still had not been settled 10 years later. The case had gone to an organization in Quebec known as IVAC, which stands for indemnisation aux victimes d'actes criminels—basically an organization that processes applications for compensation for victims of crime. The case was being challenged and had gone before Quebec's administrative tribunal. It was a question of anatomicophysiological deficit, or APD. There were differences of opinion.

My first instinct was to send my client for further psychological examination, because he was suffering serious repercussions. Thus, another psychiatrist met with him in the Quebec City area. This increased his APD diagnosis by a few percentage points, so we were able to reach a settlement in the end.

I wanted to share this particular case with you because there had been a 10-year delay and when the incident happened, the parents had no resources whatsoever. I know that, because the young man's father, whom I saw that day at the hospital, was completely distraught. Very little support was offered to the parents by either the school system or the government.

I am talking about this case here today simply to illustrate that it is no secret that these terrible incidents happen on a regular basis.

What is interesting about this bill is that it is a pragmatic response to the financial difficulties experienced by vulnerable families as a result of tragic and fortuitous events. That is why my party supports the proposed measures, since they would ease the added financial burden on parents in need.

There is talk of integrity and threats to the physical integrity of a child. I say that parents are often distraught. But this is not just when a young person is the victim of a crime. When I worked in a legal aid office and in my own law firm, I saw the same type of reaction. I represented young people who were under psychiatric care. They were often children admitted into psychiatric care because they presented with symptoms of toxic psychosis. In my community, Uashat-Malioctenam, and also in the city of Sept-Îles, there is a serious problem right now with methamphetamines, commonly known as speed. Some young people are inhaling them by turning them into powder. This is commonly referred to as sniffing speed. They inhale four or five of these pills. After sniffing four or five speed pills, a person decompensates and becomes incoherent and violent. That is not always the case, but it can happen. These young people end up under psychiatric care, and the parents are distraught.

I noticed that there was a lack of resources available to them, because the health and safety of these young people as well as their physical integrity were in jeopardy.

• (1605)

When I was working on my speech for today, I was reminded of these things from my past experience at the itinerant court and the civil court. Often, these were prison custody cases heard in civil court. I was reminded of these things, and I make mention of them today. I believe that it is important to share this information with the Canadian public.

In passing, I would like to point out the innovative nature of the compensation for parents of missing children, a measure that addresses a deplorable reality in Canadian society.

I would like to talk about missing children. I agree that the presumption that a crime has been committed can be problematic. However, in many communities, including aboriginal communities, the disappearance of children is a fairly widespread and growing phenomenon, when we compare the number of aboriginal young people who go missing to the total number of people in the community.

This type of measure will most likely be well received by aboriginal communities across the country. When I was working on this file, I was reminded of the posters of young *Maisy Odjick* and other young people from aboriginal communities. A criminal investigation is most often launched if suspicious circumstances exist. Many cases of missing children involve a criminal investigation, a police investigation. This always depends on the analysis of the judge and arbitrator, the person who makes the final decision as to the moment at which suspicions of a crime or criminal activity come into play.

*Government Orders*

I hope that the members opposite agree, but in my opinion, this criterion would be easily applicable. In most cases, when a child goes missing, there is a criminal investigation and suspicions can therefore be confirmed. It remains to be seen how these proposed measures will actually be implemented.

That being said and despite the highly commendable nature of the proposed measures, we must reassess the relevance of withdrawing money from the employment insurance fund for parents of critically ill children given that this fund has a cumulative deficit of \$9 billion, which is not just pocket change.

• (1610)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Before we proceed to questions and comments, I wish to inform hon. members that there have been more than five hours of debate on the motion before the House. Consequently, the time allocated for all subsequent interventions shall be ten minutes for speeches and, as usual, five minutes for questions and comments.

The hon. member for Honoré-Mercier.

**Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I was listening to the excellent speech delivered by my colleague and it reminded me of the time when I worked as a high school teacher. I taught young teenagers who had serious behavioural problems. There were, of course, many young offenders among them. Some even robbed convenience stores. I put myself in their parents' shoes. Most of them were professionals. We always think that it is the poor who have children with behavioural problems.

If a child injures himself while committing a crime and ends up in hospital, his parents cannot even help him. This means they suffer a double punishment. In addition to knowing that their child has a problem that will haunt him throughout his life, they are punished because they will not be able to support their sick child. If they do, it will be at their own expense.

What does the hon. member think of that situation?

**Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. I submit the following distinction to the Conservatives. In our justice system, when an offence is committed by a young person under the age of 16, 17 or 18, the Youth Criminal Justice Act automatically applies. The Conservatives should nuance their approach in the case of a young person who is injured while committing an offence that would be dealt with under that legislation.

Based on my own understanding, such an exclusion should be provided. Regardless of whether a criminal activity took place or an offence was committed, the parents of the young person should not be penalized if the case comes under the Youth Criminal Justice Act. As my colleague pointed out earlier, these young people are in their formative years. Parents should not be automatically excluded when their child is injured. They deserve to be compensated. There should be an exclusion clause.

**Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's remarks. He shared his experience with groups that had problems related to drugs, violence and all those things that we do not like to hear about.

However, despite many speeches like this one, which tell things as they happen in real life, I notice that there are often people who are forgotten in the bills introduced by the Conservative government.

Is it because members opposite are simply out of touch with local reality, or is it for the sake of ideology? I wonder if the hon. member could enlighten some members.

**Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I sometimes ask myself the same sort of questions. When I see the legislation contemplated by the Conservatives, I wonder if their reality is the same as ours. I wonder if they do their groceries, or if they have loved ones, because their approach often seems dehumanized.

I know they have a rather hard party line that leans towards the right. It is becoming rather obvious with their proposed measures. However, they should sometimes show a bit of humanity and put themselves in the shoes of ordinary citizens, because this would make them aware of specifics and personal experiences.

• (1615)

**Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his speech.

Sometimes, children may disappear because they sniffed something. Why does the support provided by the government regarding children who disappear not apply when it is believed that a Criminal Code offence was committed?

**Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question. That criminal nature is, of course, included to please a specific segment of the population. Over the past year, I noticed that the Conservatives try to paint themselves as the ultimate source of righteousness and impunity. Once again, they are merely trying to convey the idea that they represent the victims, and not the criminals. However, in this case, they are going after children. There are limits to trying to please a specific segment of the population.

**Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-44. It is always pleasant for an elected member to rise and to find that there is basically unanimity in the House. When we make speeches and say that we are all in agreement, there is less fuss and foot-dragging by other members.

However, like the NDP members, I see some flaws in this bill, even though I want to say from the outset that the Bloc Québécois supports it. It was time the government took action regarding what is happening on the victims' side as well.

The previous speaker said the government was boasting about helping victims first. However, since the Conservatives took office in 2006 to form a minority government, they have primarily targeted various types of crimes.

*Government Orders*

We have nothing against improving our justice system. However, quite often, the government was primarily interested in grandstanding, for example by adding minimum sentences and increasingly tying the hands of judges for all kinds of ideological motives. This time, with Bill C-44, it is looking after the plight of victims, which is a good thing. We fully support this legislation.

However, this legislation is less generous than bills introduced by the Bloc Québécois in previous Parliaments. For example, as early as 2007, my former colleague, France Bonsant, tabled the first bill on victims of crime, precisely so that the parents of these victims could, for example, collect EI benefits.

We know that it is always critical to keep one's job when a tragic event occurs, such as the disappearance of a child or, even worse, the death of a child following a crime. All sorts of events may cause the parents to be absolutely unable to go back to work.

When my colleague France Bonsant introduced this bill, she was working with Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu, who is now a senator. We are aware of the tragedies in Senator Boisvenu's life. He was the president of a missing persons association. He worked with Ms. Bonsant on that bill and he supported her initiative. That was a long time ago, in 2007. We introduced this bill on other occasions.

During the election campaign, I got Ms. Bonsant to come visit my riding because my constituents made me aware of this issue. Thanks to the Quebec government, parents can maintain their employment. However, even if they manage to keep their job and take leave without pay, the result is the same: they have to quickly return to work because creditors do not have any compassion. These parents have to pay for food, housing and transportation. No one will take into account that something bad has happened to their child. People will sympathize but creditors will not. The parents of a missing child will receive bills and have to pay them.

If these parents keep their jobs but are not being paid, there is a serious problem. This hole needed to be filled, so to speak, and that is what my colleague was doing. In 2008, I decided to make this an election issue since my constituents talked to me about it a lot, given that there were people who were particularly affected by problems in their families. This issue was more than local; it affected many people. I am talking about 2008.

We have come back to this issue again. It is the hon. member for Ahuntsic who introduced this bill again. The government finally took note of all the demands that were coming from across the country, including from the Bloc Québécois, and introduced a bill that favours victims for once. This is a very good thing.

Bill C-44 amends the Canada Labour Code to provide an employee with the right to take leave when a child of the employee is critically ill or dies or disappears as the probable result of a crime. The bill also makes technical amendments to that act. It also amends—and this is important—the Employment Insurance Act to provide benefits to claimants who are providing care or support to their critically ill child and to facilitate access to sickness benefits for claimants who are in receipt of parental benefits. That is key.

I noticed earlier that members were talking about some shortcomings of the bill, and I have the same concerns. We are talking about injured children.

● (1620)

When the government announced the introduction of Bill C-44, the news release stated that the bill would implement the new EI benefit for parents of critically ill or injured children. However, the bill does not define an injured child. This means that the minister has the power to define an ill child. We need more information about that. I am sure this will come up in committee. Earlier, the official opposition announced that it would propose amendments. I would like my colleagues to consider this flaw in the bill as written to ensure that injured children are included too. Saying it in the news release is one thing, but if it is not in the bill, the people who have to rule in these cases will not be able to do their job properly.

There is also the matter of the bill's generosity. I do not want to use unparliamentary language, but we introduced a bill providing for up to 52 weeks of benefits. Bill C-44 limits benefits to 35 weeks. Our bill was also more generous with respect to the weekly benefit amount, which was up to \$485, if I remember correctly. In the Conservative Party's bill, that amount is \$300 and some. Those are some of the differences.

I am also asking the government to increase the benefit amount. I do not think that we will manage to help all of the families that need help by giving them benefits for 35 weeks. In some cases, the number of weeks could be doubled. In particularly difficult cases, the benefit period could be up to 104 weeks.

I know that, as legislators, we cannot solve every case. We have to work on a case-by-case basis, and sooner or later, we will realize that we missed something, that someone has slipped through the cracks. We have to be flexible enough to ensure that as many people as possible benefit from the measures in this bill.

We introduced our bill three times. People say that being in opposition is a thankless job. Indeed, we introduce bills only for the government to take credit for them and find a way to make it look like they came from the government rather than the opposition. Personally, that has never offended me. The government has done this to the Bloc Québécois several times now.

Consider, for example, some of our justice bills, like the anti-gang legislation or the legislation to reverse the burden of proof, which means that from now on, criminals have to show how they acquired their assets. When someone declares an income of \$25,000 a year and has a \$450,000 house, an SUV, snowmobiles, motorcycles and beautiful landscaping, sooner or later, you have to wonder who paid for it all. No one can afford that kind of lifestyle on \$25,000 a year.



*Government Orders*

The government, whether Conservative or Liberal—in the case of the anti-gang legislation—has taken credit for either some portion or entire pieces of our legislation—again in the case of the anti-gang legislation.

The goal of legislators is to advance our society when it comes to any given issue so that the community somehow benefits. Our role is just as important.

I see some elements in this bill that come directly from bills that the Bloc Québécois has introduced over the years. I commend this government's efforts to do something positive to help victims by introducing Bill C-44. I repeat, I agree with my colleagues who are in favour of this bill. Despite the shortcomings I have pointed out, we should be pleased and vote to support this bill.

• (1625)

**Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Richmond—Arthabaska for his speech. He spoke about some shortcomings. We agree because we will support the bill at second reading, but certain shortcomings, certain omissions should be pointed out. I hope that they will be addressed in committee. I am not a member of this committee, but I hope that my colleagues who are will be able to address them.

Aside from injured children, there is also the issue of missing children. I focused on this topic in my speech and in an earlier question. I would like my colleague to comment on the omission of cases of missing children where illegal activities or crime are not suspected of being behind the disappearance. A child may run away, which does not diminish the amount of distress felt by the parents, for whom a program like this one could be appropriate.

Does my colleague have any recommendations to make with respect to this issue?

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his very pertinent question.

That goes back to what I was saying earlier when I mentioned that it was not necessarily bad faith. The people who draft the bills cannot always cover everything.

I said that someone could fall through the cracks. I believe that is the case that my colleague from Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques is raising. It is the case of children whose disappearance is not related to a crime. They find themselves at square one. In the end, these people experience just as much distress as the parent of a child who disappears as a result of a crime, and it is no easier for them to go to work knowing that their child is missing.

It is an excellent question to ask the government in committee in order to address this shortcoming and ensure that people in this type of situation are compensated.

[English]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to pick up on that particular point because it is something we raised earlier within the Liberal caucus. There are some issues that we would hope the government would take to committee with the idea of providing some more detailed responses, and this is one of them.

Every year there are hundreds, and I suspect thousands, of people who go missing, even though a good percentage of them are found relatively quickly. However, this is for the others.

Would the member agree that there is a responsibility for the government to, even, give us something in advance of the committee meeting, because I know there would be some interest in hearing direct feedback from the government on this very important issue?

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right. He did not ask me a question, but the government needs to hear his comments.

My colleague also mentioned it earlier. There are many elements that are missing from this bill, which must be improved. If we cannot do so when studying the bill in committee, members might think about introducing bills to fill the gap. In fact, these parents will experience the same despair as others, and we must not overlook them.

• (1630)

[English]

**Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am proud to say that our government continues to focus on jobs, growth and long-term prosperity and I am encouraged today by the debate and the fact that the opposition parties are supporting the bill.

Our government continues to provide support for families, be it by taking over one million Canadians off the tax rolls, providing over \$3,000 of tax cuts to the average family, or instituting the working income tax benefit and the universal child care benefit. These are all initiatives that have helped the families I talk to in my riding of Mississauga South.

I wonder if the member for Richmond—Arthabaska would comment on how important all of these measures have been, in terms of a declining poverty rate in Canada?

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Mr. Speaker, it may seem strange, but I do not think this is the right moment for the member to engage in a partisan aside and read a list of everything she believes the government has done right.

What we are saying today is that Bill C-44 is a step forward. As for the other budget measures, I could point to the fact that Quebec is suffering enormously because of everything the government decided not to do for the forest industry, for example. It contributed billions of dollars to Ontario's automobile industry and virtually nothing to Quebec's forest industry. It is a serious problem. We should not mix things up.

It is true that Bill C-44 is a step forward. We established that there were a number of shortcomings, and the member should also be made aware of that and ensure that her government addresses these shortcomings to make the bill even better.

*Government Orders**[English]*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Before we resume debate, it is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the house that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, Employment Insurance; the hon. member for Drummond, the Environment; and the hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, Employment Insurance.

*[Translation]*

**Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I will of course be pleased to support these changes. These new measures will truly enable workers to take leave and draw employment insurance benefits in the event that their children become seriously ill, disappear or die as a result of a crime. In my view, all the parties agree on that.

I would nevertheless like to state my concerns about employment insurance. It is clear that the employment insurance system needs a reform like this one. The fact is that 1.3 million Canadians are without work and the vast majority of them do not have access to employment insurance. This bill is the first in a long series of changes that would strengthen and improve access to employment insurance.

Knowing what we do about the budget bill, I doubt that the government is seriously committing itself to improving the system. I find this truly unfortunate, because the members of this House have the power to make a genuine difference in the lives of Canadians.

In my riding, the average person's income is below the average income for Quebecers and Canadians. I often hear that people do not have access to employment insurance and that they have trouble making ends meet.

*[English]*

I support the substance of the bill and the help it would accord an estimated 6,000 people who can really use the relief it would provide. However, there are aspects of the bill that are badly thought out and I am hoping that the government will see fit to amend the bill at committee. For example, the Conservatives first promised to make this change to EI benefits during the last federal election campaign and at the time they specifically stated that, "Funding for this measure will come from general revenue, not EI premiums".

Now that the bill is in the House, we find that the government is renegeing on this promise and will be taking the funds out of EI to pay for the part of the legislation that would provide benefits to parents with children who are critically ill. It may seem like an insignificant cost but when we consider that, by the Conservatives' own calculation, an estimated 6,000 people will be claiming this benefit, it will come to a large amount when the EI program is already \$9 billion in deficit and hundreds of thousands of Canadians already cannot access regular benefits and are slipping deeper into poverty.

It is important to note that the \$9 billion deficit is not because EI is an intrinsically unsustainable program. It is because the government and the Liberal government before that did a really bad job of managing and maintaining it. This is the case for so many of our essential public services. These services are being eroded by short-

sighted corner cutting that costs taxpayers more money in the long term. Major cuts that came down with the last federal budget are having major impacts in my riding. Every day when I am in my riding I hear from constituents who cannot make ends meet because of insufficient EI, pensions and OAS. I have promised them that I will bring their needs to the House and raise them when I can.

My constituents would say that this bill is good but that it does not go far enough to improve our EI system. We need comprehensive EI reform and we need it fast. I am very proud that today we are helping Canadians who are caring for their sick children but that should not divert our attention from the thousands of other Canadians whose lives could really be improved by extending similar EI benefits to their specific needs.

● (1635)

*[Translation]*

For example, one of my constituents recently called my office. She said that she had cancer and was undergoing treatment. As people who have undergone cancer treatment know, 15 weeks of employment insurance benefits are not enough to recover and return to work.

My constituent was not even eligible for employment insurance benefits, even though she truly needed them to make ends meet. To be entitled, she would have had to work 600 hours, but had only worked 450.

If the government had deemed it appropriate to adopt the NDP's long-standing position, which would reduce the number of hours for employment insurance eligibility from 600 to 360 hours, my constituent, who worked 450 hours, would have been eligible for these benefits.

If the bill put forward by my colleague from New Westminster—Coquitlam had been passed, we would have a system under which benefits for serious illnesses would be extended from 15 weeks to 52 weeks. My constituent would then have had the financial security to take care of herself during these difficult times, rather than have to worry about making ends meet and not knowing whether she would be able to pay her heating, grocery or rent bills. That is the situation she is currently in, as she suffers from cancer and tries to undergo treatment to cure it.

This is not the only example I have encountered since being elected, but it is the most recent. There are many others in my riding. We really need to reform employment insurance to help these people.

For example, we need to improve employment insurance for seasonal workers. Since so many of my constituents earn their living in seasonal industries like forestry, farming and tourism, I have a duty to fight for this. It is a question of equity for rural people. All of Canada benefits from the work of seasonal workers. They deserve protection appropriate to the way they live and work.

*Government Orders*

The other major improvement we could make to employment insurance reform is to introduce compassionate benefits. My constituents are aging. The average age in my riding is higher than the average age in Quebec, which is higher than the average age in Canada.

In view of the shortage of long-term health care services in my riding and the rural factor, the task of caring for the elderly often falls to family members or friends. The Canadian Caregiver Coalition estimates that five million Canadians are caring for a loved one. This is an incredible amount of work that goes unpaid. These caregivers are heroes.

The NDP has frequently tabled bills to extend employment insurance benefits for caregivers, but the Conservatives have always voted against them. This is an area that truly needs improvement.

• (1640)

[English]

These are all issues I thought I would use this opportunity to raise.

Right now we have an unemployment crisis. In July 2012, 1.3 million Canadians were unemployed and only 508,000 of them received EI benefits. That means that a staggering 870,000 unemployed Canadians could not claim EI and many of those were barely surviving because of the situation. That means that less than four in ten unemployed Canadians are getting help, which is a historic low. It is the worst it has ever been.

I will be supporting the bill but I want it to be clear that this is only the tip of the iceberg.

[Translation]

**Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, one thing seems obvious to me. Here we are talking about employment insurance for parents with children who are critically ill. What happens if the parents are self-employed workers? Are they going to find themselves on social assistance?

In the Conservatives' first proposal, during the other Parliament, they said that the parents of children who are seriously ill would receive the benefit from the general revenues in the budget. If this were the case, self-employed people could be included. However, when we talk about employment insurance, we are well aware that the self-employed do not have access to it. They are being penalized.

What does my colleague think about this?

[English]

**Ms. Mylène Freeman:** Mr. Speaker, my colleague raises an important point. That is just another example of one of the gaps in employment insurance that we are facing in this country. There are other gaps. For instance, we are not talking about allowing the combination of special benefits and regular benefits. We will continue to fight for that for women who are on parental leave.

However, that is only the tip of the iceberg. I could pull out a stack of cases that I have seen in my riding. What I have seen most frequently are people who are really sick but no longer qualify for EI. There are also contract workers who go on maternity leave but cannot claim EI. There is a real gap. As I said, the majority of Canadians cannot access EI. We really need to look at addressing

this problem seriously so that all Canadians can make ends meet when they go through changes in their lives.

**Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is not often that we are in agreement with the government side but this happens to be one of those times.

However, I find it very ironic that, while the NDP is finding itself in the position of trying to explain the bill, we are not hearing a lot of input from the Conservative side of the House.

There is a side to the bill that needs some clarification. We are talking about federal jurisdiction here. Is the member aware of any process, procedure or any investigation of whether the provinces will be like-minded and move on this? It is important because of that jurisdiction.

**Ms. Mylène Freeman:** Mr. Speaker, that is a very good point. The bill would only affect workers within federally regulated workplaces but this is something that needs to be applied to all Canadians. I hope the government will be working with the provinces and territories to ensure that happens.

We can pass the bill but we should not pat ourselves on the back and say that our work is done. There is a lot more to do and that is part of it.

• (1645)

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up on the member's last comment.

As she is probably aware, at one point employment insurance was under provincial jurisdiction. It was not until the 1940s when it was recognized that it would be best if it were under national jurisdiction, which ultimately led to a constitutional change.

There are huge issues with workers' compensation throughout Canada. Many would argue that the federal government needs to be more involved with workers' compensation. Does the member have some insights in terms of that particular issue? Should the federal government be playing a stronger role in workers' compensation?

**Ms. Mylène Freeman:** Mr. Speaker, in Quebec, we are hearing a lot about it wanting to take control again. This reminds me of that can of worms. However, everybody needs to ensure that we are addressing the problem. I hope we can do that here to ensure that all Canadians have easy access to good benefits and are able to live in dignity, especially when they are going through times in their lives when they need the support. That is why I think we should be doing more.

I hope that we can all work together here where we can really make a difference for all Canadians to make that difference happen concretely.

[Translation]

**Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in the House to speak to Bill C-44, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code and the Employment Insurance Act and to make consequential amendments to the Income Tax Act and the Income Tax Regulations.

*Government Orders*

The bill provides that an employee is entitled to take leave when his or her child is critically ill or dies or disappears as the probable result of a crime. More specifically, Bill C-44 amends the Canada Labour Code to establish new types of leave that parents can take. For instance, it authorizes the extension of parents' maternity leave and parental leave by the number of weeks during which their child is hospitalized.

Parents who take sick leave during their parental leave or who take part in the operations of Canada's reserve force will have their parental leave extended by the number of weeks of their sick leave or their absence.

It grants unpaid leave of a maximum of 37 weeks to the parents of critically ill children. It grants unpaid leave of no more than 104 weeks to the parents of a child who was murdered, and leave of up to 52 weeks to the parents of a child who has disappeared as a result of a crime. Finally, it extends by up to 17 weeks the unpaid leave that an employee may take because of illness or an injury without the risk of losing his or her job.

These amendments apply solely to employees working in federally regulated sectors, but it is expected that the provinces will make similar changes to their labour code, as they did when compassionate care benefits were introduced. I am optimistic that the provinces will act quickly, because it is absolutely necessary and possible to apply these measures to all Canadians.

• (1650)

[English]

Let me be clear, the bill is not a question of ideology or partisan politics; it is about assisting families in their time of need. That is why I can state that the New Democrats support the legislation, as Canadians from all walks of life deserve economic certainty in situations where they are forced to take time away from work due to the serious illness, disappearance or unfortunate death of a child.

Many of the issues of ill health and disease that children live with, although not fatal, are serious concerns. Some are of concern specifically in the childhood years, while others can have serious repercussions for children upon reaching adulthood. Some of these are, for example, diabetes and cancer.

Each year on average, 880 children under the age of 15 are diagnosed with cancer and 150 die from the disease. Although this makes cancer the second leading cause of death by disease among Canadian children, cancer is still relatively rare in this age group. Over the last 30 years childhood cancer survival rates have improved substantially, from 71% in the late 1980s to 82% in the early 2000s; five-year survival rates have increased for several types of childhood cancers. That is something we can all applaud.

As for missing children, in 2011 the Canadian Police Information Centre, CPIC, reported 25 stranger abductions and 145 parental abductions.

It goes without saying that we support these changes. We believe they would ease the suffering of parents who need help, especially in those times when their children are going through those crises.

In their 2011 platform, the Conservatives promised that funding for this measure would come from general revenue, not from EI

premiums. The grant for parents of murdered and missing children would be paid from general revenue and not through EI. However it appears the Conservatives have ignored this promise that benefits for parents of critically ill children would be paid through general revenues. This legislation would be by far a more costly measure and comes at a time when the EI account has a cumulative deficit of about \$9 billion.

If we are looking at some facts and figures about EI, the minister has estimated that the bill would benefit approximately 6,000 Canadians per year. While this is a good measure, and I do not want to slam that at all, there are still approximately 870,000 unemployed Canadians who are not able to access regular EI benefits. The bill fails to address some of those bigger issues facing EI. In July of this year, 508,000 Canadians received EI regular benefits, but there were still 1,377,000 unemployed Canadians that month. That means there are 870,000 unemployed Canadians without EI. Fewer than four in ten are receiving EI, a historic low.

We are not the only ones who are talking in favour of this. Looking at some of the other validators out there, the Canadian Cancer Society welcomes this change. It sees it as a way to provide more support for parents of critically ill children through a new employment insurance benefit. The benefit would help alleviate some of the financial burden associated with caring for a sick child.

Prior to this announcement, the only benefit available to family caregivers looking after their sick child was about up to eight weeks of leave under the federal employment insurance program, six of which were paid at 55%. If a child is sick and the parents are worried about medicine or any type of care they need to provide, if their income is at only 55% it truly would be another layer of worry for families and parents, which they do not need.

The Canadian Hospice Palliative Care Association is in support of the changes we are seeing. It is the same thing with the Canadian Caregiver Coalition.

[Translation]

In closing, I would like to say that, even though I support the purpose of the bill, I would point out that the government is not dealing with the main concerns raised by the employment insurance system. It is true that less than half of Canadians who are unemployed receive employment insurance benefits. The New Democrats support the bill, but we will nevertheless continue to fight for an employment insurance system that is fair and just.

• (1655)

**Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, as other members have said, it is clear that all members of the House are unanimous in thinking that this bill is a good idea. This is a good bill, but it is flawed. No government member has risen to express agreement or disagreement about the flaws that could be corrected. I would like to hear the government's opinion on this. Perhaps the committee can propose some amendments. Unfortunately, NDP members are the only ones who are standing up to talk about this, along with the occasional member of another party.

*Government Orders*

What does my colleague think of that attitude?

[English]

**Mr. Glenn Thibeault:** Mr. Speaker, we are talking about a bill right now relating to children, and we are hearing some children speaking in the gallery, which is always great within the chamber walls because it really reminds us of the importance of what we are doing here for our country and what we try to do in the House.

Sometimes we disagree; well, maybe a little more than sometimes. We probably disagree a lot, and right now we are talking about a bill that we can agree upon.

My hon. colleague is right. Is the bill perfect? Of course not. Do we want to see some changes? Of course we do. The process we have in place here in our parliamentary system allows us to present amendments once we get the bill to committee.

Right now we truly have an opportunity to do what is right for Canadian people. We need to make sure our EI system is functioning and is working well for all. This is a small step in the right direction.

[Translation]

**Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, we support the bill. However, it is flawed. I would like to hear my colleague's comments on those flaws.

As written, the bill does not allow women returning from parental leave to collect regular benefits immediately after collecting special benefits if, upon returning to work, they discover that they have lost their job or their job has been cut. I would like my colleague to comment on that.

When the committee studies this bill, I hope it will amend the bill accordingly because women need those benefits. They cannot live without money.

[English]

**Mr. Glenn Thibeault:** Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague is right. It is a very easy answer for me to stand up and say I agree wholeheartedly, and most of us on this side of the House agree with that. I am very pleased to hear that this will be brought forward to committee, to make sure it is implemented and recommended.

We are in an age when we should be able to have children and go back to our job and not worry about whether the job is going to be there. That should be put into law. I completely agree. I have no questions relating to that, and I hope it gets recommended when it goes to committee.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, just to be very precise, when a child goes missing and is missing for more than a week or 10 days, employment insurance could and should be provided in a limited way for a parent in that situation. This is something most Canadians would want to see us do. Is this the type of amendment the member would be in favour of?

**Mr. Glenn Thibeault:** Mr. Speaker, I totally agree. That would be an amendment I would like to see, as the father of two young daughters, as would so many parents out there in the world. Right now we rely on the good nature and support of our neighbours to bring food or to help out when such things happen. The last thing on parents' minds is worrying about going to work. They want to find their child.

If we can put that amendment in place, I do not see any reason why anyone would not want to support that.

• (1700)

**Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today as a member of the official opposition. Our role as we see it is to criticize and critique the government side. This is one of those instances in which it is important to give reasonable credit to the government for this initiative. I was surprised that the government members are not taking advantage of the opportunity to explain to Canadians the significance of what they are doing.

Today there is controversy around EI changes. There are a number of areas where we would disagree quite heatedly with the government, but this is not one of those. One of the things I prided myself on when I came to this place was bringing my own life experience here to put a face to some of these issues. I am going to tell three stories. I told one in the House once before.

In 1949, my sister was murdered and at that time society was greatly different than it is today. One of the members of my family was arrested for a period of time and then subsequently proved he was not associated with the crime. Later there was an inquest and the ultimate outcome was that a 10-year-old girl had died at the hands of person or persons unknown, when in fact we did have a family member who we later learned had a severe mental illness and we could satisfy ourselves that in all likelihood that person was the perpetrator of the crime.

The impact of that situation was on the family and my father in particular because of where he worked at the time and the amount of time he needed to be off the job. For a time he was questioned and detained. Fortunately, he worked for the Canadian National Railway, which was relatively understanding of this, but there are other employers who would not be. There is no doubt he lost wages, but at least he retained his job and his position, even when at one point in time he was under suspicion for the crime.

The second story happened to me. In 2001, my 30-something-year-old son disappeared for 28 days and we had no idea where he went. He was living with my former wife at the time. He had a little apartment there, and he was a musician. When I went to check the apartment, his drum kit was gone, his guitar was gone, his computers were gone. Everything had been sold.

For 28 days we were on edge. In my case I had an employer at the time who was very understanding of the circumstances and I had the latitude to come and go as I wished. In the case of our son it turned out that he had developed stomach cancer and had headed to the United States to see if he could find treatment. That was a long time ago now and fortunately we reconnected with him.

He was a man who simply felt he did not want to burden his family. Getting back to what we're seeing in this legislation, he was worried that he was going to cost us money. Ultimately when people go to the United States for health care it does cost money, but we worked our way through that. The good news is that he survived with a treatment there that worked. However, had I not had an employer who was sympathetic to the situation, I would have had to rely on some recourse such as this. Again, I give direct credit to the government for doing this.

*Government Orders*

I have been involved with the third story since being elected. In Hamilton there was a young man named Billy Mason who went missing. The word was that someone escorted him out of an apartment with a shotgun. Donna Dixon, Billy's mother, came to me for help. Billy was in his early 20s and the police were quite sure that he had been murdered. Over the course of time she and three other families in Hamilton who had missing young people kept pursuing this.

I have talked in this place about the need for a DNA databank for missing persons.

Coming back to Donna, the mother of this young man, and the cost to her, she is off her job. I talked to her recently and she was getting some victim's help. It was ultimately found out through the confession of one guy that another person had indeed murdered her son and disposed of his body. She had to go to the court case, day in and day out, and listen to that. By the way, that individual was convicted, went to prison and he killed another man in prison.

● (1705)

Aside from that, there was the turmoil and anguish this mother was living through when her son was missing. There was the terror of his never coming home. We had annual gatherings, candlelight vigils, where we hoped that Billy would return home.

People are living with that on one side and then on the other side they are living with the fact of their financial burden. Then the police finally come and say, "By the way, Mrs. Dixon, we have some answers for you. We have the perpetrator. There is going to be a trial."

I believe she works in a daycare centre, but she is going to have spend all of that time going to the trial. As a mother she wants to see the evidence and the trial, to have closure. However, there is again the financial cost.

Oftentimes we hear great stories about all the legal bills someone has to pay when they get into a situation, but we forget about the level lower aspects of these things where a person is facing a loss of income. If they have other children, there are expenses around daycare and so many other things to be considered.

When it comes to employment insurance in this country, the government should reach across the aisle to us because, right now, major mistakes have been made with employment insurance. The government should reach across the aisle and we should come together and discuss what we can do to make employment insurance work for Canadians and protect them in times like these, or in times of catastrophic illness, like we had with my son. We could find a better way to do this.

I say this because it is not all about money; it is about dignity. I went on a little tour this summer to the south shore of Nova Scotia. I went to Cape Sable Island, Port Mouton Bay, and Bridgewater. I also went to Charlottetown, and then to Fredericton and Saint John, New Brunswick. I listened to the people there who had many concerns about the changes that are taking place with EI.

These people are hard-working Canadians, who were saying that they did not have anything else to go to when the fishery closes down. Then there are people on the other side of it, those who have

small businesses. They were saying that the changes to EI were liable to force a lot of people out of the communities, so that when next season came around they would not have people for the job. They want to know what they are going to do.

There is a certain expertise that comes even from collecting crops or working in the fishery, or whatever someone is doing. The expertise that is developed over time will be lost. In that area, the government has made critical mistakes that will have an impact.

The government is saying that after a certain period of time, people will have to accept a job for 80% of their salary. Well, they accept that job and then they are out of work the next year. The next time comes around and they again accept a job at 80%, and then again. Is that not going to encourage some employers to say, "If I keep hiring different people, I can pay them less and less"? Will that not depress wages?

That is just an example of a conversation we could have had across this aisle before the government legislated and made changes. There is a feeling in this place that we are segmented, that we do not come together at those times when we should.

Some of the committees of the House work reasonably well at times. However, the purpose of our committees in this place is to take a piece of legislation and make it better, not to take a piece of legislation and destroy it. Both sides have to have confidence in one another to make that work.

The last time the government was planning significant changes to EI was back in the 1990s when the Liberals destroyed unemployment insurance and made it into employment insurance and started segmenting our country in an unbelievable way. Workers could not quality. My friend from Nickel Belt is acknowledging that.

We can and should do better in this place. We should be working together.

I have been pleased to talk a little bit about our views on employment insurance. It would have been nice to hear more from the government side on it.

● (1710)

**Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened attentively to my colleague from Hamilton make some very good points about temporary workers.

I had a case in Nickel Belt this spring where a tourist operator could not find part-time seasonal workers and had to bring in foreign workers from, I believe, Mexico.

I would like the hon. member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek to tell me what effect these EI changes will have on temporary workers, and will we have to bring in more foreign workers to fill in the gaps?

**Mr. Wayne Marston:** Mr. Speaker, I certainly do not have any problems with foreign workers being brought in when their expertise is required.

However, there was recently a year when we had about 300,000 people immigrate to Canada and about 240,000 temporary workers. Something is wrong with that equation.

*Government Orders*

The people I talked to in Nova Scotia were talking about the fact that their people were going west, being chased out of the province by these changes, and that they had little alternative but to turn to foreign workers.

Foreign workers in many instances are taken advantage of by some unscrupulous employers. They are paid less money. They do not feel they have the protections of the Government of Canada, although they are entitled to them when they are guests in our country.

However, we have workers who are willing to support those industries if they are allowed to stay in their communities and to hold them together.

In Nova Scotia they are scared to death of the aging of the population, because all of the young people have left. They believe the result will be endless retirement homes and seniors homes, with no young people generating and stimulating that economy to keep it working.

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek for that, at times, touching speech. He referenced the fact that he had a personal experience where his son disappeared, and luckily was found again.

My understanding of what has been proposed in Bill C-44 is support for parents of children who have disappeared as a result of suspected criminal activity. In my own riding there is a family where the young person has disappeared. Unfortunately, the suspicion is that she committed suicide. In this case the family does deserve support, even though there is no suspected criminal activity.

I wonder if the member could comment on the fact that perhaps it might be useful to entertain an amendment to the bill when it gets to committee to broaden the scope for parents whose children have disappeared.

**Mr. Wayne Marston:** Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right on the importance of protecting the family as a family unit. We think in terms of the mother or the father, but we have to broaden it out to make sure that the supports are there over the time they are needed.

In the case of my son, we did know about it for 28 days, but it was actually a year and a half before we saw him return home. That is different. The other case I spoke about was one where the young man was murdered. The family was in turmoil for three and a half years.

I do not know where the beginning or the end is, but as I spoke about working in committee, making an appropriate amendment might well be in order for something like this, and for the critic to sit down with the government side and say, “We have a progressive amendment here. Let us see what we can do together”.

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am very happy that all of my colleagues have come to hear my speech today.

The NDP supports this bill. It is not a question of ideology or partisan politics, but rather a question of helping families in need. Bill C-44 amends the Canada Labour Code, the Employment Insurance Act, the Income Tax Act and the Income Tax Regulations. These new measures will allow workers to take leave and receive employment insurance benefits if their child becomes critically ill or dies, or disappears as the probable result of a crime.

It goes without saying that we on this side of the House support these measures. We believe that they will help ease the suffering of parents in need. It is our duty to do so. Furthermore, in their 2011 election platform, the Conservatives promised that this measure would be paid for out of general revenues, and not out of the employment insurance fund.

The money provided to the parents of missing or murdered children was supposed to come from general revenues and not from EI, but it appears that the Conservatives ignored the promise they made whereby benefits paid to parents of seriously ill children would come from general revenues. This is by far the most expensive measure and comes at a time when the EI fund has an accumulated deficit of \$9 billion.

[*English*]

It is important to underline the fact that over the years, successive governments have taken money out of the unemployment, or employment, insurance fund that all Canadians have paid into and put this into a general revenue so that we arrive today at a time when there is a deficit. There is not enough money taken from workers to finance important programs.

[*Translation*]

The government is not addressing the most pressing problems related to employment insurance. Less than half of all unemployed Canadians are receiving EI benefits. It is shameful. It is unthinkable: less than half of those who need it are receiving EI benefits. Under this government, it is becoming increasingly difficult to get benefits. The NDP will continue to fight for a fair, accessible and efficient EI system for all unemployed Canadians, because it is our duty to do so. In fact, it is the duty of every party in the House of Commons.

While we are addressing the economic crisis and trying to create jobs, we absolutely must protect those who are in need. It is our duty, as members of the House of Commons. For the past few years, there has been less and less money for those in need. Bill C-44 makes a number of amendments to the Canada Labour Code to increase leave for parents. As I said, we agree and see this as a good thing. No bill is perfect, but we support this bill nonetheless.

This bill will extend maternity and parental leave by the number of weeks the child is hospitalized during the leave. It extends parental leave by the number of weeks of sick leave taken during the parental leave, and by the number of weeks spent in the Canadian Forces reserve. It also provides for an unpaid leave of absence of up to 37 weeks for parents of critically ill children.

• (1720)

Moreover, it provides for an unpaid leave of absence of 104 weeks for parents of a child who dies as a result of a crime, and leave of 52 weeks for parents of a child who has disappeared as a result of a crime.

*Government Orders*

This bill also extends to 17 weeks the period of unpaid leave that may be taken due to illness or injury without fear of a job loss.

These changes apply only to workers in federally regulated sectors. However, it is expected that provincial governments will make similar changes to their own labour codes, as was the case when compassionate care benefits were introduced.

Bill C-44 also makes changes to the Employment Insurance Act in order to allow the stacking of special benefits only. Maternity, parental and sickness benefits fall into the category of special benefits, which is a good thing. Benefits provided as a result of a job loss are considered regular benefits. Thus, special and regular benefits could be combined.

In closing, the NDP will support this bill, not for ideological or partisan reasons, but to help families in need. We want the employment insurance program to be accessible and effective for all Canadians.

**Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, there is another thing that worries me, because it is perfectly clear that two categories of parents have been established.

First of all, there are parents whose child disappeared or was killed, which is horrible. These parents will receive their benefits from general revenues and not from the employment insurance account. Parents who are self-employed are therefore protected.

Now let us take the case of parents whose child is ill, and an example comes to mind. This is the case of a lovely young girl I knew, who was my son's classmate and who died of cancer when she was 13. I learned the sad news last year, on the day that I was elected as a member of Parliament, and it was a shock. Her parents had some financial problems and had to sell their house. That is why I said that there are two categories of parents, and I would like my colleague to tell me what he thinks about this.

Parents who are self-employed are not eligible for employment insurance. Why limit access to those who are eligible for employment insurance? There should not be different categories of parents. My view is that parents are entitled to receive help. They should be paid benefits out of general revenues from the government's budget.

What does my esteemed colleague think?

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

She explained clearly what should be done. Access to employment insurance must be fair for those who need it. That is all that is required.

I hope that these issues will be discussed as the bill makes its way through the legislative process.

**Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to comment on a number of broken promises, some old and some even older.

The first was that these funds would not be taken from the employment insurance account, but rather from general revenues. At the moment, these funds come from the employment insurance account. That is therefore a broken promise.

Furthermore, I would like to remind you that a few years ago, parliamentarians in this House decided to protect the employment insurance account so that funds could not be removed directly from it to cover other shortfalls.

Have the Conservatives found a roundabout way of taking funds out of the account for other projects?

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

As I tried to point out in my comments, some time ago, there was \$50 billion in the account for those who needed funds. This money disappeared into the general fund, as my colleague mentioned. That is shameful. As a result there are people across Canada who need money, particularly during the difficult times we are currently experiencing. There is not enough money because this money, our money, money belonging to all Canadian workers, was put into a fund in an attempt to balance the budget.

I am going to underscore this yet again: it is shameful and it is something that has been done by the two or three previous governments, including this one.

• (1725)

[English]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate. We have to respect what the federal Auditor General had to do and had to say in regard to the consolidated fund. Having said that, I am anticipating that the bill will pass relatively quickly.

We want to express that we do support the compassion in proceeding with the bill. At the same time, I would like to remind the minister responsible at EIC of other decisions within the department, particularly some of the cutbacks that are affecting our workers. She should be looking at revisiting those in hopes of reinstating the type of support that they were receiving prior.

Having said that, we are prepared to see the bill pass.

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Winnipeg for his brief summary of what we expect. I hope that we move forward in a spirit of cooperation to really fine-tune what has to happen so that all Canadians can get the help they need with this type of legislation.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Is the House ready for the question?

**Some hon. members:** Question.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

**Some hon. members:** Yea.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** All those opposed will please say nay.



**Some hon. members:** Nay.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** In my opinion the yeas have it.

*And five or more members having risen:*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** The Chief Government Whip on a point of order.

**Hon. Gordon O'Connor:** Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the whips and I believe that if you seek it you will find agreement, pursuant to Standing Order 45(7), to defer the vote on this motion to the end of government orders on Tuesday, October 2, 2012.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Does the House agree?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

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## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

•(1730)

[*Translation*]

### ASBESTOS

**Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP)** moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should: (a) implement, in the year following the adoption of this motion, an industrial restructuring plan towards sustainable economic sectors for all communities in which a portion of the economy still depends on asbestos mining; (b) hold, in the six months following the adoption of this motion, a public consultation that shall (i) establish measures to be included in the industrial restructuring plan to ensure the creation of alternative employment for workers presently employed in the asbestos sector, (ii) include all organizations concerned and groups of regions still mining asbestos and who ask to participate; (c) publish, in the year following the adoption of this motion, a comprehensive list of public and quasi-public buildings under federal jurisdiction that contain asbestos and take the appropriate measures to ensure the health and integrity of the people working in these buildings; (d) support the inclusion of chrysotile on the Rotterdam Convention list of dangerous substances; and (e) stop financially supporting the asbestos industry within six months following the adoption of this motion.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table in this House Motion No. 381 on a very thorny and important issue in Quebec.

This motion is about the next steps that the NDP and almost all Quebecers and Canadians feel must be taken with regard to the asbestos issue in Canada. In addition, a clear majority of Canadians, who we all—New Democrats as well as Conservatives—represent here in this House would certainly prefer to hear me describe in more detail the next steps in establishing logical procedures to stop the mining of asbestos in Canada.

The motion being debated today complements the work that the NDP has been doing for years to advance—and yes, I said advance—the issue of asbestos. We sincerely believe that this motion takes into account public opinion that can no longer be ignored. It calls for respect for the main individuals affected by the difficult decisions

### *Private Members' Business*

that now inevitably have to be made, namely, the hundreds of workers who still earn their living in this industry and the people in all the surrounding communities.

Before I break down each section of the motion, I believe that it is essential to review the events that led us to the difficult circumstances that we are in today, or in other words, the need to take away from a region this mining activity that has been one of the pillars of its economy for over a century.

Around the late 1870s, the discovery of asbestos changed the Asbestos region forever. As early as 1878, 40 tonnes of asbestos were extracted from the deposits. Between 1919 and 1945, the asbestos industry flourished. It was during that period that a working class emerged and became stronger with a succession of labour movements. In 1949, the Asbestos region experienced the most important, the most significant event in the history of workers' rights in Quebec and Canada: the famous Asbestos strike.

This dispute was of such importance that, in 1956, a group of researchers, directed by the Right Honourable Pierre Elliott Trudeau, the future Prime Minister of Canada, published a book about the strike. According to its authors, the asbestos strike was a turning point in Quebec's social history. The Honourable Jean Marchand, who held among other positions that of Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, and Minister of Manpower and Immigration in the Pearson government, was the leading instigator of the strike.

Even on a personal level, the struggle by the asbestos workers has affected me: the then President of the Confédération des travailleurs catholiques du Canada, Gérard Picard, the main negotiator for the labour conflict, was one of my mother's uncles, and a man she greatly admired.

In providing just a simple overview of this historic labour dispute, it is important to remember how very far workers' rights have come since that time. For instance, it was quite acceptable then for the mine owners to say that the claim that the dusty working conditions were hazardous to the workers' health was just a way to gain public sympathy for the employees. Strikebreakers were used routinely. There was harassment by the police. The workers showed a level of courage and solidarity that was unprecedented at that time.

On March 5, 1949, Archbishop Joseph Charbonneau spoke out in favour of the strikers and urged people to donate money to help them. The Archbishop was forced to resign in 1950. The conflict was of such significance for Quebec society that it is considered the first milestone on the road leading to the split between the clergy and the political elite, known today as the Quiet Revolution.

For all of these battles, I would like to formally thank the asbestos workers and the people of Asbestos and Thetford Mines, and convey to them my great admiration. In light of these events, it is clear to see that the workers in Asbestos and all the surrounding communities have woven the tightest possible social fabric. It is also, therefore, easy to understand how strong the position is for maintaining asbestos production among all the stakeholders in the region.

*Private Members' Business*

Discoveries over the past few years have confirmed that asbestos mining must stop, and these conclusions have the support of a large majority of the international community and, for more than a year now, of a distinct majority of those in Quebec's civil society.

• (1735)

Given this situation, and when we go back to the origins of the story of asbestos workers, there are some things that have to be said. It is time to give them the assistance they are entitled to, after years of economic uncertainty. They must be given that assistance with all the respect they are due after their years of fighting for decent working conditions. All Canadians have benefited from their courage, and we thank them for it.

It is in this spirit that I call on all of my colleagues in the House to support my motion. If the Canadian government has any hope of aligning its policy even slightly with public opinion in Canada, it must implement four initiatives.

First, there has to be a genuine industrial restructuring plan to alleviate, at long last, the incessant economic insecurity that has hung over the communities in which a portion of the economy still depends on asbestos mining. Second, that plan has to be defined through consultations that include all stakeholders in the asbestos region who wish to participate.

We need the support of a majority of the members of this House to persuade the Minister of Industry to take that last little step to guarantee a process that respects the people of Asbestos and Thetford Mines. So far, he has expressed nothing but contempt for the provincial government's consultation plan, even though both left and right in Quebec are now prepared to help the asbestos region get out of asbestos production and make the transition to economic development projects for the future.

Third, a comprehensive list of public and quasi-public buildings under federal jurisdiction that contain asbestos must be drawn up. Over the past few years, thanks to the courage of the asbestos workers and their fight for proper working conditions, miners working in the asbestos mines are no longer regularly falling victim to respiratory diseases. However, other workers, and in particular construction workers, are the ones with health problems brought on by chrysotile. Thousands of Canadian workers need that list. We cannot deny them the ability to protect their health.

Fourth, we must support the inclusion of chrysotile on the Rotterdam Convention list of dangerous substances. Here again, we need the support of a majority of the members of this House to persuade the Minister of Industry to take that last little step. So far, the Minister is simply saying he will not oppose including chrysotile on the list.

If Canada, in the next round of talks on the Rotterdam Convention, were to simply stay silent and let another country derail the talks, Canada's image would be tarnished even more. Why? To keep a few hundred jobs for workers who are in any event in the process of making the transition to other industries, since \$50 million has already been announced for that purpose. It would be completely absurd; it would be nonsensical. We have to support this and not be reduced to the embarrassing—indeed, humiliating—

position of merely not opposing it, for the sake of consistency and to protect Canada's reputation.

I am now going to comment on particular aspects that must absolutely be considered when it comes time to vote on this motion in a few weeks. We have to think about the asbestos communities when we vote on this bill. In a nutshell, they are the victims of a massive trend. For a decade now, they have been going through waves of job losses, and this has had an enormous effect on their social fabric, in spite of how strong it was.

We must think about the fundamental right of construction workers to know, when they hit a wall with a hammer, whether there is asbestos on the other side.

• (1740)

This week again I was told that trainees had spent several days tearing down walls containing asbestos, without protection, without masks and without gloves. It was only after several days that a foreman showed up and told them to be careful because they were filling their lungs with asbestos fibres.

We will have to think about those people when we vote on this motion, simply to reflect Canadian public opinion in 2012. These are people whom we represent in this House. We can no longer afford to be completely at odds with Canadian public opinion. The point here is that there is a virtual consensus out there and it must absolutely be reflected in the House.

The motion also asks that we stop financially supporting the asbestos industry. This may seem like stating the obvious, following the announcement made by the Minister of Industry, who is going to give \$50 million with one hand. We must ensure that no government spending will be made with the other hand to support the development of asbestos markets. We absolutely cannot be sure of that. Just since the Conservative government came to office, there have been 160 international missions to more than 50 countries. These missions have cost the government a lot of money and they have been used precisely to promote the development of asbestos markets.

Even the last point, point (e), which may seem obvious, is not a given. We need a majority of members to rise to ensure that Canada will make the necessary decisions about asbestos.

I would like to read out the points of the motion:

(a) implement, in the year following the adoption of this motion, an industrial restructuring plan towards sustainable economic sectors for all communities in which a portion of the economy still depends on asbestos mining;

The key word here is "sustainable". People in the asbestos region deserve to be involved in sustainable development, so that over 5, 10, 15 or 20 years, they can be assured of the strength of their businesses.

(b) hold, in the six months following the adoption of this motion, a public consultation that shall (i) establish measures to be included in the industrial restructuring plan to ensure the creation of alternative employment for workers presently employed in the asbestos sector...

*Private Members' Business*

It may be obvious, but the key words here are “creation of alternative employment”. Do we know whether the \$50 million figure that has been mentioned suits their needs? No, because there is no planned public consultation. That is the opposite of what must be done. We must talk to people in the area. They will tell us how to guarantee that there will not be a bunch of investments made in areas that will not create jobs specifically for the people who were laid off because of problems with the asbestos industry. Curiously, the key word is “employment”.

...(ii) include all organizations concerned and groups of regions still mining asbestos and who ask to participate;

The minister's first reaction is one of contempt for any provincial decision to hold consultations. This is not a given.

(c) publish, in the year following the adoption of this motion, a comprehensive list of public and quasi-public buildings under federal jurisdiction that contain asbestos and take the appropriate measures to ensure the health and integrity of the people working in these buildings;

There are already provinces in Canada, such as British Columbia, that have done this. We cannot allow some Canadians to be protected and most other Canadians to not be properly protected.

I repeat, because it is very important: we need majority support in the House to finally respect the opinion of an overwhelming majority of our constituents.

• (1745)

**Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup for his comments on asbestos.

I would like him to answer a question. Can he explain to me, and to the rest of Canada, why the Conservative members from Quebec and in the government ignored evidence about chrysotile for decades before hoisting the white flag last week?

**Mr. François Lapointe:** Mr. Speaker, for this to happen, many components were essential, including scientific evidence, the positions taken by the major medical organizations and the Cancer Society, the NDP's thorough work over the years and, more recently, the position taken by sovereigntists and non-sovereigntists in Quebec, both on the right and the left, together with union organizations like the CSN and the CSQ. All of these are clearly and firmly in favour of the transition for the asbestos industry in Beauce.

How to explain why it took the Conservatives so long? I'm sorry, but that falls into the category of the inexplicable.

**Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, as my colleague knows, there was recently an NDP opposition day on the asbestos issue. That day, particularly when the vote was held, a rather interesting phenomenon occurred: several members, Conservatives in particular, withdrew from the House prior to the vote and they did not vote. For me, this demonstrates malaise within the Conservative caucus on the issue.

I would like my colleague from Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup and the riding that neighbours my own, to explain what he expects in connection with the vote on this motion. Does he expect the Conservative caucus to change its position on the matter? How does he think the Conservatives will vote this time?

**Mr. François Lapointe:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from the neighbouring constituency, for his very important question.

There is indeed a small part of the Conservative caucus that for various reasons has stated its disagreement with respect to continuing asbestos mining in Canada. It is already in motion.

On the basis of my reading of a number of conversations I have had with other colleagues from the Conservative Party, who did not always agree with those who have thus far expressed their discontent, people were still under the completely false impression that in Quebec, there is consensus on continuing to operate the asbestos mines. It is very important to tell these colleagues that this is absolutely not the case. The PQ, the CAQ, the CSQ, the CSN, the coalition *Pour que le Québec ait meilleur mine*—the list is endless—as well as the clear majority of Quebec civil society, for almost two years now, do not want asbestos production to continue. This is the information that some of my colleagues on the other side of the House needed to understand, that the consensus was not only in English Canada, but also in Quebec.

That being the case, the initiatives suggested by this motion become completely natural and consistent with the position and convictions of most of the people we represent everywhere in Canada, coast to coast to coast, as my anglophone colleagues say.

• (1750)

**Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today on behalf of the constituents of Thetford Mines in this debate which affects them more than any other community in the country.

I am of course referring to Thetford Mines and Asbestos. I listened to the remarks made by my colleague from Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, who told us of the mischief that Pierre Trudeau got up to during the 1949 strike—the member gave us a full account. He was quite accurate in his account in several respects, but I just want to remind him which region was affected, and it was not Beauce. It was Thetford Mines, not Beauce, which is located beside it. It is important to provide an accurate account when presenting information regarding matters that have significant ramifications. When referring to the affected regions, it is important to at least have the decency to refer to the right regions.

That is why I want to remind members that the people in my riding have been living with chrysotile on a daily basis for 100 years. They work in the mines, they have previously worked in them or their friends or family have worked in them. They were also in the front lines of every fight waged against chrysotile. It was the workers of my riding who were the first to warn people about the risks associated with the misuse of asbestos. This goes back a long time. There was amphibole asbestos and sprayed asbestos; it was not encapsulated asbestos. And after that, a distinction was made between chrysotile fibres and amphibole fibre. There is quite a background to all of this.

*Private Members' Business*

The workers of my region contributed, alongside employers and governments, to develop an approach for the safe and controlled use of chrysotile. It is a legacy of which my region is proud. Today, my constituents face a new challenge: an economy without chrysotile. This is a new fight that they must wage; it is a fight that they did not choose, despite being those most affected.

A few weeks ago, the new Premier of Quebec, Pauline Marois, clearly indicated that her government was going to prohibit the use of chrysotile in Quebec. She also indicated her intention to cancel the loan guarantee, which was previously offered by the Charest government to the Jeffrey mine in the Asbestos sector. Her remarks were unequivocal: there will no longer be a chrysotile mine in Quebec.

This decision obviously has negative ramifications in terms of the prosperity, both current and future, of my region. Hundreds of miners, who were hoping to find work as a result of the reopening of the Asbestos Lake mine, have consequently lost all hope. Many SMEs that gravitate around this mine will no longer be able to rely on this major client. What is more, this natural resource, that is found in abundance, will now be locked forever in the ground.

I know all too well that the fate of my constituents will not be of concern to my NDP colleagues. Indeed, whenever there is a natural resource project that brings jobs and opportunities to a rural community, the NDP does all it can to close those projects down. This is not new. That is why I am so proud to be part of a government that listens to our regions and that cares about their development and prosperity. My region is a concrete example of this.

I mentioned a little earlier that hundreds of workers in my region are currently jobless and facing uncertainty. I met with those workers. They lived in hope, but now, all that is left is uncertainty. The mine has been closed for a year and they have been waiting. They were told by the Quebec government that mining would be banned, and were told at the same time that there will be educational consultations. When a family is struggling to make ends meet, consultations for educational purposes are not going to put food on their plates. That is the reality faced by my region. I have seen the miners and their families in distress over recent months and even more over recent weeks. Some have almost run out of employment insurance benefits. That is the reality that we face. We can debate all we want here in this House of Commons, but that is the reality on the ground.

The last thing they need is a bogus consultation when the decision to shutdown the industry has already been made by Ms. Marois. That is why our government has taken swift action and committed to invest up to \$50 million to support the diversification of the asbestos communities. Our government has, therefore, taken the most responsible decision by focusing on our economy's transition in order to create jobs for our workers as soon as possible.

• (1755)

Fortunately, the region has worked tirelessly over recent years in order to diversify its economic base and our government is no stranger to this effort.

Efforts by our government in this regard include the gas pipeline between Vallée-Jonction and Thetford Mines, an important project

that was recently announced in the presence of the Prime Minister. With this investment of more than \$18 million, the government is making possible the construction of a \$24 million pipeline that will provide access to a reliable and less costly source of energy, natural gas.

The project will contribute to the economic development and diversification of the region and of the surrounding communities. It will also enable businesses to improve their competitiveness, in addition to incentivizing others to set up shop in the region, thereby creating wealth and employment.

The Government of Canada's contribution is an exceptional measure to diversify this region's economic base. Since it has been a single industry region for years, it has fallen behind in terms of energy supply compared to other regions in Quebec.

Various contributions have been made to set up and operate two research centres in Thetford Mines. These research centres are the pride of the business people in our region.

The Centre de technologie minérale et de plasturgie provides professional expertise in the plastics and mineral sectors, and the Centre collégial de transfert de technologie en oléochimie industrielle provides businesses with applied research services, technical assistance and information in the area of synthetic organic chemistry and oleochemistry.

It is also in this context that we launched, in Thetford Mines, a research project to examine the economic opportunities to be derived from mine tailings. The objective is to provide a complete portrait of the physical and chemical composition of the tailings in the mines. We will review all the documentation on the issue and we will analyze samples of tailings and surrounding waters.

The results will enable us to assess the stability and the chemical evolution of the tailings when they are subject to erosion and water infiltration, to identify the minerals that may constitute trade opportunities and examine the sustainable extraction methods for the re-cleaning of tailings. This project may eventually lead to secondary activities at the same site.

My constituents in Thetford Mines have worked hard to diversify their economy, and they will have to continue, because another blow has been struck. They can be proud of what has been accomplished.

Like all other regions of Quebec and Canada, the Thetford region has assets when it comes to resources, and it can count on our government to support it in its future development. A blow has been struck; a decision has been made by Ms. Marois. We are aware of this, and Canada now no longer has any logical reason to object to the inclusion of chrysotile on the list in Annex III of the Rotterdam Convention. We are pragmatic, and the region knows it can count on us. It knows it can count on a government that recognizes the importance of its natural resources to the economy of the country and the regions, and all regions of the country can count on our government.

*Private Members' Business*

We are in favour of economic development. We believe in exploiting our resources and we will continue to bring forward promising projects, like the oil sands and shale gas. There are opportunities galore. With the Plan Nord in Quebec, investments of over \$4 billion are being proposed. There is also the Ring of Fire in Ontario. The economic benefits are extraordinary.

This is a school of thought that believes in economic growth, in job creation and in developing our land, unlike the NDP, which simply wants to lock the door to anything that falls under the heading of natural resource development projects. The choice is clear, and we urge Canadians to get on board with a responsible government that believes in economic development and the welfare of society. That is what will enable us to occupy our land, to develop a strong country, with quality of life, everywhere in Canada.

That is also why, in my own department, we are constantly working toward providing the greatest possible number of Canadian homes with high-speed Internet access, and we are making headway. We now know that 98% of Canadian homes have that access, and I am very proud of that. It is part of a global vision.

But the NDP opposed all these investments that were made in the past, to develop this basic infrastructure. There are clearly two schools of thought. The Conservative Party is responsible, and Canadians can count on our government for the development of our regions.

• (1800)

**Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to participate in this debate on the motion moved by my hon. colleague from Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup.

[*English*]

Motion No. 381 outlines a plan of action for dealing with asbestos, including economic diversification, including having this dangerous substance listed on the Rotterdam Convention and public hearings.

[*Translation*]

Today is not a day to celebrate. Yes, it is good to have the substance on the list, but the people in the affected regions will have a hard time once the industry ceases to exist. The government must implement measures to help these people and the regions. People will have to find new jobs, another source of income.

[*English*]

Everyone is familiar with the dangers of asbestos, so I will not retil that particular soil. While this motion is non-binding, it is certainly welcome, given the events of the past few weeks. The Liberal Party has for a number of years been pushing to have asbestos listed on the Rotterdam Convention's list of dangerous substances. It has become more clear in the last few years that this is necessary. We have been urging the Conservative government to ensure that workers in this industry have the assistance they need to transition to other forms of employment.

[*Translation*]

That is why we intend to support this motion.

Last October, during the opposition day on asbestos, the NDP moved a similar motion. The main difference is that the motion moved last year would have prohibited the use and exportation of all forms of asbestos, which today's motion does not do.

During the debate last year, the Conservatives were incapable of thoroughly analyzing problems related to asbestos and the harm that exporting this dangerous substance was causing to Canada's international reputation.

However, the minister defied all logic and defended the government's position even in light of the incontrovertible facts.

[*English*]

Then earlier this month something happened. As we all know, a minority PQ government was elected in Quebec. I am not celebrating that either, but as a result the minister has apparently had a change of heart, although one has to question his motives; if he had listened a year ago, we could be much further along now in the process of providing assistance to communities like Asbestos, where the Jeffrey mine is located.

This month, the government announced that it will no longer oppose adding chrysotile asbestos to the Rotterdam Convention's prior informed consent procedure list. I should point out that in July 2011, Canada was the only country in the world to object to adding chrysotile asbestos to the Rotterdam Convention's list of hazardous chemicals. Adding asbestos to the list will force exporters to warn recipient countries of any health hazards.

That is very important because we know it has been going around the world and it has been going to countries where it has not been handled properly, especially when people are taking buildings down. All we have to do is go outside this building, the Centre Block, and look over to the West Block, which is surrounded by a fence and has been enshrouded for the past year or so, as work is being done to remove asbestos from it. It is pretty obvious to us, just looking at how carefully the public is excluded from that area, that this is considered a real problem. When people are working with any kind of asbestos, to try to remove it from a building, they have to take very careful precautions, so we all know it is a serious matter.

The federal government also promised to provide up to \$50 million to help the region diversify its economy, but it has not provided much so far in the way of any detailed plan.

• (1805)

The Conservatives also tried to blame the new PQ government for the demise of asbestos mining in Quebec, because that government said it would cancel the \$58 million loan the Charest government had announced earlier this year, and the intent of that loan was to revive the country's only asbestos operation in the town of Asbestos.

If the government actually based its decisions on science and facts instead of political gamesmanship, it would have followed the scientific evidence far sooner, and that has clearly established the health dangers of chrysotile asbestos.

Let me conclude by noting that despite the recent announcements by the federal and provincial governments, opponents of asbestos continue to argue that the problem is far from over.

*Private Members' Business*

For example, recent media reports say that \$2.6 million worth of asbestos-containing brake pads were imported into Ontario last year. There are concerns about exactly what the government's new position will mean. We will have to wait and see. But the fact that asbestos is still moving around this country, is still being used, is a concern. That makes me concerned about mechanics in auto shops who have to work on these brakes. They may have no idea that they contain asbestos and may not be taking the measures necessary to protect themselves from inhaling asbestos. I hope they are taking the necessary measures. I would be very concerned about that. It is time steps were taken to end this activity.

[Translation]

**Mr. François Pilon (Laval—Les Îles, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in this House to support my colleague from Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup and his motion on the government's responsibility for the current state of the asbestos industry in Canada.

A huge debate has been raging over the past few years on the use of asbestos, particularly in Quebec, focusing specifically on the use of chrysotile asbestos, an ore that is proven to be carcinogenic.

Chrysotile is a fibrous, non-flammable mineral that is flexible and resistant to most chemicals and has high tensile strength. This unique combination of characteristics has for decades made it a choice component for lightweight reinforced cement products, friction materials, and high-temperature seals and gaskets, to name just a few. Chrysotile accounts for a huge share, 94%, of the world asbestos market.

Chrysotile has been recognized as a carcinogen for more than three decades now and there are approximately 30 countries in the world that have banned its use, including France in 1997.

In 2011, under this government, when the UN Environment Programme wanted to add chrysotile to the list of 39 chemicals whose industrial use is hazardous, better known as the Rotterdam Convention list of hazardous substances, the program came up against the refusal by the four major chrysotile producers and exporters: Russia, Kyrgyzstan, India and, of course, Canada.

Canada's refusal was ascribed to the fact that this government supported the export of chrysotile to developing countries.

As exporting countries are not required to provide information about the toxicity or safe handling of this hazardous material, this government decided to shift the burden of asbestos exposure to the developing countries.

This all happened while this very government was using millions of dollars from Canadian taxpayers—and guess why—to remove asbestos from public places such as the Parliament buildings and the Prime Minister's residence. This provided another great opportunity for this government to promote Canada's image abroad.

While the government has been dithering, dawdling and procrastinating on this issue, here are some of the solutions that NDP MPs would like to see. First of all, we demand that this government support the addition of chrysotile to the Rotterdam Convention list of hazardous substances. When asbestos is on the list, Canada will be forced to warn asbestos importing countries

about its dangers to human health. Second, we demand that the government stop providing financial assistance to the asbestos industry.

Under this government, Canada has sponsored and paid for an impressive 160 trade missions to 60 countries to promote asbestos. If the government had only put the same effort into the manufacturing sector and into maintaining our social programs, Canada's economy would be a lot stronger today.

Finally, we hope this government will set up an industrial restructuring plan for asbestos workers. We want the government to put just as much effort into economic diversification and into redeploying former asbestos workers as it put into promoting asbestos throughout the world. Our regions and our workers are affected and they deserve the same amount of money as the government has invested in promoting asbestos over the past few years, in Canada and abroad. Workers in Canada and Quebec should not have to bear the brunt of this government's callousness.

The NDP's position is supported by the vast majority of people, in addition to being supported by many Canadian professionals, including healthcare professionals and the Canadian Cancer Society, to name just a few.

Recently, the World Health Organization, the Canadian Medical Association and the Canadian Cancer Society stated that asbestos should be banned in all its forms, as chrysotile is a class A carcinogen.

• (1810)

Finally, Quebec's Premier recently pledged to cancel the \$58 million loan guarantee that was meant to revive mining operations in the Jeffrey mine, thereby bringing an end to asbestos mining operations in Quebec.

If Canada wants to continue being a leader on the international stage, we must put international interests before domestic political considerations. We no longer use asbestos in our buildings, and it is not any safer to use it in buildings in other countries. Asbestos is just as carcinogenic in the walls of buildings in developing countries as it is in our own.

The World Health Organization and the International Labour Organization have agreed that there is no safe level of asbestos exposure. It is incumbent on the Conservative government to stop tarnishing our international reputation. It must demand that asbestos be added to the Rotterdam Convention list of hazardous substances immediately.

In conclusion, as far back as 2006, internal documents revealed that Health Canada officials agreed that the department's preferred position would be to add asbestos to the Rotterdam Convention list, as this would be consistent with controlled use. Six years later, this recommendation has not yet been followed by the Conservatives. It is high time that this government do the right thing and call asbestos a dangerous substance, for our health and for everyone's health.

•(1815)

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, for Official Languages and for the Economic Development Agency for the Regions of Quebec, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, since 2006, our Conservative government has sustained the security and prosperity of Canadians, and provided incentives for companies and investors to create jobs.

We have acted prudently from a fiscal standpoint, and have introduced programs to promote economic development across Canada.

When the global financial and economic crisis struck, these efforts helped Canada avoid a long and deep recession.

Because Canada's financial position was sound before the crisis, the government had the latitude it needed to launch its economic action plan.

The targeted measures in the plan were implemented in a timely manner to produce maximum effect. The plan has proved to be one of the most vigorous intervention programs by a G7 country in response to the global recession.

I wish to remind people that in Canada, mining is mainly a provincial jurisdiction. The measures announced by the Quebec government simply mean that chrysotile mine operations will cease and that Canada will no longer export chrysotile.

This decision leaves a huge economic void not only in Asbestos and Thetford Mines, but throughout the region.

Simply referring to how many direct jobs are related to mining is inadequate. The companies and workers who depend on the commercial and industrial activity peripheral to the mines must also be taken into consideration. The impact on the region's communities is easy to understand.

Hundreds of workers in our region are unemployed and living in uncertainty, hoping that the mine will be reopened.

A few days ago, our government announced that henceforth, Canada would no longer oppose the inclusion of chrysotile in Annex 3 of the Rotterdam Convention. Even more importantly, our government decided that it would be appropriate to do something for these communities, these workers and these families.

It must not be forgotten that the impact of unemployment lasts for a long time. It can take years to recover from a period of debt accumulation. When family income drops or disappears completely, the financial burdens remain.

The loss of family income has consequences that are often difficult to calculate and that go well beyond the paycheque. It is a form of pressure and stress that affects every facet of life, including health.

The same is the case for those communities that will have to continue to provide public services at a time when taxation revenue is dropping.

### *Private Members' Business*

We know that when a key industry shuts down in a small community, a spiral begins, and it becomes increasingly difficult to reverse it as it advances.

That is why our government has announced that we will invest up to \$50 million to help the asbestos community diversify its economy. This contribution is part of our national effort to secure the prosperity and quality of life of all Canadians.

Since 2006, the Conservative government has bolstered the security and prosperity of Canadians, and provided incentives for companies and investors to create jobs.

When the global financial and economic crisis struck in 2009, these efforts helped Canada avoid a long and deep recession. Because Canada's financial position was sound before the crisis, the government had the latitude it needed to launch its economic action plan.

The targeted measures in the plan were implemented in a timely manner to produce maximum effect. The plan has proved to be one of the most vigorous intervention programs by a G7 country in response to the global recession.

Our government remains concerned by the current situation. Even though the Canadian economy performed best among the G7 countries in terms of employment and growth, by creating some 770,000 net new jobs since July 2009, the global economy remains tenuous.

Any setbacks from beyond our borders could have serious negative impacts on Canada. That is why our government continues to remain vigilant and to take prudent measures as part of its economic action plan.

Canada is continuing to co-operate closely with its G20 partners with a view to achieving strong, lasting and balanced world growth.

•(1820)

It is continuing to implement the measures provided for in the 2012 economic action plan, including opening up new markets, increasing Canadian exports, training, research and support for the responsible development of our natural resources.

By continuing its focus on restoring a balanced budget, keeping taxes low and promoting a more globally competitive economy, our government is helping to make Canada stronger.

Needless to say, Canada faces economic challenges, and we are not afraid of the truth when the time comes to tell it like it is. But we can overcome these obstacles if all the economic partners—both public and private sector—take the steps that are needed to create jobs, growth and long-term prosperity. That is what drives our support. It is a contribution that needs to be seen as part of a larger set of means and initiatives to create business opportunities and jobs.

I very much hope that Quebec will take all the steps needed to take advantage of our government's many programs in support of entrepreneurship, innovation, training, trade and infrastructure. We will be there to support the stakeholders in their efforts.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

**Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I would like to thank my colleague from Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup for his motion and his speech in the House of Commons today.

Since the member was elected on May 2, 2011, asbestos has become his passion because he wants to help Quebecers affected by it. I thank him for that.

[*English*]

Someone else I would like to thank is the member for Winnipeg Centre, who, for years and years, has presented petition after petition in the House of Commons from Canadians from coast to coast to coast who want asbestos banned in Canada. I also thank all of the activists, scientists and doctors who support our position on asbestos.

I am particularly interested in this motion. Back in October 2011, a motion was debated in the House that I presented. I do not want to read the whole motion but I will read parts of it. The motion read, in general, “(a) ban the use and export of asbestos; (b) support international efforts to add chrysotile asbestos to the list of hazardous chemical[s]”, and this is the important part, “(c) assist affected workers by developing a Just Transition Plan with measures to accommodate their re-entry into the workforce”, something the Conservatives voted against. They voted against helping the workers.

It went on to say, “(d) introduce measures dedicated to affected older workers, through the employment insurance program”, something the Conservatives voted against. As far as I am concerned, this is the key part, “(e) support communities and municipalities in asbestos producing regions through an investment fund for regional economic diversification”, which would have helped the communities that produce asbestos. The Conservatives voted against that and shame on them.

I will now talk about the community of Elliot Lake in northern Ontario which at one time was a producer of uranium. However, because of the markets, the mines had to shut down. What did the municipality and the provincial and federal governments do? Instead of throwing up their arms like the Conservative government is doing, they got together and formulated a plan. They diversified Elliot Lake and today Elliot Lake is not producing uranium. It is a diversified and vibrant community that is alive and well because a plan was formulated to help the community, something that the Conservatives do not want to do for communities that are affected by asbestos.

In my previous life, I worked for a mining company and I used asbestos. We had to mix an asbestos powder with oil when we were pouring Babbit bearings. At the time, the boss said that it was okay, that there was no danger. We used to grab some asbestos flakes and mix them with oil. We did not use masks or protective equipment, but the boss said that it was okay. It is a lot like what the bosses on the other side of the House are telling the asbestos workers; that it is okay to work in an industry that causes cancer.

•(1825)

Asbestos is banned in 50 countries across the world but Canada is exporting asbestos to countries such as Indonesia, India and the Philippines. Those are the primary customers for Canadian asbestos. As we know, there are no safety rules in those countries. No one is

watching out for the workers. I recently saw a film clip on CBC television of some of these workers handling asbestos with no masks and no protective equipment. They were just throwing it around because they do not know any better.

However, we in Canada know better. We know that asbestos causes cancer. Only the Conservatives do not know that. Science has proven it. Scientists and doctors say that it causes cancer but the Conservatives do not believe the science.

Today, during question period, I was astounded to hear the Minister of Agriculture say that E. coli testing is done on a scientific basis. If there had been more room between my chair and my desk I think I would have fallen out when I heard a minister of the government say that the government was using scientific evidence. There has been scientific evidence for years and years that asbestos causes cancer but the Conservatives have chosen to ignore that.

It is estimated that, worldwide, asbestos costs 100,000 lives every year. That is a lot of lives. To put it into perspective I will read something. When this survey was taken, 103,617 citizens were living in the riding of Beauce. If 100,000 of them were killed, that would only leave 3,617 people in Beauce, which is not very many. Lévis-Bellechasse has 105,927 citizens living in that area. If 100,000 of them were killed that would not leave very many of them. We hear a lot of discussion in the House of Commons about the riding Fort McMurray—Athabasca. It has 100,805 people. If we were to take the numbers from the World Health Association, we would only have 805 people left in that riding. More Canadians die of asbestos related disease than any other occupational health disease.

I will relay a very short story. When I was elected back in 2008, I moved into my office and wanted to put up some pictures and decorations. I was getting ready to do that one day when one of the workers came into the office and said that I could not put up a picture, that I could not put a nail in the wall. I thought he was upset because I was doing his job. I was not sure, so I talked to him about it. He explained that I could not do that because the walls were full of asbestos. He said that if I wanted to put up a picture he would need to do it. He said that he would need to wear special clothes and a mask and that after he had hammered the nail in the wall he would need to use air exchangers to get rid of any asbestos fibres that might have moved around. That was unbelievable to me.

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## ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.



*Adjournment Proceedings*

•(1830)

[*Translation*]

## EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

**Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I hope to be given a more satisfactory answer for the workers in my riding than the one I received last May and this week. Every time the minister has had to explain how these employment insurance changes will affect workers, she plays the same old tune. I hope she will not do so this time.

Instead of again telling us that we have got it all wrong, can she explain what options EI recipients in my riding will have when they cannot find work either because the fishing season is over, or because plants have no more fish to process, or because the tourists are gone, or because restaurants, hotels and museums are empty, or because the school year is over, or because the fruits and vegetables have been picked? In short, we have a seasonal economy.

These are the workers' options. According to the changes proposed by the minister, they will have to accept any job and be paid 80% of their previous wages up to the sixth week, and then 70%. In Gaspé and the Magdalen Islands, more than 80% of the jobs are seasonal, and all these workers will have to accept a 30% reduction in their income. Is the minister serious when she says that she will reduce my constituents' income by 30% this year, another 30% the following year, and yet another 30% the year after that? Does she really want to impoverish my constituents to that extent?

In the medium term, that measure can only have one consequence: the impoverishment of the whole region and the exodus of families to other parts of the country. There will not be enough people left to fish, to harvest and to welcome tourists. This is ridiculous.

Is the minister not aware of the impact of what she is proposing? With the cuts to Service Canada local knowledge is disappearing and this is already being felt. When my fellow citizens are asked to take jobs that are three hours away from their home, or else they may lose their benefits, it shows that public servants have ignored the geographical reality. That is the risk with centralization and this government is the one to blame for that. Does that not ring a bell with the minister?

Finally, the government is putting a stop to a pilot project designed to bridge the gap between the end of benefits and the beginning of the working season, in the spring. That project protected workers against the harsh reality of not having an income for a month or two. Is the minister able to understand the distress of people when there is simply no money coming in?

The change made to the working while on claim program is another joke. One wonders whether the minister really understands the issue. This measure targets the poorest in our society and the minister should be ashamed. What she will not say is that this measure is deterring many unemployed people from working part-time.

Because of all these changes, small and medium businesses will have a hard time keeping workers. People will simply leave the regions. This reminds me of the Conservative election campaign, in

May 2011. Their slogan was “Power to the regions”. Is that their vision for our region?

•(1835)

**Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our top priorities are job creation, economic growth and long-term prosperity for Canadians.

[*English*]

Our government remains committed to providing temporary income support to unemployed Canadians who have lost their jobs through no fault of their own while they look for work or upgrade their skills.

[*Translation*]

However, if there is one thing that we should do better, it is matching Canadians with the jobs that are available in their communities.

[*English*]

We need to ensure that Canadians have access to and are skilled enough for the jobs that are being created. Full-time jobs have been increasing across many occupations and many industries. In fact, from July 2009 to May 2012, employment grew by more than 770,000 jobs. This represents the strongest growth by far among G7 countries. Of these 770,000 jobs, 90,000 are full-time positions. Statistics Canada indicates there were 250,000 job vacancies across the country last month.

What are we going to do to help unemployed Canadians find jobs?

Our government is committed to making targeted common-sense changes to the EI program that encourage Canadians to stay active in the job market either by working or looking for jobs and removing disincentives to work.

We will provide enhanced labour market information to claimants to support their job search efforts, including enhanced online job alerts. EI recipients will now get job postings twice a day for those chosen occupations within their community, as well as postings for jobs in related occupations in other geographic regions. This will enable them to make more informed decisions about how to conduct their job search.

We will also strengthen and clarify what is required of claimants who are receiving EI regular benefits. The definition of “suitable employment” will be based on a number of criteria, such as working conditions, hours of work and commuting time. Personal circumstances will also be taken into account. EI claimants will not be expected to take a job that is hazardous to their health or physically difficult for them to perform.

Many employers have said that they are facing significant skills and labour shortages and they need to have access to temporary foreign workers.

The government will ensure better coordination with the temporary foreign worker program and the EI program. We want to ensure that Canadians who are available and have the right skills have the first crack at these jobs. It only makes sense.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

For people who are unable to find employment either because opportunities do not exist or they are not reasonably matched, EI will continue to be there for them as it always has been in the past.

**Mr. Philip Toone:** Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary's response is certainly a matter for thought, but I have a few questions.

The parliamentary secretary said that people would be offered appropriate employment, but the definition has been removed from the act. There seems to be a lot of discretion as to what "appropriate" actually means now. I would like to better understand that. Are we leaving it to the courts to decide or will the ministry propose a definition?

Also, if jobs are being offered within a reasonable distance, why is it that in my riding people have been offered jobs that are three, four or sixteen hours away from their homes and those are considered jobs that are within their region? I believe the change the Conservatives proposed was within an hour away from a person's home, but now we are talking about someone taking a ferry and travelling incredible distances to get a minimum wage job. How does that help increase the wealth of the regions? How does that help anyone really?

• (1840)

**Ms. Kellie Leitch:** Mr. Speaker, let me be clear. Our government will continue to provide temporary financial assistance to unemployed Canadians who have lost their jobs through no fault of their own while they look for work or upgrade their skills.

[Translation]

We are also taking measures to match Canadians with the jobs that are available in their communities.

[English]

Our government's top priority is the economy, and we are proud of the 770,000 net new jobs that have been created since the end of the recession.

The member may not have heard this so I will repeat it. As I mentioned earlier in my speech, there will be job postings twice a day for chosen occupations within communities as well as postings for jobs that are related occupations in other geographic regions. People will be receiving those.

Our government is working to help Canadians find jobs in their local areas specific to their qualifications.

For those who need employment insurance, it will be there when they need it, as it always has been.

[Translation]

## THE ENVIRONMENT

**Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to address the Minister of the Environment or the parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment on the issue of subsoil fracturing, and more specifically hydraulic fracturing for shale gas.

In my riding of Drummond, and everywhere in Canada, this issue is raising questions among Canadians. First, on the greenhouse gas emissions balance sheet, is shale gas as polluting as coal, as some

studies have shown? Second, are the chemicals used by the industry a threat to Canadians' health? Because a good dozen chemicals appear to be carcinogenic, according to a study released by the United States. Will rural communities have their underground water, the source of their drinking water, contaminated? These are all questions we have had no answers to, and there are a lot of other questions I could tell you about.

In fact, the truth is that we know nothing about the real impact of this industry. We know nothing about the impact on Canadians' health, and we know nothing about the impact on the environment or on our biodiversity. Why is this Conservative government closing its eyes to the practices of this industry?

The federal government must make protecting the public its absolute priority. That is what its priority should be. I especially hope the parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment is not going to tell us this is under provincial jurisdiction. I will show you, based on all the legislation relating to this, that that is not the case.

First, there is the Canadian Environmental Protection Act. Then we have the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, the Canadian Species at Risk Act, and the Federal Sustainable Development Act. All of these acts are Canadian environmental protection legislation that exists and that we should have, precisely to protect Canadians' environment.

In keeping with the division of powers, and in cooperation with the provinces, the territories, the First Nations, environmentalists, scientists and the populations concerned, it is important that the federal government live up to its responsibilities, do the studies and exhibit some leadership in this area, where a lot of questions are going unanswered.

The evidence can be found in a study by the Munk Centre for International Studies at the University of Toronto dated 2012, confirming that this power system threatens our water reserves in Canada. The study says:

...neither the National Energy Board nor Environment Canada have yet raised any substantive questions about the 'shale gale' or its impact on water resources.

Ultimately, it could threaten drinking water in the regions affected. From what I know, water is a resource to which we must pay very close attention, and we must be fully aware of its importance. It is a vital need.

Another study stresses air pollution and this industry's disastrous track record when it comes to greenhouse gases. It is apparently as polluting as coal.

This brings me to my question. What, exactly, is the government waiting for to require an immediate public study of shale gas and its impact on the environment and on health?

*Adjournment Proceedings*

•(1845)

[English]

**Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is always good to be here at the adjournment proceeding hour, especially with my colleague from Simcoe—Grey, who seems to have amassed a lot of practice lately. It is good to be here tonight to chat about shale gas practices.

It is important to note that my colleague, in his original question, which was posed in the House on May 3 of this year, said:

Even though this is mainly a provincial matter, the minister has confirmed....

I am glad that my colleague does recognize that this particular issue is mainly a provincial matter. That said, there are several different initiatives in provincial jurisdictions that are happening on this topic right now. There is an online public registry, launched this past January in British Columbia. There is a strategic environmental assessment under way in the province of Quebec and a review being conducted in Nova Scotia. As well, the Government of Alberta has announced that public disclosure rules for chemical additives used in hydraulic fracturing are planned in the coming year.

As we have also talked about in the House, and the Minister of the Environment has spoken to this as well, Environment Canada has asked the Council of Canadian Academies to assess what is known about the potential environmental impacts from shale gas production.

As we have said several times in the House, we are looking forward to the results of this study. We are also working, as we always do, with our provincial counterparts on this important issue.

Here are some other undertakings that are happening across the country. Earlier this year the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers posted proactive rules for disclosure of fracturing fluids for its member companies.

Some other things that are interesting to note on our government's track record on the environment, especially when it comes to the health and safety of Canadians with chemicals, is our world-class chemical management plan. We have seen the assessment and listing of several thousand different chemicals, and this has been a great success. It has actually been looked at as a model internationally for something that has been very successful in managing chemicals in a very pragmatic, science-based and transparent way.

I will close with the first part of my colleague's statement, where he mentioned greenhouse gas emissions. The interesting thing to note in our most recent greenhouse gas emissions inventory, earlier this year, is that even though Canada only produces 2% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions in total, we have been very active in pursuing a sector-by-sector regulatory approach to pragmatically reduce the amount of greenhouse gases that are produced in a way that still balances real results with economic growth.

In that greenhouse gas emissions inventory, we saw, for the first time, the stabilization of the growth of greenhouse gas emissions while the economy grew.

Also earlier this year, our government posted regulations for greenhouse gas emissions for the coal-fired electricity sector. This is

a very good thing for this country, and it was done in a transparent way. It was done in a way to ensure that we have supply of energy, as well as being cognizant of pricing of electricity, again focusing on a balance with real results.

As the minister also mentioned in the House earlier this year Canada is well on its way, over 50% of the way, to making our Copenhagen targets, which is a great positive thing.

I thank the member for his question, and I look forward to working with him on the environment committee this year.

[Translation]

**Mr. François Choquette:** Mr. Speaker, I also thank my distinguished colleague for her answer, in spite of the fact that I could talk about this for hours, because a lot of things have been said on this subject that are not true. However, I will be brief.

I am going to read part of a press release issued by Environment Canada:

[English]

Water use and contamination are at the top of the list of environmental concerns surrounding shale gas exploration in Canada, Environment Minister...was told earlier this year in an internal memorandum released on Monday.

[Translation]

What that says is not complicated. It means there is no transparency. Studies are done on the sly and serve the needs of the corporations, once again.

We are talking about greenhouse gases. If we want to combat greenhouse gases, what we specifically must not do is develop shale gas, because it is as polluting as coal.

Does my distinguished colleague, the parliamentary secretary, mean to say that we need to move toward more coal and more shale gas? Is that her solution for combatting greenhouse gases?

•(1850)

[English]

**Ms. Michelle Rempel:** Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that natural gas is actually a very clean-burning fuel. When used properly, it can actually help complement Canada's energy production, while reducing our greenhouse gas emissions profile.

I do beg to differ with my colleague's comment because the government does see natural gas as a component of our country becoming a clean energy superpower. I do differ with him on that opinion.

I would like to re-emphasize that shale gas development and regulation is mainly a matter of provincial interest and provincial jurisdiction. That said, Environment Canada has conducted the study that I mentioned earlier and we are monitoring this issue closely.

[Translation]

## EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

**Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, who will once again respond to these questions.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

I am pleased to have an opportunity to return to the House today to speak about an important subject that affects all Canadians. I am referring to one of our most precious social safety nets: employment insurance.

Last spring, when the session was in full swing, I asked two questions of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour. The questions were about employment insurance, and I think that no time is better than the present to once again attempt to get answers, since this topic is again the fodder for our debates in the House.

I will therefore ask the following question. Bill C-38 on the budget proposes to repeal the clause under which a worker seeking employment is not obligated to accept a job where the working conditions, including the rate of compensation, are less favourable than those offered by good employers. In short, the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development wants to lower salaries and the buying power of this country. Why are the Conservatives waging war on workers, when they drive our economy?

We all know that Bill C-38 has now become law and that the changes made to the legislation have come into effect or will soon do so.

Since the bill was passed into law, we have received thousands of calls and much correspondence from employees, the unemployed and employers who not only say that they are concerned about the new measures, but who also confirm that they only aggravate the already precarious situation in which the poor of our country find themselves.

The reason for this concern is quite simple: the new definition of suitable employment announced by the minister is quite illogical. To begin with, the new categories of unemployed persons concocted by the minister's team now put pressure on job seekers, who after a certain time will have to agree to whatever job comes their way, with a salary of up to 30% less than their average compensation. That, therefore, means less money in the pockets of workers and their families.

These measures will put pressure on seasonal employers, who will lose skilled and specialized labour because unemployed workers will be obligated to find other employment before their seasonal work resumes. This will be more costly for businesses as they will have to continuously retrain a new labour force that will not return.

Also, the possible devaluation of skills must be taken into consideration. Nothing in the Conservatives' budget referred to training and support in order to place the unemployed in their area of expertise. In short, workers will find themselves forced to work at jobs that in no way relate to their qualifications. Skills and productivity will be lost. I cannot see how an unemployed welder will contribute as much to the Canadian economy with the salary of a packager.

The Conservatives boast that they are focusing on kick-starting the economy and creating jobs. Can the minister explain on which economic principles and which studies her department relied to create this reform and to make the claim that it would create jobs and wealth?

• (1855)

[English]

**Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be here this evening to respond to the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles on the subject of employment insurance and the support it provides to unemployed Canadians looking for work.

[Translation]

Our government remains committed to providing temporary financial assistance to unemployed Canadians who have lost their jobs through no fault of their own, while they are seeking a job or building their skills.

[English]

Thanks to the strong leadership of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance, the rate of economic activity continues to be strong in 2012. The number of full-time jobs has increased across the country. From July 2009 to March 2012, more than 770,000 net new jobs were created with 90% being full-time positions. This represents the strongest growth by far among G7 countries.

[Translation]

But we cannot rest on our laurels.

[English]

Our economic well-being depends on our ability to meet growing labour market challenges. One of the challenges we are facing is a skills shortage.

Statistics Canada tells us that there are about 250,000 job vacancies across the country each month, so what are we doing to help unemployed Canadian workers find jobs?

[Translation]

We will match Canadians with available jobs to help them return to work more quickly.

[English]

One way we will be doing this is by making it easier for Canadians to find work available in their local communities. This includes simple but effective methods, like enhancing job alerts to Canadians receiving EI regular benefits. The enhanced job alerts will provide Canadians receiving employment insurance information about job opportunities within their local area that are within their occupation and related occupations. This will also ensure that Canadians have the first opportunity to fill jobs.

We are also clarifying what suitable employment is, as well as what constitutes a reasonable job search. These terms will be clearly defined in regulations, with local employment opportunities being a key consideration.

In addition, there is a new, permanent national approach to calculating EI benefits that will be aligned with local labour market conditions. The local unemployment rate will be used to determine the number of best weeks when calculating the value of the weekly EI benefit.

[*Translation*]

The purpose of these changes is to give unemployed workers more tools, to help them get back into the labour market and to direct resources to where they are needed most.

[*English*]

I ask all members of the House to support our economic action plan that is clearly delivering world-leading economic results.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Anne-Marie Day:** Mr. Speaker, during that same intervention in the House, I also asked the minister another question. I asked the Conservatives why they decided to hide these changes in an omnibus bill, so they would be totally shielded from any real consultation.

I also wanted to know why the Conservatives are not dealing with the real problems that affect day-to-day life, such as delays at Service Canada and the lack of EI benefits for unemployed Canadians who nonetheless contributed to the employment insurance plan. I would like to hear more from the minister on this issue, because I think the Conservatives are on the wrong track.

Once again, their incompetence in managing social programs proves that the Conservatives are not champions of the economy but rather they are champions of undermining the fabric of society. The Conservatives are making senseless cuts to services and they are jeopardizing Canada's still fragile economic recovery.

The NDP is proposing practical solutions that will improve the lives of Canadians and ensure that our children inherit a country that

*Adjournment Proceedings*

is fairer and more prosperous. I hope the minister will drop the Conservatives' predictably narrow-minded attitude and consider our suggestions before the EI reforms drive Canadian families further into poverty.

**Ms. Kellie Leitch:** Mr. Speaker, our top priorities are job creation, economic growth and long-term prosperity for Canadians.

[*English*]

When Canada faces labour and skills shortages, it simply makes sense to try to reconnect Canadians with those opportunities.

We want to provide more labour market information to claimants, including online job postings. This information will help them to make better informed decisions about job opportunities and the skills required. We are looking to make sure that Canadians have jobs and that they are able to keep them.

I have asked many times in the House why the NDP members continue to vote against our measures to help Canadians who are unemployed. Why does the NDP oppose our economic action plan that has already created 770,000 net new jobs?

● (1900)

[*Translation*]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7 p.m.)



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