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(HANSARD)

Wednesday, October 23, 2013

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, October 23, 2013

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1405)

[English]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem, led by the hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

[Members sang the national anthem]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

AEROSPACE INDUSTRY

Mr. Jay Aspin (Nipissing—Timiskaming, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to inform the House of an important event in my riding in two weeks.

On November 8, North Bay will host an aerospace forum to bring companies and suppliers together with industry and government to grow our region with investment in the aerospace sector. As a result of the Emerson report, our government will strengthen this industry. This \$22-billion sector employs nearly 70,000 Canadians with highly skilled well-paying jobs.

North Bay has a deep and proud history with respect to aerospace. It is home of NORAD, CFB 22 Wing, and Canadore aviation training. Our forum will showcase our region's assets to attract investment to our part of rural Canada.

I applaud our government for looking to the future and laying the groundwork for aerospace investment with the Emerson report and economic action plan 2013. We are going to move forward, create jobs and grow the economy in Nipissing—Timiskaming.

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REPATRIATION OF CANADIANS DETAINED IN EGYPT

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to welcome home Dr. Tarek Loubani and Mr. John Greyson. Their detention caused great concern for all Canadians during the 50 days they spent behind bars at Cairo's Tora prison.

Tarek is an emergency room physician in London, Ontario, and John is an acclaimed filmmaker and professor.

Their unlawful arrest sparked an amazing campaign led by the families, colleagues and community supporters of John and Tarek. When they finally landed on Canadian soil on October 12, we were all profoundly relieved. I would like to thank all those who contributed to their release: their families who campaigned so tirelessly; NDP consular affairs critic, Wayne Marston; and NDP foreign affairs critic, Paul Dewar. Most of all, I would like—

The Speaker: Order, please. I just need to remind the hon. member to refrain from using proper names in her statement. Even if she is quoting something, we are still to observe that protocol.

The hon. member for London—Fanshawe.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank John and Tarek for keeping their spirits and hopes up during a traumatic time for them both. They are clearly special Canadians who inspired great pride and determination in their fellow citizens. I am very pleased to be joining the rest of Canada in welcoming John and Tarek home.

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CANADA-EUROPE TRADE AGREEMENT

Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all across Saskatchewan, communities are coming together by holding their annual fall and fowl suppers. These events are a wonderful time for friends, families and neighbours to get together and share from the increase of their fields and gardens.

This year, rural Saskatchewan and in particular our farmers have much to celebrate. In our region of the country, we were blessed with great growing weather and a dry, hot fall, which have helped to produce a bumper crop this harvest. As a result, farmers are very optimistic.

However, now farmers have even more reason to be optimistic. The Canada–Europe trade agreement signed by our Prime Minister last week will expand market opportunities for products produced by farmers and ranchers, not only in Saskatchewan but all across Canada, creating more jobs and economic growth in our rural communities. This is great news for our producers.

*Statements by Members***P.E.I. MARATHON**

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I take this opportunity to extend my congratulations to the winners of the P.E.I. marathon this past Sunday. The top male and female marathoners both come from my riding. I know Malpeque oysters are great, but I do not believe they are the only reason these two runners won.

Kris Taylor, a native of New Glasgow, came in first overall for his first ever marathon win, while Jen Nicholson from Cornwall was the top women's marathoner. Jen also holds the course records for both the full and the half marathon. Kris's and Jen's strong showings demonstrate a commitment to their sport, and their successes provide models of athletic accomplishment for all Islanders and all Canadians.

In addition, I want to congratulate and thank all runners who took up the challenge to participate, with representation from every province but one and runners from around the world. We thank them for promoting fitness and healthy lifestyles. Every runner should take pride in his or her accomplishment. I say congratulations.

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● (1410)

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this past summer, my riding was host to a family farm celebration of the first anniversary of marketing freedom for farmers in western Canada after 70 years of single-desk control. Approximately 200 farmers gathered at the family farm of Jim and Levi Wood in Pense to celebrate being able to sell their grain at the time of their choosing.

The opposition projected doom and gloom upon the demise of the wheat board, but it appears that the vast majority of producers have experienced benefits. I have good reason to say that. According to the survey done by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, 81% of farmers reported a positive impact. One producer summed it up best when he said he “has better cash flow, logistics control, and the sky didn't fall.”

With marketing freedom, bumper crops and good prices over the long term, farmers have many reasons to smile across western Canada.

* * *

NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, coming from Newfoundland and Labrador, I love a good laugh, which is often found in the most unexpected of places. Take last week's Speech from the Throne, for example, and this little gem of a line, “Our Government has supported fishermen by ensuring proper management of fish stocks”. Yes, the best lines are always delivered with a straight face.

Today there is a demonstration in Grand Bank on Newfoundland's south coast over the closure of the Fisheries and Oceans office that was there for decades. Last month DFO shut down the library in St. John's. Proper management at DFO means eliminating whatever it is it manages.

How about this quote about the oil industry? “Our Government will...[s]et higher safety standards for companies operating offshore”. In that case, where is the independent safety regulator for the offshore oil industry? That was the number one recommendation from the Wells inquiry into the 2009 crash of Cougar Flight 491.

We do so love a good laugh, but not when the punchline is always Newfoundland and Labrador.

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AMERICAN VETERANS OF ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FORCE

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for going on two centuries, Canadians and Americans have crossed the 49th parallel to take up the fight of their neighbour. Nine thousand Americans served in the Royal Canadian Air Force in World War II, and 764 made the ultimate sacrifice in the cause of freedom.

Yesterday I had the great honour of representing Canada at the Virginia War Memorial for the unveiling of a plaque to honour the memories of 16 sons of Virginia who died in the service of RCAF Bomber Command. I joined Virginia Governor Robert McDonnell, military and civilian leadership, veterans and families of the fallen 16 to unveil a stone tablet with aluminum crests of the Commonwealth of Virginia and the RCAF. What made it more special was that the aluminum came from Halifax LW682, shot down over Belgium in 1944 and only recovered in 1997.

Courage and sacrifice know no boundaries. The world is a better place because Canadians and Americans have stood together in troubled times. The ties that bind Canada and the United States have been forged in common cause and the blood of our sons and daughters.

Lest we forget.

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INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the constituents of Yorkton—Melville, Saskatchewan, I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the Prime Minister for reaching an agreement in principle on the comprehensive economic and trade agreement with the European Union.

Having had the distinct privilege of working alongside our Prime Minister, I am proud to be a part of a team that can bring such abundant opportunity to this great country. This historic agreement opens up trade with 28 member states, 500 million people, and an annual economic activity of almost \$17 trillion, and all Canadians stand to reap significant benefits in jobs, economic growth and prosperity.

*Statements by Members***AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

Twenty years ago this week, I arrived in Ottawa as the member of Parliament for Yorkton—Melville, wet behind the ears and eager to make a difference in this country, to make it a better place in which to raise our children, to provide our kids and grandkids with a better future. Today, I can honestly say that under the leadership of our Prime Minister, we are accomplishing just that.

* * *

[Translation]

LE GOUVERNEMENT CONSERVATEUR DU CANADA

Mr. José Nunez-Melo (Laval, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last Sunday in Laval, at the impressive unveiling of an Armenian memorial monument, which means "hope" and is very important to the Canadian-Armenian community, I had the opportunity to listen to my constituents' concerns about the actions of this government.

Believe me when I say that these complaints are no different from those we receive in the mail on a regular basis.

EI reform is the top concern for Canadians. This is followed by other issues such as the environment, public safety, housing and consumer protection.

Every time the Conservatives boast they have achieved something positive, the response is overwhelmingly negative.

In Laval, the unemployment rate has risen from 6.1% to 7.4% since June 2011.

When it comes to the environment and natural resources or the Senate, we get the same do-nothing policies.

When will we get a responsible government?

* * *

● (1415)

[English]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it speaks volumes that the NDP continues to say one thing about the temporary foreign workers program in public while in private they ask for more and more temporary foreign workers to be poured into their ridings. Yesterday, the member for Acadie—Bathurst was quoted in Fredericton's *The Daily Gleaner* as advocating for better employment insurance benefits for temporary foreign workers in his riding.

Last month in Atlantic Canada, there were 11,000 unemployed Canadians. Employers in regions with near double-digit unemployment should not have to look to other countries to get employees. Our government has made modest and reasonable changes to employment insurance to help keep Canadians attached to the workforce and better connect unemployed Canadians with the available jobs in their local areas, jobs that match their skills.

We want all Canadians in all regions to benefit from economic growth. Why does the member for Acadie—Bathurst and his NDP colleagues continue to prefer that these jobs go to temporary foreign workers before they go to Canadians?

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, winter is fast approaching. For women who are homeless, the impending freezing nights may well be fatal. Many are simply the victims of poverty or domestic violence.

On any given night, in my hometown of Hamilton, at least 10,000 women are at risk of becoming homeless. More than 300 are turned away from shelters every single month, and we have 5,450 households waiting for affordable housing, mostly women-led. More shelter beds are important, but they are not the answer. We need social and affordable housing. It is not just a key social investment; it makes economic sense, too. To keep a homeless person in a shelter costs almost \$2,000 per month, whereas a subsidized housing unit costs \$200 per month.

This year's budget promised \$253 million for housing, but it still has not been allocated. Long-term housing agreements with the provinces are expiring, but nothing new is in the works. We have not had a national housing program since the Liberals axed them in 1995.

With close to 200,000 Canadians homeless, we need national action for this national crisis. November 22 is National Housing Day. Let us give meaning to the day and act on housing now.

* * *

CANADIAN UNION OF POSTAL WORKERS

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on October 15, CRTC fined the Canadian Union of Postal Workers \$50,000 for breaking the law.

Kitchener Centre residents were disturbed throughout May and June by robocalls announcing the closure of a Canada Post location. The robocalls did not provide a name, address, or phone number where they could be tracked. I was personally misrepresented when constituents were informed that I had approved the closure of the downtown location. This decision was actually made by Canada Post after a month-long consultation. In fact, no decision had even been made to close the post office when this false information was given out. My constituents were upset by the calls and had no way of tracking the originator.

Even if union bosses take their partisan cues from the NDP, their union members and the public deserve better from CUPW. I ask CUPW to apologize to their Kitchener members and to Kitchener residents for their undemocratic way of proceeding.

*Oral Questions***CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION**

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, family matters. Day after day, time after time, our reliance on families makes our successes better and our struggles less severe.

Many families rely on their parents to provide child care, which has become especially important after the Conservatives and New Democrats teamed up to kill the Liberal national child care program. However, the Conservative Minister for Multiculturalism thinks differently. Recently, he called the parents and grandparents of immigrant Canadians a burden. Parents and grandparents are not a burden on our society; they make our lives richer, fuller. Their help around the home helps us be more productive members of Canadian society. Their presence in Canada means that new Canadians no longer have to send money out of the country to support their parents.

The government's view is shameful. Canadians deserve better.

* * *

• (1420)

[*Translation*]

ELECTIONS CANADA

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadian values such as decency and equality call for individuals to take responsibility for their debts. Strangely enough, the candidates who lost their bid to lead the Liberal Party do not seem to believe that that principle applies to them.

Recently, a lawyer for defeated candidate and former MP Ken Dryden crowed that Dryden would not even attempt to pay back the money owing.

Elections Canada knows and openly admits to knowing that the loan will never be repaid. Elections Canada says that it does not have the authority to investigate loans given to candidates who lost the Liberal leadership race.

The current legislation authorizes the Commissioner of Canada Elections to investigate whether loans were used to circumvent donation limits. There needs to be an inquiry into whether Liberals used loans to intentionally exceed the legal donation limits.

What is keeping Elections Canada from conducting such an inquiry? I am calling for Elections Canada to shed some light on this for Canadians.

* * *

[*English*]

ETHICS

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, Canadians were stunned by Mike Duffy's speech to the Senate. They heard about a government being forced to face its deceit and an institution sinking under the weight of its corruption, just when Canadians thought Liberal Party and Liberal senator corruption were as bad as things could get. Recall the conviction and imprisonment of former Liberal Senator Lavigne and the conveniently timed resignation of Senator Mac Harb, and note the new

allegations against a Liberal senator only yesterday. Then along came the Conservatives to lower the bar even further. Giving money to a sitting parliamentarian to ensure his silence is a crime. Engaging in a conspiracy to bribe a public official is a crime.

Mike Duffy has now said more in public about the whole affair than the Prime Minister. Canadians deserve better. Canadians are watching. Will the Prime Minister finally rise in his place and start telling Canadians the truth?

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians from coast to coast are speaking out in support of the historic Canada-Europe trade agreement. The B.C. Wine Institute has understood that “there's opportunity” because of the eliminated tariffs. The Grain Growers of Canada have said that this agreement means “big gains for farmers”. The door is open for increased fish and seafood exports. The Canadian Bankers Association recognizes that we preserve the “right to protect the stability and integrity of the financial sector”. It is a wonder why the leader of the NDP has said that “there's going to be a hell of a price to pay” for trade with Europe.

On this side of the House, we recognize the importance of opening new markets for Canadians. A new market of 28 nations and half a billion consumers represents great opportunity for Canadian producers. Why does the NDP continue with its anti-trade agenda and its perpetual opposition to every trade opportunity?

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*Translation*]

ETHICS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on February 13, did the Prime Minister threaten Mike Duffy with expulsion from the Senate?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will repeat what I have said from the beginning.

[*English*]

I told Mr. Duffy, when he asked, in fact, I told our entire caucus and staff, that my view was that his expense claims were inappropriate, and they should be repaid.

At that particular time did I threaten him with expulsion? No, but when inappropriate expense claims are made, I expect corrective action to be taken. If it is not taken, a person who does not take corrective action could not expect to continue to sit as a member of the Conservative Party.

• (1425)

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on February 13, did the Prime Minister tell Mike Duffy, “It's not about what you did; it's about the perception of what you did....The rules are inexplicable to our base”? Did he say that, yes or no?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no, I absolutely did not say that.

This issue is not a matter of perception. What I said to our caucus, and I said to the caucus as a whole when this issue came up, was that “You cannot claim an expense you did not incur. That is not right. That is not proper, and that will not be tolerated in this party”.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on May 28, the Prime Minister said that he had never given any instructions to his staff on how to resolve the problem of Mike Duffy's expenses.

Was Nigel Wright present when the Prime Minister instructed Mike Duffy to repay his expenses, end of discussion?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, I have indicated that I made these statements in a caucus room. I made them to an entire caucus and senior staff, not just to Mr. Duffy and to Mr. Wright but to many others who were present and who heard them. Those instructions were absolutely clear. I expected Mr. Duffy to repay his expenses and not Mr. Wright to repay them for him. That was also not correct, which is why Mr. Wright is no longer working for me and why Mr. Duffy is no longer in the Senate.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, did anyone in the Prime Minister's Office or in his cabinet, at any time, inform Mike Duffy that his expenses were illegal?

[*English*]

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me correct my previous statement. I meant to say that Mr. Duffy is no longer in our Senate caucus.

[*Translation*]

This is not a cabinet issue. I clearly told our caucus and our staff that Mr. Duffy's expenses were completely inappropriate. You cannot claim an expense that you did not incur. That is not right. You cannot remain a member of the Conservative caucus after that kind of behaviour.

[*English*]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, now that he has had some practise correcting his previous statements, let us try again.

On June 5 and 6, when I asked the Prime Minister whether Ray Novak was involved in the Duffy affair, the Prime Minister said that Nigel Wright acted alone. Was that true?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I addressed this issue some months ago. Mr. Wright has been absolutely clear in terms of who he told he intended to repay Mr. Duffy's expenses to. He did not say Ray Novak was one of those people. He has named those people. He has been very clear. He has also been very clear that one of those people was not me, because I obviously would never have approved such a scheme.

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, leaders take responsibility. The Prime Minister appointed Mike Duffy—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Papineau.

•(1430)

Mr. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, leaders take responsibility. The Prime Minister hired Nigel Wright. The Prime Minister appointed Mike Duffy. The Prime Minister has daily meetings with a team that, as we are discovering, has been working for months to cover up a scandal. Does the Prime Minister still refuse to take any personal responsibility for what has happened?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously, I reject the preamble of that question. The reality is we are talking about the actions of Mr. Wright and Mr. Duffy. They are being held accountable for those actions. Mr. Wright has accepted his responsibility. He has admitted that his actions were not appropriate.

Unfortunately, Mr. Duffy continues to assert that his expense claims were all valid and all appropriate. We obviously disagree with that and believe he should be held accountable for that behaviour.

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, regrettably, for months now the Prime Minister has refused to answer even the most basic questions on the scandal that has engulfed his office. The Prime Minister's silence has shaken Canadians' trust in him and in their government. Will the Prime Minister agree to testify under oath to reveal everything he knows about this scandal and the cover-up?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been crystal clear about this. I continue to be so. It is interesting. We, of course, insisted that those who are responsible be held accountable for their actions, unlike the hon. leader opposite. The very first thing he said was he thought that Mac Harb should be readmitted to the Liberal caucus. We obviously do not believe that kind of behaviour is appropriate.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister appointed Mike Duffy and hired Nigel Wright. He has daily meetings with a team that has been working for months to cover up this sordid affair. The Prime Minister has to show leadership and take responsibility for the actions of the people he chose.

Will the Prime Minister agree to testify under oath?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when we appoint senators, we expect them to follow the rules and obey the letter and the spirit of the law.

[*English*]

When any member or members of staff do not respect high ethical conduct, we expect them to recognize that and to correct their behaviour and be held accountable. Mr. Wright has accepted his responsibility. He resigned. Mr. Duffy continues to insist that there is nothing wrong with his behaviour. We obviously disagree and believe he should be held accountable for it.

Oral Questions

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last June, the Prime Minister said in the House that no one, other than Nigel Wright, was aware of the scheme to buy Mike Duffy's silence. It turns out that 13 top Conservative officials were very much aware. Who are the 13 top Conservative officials who were aware of the scheme to buy Mike Duffy's silence?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I say, Mr. Wright has addressed that particular question directly. The number he cites is obviously not the number that Mr. Wright has said. Mr. Wright has said very clearly that this was a decision he took using his own resources. He did not seek permission or consultation with others. He did say who he informed, but he has taken full responsibility for his actions and he is being held accountable for them.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, actually, what the Prime Minister told the House, and told Canadians, was that no one else knew about it. We now know that that was false.

[Translation]

Is the Prime Minister saying that 13 Conservatives in his inner circle did not keep him informed and allowed him to make false statements to Parliament in spite of himself? They never set him straight. If that is true, why did he not kick them out? Why are they still there? I would like him to explain that.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Wright has already answered that question very clearly. He did not name 13 individuals. He said that he made the decision on his own using his own resources. He admitted that he made a bad decision. He took full responsibility and is being held accountable for his actions.

• (1435)

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, did the Prime Minister order or approve of the Senate motion to suspend Senator Brazeau, Senator Wallin and Senator Duffy?

[English]

Did the Prime Minister play any role? Did he order or take part in the motion to have Mike Duffy, Patrick Brazeau and Pamela Wallin suspended from the Senate? Yes or no?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that this is a motion that the Senate leadership had approved by the Conservative Senate caucus.

Let me be unequivocal for the record. I fully support that motion. I do not believe that, under the circumstances, these individuals should be on the public payroll. I believe that in private life, had they undertaken such actions, they would not continue to be on the payroll. I believe Canadians feel strongly about this.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, will the Prime Minister repeat in the House today what he has already said, that his lawyer, Ben Perrin, played absolutely no role in this entire Mike Duffy affair?

Will he repeat that today?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what I have said in the House is that Mr. Perrin has made a

statement on his own behalf in terms of his actions. Mr. Wright has also been very clear on this as well.

To be absolutely clear, once again, any assertion that I was in any way consulted or had any knowledge of Mr. Wright's payment to Mr. Duffy is categorically false. Had I known about it, I would not have permitted it. As soon as I knew about it, on May 15, I revealed it to the public.

[Translation]

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have heard Mike Duffy's version. If the Prime Minister wants to keep the tiny bit of credibility he still has, he should publicly release all of the documents about this scandal.

When will he do that?

[English]

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, those who undertook these actions are being investigated by the appropriate authorities. Obviously, any information that we can provide, we have provided and will continue to provide. We obviously want to see those authorities complete their actions and make the appropriate judgments in terms of responsibility.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, would the Prime Minister agree that he should have told the House how many members of his staff were involved in the Mike Duffy matter when he was asked by the NDP on June 5?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course, I addressed this issue publicly in July. Mr. Wright has been very clear about who he told or who he informed of his intentions. He has also been very clear that he undertook this action on his own. It was his own decision, using his own resources. He has admitted to me and to others that the decision was a mistake. He has resigned and is accepting his responsibility.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in exchange for Mike Duffy going along with the PMO clan, did the Prime Minister ever undertake to "publicly confirm you are entitled to sit as a Senator from PEI"?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when we name senators, we ensure that they fit the eligibility criteria for the Senate. Those criteria are laid out in the Constitution.

Once again, none of that permits, however, in our judgment, if someone acts with integrity, someone claiming an expense he or she did not incur. When someone is living at a long-time residence, he or she cannot claim to be in travel status legitimately, in our view. I think Canadians widely share that view, and I am surprised that the NDP now seems very uncertain on that matter.

[Translation]

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the RCMP, the media, Nigel Wright and Mike Duffy have all reported the same version of the facts.

Oral Questions

Their version of the facts contradicts the Prime Minister's. The Prime Minister's parliamentary secretary does not know the details of the scandal, but the Prime Minister does.

Did the Prime Minister keep quiet yesterday because he could no longer think of a way to get around the truth and because there was no way out?

• (1440)

[*English*]

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my answers on this matter from day one have been exactly the same as they are today.

The facts are clear. Mr. Duffy was told. Mr. Duffy now says he is a victim because I told him he should repay his expenses. Dam right I told him.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister seems to have a well-developed sense of victimhood that he is embellishing every day.

The Canadian public is watching with shock and disgust as the Conservative web of lies completely unravels. We have seen a senator willing to tell his story and a lawyer reading from damning PMO emails; yet the Prime Minister refuses to answer any questions truthfully, refuses to produce any evidence whatsoever and stubbornly refuses to be honest with Canadians. Instead, he sits in his seat and sends out his latest spokespeople to evade and mislead Canadians. This goes to the heart of the Prime Minister's Office, to his very character.

When is the Prime Minister going to stand and finally tell—

The Speaker: The Right Hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): That is a lot of rhetoric, Mr. Speaker.

The fact of the matter is this. The victims here are the Canadian people who expect from all parliamentarians that they will treat public money with the appropriate respect and integrity it deserves. It is not appropriate for someone to claim an expense that he really did not incur even though he thinks he can technically argue it is somehow within the rules. That is not proper.

One expects that the Senate will take the appropriate action, as it is doing, to deal with this.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister acknowledges a February 13 meeting in which he ordered the Duffy payback scheme, but according to PMO security logs there was another encounter two days earlier. Mr. Duffy attended a meeting in the Prime Minister's private boardroom on the second floor of the Langevin building on Monday, February 11, 2013. Was the Prime Minister in his office in the Langevin building on that day?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been clear. I spoke to Mr. Duffy on one occasion about that on February 13.

The inference of what the hon. gentleman said is that somehow I approved Mr. Wright paying Mr. Duffy's expenses. I did no such thing. I made it very clear to everybody on my staff and in my caucus that I expected the senator in question to repay his own inappropriate expenses.

When Mr. Duffy went on national television to say that he had repaid his own expenses by taking out a loan against his assets, that is exactly what he should have done. Unfortunately, he did not do it, and he does not face up to the fact that he was wrong not to do it.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to be clear, the answer to my question is yes.

Until just a few days ago the Prime Minister's website proudly displayed a photograph of the Prime Minister at his desk in the Langevin building on February 11, just a few feet from where Mr. Duffy would have been.

Was there any conversation between the two of them? If not, was the Prime Minister—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Wascana now has the floor.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: They seem a titch nervous, Mr. Speaker.

Was there any conversation between the two of them on that day? If not, was the Prime Minister debriefed on his office's meeting with Mr. Duffy? What was the purpose of Mr. Duffy's meeting in the Prime Minister's Office on February 11?

• (1445)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the answer to the direct question is no. I think the allegation here is that Mr. Duffy and I were in Ottawa on the same day.

I made it very clear to Mr. Duffy, and I said long before, on February 13, that he should repay his inappropriate expenses. I learned only later, on May 15, that he had not done so, and that Mr. Wright had done that on his behalf.

Because of that, Mr. Duffy is no longer a member of the Conservative caucus and Mr. Wright no longer works in the PMO.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister did not know, but 13 people in his office did.

By the Prime Minister's admission, he gave the orders that covered up the Mike Duffy situation. What followed was a pattern of hush money, spin, and disinformation, and the deliberate obstruction of a forensic audit.

Now we have the shovelling of all the key actors out of sight: Wright, LeBreton, Tkachuk, Perrin, Woodcock, and Stewart-Olsen have all conveniently been moved aside.

Without any further deflection or delay, will the Prime Minister assume his responsibility for all the people in this fiasco that he appointed, and for the orders he gave?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again the entire premise of that question is false. Mr. Wright has said very clearly that the payment he made was his own decision. He has admitted that it was made with his funds and that it was an inappropriate and incorrect decision. He has taken full responsibility, as he should, and he is suffering the investigations and consequences.

*Oral Questions***ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS**

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, late last night the government quietly posted online a draft of the new first nations education act.

Conservatives are proposing a complex and costly new bureaucracy for a first nations education system that is already grossly underfunded compared to other schools in Canada.

If the government is ready to work with first nations communities in a spirit of reconciliation, will the minister stand up right now and agree to stop underfunding on-reserve schools?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is consulting on a draft proposal for first nation education on which it has not taken any kind of decision.

With first nations stakeholders, provinces, and people who care, we look forward to participating in this consultation process and receiving their comments and feedback so that collectively as a country we can live up to our responsibility to ensure that first nations students get a good education system in place.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister continues to spout nonsense.

The minister wants to link funding for schools with performance. However, as everyone knows, the problem is that the schools on reserve are currently underfunded. Given that situation, we cannot expect very high performance levels. The problem with the performance of aboriginal schools is underfunding.

When will the minister address the root of the problem and provide adequate funding for schools rather than continue to decrease—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member would do well to prepare his own questions. Then he would not have trouble reading the text that someone else prepared for him.

First, what he is saying is completely false. In the proposal that was issued yesterday, funding is in no way related to performance. Once again, this is a proposal. A final decision has not yet been made. We are in the process of consulting with first nations, the provinces and people who are interested in developing an education system for first nations students in Canada.

* * *

[*English*]

PRIVACY

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the privacy of Canadians is again under attack. This time it is Bell, which will start gathering a massive amount of information on their customers: every website they visit, every search they do, every time they click the mouse, Bell will snoop on them whether they give their consent or not.

When Canadians pay their Internet bills, they expect good service, not to have Ma Bell keeping tabs on them.

Will the Conservatives act now to protect the privacy rights of Canadians and bring our privacy laws into the digital age?

• (1450)

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have taken many actions to protect the privacy of Canadians.

Specifically with regard to this matter, indeed Bell has raised a number of new policies that are of concern to consumers. The good news for my colleague opposite and for those Canadians who are concerned is that the Privacy Commissioner, whom I met with yesterday, is looking at this matter. Those Canadians who are concerned about the new policies that Bell is putting forward have an avenue to register their concerns and be involved in a process to allay those concerns effectively through the regulator.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, he completely failed to address the issue raised by my colleague. Bell is going to keep tabs on its customers and the government is going to just sit back and watch. This is a major failure for a party that just gave a so-called pro-consumer throne speech.

This type of spying must stop. There are simple and practical solutions to this problem, solutions that are found in the NDP's Bill C-475.

Will the Conservatives support Bell keeping tabs on its customers or will they support my bill?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we will not support either. What I just said is that we are not in favour of a process that is not in the interests of consumers. That is why a commissioner is now involved in this process. If people across Canada are concerned about the policies in question, they can now get involved in the process and register their concerns.

With regard to the member's bill, we simply do not support it. It goes too far. We explained why when we debated the bill in the House of Commons.

* * *

[*English*]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as most of us in this chamber know, trade creates jobs and opportunities and improves the living standards of Canadian families. The exception is the NDP, which opposes all trade, including the new Canada-Europe trade agreement, much to the dismay of anyone who benefits from free and open trade.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport please inform the House of the other ways our government develops trade and creates new opportunities for Canadian families?

Mr. Jeff Watson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Brant, who is a solid advocate for increased trade.

Projects such as the Canada-Europe trade agreement and the Detroit River international crossing will generate jobs, growth, and long-term prosperity.

A new bridge to connect Windsor and Detroit is needed for growing trade and traffic at the busiest Canada-U.S. commercial border crossing. This project will create thousands of jobs and opportunities. Over two million family-sustaining Canadian jobs depend on trade and investment between our two countries, and we cannot rely on the NDP's radical economic experiments to protect them.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked the Minister of Finance about his embarrassing comments concerning quantitative easing. The finance minister said he was against both “monetary accommodation” and “monetary easing”. Is this in fact the finance minister's position?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know why the hon. member opposite would ask the same question again. I do not suffer from amnesia, although I have some health problems.

I thank the hon. member for her question. We have a Canadian position, our own situation in Canada, and we are fortunate, in my view, because of solid economic management, which one would expect me to say, that we are not in need of such a remedy.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is non-answers like that that have the international business community scratching their heads. Monetary accommodation is conventional, standard monetary policy. It is entirely different from extraordinary measures such as quantitative easing. Neither of them is quite the same as printing money.

Is the finance minister really saying that he opposes the Bank of Canada using normal monetary policy to stimulate the economy?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have an agreement with the Bank of Canada about the use of extraordinary measures.

* * *

THE BUDGET

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, how can Conservatives ask Canadians to trust them on the economy when they clearly do not understand Economics 101?

The Conservatives' latest budget implementation bill is just a grab bag of surprises, including an underhanded attack against workers. Why is the Minister of Finance using a budget bill to undermine workers' health and safety rules?

● (1455)

Hon. Kellie Leitch (Minister of Labour and Minister of Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I guess the member opposite did not hear my answer yesterday, so I reiterate it.

Oral Questions

Our government remains focused on the economy, and part of that is making sure that workplaces are safe, productive, and fair. Health and safety officers will receive additional support so that they can do their job, enhancing quality and making sure that the decisions they are making for the safety of Canadian workers are focused.

We are focused on making sure that workplaces are safe and productive. I ask the member opposite why she is not on board with this.

* * *

JUSTICE

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thought the question was about the budget. I guess I missed the point.

[Translation]

Does the Minister of Finance understand finance? I do not see how changes to the legislation for appointing Quebec judges to the Supreme Court, which were announced without consulting Quebec, help promote economic growth in Canada.

The changes to the legislation for appointing Quebec judges to the Supreme Court have massive implications.

Why does the minister want to pick a new fight with Quebec? Will judicial appointments for Quebec from the Federal Court be a new standard at the Supreme Court of Canada?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated yesterday, our government believes very strongly that we should defend the rights of long-serving members of the Quebec bar, and in fact of every bar in the country, to serve on the highest court of Canada.

What we have done as well is table in the House of Commons a clarification provision that will provide greater clarity. I know members opposite want clarity in Quebec.

That is exactly what we have done. We look forward to the Supreme Court itself ruling on the eligibility of Mr. Justice Nadon and then to seeing him join that esteemed group on the Supreme Court of Canada.

* * *

ETHICS

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Chris Woodcock was director of issues management for the Prime Minister.

We know he was deeply involved in crafting the scheme and the media lines to help cover up who actually cut the cheque to pay back Mike Duffy's expenses.

Oral Questions

Mr. Woodcock has since moved jobs, putting distance between him and the Prime Minister. He is now the chief of staff for the Minister of Natural Resources.

Can the minister categorically deny he was not asked by the PMO to hire Mr. Woodcock?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think the Prime Minister has been very clear today. He has answered all of the questions put forward to him.

What was very clear is that when Senator Duffy approached the Prime Minister about his inappropriate expenses, the Prime Minister told him to repay those expenses.

What happened yesterday is that Senator Duffy could have gone into the Senate, accepted responsibility for what he had done, and said “Sorry”, but he chose not to do that. Instead he chose to defend the fact that he had accepted inappropriate expenses.

We have the leadership of the Prime Minister, who said that we should not only accept the letter of the law but also the spirit of the law.

[Translation]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Nigel Wright did not act alone in the Mike Duffy affair. Ray Novak, the Prime Minister's current chief of staff, Marjory LeBreton, the former leader of the government in the Senate, and Conservative senators Tkachuk and Stewart Olsen have all been accused of participating in this scheme and threatening Mike Duffy in order to buy his silence. We are talking about potential criminal allegations.

How can the Prime Minister keep people in his inner circle who are the subject of these kinds of allegations?

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has said quite clearly that he answered all the questions available to him with the information that he had available. Mr. Wright, at the same time, has accepted full responsibility and sole responsibility for this. We are assisting in the investigations.

At the same time, as the Prime Minister said, we expect all parliamentarians to not only follow the letter of the law but the spirit of the law, and not accept expenses that are inappropriate.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have learned that the CEO of Rio Tinto Alcan is advising the government about the merger of what was formerly CIDA with the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

The Conservatives let the gun lobby dictate our arms trade policy, are they now going to let the mining industry dictate our foreign aid policy?

• (1500)

[English]

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is maximizing the effectiveness of development and humanitarian assistance. We are ensuring that Canada stays at the forefront of an ever-changing world.

Thanks to the leadership of the Prime Minister, Canada is respected around the world for the work and the results that we achieve. Our government will continue to seek advice from all players to ensure we continue to deliver results for both Canadians and our development partners.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after rushing ahead with the merger, without proper consultation, the Conservatives have quietly appointed a mining executive to help restructure the Department of Foreign Affairs, if members can believe it.

Being good at increasing profits does not mean necessarily being good at reducing poverty. The OECD has already condemned the government for putting its aid to corporations instead of people.

Are the Conservatives putting big business in charge of the foreign affairs agenda of the government, yes or no?

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, helping those most vulnerable in the world remains the focus of our development dollars. The realignment of development with foreign affairs and trade will help us do this more effectively.

We have experts from all disciplines: academics, business, public service, diplomatic and civil society. With this expertise, we will help more people, while respecting taxpayer dollars.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no other government in Canadian history has done more to stand up for victims of crime than our Conservative government. Whether it is repealing Pierre Trudeau's faint hope clause for murderers, cracking down on child sexual offenders or creating a federal victim strategy, Canadians can count on our government to stand up for victims. This is one reason why our government has introduced and passed legislation to double down on the victim surcharge and make it mandatory in all cases without exception.

Could the Minister of Justice please inform the House when this important legislation will come into force?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, like my friend, I am happy to report that Bill C-37, Increasing Offenders' Accountability for Victims Act, will come into force tomorrow.

Oral Questions

By increasing the victim fine surcharge, victims across the country will find more funding available for their much-needed services. In fact, this will enhance measures to hold offenders responsible for their actions.

This is but one of a comprehensive justice package that we have presented over the years. I assure the House that while we have made great strides, we will continue to stand up for victims, and there is more to come, including a victims bill of rights. I would encourage opposition members to support those initiatives.

* * *

FINANCE

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance, who has added over \$150 billion to our national debt, is now promising balanced budget legislation which “will require balanced budgets during normal economic times”. Yesterday he told us that “Normal times are times when the government is not in deficit”.

Will the minister please confirm that his balanced budget legislation will require balanced budgets only when the budget is already balanced?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course, it would be a foreign concept to my friend opposite to talk to him about balanced budgets.

Let me say this. We had a balanced budget—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. Minister of Finance now has the floor.

The hon. minister.

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Mr. Speaker, the purpose of the proposal, which will have to be legislated and get the approval of the House, is to ensure that in normal economic times governments do not run the country into more public debt. What we have seen over the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s under former Liberal prime ministers is an accumulation of public debt that is massive, and we are going to pay it off.

* * *

• (1505)

[*Translation*]

HEALTH

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one year has already passed since the first red dust cloud descended on Vieux-Limoilou.

It was also one year ago that the former Minister of Transport, the current Quebec lieutenant, refused to acknowledge his responsibility in the Port of Quebec file. He ignores the risks to public safety, including during the unloading of nickel.

Unlike her colleague, the new Minister of Transport must accept her responsibilities and take action in order to protect public health.

Will she do so?

[*English*]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Port of Quebec officials are the ones responsible for balancing the economic inputs and effects they have in the Quebec area to create jobs, as well as with the health and safety of the residents in the area. I expect that the port authority will take the concerns of the community into consideration as it continues to make decisions.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the historic Canada-EU trade agreement announced by our Prime Minister will bring benefits to key economic sectors in every region of the country. Despite what the opposition and its anti-trade union backers say, we know this trade agreement, with a market of over 500 million people, will benefit Canadian workers, businesses and families.

In order to counter the fear and misinformation being spread by fringe anti-trade free traders, could the parliamentary secretary update the House on what our government is doing to ensure Canadians from coast to coast have the facts about this important trade deal?

Mr. Erin O'Toole (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canada-European Union trade agreement is great for job creation and families across the country. That is why the trade minister is in Halifax today talking about the benefits to the seafood, agriculture and forestry and shipping sectors, and that is why in the last few days the Conference Board of Canada, the Chamber of Commerce and others have confirmed that prices will go down for families and employment will go up.

The member for New Brunswick Southwest can assure families in New Brunswick that our government has secured an agreement that is tremendous for Atlantic Canada and will secure a \$1,000 net benefit for families once implemented.

* * *

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Employment said that he never received the letter from Mouvement autonome et solidaire des sans-emploi. If he does not find it, I would be pleased to send him a copy.

However, the group's concerns, and ours for that matter, are heightened by reports in *Le Devoir* that unemployed workers will now have to submit an access to information request to access their own records. How ridiculous can this get, especially when we know just how dysfunctional the access to information system is.

How can the minister justify such a directive?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is no such policy.

Business of Supply

Service Canada has informed me that it will continue to provide information, as it has in the past, before an appeal is filed. I would like to point out that, under the new Social Security Tribunal, the review process for employment insurance applicants has improved greatly. The number of applications that go to a formal appeal has been greatly reduced. Reviews are conducted much more quickly and it is much more convenient for applicants.

* * *

INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this morning, the Quebec National Assembly unanimously denounced Ottawa's decision to challenge Bill 99 and to deny Quebecers the right to freely choose their future and decide their political status for themselves. Both separatists and federalists agreed that only the Quebec National Assembly has the power to set the rules for a referendum, including the wording of the referendum question.

Will the Prime Minister finally honour his commitment to recognize Quebec as a nation and comply with the unanimous will of the Quebec National Assembly?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Infrastructure, Communities and Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that question is based on false premises.

This case does not involve the Government of Canada, but rather a Canadian citizen against the Government of Quebec. This matter is before the courts. I even went into the member's region this summer and I did not hear anyone asking for a referendum. We certainly cannot blame the Canadian government for defending the laws of Canada.

* * *

[English]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if you seek it, I think you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, the question on ways and means Motion No. 2 be put immediately following the recorded division on the opposition motion later this day and if a recorded division is requested on the ways and means motion, the vote shall be taken up immediately.

● (1510)

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY**OPPOSITION MOTION—SENATE ACCOUNTABILITY**

The House resumed from October 22 consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: Pursuant to an order made on Tuesday, October 22, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion relating to the business of supply.

● (1515)

(The House divided on the motion which was negated on the following division:)

*(Division No. 4)***YEAS**

Members

Allen (Welland)	Angus
Ashton	Atamanenko
Aubin	Ayala
Bellavance	Benskin
Bevington	Blanchette
Blanchette-Lamothe	Boivin
Borg	Boulerice
Boutin-Sweet	Brahmi
Brousseau	Caron
Cash	Charlton
Chicoine	Chisholm
Choquette	Chow
Christopherson	Cleary
Comartin	Côté
Crowder	Cullen
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Day
Dewar	Dionne Labelle
Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre
Dubé	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseault	Fortin
Freeman	Garrison
Genest	Genest-Jourdain
Giguère	Godin
Gravelle	Groguhé
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Harris (St. John's East)
Hughes	Hyer
Jacob	Julian
Kellway	Lapointe
Larose	Laverdière
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	Leslie
Liu	Mai
Masse	Mathysen
May	Michaud
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Mulcair
Nantel	Nash
Nicholls	Nunez-Melo
Papillon	Patry
Péclet	Pilon
Plamondon	Quach
Rafferty	Ravignat
Raynault	Rousseau
Saganash	Sandhu
Scott	Sellah
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	Sitsabaiesan
Stewart	Stoffer
Sullivan	Thibeault
Toone	Tremblay
Turmel— 99	

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq

Albas
 Alexander
 Allison
 Ambrose
 Anderson
 Armstrong
 Baird
 Bélanger
 Benoit
 Bernier
 Blaney
 Boughen
 Breitzkreuz
 Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
 Brown (Barrie)
 Butt
 Calkins
 Carmichael
 Casey
 Clarke
 Cotler
 Cuzner
 Davidson
 Del Mastro
 Dion
 Duncan (Etobicoke North)
 Easter
 Fantino
 Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
 Fletcher
 Fry
 Gallant
 Gill
 Goguen
 Goodale
 Gosal
 Grewal
 Hawn
 Hiebert
 Hoback
 Hsu
 Jean
 Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
 Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
 Kent
 Komarnicki
 Lake
 Lauzon
 LeBlanc (Beausejour)
 Leitch
 Lizon
 Lukiwski
 MacAulay
 MacKenzie
 McCallum
 McGuinty
 McLeod
 Menzies
 Miller
 Moore (Fundy Royal)
 Norlock
 O'Connor
 O'Neill Gordon
 O'Toole
 Payne
 Preston
 Rajotte
 Reid
 Richards
 Ritz
 Scarpaleggia
 Seeback
 Shea
 Shory
 Sorenson
 St-Denis
 Strahl
 Tilson
 Trost
 Trudeau
 Valcourt
 Van Kesteren
 Vellacott
 Warawa

Albrecht
 Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
 Ambler
 Anders
 Andrews
 Aspin
 Bateman
 Bennett
 Bergen
 Bezan
 Block
 Braid
 Brison
 Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
 Bruinooge
 Calandra
 Cannan
 Carrie
 Chong
 Clement
 Crockatt
 Daniel
 Dechert
 Devolin
 Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
 Dykstra
 Eyking
 Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
 Flaherty
 Foote
 Galipeau
 Garneau
 Glover
 Goldring
 Goodyear
 Gourde
 Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
 Hayes
 Hillyer
 Holder
 James
 Jones
 Karygiannis
 Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
 Kerr
 Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
 Lamoureaux
 Lebel
 Leef
 Lemieux
 Lobb
 Lunney
 MacKay (Central Nova)
 Mayes
 McColeman
 McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
 Menegakis
 Merrifield
 Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
 Murray
 Obhrai
 Oliver
 Opitz
 Pacetti
 Poilievre
 Raitt
 Regan
 Rempel
 Rickford
 Saxton
 Schellenberger
 Sgro
 Shipley
 Sopuck
 Stanton
 Storseth
 Sweet
 Toet
 Trottier
 Truppe
 Valeriote
 Van Loan
 Wallace
 Warkentin

Watson
 Sky Country
 Weston (Saint John)
 Williamson
 Woodworth
 Young (Oakville)
 Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
 Wilks
 Wong
 Yelich
 Zimmer — 182

Routine Proceedings

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion defeated.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska on a point of order.

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I just quickly wanted to make sure that you understood our dissent regarding the motion moved by the Chief Government Whip. We shouted “on division”, but I did not hear you say that. I just wanted to clarify this.

The Speaker: In fact, I asked for unanimous consent to now have the vote on the ways and means motion, but I did not put the question on the motion before the House. In a few seconds, the member can indicate that it is on division.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1520)

[*English*]

WAYS AND MEANS

MOTION NO. 2

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the question on Motion No. 2 under ways and means proceedings.

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC) moved that a ways and means motion to amend the Canada-Newfoundland Atlantic Accord Implementation Act, the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Resources Accord Implementation Act and the Excise Tax Act be concurred in.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried on division.

(Motion agreed to)

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present in the House, in both official languages, three reports on the Canadian section of ParlAmericas respecting its participation at the 21st executive committee meeting in Panama City; the 27th ParlAmericas meeting of the board of directors in Manzanillo, Mexico; and the 31st ParlAmericas meeting of the board of directors in Paramaribo, Suriname, May 13-15.

Routine Proceedings

Mrs. Susan Truppe (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian section of the ParlAmericas respecting its participation at the Annual Gathering of the Group of Women Parliamentarians, Paramaribo, Suriname, May 16-17, 2013.

* * *

NAVIGABLE WATERS PROTECTION ACT (PEEL RIVER)

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-543, An Act to amend the Navigable Waters Protection Act (Peel River).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to add the Peel River to the list of waterways protected under the Navigable Waters Protection Act. The Conservative government removed this very important river from that list as part of second omnibus bill, Bill C-45.

After consulting this summer with the people in the Mackenzie Delta and those in the Yukon, there was a great deal of support for this river's protection. This is one step in making an attempt to return this river to a status of some measure of protection, which means that in the case of a development on the river, the federal government would have a responsibility to ensure that the development was following good practices.

This is a river that has great tourism and wilderness value, and it is a river that has enormous significance to the Gwich'in people of the Northwest Territories and the Yukon.

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

* * *

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the motion I have relates to MPs becoming parliamentary secretaries and vacating their private members' bills as a result of that process.

There have been consultations among the parties, so I anticipate unanimous consent for the following motion.

I move:

That, notwithstanding any standing order or usual practice of the House, the order for second reading and reference to committee of Bill C-511, an act to amend the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act (period of residence) listed in the order of precedence; Bill C-515, an act to amend the Criminal Code (law enforcement animals), listed on the Order Paper; and, Bill C-517, an act to amend the Criminal Code (trafficking in persons), listed in the order of precedence, be discharged and the bills withdrawn;

And, the order of reference to the Standing Committee on Finance of Bill C-458, an act respecting a national charities week and to amend the Income Tax Act (charitable and other gifts) be discharged and the bill withdrawn;

And, the Order of reference to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights of Bill C-478, an act to amend the Criminal Code (increasing parole ineligibility) be discharged and the bill withdrawn.

● (1525)

The Speaker: Does the hon. Leader of the Government in the House of Commons have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

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[Translation]

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON VIOLENCE AGAINST INDIGENOUS WOMEN

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I move the following motion:

That, notwithstanding the Order adopted by the House on Monday, October 21, 2013, the first vice-chair of the Special Committee on Violence Against Indigenous Women be the Member for Nanaimo-Cowichan.

[English]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PETITIONS**NATIONAL PARKS**

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, I stand on behalf of petitioners in the greater Toronto area with respect to the creation of Rouge national urban park. Since 100 square kilometres of public land assembly surrounds the Rouge River and Duffins Creek watersheds in Toronto, Markham, and Pickering, this publicly owned provincial, federal, and municipal land is predominantly designated under the provincial greenbelt natural heritage system. It is home to the endangered Carolinian and mixed woodland/plain-life zones of Canada. It is also the ancestral home of the Mississauga, Huron-Wendat, and Seneca first nations and their sacred burial and village sites.

Since the plan for the Rouge national urban park concept and the May 2012 draft confines the park area study to 57 square kilometres instead of the 100 square kilometres of public land assembly needed for a healthy and sustainable Rouge national park, the petitioners are requesting that the land be protected and that 100 square kilometres of public land assembly be brought together for the Rouge national urban park.

NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition signed by several pages of people from Saskatchewan and across Canada expressing their deep concern about the continuing threat posed by many thousands of nuclear weapons across the globe. They argue that any use of weapons of ultimate mass destruction, whether by accident or miscalculation, would have catastrophic consequences for humanity. They call upon the Government of Canada and all national governments to negotiate a treaty banning nuclear weapons and leading to their complete eradication.

CELL TOWERS

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to table a petition on behalf of another group of hundreds of constituents concerned about the installation of yet another cell tower in Guelph.

Yesterday I tabled a similar petition for one in the south end. Today it is for one in an east end residential area on Starwood and Grange. The petitioners are concerned about studies that have found that microwaves emitted from cell towers are being linked to leukemia, infertility, cancer, Alzheimer's, and autism as well as other short-term effects. They call upon Industry Canada to not approve the proposals and state that local councils must be allowed to make their own decisions about tower sites without being overruled.

This is not exclusive to Guelph. Telecommunication towers are being built indiscriminately in communities across Canada. Ministry guidelines do not provide the opportunity for Canadians to object if the tower is under 15 metres. This is a national issue, and the minister must change the process.

MINING

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present petitions received from residents of North Bay, Ontario and Kipawa, Quebec. They relate very specifically to a proposed mining area. Matamec Explorations proposes to mine for rare earths.

The petitioners call upon the House to recognize the unique ecological, cultural, and historic value of the Kipawa Lake system and to protect this system from the proposed development.

GENETICALLY MODIFIED ALFALFA

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House to present a petition containing over 200 signatures from my riding of Barrie, Ontario in regard to a concern about genetically modified alfalfa. I will pass these concerns along.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I have petitions from across Canada calling on our government to implement a national moratorium on hydraulic fracking, to compel oil and gas companies to disclose the database of chemicals used in fracking to date, to conduct a comprehensive environmental assessment on fracking, and in accordance with polluter pay, to hold companies to account for the cost of cleaning up fracking damage that has already occurred.

Privilege

● (1530)

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.

* * *

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: I will hear the hon. member for Avalon on the question of privilege that was raised last week.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

STATEMENTS BY PRIME MINISTER REGARDING REPAYMENT OF SENATOR'S EXPENSES

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on the question of privilege raised by the member for Timmins—James Bay on October 17.

On June 5 with the resignation of Nigel Wright, the pressure was mounting on the Prime Minister surrounding the \$90,000 payoff to Mike Duffy. The Prime Minister rose in the House and told the House:

...it was Mr. Wright who made the decision to take his personal funds and give those to Mr. Duffy so that Mr. Duffy could reimburse the taxpayers. Those were his decisions. They were not communicated to me or to members of my office. They were Mr. Wright's decisions, but he takes full responsibility for them.

The most important sentence in that whole statement was, and I will reiterate, "They were not communicated to me or to members of my office". I assume on June 5 he did communicate with all members of his office to get to the bottom of this.

With revelations not only by Senator Mike Duffy yesterday but indeed by sworn court documents filed by the RCMP, we know now that the Prime Minister's assertions in June and his ongoing answers to the Mike Duffy payoff are simply not true. Worse, the Prime Minister continues to provide answers in the House that bear no resemblance to the facts that are now on the record.

Back in June it seemed somewhat possible that the Prime Minister simply had no idea what was going on in his own office and that Nigel Wright acted alone with no one else involved or informed. Some would give him the benefit of the doubt. However, it is now plainly evident that this was not the case.

Privilege

We know that several people in the Prime Minister's Office and his inner circle were involved with this deal and this cover-up. We know this from sworn court documents filed by the RCMP, and Mike Duffy echoed this yesterday, revealing that the Prime Minister himself gave the order, far from the Prime Minister's claim of Nigel Wright acting alone.

The list of those allegedly involved in what is known now about this Conservative cover-up has become extensive: Senator Mike Duffy; former PMO chief of staff Nigel Wright; current PMO chief of staff Ray Novak; former government leader in the Senate Marjorie LeBreton; former PMO staffer and chief of staff to the Minister of Natural Resources Chris Woodcock; Senator Irving Gerstein; Senator Carolyn Stewart Olsen; Senator David Tkachuk; Conservative national campaign manager Jenni Byrne; PMO staffer David van Hemmen; PMO lawyer Benjamin Perrin; PMO staffer Patrick Rogers; Senator John Wallace; and most important, the Prime Minister himself, who met with Mike Duffy and Nigel Wright on this very issue on February 13 and told senator Duffy that he needed to warp the public perception of this issue regardless of the facts. That, my friends, is called a cover-up.

The allegations are shocking: the bribery and extortion of a senator; telling him to take the money and follow their plan or face disgrace and expulsion. They told him to agree and all of his improprieties would go away; just take the money and play by the PMO rules.

The issue at hand is the question of privilege. The specific abuse that we are dealing with right now is ongoing and misleading of the House by the Prime Minister.

It is now plainly evident that Nigel Wright did not act alone. What we may have excused as ignorance and incompetence on the Prime Minister's part in June can no longer be dismissed so easily. The facts are now coming out, and they demonstrate a clear and deliberate attempt to mislead the House and to mislead Canadians about the actions of the Prime Minister, his office and his inner circle. That is contempt of Parliament.

Some may ask who we are to believe. Is the Prime Minister telling the truth, or is Mike Duffy, or is the RCMP? This brings me to a difficult role that the Speaker must play in these matters.

The House does not rely on the Speaker to pass judgment on whether it is absolutely proven that the Prime Minister deliberately misled the House. The question you face, Mr. Speaker, is simply put: At first glance, is it possible that contempt has taken place? I would argue that this situation has clearly passed that test. If you agree, Mr. Speaker, you must allow this issue to be debated and sent before an appropriate committee of the House, so the House can be satisfied on this matter.

• (1535)

The very functioning of this place is based on the assumption that all hon. members behave in an honourable manner. While opinions may differ at times, we are all bound to speak the truth. When any member abandons this principle, it is an insult to the House and to Canadians, who we are sent here to represent.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is always a great honour to stand in the House.

I would like to offer some additional comments on the question of privilege that I raised on October 17 regarding misleading statements made by the Prime Minister in the House in relation to the secret and potentially criminal payout to Mike Duffy. More specifically, I feel I need to add to this issue in order to answer the intervention yesterday by the government House leader.

First, let me say I was very disappointed that the government House leader would say that this issue was “absurd” or a “political stunt”. I hope that, given the seriousness of the matter before Parliament, the House leader would not have taken it so lightly and would not have tried to shove it aside. This is not an issue that can be brushed aside, because Parliament is where the laws of this land are made and there is an obligation for all of us to meet certain standards. Canadians want answers in this very disturbing and squalid scandal, and they want to know what happened. Therefore, when the Prime Minister was asked questions and provided false information, he interfered with the rights of the members of the House.

One of the arguments of the government House leader yesterday was that it is a long-established practice in the House that parliamentarians are to be taken at their word. Indeed, that is a practice that is essential for the workings of a democratic institution, and we agree with him, which is why the issue of a minister knowingly misrepresenting facts to his colleagues in the House or misrepresenting facts because his staff misled him is a breach of the privileges of the members of the House and can be found to be a contempt on the workings of Parliament.

What we are talking about right now is not he-said-she-said, as is being inferred by the government House leader, but facts that have been shown to be false through the affidavits of the RCMP and now through other statements that have come forward. The government House leader says that we must take parliamentarians at their word, and yet we have a situation where we now have two parliamentarians who have made completely contradictory declarations about the role they played in an issue that is under investigation by the RCMP. Therefore, it is essential that we find out the true answers.

Yesterday in his speech to the Senate, Mike Duffy was categorical in stating that the Prime Minister's office was involved in the secret negotiations for the \$90,000 cheque and that the Prime Minister himself was directly involved in negotiations with Mike Duffy. Senator Duffy said the Prime Minister himself had ordered him to repay his living expenses because they had become a political problem for the Conservatives. He said that at a meeting on February 13, 2013, between him, the Prime Minister and Nigel Wright, “just the three of us”, the Prime Minister told him, “It's not about what you did. It's about the perception of what you did that's been created in the media. The rules are inexplicable to our base”. Duffy said, “I was ordered by the prime minister to pay the money back, end of discussion”.

These comments are very troubling because they contradict the statements that were made by the Prime Minister in the House, which he reiterated again today when he said that he spoke to Mike Duffy at a caucus meeting. The appearance given to the House of Commons was that this was in passing. At the time the Prime Minister made those comments, he said he told Mr. Duffy that if the expenses were inappropriate, he should pay them back. The Prime Minister today gives us, number one, the statement that he was categorical and emphatic that Mike Duffy had misrepresented his claims and was ordered to pay them back. That is different from what the Prime Minister said earlier.

The Prime Minister was asked today whether there was, as Mike Duffy said, “just the three of us”, Nigel Wright, Mike Duffy and the Prime Minister, and the Prime Minister went back to saying that this meeting happened at a caucus meeting. Both men are giving completely contradictory information, and in order to do our jobs as parliamentarians, we need to know. We cannot believe both of them, so what is it that we should do? Certainly, if we were dealing with he-said-she-said on some minor matter, this would not be a matter of privilege.

• (1540)

However, the issue before us is that there is evidence prepared by Corporal Greg Horton, peace officer of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, delivered in court, and an application for a production order that presents evidence that is in clear contradiction to the Prime Minister's position.

The Prime Minister had said in this House, and it was reiterated by his parliamentary secretary on Monday, that Nigel Wright had acted alone. Now, according to the police evidence, we begin to see more names appear of who in the Prime Minister's office was involved. That brought us at least Chris Woodcock, David van Hemmen and Benjamin Perrin who knew, and this is from the RCMP.

Now, however, after the revelations of the last two days, we see that there are at least 13 key Conservatives who were involved in this deal that may be found to be an illegal payout. Nigel Wright, Benjamin Perrin, Chris Woodcock, Mr. van Hemmen and Patrick Rogers were all directly within the Prime Minister's office, and the claim is that Mr. Wright acted without anyone else. The Prime Minister has started to slowly change his position, but he was emphatic in June, and we were led to believe him.

We now know that Senators LeBreton, Tkachuk, Stewart Olsen, Finley and Gerstein were involved in this negotiation. Jenni Byrne was involved. Mike Duffy now tells us that Ray Novak and Senator LeBreton said they were speaking on behalf of the Prime Minister, and what is very troubling is that Mr. Duffy says he was told by them that there would be a deal. If he did not go along quietly, they would have him expelled from the Senate for not meeting the housing requirement; so either Mr. Duffy met the housing requirement or he did not, which again contradicts what the Prime Minister has said previously.

The government House leader yesterday suggested in his answer to the question that one of the precedents I mentioned for 1978 of a similar case cannot be used, because contrary to that case, we do not have an admission of wrongdoing from the Prime Minister of his staff.

Privilege

That argument simply does not hold up, because it is based on the equivalency of saying that anyone can provide false statements to the House as long as they do not admit it. What kind of Parliament would we have if that were the case?

For my colleagues' benefit, let me again mention another precedent, from 2002, when the member for Portage—Lisgar said that the Minister of Defence had misled the House regarding the detention of Afghan prisoners. This case was found by Speaker Milliken to be *prima facie* case of privilege. Let me quote Speaker Milliken on this:

The authorities are consistent about the need for clarity in our proceedings and about the need to ensure the integrity of the information provided by the government to the House.

As the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst has pointed out, in deciding on alleged questions of privilege, it is relatively infrequent for the Chair to find *prima facie* privilege. It is more likely that the Speaker will characterize the situation as a dispute of facts.

However, in the case before us, there appears to be, in my opinion, no dispute as to the facts. I believe that both the minister and other hon. members recognize that two versions of the events have been presented to the House. Continuing on, he said:

On the basis of the arguments presented by hon. members and in view of the gravity of the matter, I have concluded that the situation before us where the House is left with two versions of events is one that merits further consideration by an appropriate committee, if only to clear the air.

Mr. Speaker, we have had such good, judicious rulings through the years. I think this is certainly a very appropriate one to be looking at.

In presenting his arguments, the government House leader also mentioned a ruling in 1987 by Speaker Fraser. Let me quote again from this judgment, because it offers very clear advice on what we should do in the present case:

These institutions [Parliament and the courts] enjoy the protection of absolute privilege because of the overriding need to ensure that the truth can be told...

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

• (1545)

The freedom of speech that we protect for the members in the House means that neither I nor any citizen of Canada can go to the courts on a case based on something that the Prime Minister said in this chamber. However, as Speaker Fraser said, we do have practices and traditions in this institution that allow us to deal with cases of abuse of freedom of speech, because such abuses can be detrimental to Parliament and to the democratic life of Canadians.

This is exactly the situation we are faced with today. It is certainly an unprecedented situation, which is very grave and serious. That is why I felt the need to rise again. We have to get to the bottom of this disturbing story, and the way to do that is to refer it for an in-depth study at the committee on procedure and House affairs.

Privilege

Let me repeat that we are not in the domain of simple assertions here, we are talking about facts that have been brought forward through RCMP investigation, which is that the Prime Minister repeatedly said in the House that no one in his office knew of the Wright-Duffy deal. We now know that it is anywhere from three in his office to 13 key people around the Prime Minister.

In my previous intervention I put forward two possibilities: either the Prime Minister misled the House himself, or his own staff in the Prime Minister's Office had gone rogue behind his back and misled him. Either of these cases is a contempt of Parliament and a breach of the privileges of the members of the House.

We cannot, as the government House leader would have it, shove this matter aside and hope it will disappear on its own. We need to shed light on this matter, and the only way to do this is by finding that this is a prima facie case of the abuse of our privilege.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that my friend from Timmins—James Bay would like to have the procedure and House affairs committee study this issue, however, for them to do so on the basis of his question of privilege falls far short of the test that you have articulated in the past for meeting that standard.

I would simply add, in response specifically to some of the further comments made by both of the members who spoke today, that I would also point not just to the public statements of the Prime Minister in July that I referred to but to his reference to those statements here in the House today. In fact I point to all of his answers in question period in the House today. All of which have been truthful, clear, direct and open about this, and clearly demonstrate that the basis to this point of privilege simply is not there.

I would simply add those points and adopt those as part of my argument here.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, very briefly, I get the sense from the government House leader's last intervention on this that this has been a moving target in terms of the point of privilege that has been raised by my friend from Timmins—James Bay. More and more damning evidence comes forward every time another senator gives a speech directly contradicting what the Prime Minister has told us in this place, both in the spring and in effect even during today's question period.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know if you have an answer for us at this point, but I would like to get a sense from you as to your own process. Typically the Speaker hears a number of interventions on a point of privilege, takes some time and reflection, and then comes back to the House. However, we feel a certain urgency in being able to establish an important question such as this one, as to whether or not the Prime Minister lied to Parliament.

Are you, Mr. Speaker, seeking further input from the House or do you feel that you are now at the point of satisfaction to be able to go back and reflect upon the testimony as you have heard it and look at the evidence of the blues in *Hansard* with the Prime Minister's statements in contrast to some of the facts that we have presented?

● (1550)

The Speaker: As members are no doubt aware, the government House leader came back to the original point that was raised just last evening. Not that I would go through the entire process of how a ruling comes before the House, however, I am now in the process of going back and looking at the arguments that have been made. We now have the response from the government, further interventions from the member for Avalon and the member for Timmins—James Bay, and again the hon. government House leader.

I do not feel I need to hear more on the subject. I think the facts have been laid out. Certainly if through the deliberations and consultations I feel that there may be the need for more explanation, I can certainly come back to the House and ask for that. However, at this point in time I am satisfied that I have heard the main points of the matter.

The member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley did give notice to the Chair of a new question of privilege, and I will give him the floor now.

USE OF OFFICIAL LANGUAGES IN DEPARTMENTAL BRIEFING

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am rising with some reservations on this question of privilege, but I feel the seriousness of the incident in question warrants a formal response and that the Chair is best equipped to deal with this particular matter.

Last night, members of Parliament were invited to attend a departmental briefing hosted by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance on the government's budget implementation bill, Bill C-4, which is set to be debated for the first time this very afternoon. It is a crucial element for the preparation of members of Parliament, ahead of debating a bill, to actually be able to comprehensively understand what is in the piece of legislation.

This is a particularly complex bill by the government, another omnibus motion that includes all sorts of non-budgetary items, as well as those that have some pretense to affect the Canadian economy.

[*Translation*]

When members arrived, it quickly became clear that there was no simultaneous translation and no intention to fix that problem for the meeting. When we asked the minister's representatives to repeat the bill summary in French, the parliamentary secretary replied that that was not possible. Very quickly, and as the situation deteriorated, some members began to leave. The meeting ended very abruptly, before the members could really learn anything about the bill in English and before any explanations were given in French.

According to Erskine May, the classic definition of parliamentary privilege is as follows:

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

[English]

Section 133 of the Constitution Act, 1867, sets out certain legislative guarantees for parliamentarians when it comes to the use of Canada's official languages. These include the right to use either language in legislative debates, the use of both languages in the official records of Parliament, and the use of English and French in printing and publishing acts. While departmental briefings are not specifically covered by the Constitution Act, university law professor André Braën notes that the purpose of section 133 is to grant "equal access for Anglophones and Francophones to the law in their language" and to guarantee "equal participation in the debates and proceedings of Parliament".

Bill C-4, the bill that was being discussed last night in English only, is more than 300 pages long. It was put on members' desks just yesterday morning. A departmental technical briefing was promised so that members could digest some of the information and be prepared to begin debate on the bill this afternoon. That is barely 24 hours to pick apart 300 pages and prepare to debate. Surely not providing for a bilingual briefing does not allow for equal participation in the debates and proceedings in Parliament.

• (1555)

[Translation]

In *Blaikie v. Quebec*, Chief Justice Deschênes of the Superior Court of Quebec upheld the obligation to use English and French at the same time throughout the legislative process, and found that any disruption of that practice violates both the letter and the spirit of section 133.

[English]

We live in a bilingual country. We debate and pass bilingual laws for a bilingual populace. When members of Parliament are prevented from doing their jobs because one of our official languages is being treated as an afterthought, particularly on something as serious as the budget implementation act, we have a significant and serious problem.

I can only, as an anglophone MP, ask my anglophone colleagues to imagine going to a budget briefing in which departmental officials are made available to describe and interpret very technical pieces of legislation, to find that only French was available both in text and in the presentation. It would not be acceptable to any of us. We would find that to be an incapacity to do our jobs as members of Parliament in only having French available in a briefing that actually mattered to the affairs of the nation. The reverse is no more acceptable.

[Translation]

I am therefore asking the Chair for a ruling to confirm that this was indeed a breach of members' privileges, and I would certainly be prepared to move the appropriate motion if I am invited to do so.

[English]

I just have one additional comment. I have heard from my colleagues that the text of the actual bill was printed in both official languages. Congratulations for following the basic aspects of the law.

Privilege

Documents were provided for MPs to understand what the technical text actually meant, because as all members of Parliament will know, in studying a 300-page bill, it does not read like cursive English. It is not prose. It is legislation and law. The understanding of what the law actually indicates needs to be done in such a way that MPs are able to function and perform our duties on behalf of those we represent, whether we are English or French.

This is a serious matter. It is fundamental. I can only suggest that it was an error of some judgment or another, but it is the practice of this place. Again, if the reverse were true and English members of Parliament had a technical briefing on a budget bill that the government only provided in French, with no translation and no opportunity to ask questions in English, my English colleagues, like myself, would be frustrated and somewhat aggrieved at the fact that we could not do our jobs and understand the legislation before us.

[Translation]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government feels the same way as the House Leader of the Official Opposition about what happened. We fully intend to meet expectations regarding bilingualism. Documents will be available in both languages and meetings will take place in both official languages.

I think there were some issues in the preparation for the meeting last night.

[English]

It is my understanding, and I have been advised, that there were some errors in the preparation for the meeting. There was an expectation and understanding that translation would be available, which was not. This is indeed unfortunate.

It is for that reason that the meeting was cancelled.

[Translation]

The meeting was cancelled last night because of the lack of access to both official languages. A new meeting will be scheduled tonight for all members, in English and French.

[English]

My understanding is that arrangements have been made to reschedule this meeting and to hold it properly in both official languages with that capacity available for everyone.

It is certainly the expectation of this government that all business be properly conducted in both official languages. We apologize for the unfortunate and regrettable error that should not have occurred last night in this regard. We hope that tonight's meeting will provide the proper information in both languages to everyone. For that reason, I am not sure if we have reached the threshold where we actually need to refer this to a committee.

The Speaker: I appreciate the intervention by the hon. government House leader. It seems to me that some type of technical problem led to this and that there is a meeting planned later on to make up for it. In the view of the Chair, that seems to resolve the matter. I am sure that members will take advantage of the meeting being provided to them later on this evening.

I see the member for Winnipeg North rising.

Government Orders

•(1600)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would just very briefly provide comment on the issue. I recognize and appreciate what the government House leader has put on the record, in essence saying that it was a mistake and something that was not meant to happen. It seems somewhat regretful that it did happen.

The fact still remains that we are going to be debating that particular bill today. The reason I bring this up in the fashion that I have is that I believe it is important when legislation is brought forward to the House that the bill debriefings occur in a timely fashion. Having a bill debriefing within 24 hours of a bill being introduced, at times, does not allow for mistakes of this nature to be correctly handled. We are now going to be entering into the debate, although the critics were never afforded the opportunity to have a debriefing.

I just wanted to highlight that particular point.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

The Speaker: Due to deferred recorded divisions, government orders will be extended by eight minutes.

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ECONOMIC ACTION PLAN 2013 ACT NO. 2

Hon. Tony Clement (for the Minister of Finance) moved that Bill C-4, A second act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 21, 2013 and other measures, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity today to highlight some of the key initiatives in economic action plan 2013 act no. 2.

I would like to begin by saying that our government is very proud of the steps we are taking to support the economy through today's legislation. As always, we want an open, public, and timely debate on these measures; we also look forward to a detailed committee study in the House and in the Senate.

In keeping with previous budget legislation under our government, in addition to having the bill studied by the finance committee, we will recommend even further study to the provisions in today's legislation. It is for that reason that we will be asking the following committees to look at certain portions of the bill: citizenship and immigration; human resources, skills and social development and the status of persons with disabilities; and justice and human rights. Indeed, I will move a motion at the finance committee to this effect once second reading is completed by the House.

I hope opposition members will give their support at second reading as an indication that they genuinely want these committees to study the legislation instead of just playing political games.

On that note, let me outline why the opposition should support this legislation.

Economic action plan 2013 builds on the strong foundation that was laid last year. In addition to the portfolio of initiatives we have introduced since 2006 with affordable measures to create jobs, promote growth, and generate long-term prosperity, it will help to further unleash potential for Canadian businesses and entrepreneurs to innovate and thrive in the modern economy.

Let us revisit the facts.

Today Canada has the strongest job growth among G7 countries since the recession. Our unemployment rate is at its lowest level in four years. It is significantly lower than that of the U.S., which is a phenomenon that has not been seen in nearly three decades. Meanwhile, we have created over one million net new jobs, nearly 80% of which are in the private sector, and our government continues to make new opportunities for Canadians to find employment. Today's legislation does little to detract from this goal.

Both the independent International Monetary Fund, IMF, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD, are projecting that Canada's growth will be among the strongest performances in the G7 in the years ahead. Real GDP is significantly above pre-recession levels and is the best performance in the G7.

While other countries continue to struggle with debt that is spiralling out of control, Canada is in the best fiscal position in the G7. Canada still remains on track to return to balanced budgets in 2015.

However, our government has been very clear that we will not raise taxes on Canadians to balance the budget. Unlike the NDP, which continues to push high-tax schemes, our government believes that keeping taxes low means more money in the pockets of hard-working Canadians, and that in turn helps keep our economy strong.

A recent study by KPMG concluded that Canada's total business tax cost, which includes corporate income tax, capital taxes, sales taxes, property taxes, and wage-based taxes is more than 40% lower than it is in the United States. In short, our government has created an environment that encourages new investment, growth, and job creation, and one that ensures Canada has the strongest fiscal position and the lowest business tax costs in the G7.

Having the lowest overall tax rate on new business investment in the G7 translates into Canada having a competitive business tax system, one that plays a key role in supporting businesses in all sectors of the Canadian economy to invest, grow, and thrive.

Let me share some highlights of our tax relief initiatives.

Our government has implemented broad-based tax reductions that support investment and growth and is delivering more than \$60 billion of tax relief to job-creating businesses over 2008-09 and the following five fiscal years.

• (1605)

[*Translation*]

For example, in order to boost investments and productivity, we reduced the federal corporate income tax to 15% from its 2007 rate of 21%.

In addition, the federal capital tax was eliminated in 2006, and the only corporate tax was eliminated for all businesses in 2008.

[*English*]

Furthermore, we reduced the small business tax rate to 11% in 2008 from 12% in 2007, and subsequently the amount of income eligible for this lower rate was increased to \$500,000 in 2009.

Canada's system of international taxation was strengthened in order to better support cross-border trade and investment and to improve fairness.

[*Translation*]

These measures are part of a policy framework designed to increase our economy's production capacity and improve Canadians' quality of life.

Cutting federal corporate income tax and making other tax adjustments boost the assumed rate of return on investment and reduce capital costs. These measures encourage businesses to invest in Canada and hire Canadians.

That approach increases Canada's production capacity and improves Canadians' quality of life.

[*English*]

Economic action plan 2013 focused on positive initiatives to support job creation and economic growth while returning to balanced budgets, ensuring Canada's economic advantage remains strong today and into the future.

However, the job does not end there. Bill C-4 would implement key measures from economic action plan 2013 as well as certain previously announced tax measures to help create jobs, stimulate economic growth, and secure Canada's long-term prosperity.

Our government's low-tax plan is helping to guide the Canadian economy along the path of sustainable economic growth. Bill C-4 builds on our successes and maintains our government's focus on the economy.

I would like to discuss three key aspects of the bill today: a continued focus on job creation and support for job creators, a firm response to tax loopholes and tax evasion, and an overall respect for taxpayers' dollars.

While we believe in the benefits of lower taxes, our government fully understands that sustaining an effective tax system also rests on the foundation of tax fairness. That is why economic action plan 2013 is committed to closing tax loopholes that allow a select few businesses and individuals to avoid paying their fair share.

Government Orders

Broadening and protecting the tax base supports our government's effort to return to balanced budgets, responds to provincial governments' concerns about protecting provincial revenues on our shared tax bases, and helps give Canadians confidence that the tax system is indeed fair.

• (1610)

[*Translation*]

The efforts made to ensure that everyone pays their fair share also help keep taxes low for Canadian families and businesses. In so doing, there is more motivation to work, save and invest in Canada.

[*English*]

Since 2006, and including measures proposed in economic action plan 2013, the government has introduced over 75 measures to improve the integrity of the tax system. Today's legislation takes additional steps in support of this objective.

Two examples include further extending the application of Canada's thin capitalization rules—which limit the amount of Canadian profits that can be distributed to certain non-resident shareholders as deductible interest payments—to Canadian resident trusts and non-resident entities, and introducing stiff administrative monetary penalties and criminal offences to deter the use, possession, sale, and development of electronic suppression-of-sales software designed to falsify records for the purpose of tax evasion.

We are also providing the Canada Revenue Agency, the CRA, with new tools to enforce the tax rules to combat international tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance, all while we are taking immediate action to improve the integrity and neutrality of the tax system. Specifically, economic action plan 2013 does this by streamlining the process for the CRA to obtain information concerning unnamed persons from third parties, such as banks; requiring certain financial intermediaries, including banks, to report to the CRA clients' international electronic fund transfers of \$10,000 or more; and introducing a new program to stop international tax evasion that would pay rewards to individuals who report major international tax non-compliance.

As the opposition can see, tax fairness is a basic principle that our government is committed to upholding. We make no apologies for doing so. In fact, we are proud of our record and we are building on it.

A level playing field is what Canadian businesses deserve and require, and we are delivering. For example, the Income Tax Act contains a number of provisions intended to constrain the trading of corporate tax attributes among arm's-length persons. Unfortunately, despite the various provisions intended to curtail the inappropriate trading of loss pools, transactions to circumvent these provisions continue to be undertaken.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Our government understands the need to introduce practical legislative measures to ensure that there are appropriate tax implications attached to these transactions. This bill does just that. It introduces an anti-avoidance rule to support the existing loss restriction rules that apply on the acquisition of control of a corporation.

[*English*]

As everyone can see clearly, our government is committed to putting in place the right framework to ensure tax compliance. The Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants had this to say about economic action plan 2013:

The budget looks to close tax loopholes, address aggressive tax planning, clarify tax rules, reduce international tax avoidance and tax evasion and improve tax fairness. It also provides the Canada Revenue Agency with new tools to enforce the tax rules.

The statement continued with a strong backing of our initiatives and stated:

We support efforts to maintain the integrity of the tax base....

The bottom line is this: our government is committed to fighting tax evasion and giving Canadians a tax system they can have confidence in. There are those who would rather take advantage of the system to skip their fair contribution; Bill C-4 introduces strong new measures to combat this and would ensure that any previously mentioned measures from economic action plan 2013 come to fruition.

Lowering taxes is not the only way our government is furthering taxpayers' dollars. Canadians deserve streamlined services and efficient programs.

Today's legislation contains several measures fully in line with our government's respect for taxpayers' dollars. A few examples include modernizing the Canada student loans program by moving to electronic service delivery, improving the efficiency of the temporary foreign worker program by expanding electronic service delivery, phasing out the labour-sponsored venture capital corporations tax credit, and modernizing service delivery for Canadians by accelerating the move from paper-based to automated passport application e-services.

These are all changes that I am extremely proud to speak to. It is measures like these that demonstrate our government's commitment to making it easier for Canadians to access services that are cost-effective and efficient. While many of the changes in Bill C-4 are technical in nature, many provide clear benefits for Canadians.

I know that my constituents back home expect a fiscally responsible government. Let us take the modernization of the Canada student loans program as an example. Students in my riding of North Vancouver rely on this important program to help achieve their goals and make their educational aspirations a reality. This change in Bill C-4 would not only eliminate a cumbersome and often long process of paper agreements and identification but would also provide the government with approximately \$10 million in cost savings per year. It is just common sense to provide a better service to Canadians and while saving taxpayers' dollars at the same time. It

is initiatives like this that make bills like today's all the more important to pass.

I have talked about how we are working hard to make our tax system fair and how we are doing everything possible to maximize taxpayer money, but I have not forgotten about an area that Canadians have on their minds: jobs.

Quite simply, our government values job creators and we have been working hard with them in recent years to ensure that they are in the best position possible to provide jobs for Canadians.

The legislation I have the privilege of speaking about today introduces some new ways our government can support job creation in this country. Examples include extending and expanding the hiring credit for small business, which would benefit an estimated 560,000 employers; increasing and indexing the lifetime capital gains exemption to make investing in small business more rewarding; expanding the accelerated capital cost allowance to further encourage investments in clean energy generation; freezing employment insurance premium rates for three years, leaving \$660 million in the pockets of job creators and workers in 2014 alone.

Let me elaborate on one of these measures that I think will have a big impact for small businesses.

● (1615)

Among the many ways that Canada's income tax system supports small business owners, farmers and fishermen is the lifetime capital gains tax exemption, the LCGE. In order to increase the potential rewards of investing in small business, farming and fishing, economic action plan 2013 proposes to increase the LCGE from \$750,000 to \$800,000 in 2014. The exemption helps these entrepreneurs better ensure their financial security for retirement and facilitates the intergenerational transfer of their businesses. In 2007 our government increased the LCGE to \$750,000 from \$500,000, the first increase in the exemption since 1988.

In addition, to ensure the real value of the LCGE is not eroded over time, economic action plan 2013 proposes to index the \$800,000 LCGE limit to inflation for the first time ever. The first indexation adjustment will occur for the 2015 taxation year. This is added security for the small business owner and provides financial freedom to create new jobs.

[*Translation*]

The initiatives set out in economic action plan 2013 are based on domestic government measures to improve the overall strength of Canada's tax system and to once again demonstrate our government's commitment to using taxpayers' money responsibly.

[*English*]

With a comprehensive and forward-looking agenda, these initiatives will deliver high quality jobs, economic growth and sound public finances.

Economic action plan 2013 would allow Canada to meet these challenges and emerge from them stronger than ever today and in the future.

Government Orders

While the opposition continues to focus on issues that do not matter to Canadians, our government remains focused on the task at hand. Economic growth did not stop at the last budget or the last budget implementation act for that matter. We continue to look for ways to maximize taxpayer dollars, increase the efficiency of the inner workings of government and make certain that job creation and economic prosperity are at the forefront of any new legislation. In this respect, the bill would make significant improvements that would benefit Canadians. I urge members of the House to pass it.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, clearly the government has not learned from the past. Here we have the fourth omnibus budget implementation act in two years. We have yet another bill that is crammed with changes to 70 laws. It is over 300 pages long. It is a grab bag of the wants and desires of the Conservative caucus. It contains things that should not be in a budget bill, such as Supreme Court nominations, changes to health and safety legislation for workers and changes to the National Research Council.

If my colleague and his caucus colleagues are so convinced that their government is on the right track, why are they hiding all of these changes in an omnibus budget bill rather than presenting them as individual bills? Why are they using the spin that they are doing such a great job on the economy when almost 300,000 more people are unemployed now than before the recession, growth is slowing and many of our trading partners are outdoing Canada? Our current account deficit is growing and the Conservatives are not dealing with it. Could the member answer that?

• (1620)

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, that was more than one question. That was really a grab bag of a whole bunch of questions.

An hon. member: It is like an omnibus question.

Mr. Andrew Saxton: That was an omnibus question, Mr. Speaker. I would like to try to address as many of those questions as I can possibly remember.

First, the length of this bill is really quite similar to the last four acts that have been introduced over the last number of years, so it is very similar in length.

Second, the vast majority of the items in the bill refer to technical items that were already presented in economic action plan 2013 by the Minister of Finance back in March of this year.

It is a lengthy bill because we have a lot of work to do in Canada. We have been extremely fortunate to have weathered the economic storm so well. However, we still are not immune to pressures from outside the country and therefore we have to take measures in order to protect our economy.

To give the House an idea of some of those measures, economic action plan 2013 focuses squarely on the creation of jobs, economic growth and the long-term prosperity of Canadians. It is doing this by connecting Canadians with available jobs, a new long-term \$70 billion infrastructure plan over 10 years, which is an unprecedented amount, investing in world-class research and innovation and much more.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every time I hear one of the Conservatives stand and use the phrase

“economic action plan”, I have this vision of someone sitting inside the PMO putting a little gold star beside that name.

It is almost like it is mandatory, “You will stand up. You will say economic action plan”. Every time the members say it, they get a gold star. I am sure there is someone in the Prime Minister's Office making note of every time one of the members talks about it.

For most Canadians, we see it as a great deal of waste in terms of the promotion of that slogan, the millions of dollars that have been spent on it.

My question is related to the balanced budget legislation about which the government is talking. We all know the government inherited a huge surplus, turned it into a deficit and now it says it will get out of a deficit into a balanced position in 2015-16. At the end of the day, we will not find out if that is true or false until after the next federal election.

On the balanced budget legislation, is there a consequence to the government if it is does not meet that balanced budget requirement, whatever it might be?

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, regarding the balanced budget, before the global recession hit, our Conservative government paid down over \$37 billion in debt, bringing Canada's debt to its lowest level in 25 years.

It is because we paid down the debt that we were in a position to help the economy when it needed it most. Our fiscal responsibility and aggressive debt reduction placed Canada in the best possible position to weather the global economic storm.

When the global economic recession hit, we were able to respond quickly and effectively with Canada's economic action plan. Here are some examples of how well we are doing. Canada's net debt to GDP ratio was 34.6% in 2012. That is the lowest level among G7 countries. Germany, by contrast, is the second lowest at 57.2%. The G7 average is 90.4%.

• (1625)

Hon. Lynne Yelich (Minister of State (Foreign Affairs and Consular), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wanted to know if the member would like to tell the member for Winnipeg North just how the budget had been balanced by the Liberals, which he was applauding.

How did that really occur? If I remember correctly, the Liberals balanced the budget on the backs of Canadians. Maybe the member would like to tell the story.

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, I am glad that my colleague asked me that very important question.

Government Orders

Unlike the previous Liberal government that balanced the budget on the backs of hard-working Canadians and on the backs of the provinces by cutting health and education transfers, which caused significant shortages in our health care system and our education system, we are not doing that.

When the member opposite mentions that we inherited a surplus, I can tell members where that surplus went. It went back into the pockets of ordinary hard-working Canadians, because that is where that money should be, not in government coffers.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, my first comment is for my hon. colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance.

Although this administration has reduced corporate taxes dramatically, economists such as Mark Carney, the former governor of the Bank of Canada, found that corporations were not using it to create jobs. In fact he called it “dead money”.

An RBC economist has pegged that amount at over \$600 billion, money that corporations are saving, not spending. They are not spending it on jobs. They are not spending it on growth. It is in fact dead money and we need to adjust the corporate tax rate to the benefit of Canadians.

I have a lot of questions. I attended the briefing last night, and I think the hon. member did the right thing postponing until tonight, but it means I have a lot of specific questions. I do not know what this has to do with budget 2012. I never saw in budget 2012 that the intention of the budget was to change the Canada labour code so workers covered by it would be less protected against dangerous assignments.

The revision in clause 176, found by coincidence at page 176 of Bill C-4, changes the definition of “danger” and removes, as a reason a worker can refuse to participate in that work, injury or illness that could result in chronic illness, removes the words “injury or illness” and insists that to be dangerous it has to be an “imminent or serious threat to the life or health” and removes what is in the current definition of damage to the reproductive system.

In other words, it is a systematic attack on the rights of a worker to refuse to work in dangerous conditions. That was never cited in budget 2012. I would like to know if the hon. member could explain it to us.

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, the first part of the question regarded lowering taxes for businesses. We are proud that our government has lowered taxes to record lows. It is at 15% now in Canada.

Let me give an example of a result of that. Tim Hortons had its international headquarters in the United States five years ago. It has now moved those headquarters back to Canada because of our low tax measures. That is a perfect example of jobs being created in Canada as a result of our government's policies on lowering taxes for small, medium and large businesses.

Regarding the member's question about the Canada Labour Code and the change to the definition of “danger”, these amendments ensure that employees and employers remain at the forefront of resolving occupational health and safety issues. This would allow

our government to improve our focus on critical issues that affect the health and safety of Canadians in the workplace. Employees still have the right to refuse to work where they have reasonable cause to believe a situation is dangerous. Health and safety officers remain available 24-7 to respond to real situations of danger in the workplace.

Worker safety is of the utmost concern to us, and it will remain at very high levels.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): 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 Vancouver Kingsway, International Trade; the hon. member for Winnipeg North, Intergovernmental Relations.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Parkdale—High Park.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-4, the second federal budget implementation bill in 2013, and the fourth omnibus bill introduced in the House in the past two years. This time, the Conservatives have pushed the urgency to new levels to get their files through the House.

Bill C-4 was introduced yesterday morning and we have already started debate on a bill that is over 300 pages and that amends or repeals 70 legislative measures. This is yet more proof of the Conservatives' absolute contempt for the democratic process.

Once again, the NDP must express its opposition to these heavy-handed tactics. Canadians deserve better.

• (1630)

[*English*]

Canadians were asked to wait for an extra month for their MPs to come back to work here in Ottawa. The Conservatives said the prorogation was necessary and that it was time to reset the government's policy agenda. I certainly agree that the government's policy needs a serious redo, but that is not what Canadians heard last week in the Speech from the Throne.

Instead, despite soaring youth unemployment and nearly 300,000 more people unemployed today than before the recession, the Conservatives failed to lay out a jobs plan or take concrete action that would create good middle-class jobs.

Just today, the Bank of Canada issued a report. It said that it had significantly overestimated growth in its last report and has now lowered GDP growth projections for 2013, 2014 and 2015. That is the kind of job the government is doing. The Bank of Canada is now predicting that in 2013, GDP growth will be a meagre 1.6%. Clearly, the government's economic agenda is failing. The Prime Minister has failed miserably. I will say it again. The Prime Minister's economic agenda has failed miserably.

Government Orders

In fact, the government is pushing ahead with its plan to claw back \$300 million from skills funding for the most vulnerable workers, even in the face of united opposition from the premiers. Bill C-4 focuses more on gutting Canadians' right to a safe and healthy workplace and prompting conflict with civil servants than it does on job creation.

Despite all the Conservative spin, Canadians know that only New Democrats can be trusted to put their needs first and to give middle-class Canadians a fair break. Canadians need a government committed to genuine consultation to get to the bottom of this. Only by working together and pulling in the same direction can we have an economy performing to meet the needs of all Canadians and Canadian businesses.

The NDP vision for the economy is one where we maximize the opportunities we have, based on our enormous advantages as a country, to deliver the best we can for Canadians.

[Translation]

Since the 2008 financial crisis, the economy has been at the heart of Canadians' concerns. We have faced an endless number of foreign economic threats. Our recovery was marked by fear of a debt spiral in Europe and political impasses in the United States.

Today, the Canadian economy is facing new challenges. We still face threats abroad, but we are also facing threats that originate much closer to home.

[English]

Canadian families are struggling like never before. They are caught between a rising cost of living on the one hand and disappearing middle-class jobs on the other. Over the last 35 years, income is up for the top 20% of wage earners, but down for the bottom 80%. Our economy has grown nearly 150% over that 35-year period of time and yet median household income has declined by 7%.

Professor Miles Corak at the University of Ottawa said:

Over the last couple of decades or more the median wage rate has hardly changed, and wage rates below the halfway point have fallen by five to as much as 10 percentage points....

This means that many families who face lower wage rates have to run harder just to stand still....

In my own city of Toronto, a recent report by the Daily Bread Food Bank found that almost one-quarter of the people accessing food banks have someone in their households who is working. In the 905 region, that number is almost 40%. Therefore, paid employment, even a full-time job, is clearly not always a ticket out of hunger and poverty. That is shocking. That is simply unacceptable.

In September, Statistics Canada announced that household debt had reached a whopping 166% of disposable income. More than one in eight households has a debt-to-income ratio higher than 250%; that is one in eight. Mortgage debt alone now stands at roughly one trillion dollars. In many communities the cost of housing is squeezing household budgets.

A report by the Toronto Community Foundation found that according to 2001 figures, almost one-third of Toronto region households are spending 30% or more of their total income just on

housing. Among the city's renters, the number was even higher, at over 43%. According to the OECD, the Canadian housing market is now among the most overvalued in the world. Taken as a whole, Canadian household debt is now dangerously close to American debt levels just prior to the financial crisis of 2008.

Before leaving his post as governor, Mark Carney warned that mounting household debt may force the Bank of Canada to pull back on economic stimulus. While the rate of growth of household debt has slowed somewhat since Mr. Carney's departure, the Bank of Canada says that household debt is still the "biggest domestic risk" facing our economy.

All of this, the rising cost of living, coupled with stagnating wages, has major implications for domestic demands. After all, if a consumer-driven economy is to succeed, consumers need money in their pockets to spend. This is, of course, what every business knows, especially small businesses.

Earlier this year, *The Economist* magazine remarked on Canada's economy:

...five years on, consumers are showing signs of flagging. ...So the authorities are casting around for another source of growth. The trouble is they cannot seem to find one.

The Conservatives promised to focus on affordability in their throne speech with a so-called "consumer first" agenda for the new session of Parliament, but Bill C-4 makes no progress for Canadian consumers. The Conservatives have made big promises about protecting consumers for seven years, but have failed time and time again to help consumers in need and consistently vote against consumer-friendly provisions put forward by the opposition.

Consumers are failed by the government. The Conservatives have been big on talk and very small on follow-through. By contrast, New Democrats have led the way on consumer protection and will be looking to hold the government members to account to ensure their actions match their words. We know that any serious attempt to tackle this complex issue has to start with an honest look at the economic conditions facing business and labour markets as well as families.

● (1635)

[Translation]

The Canadian labour market is facing significant challenges, in both the short and medium terms. Today, our unemployment rate remains stubbornly high. There is only one position available for every 6.5 Canadians looking for a job.

Even worse, youth unemployment is now over 14%, which means that the next generation of workers cannot gain the experience they will need to replace the older generation.

[English]

In my city of Toronto, one in five youth is unemployed. With households and workers facing such challenges, it is no wonder our business sector is struggling as well. We have heard the statistics, \$600 billion in private money sitting on the sidelines. The former governor of the Bank of Canada has spoken about this.

Government Orders

While the Minister of Finance admonishes business to just step up and invest, New Democrats are more interested in working with business leaders, listening to them and finding out what the barriers are to them investing in the current climate. While Liberal and Conservative governments sat back and watched a generation of middle-class jobs disappear in Canada, pausing occasionally to wag their fingers at business for not doing better, we are more interested in working together, pulling together to create the next generation of middle-class jobs here in Canada.

Let us talk about those jobs, an area that the Conservatives have continually failed to take any action on, even in four omnibus budget bills. The real question is this. What kind of jobs are we creating?

Simply put, we want Canada to own the most profitable and productive slice of the global supply chain, 21st century knowledge economy jobs, in the most modern, innovative and energy-efficient industries, instead of falling further behind under the current government. I know that is easier said than done. However, the fact is that with as many challenges as we have ahead of us we have opportunities too. Canada has many advantages. Canada is among the most entrepreneurial countries in the world. Even through the worst of the recession, Canadian small businesses continued to thrive and multiply.

Yet one of the most disturbing trends in Canadian business development is that alarmingly few of those small businesses are growing into medium businesses and beyond. From 2006 to 2010, Canada lost more than 1,500 medium-size businesses, even as the number of small and large businesses grew. During that period, mid-size businesses were 10 times as likely to shrink or shut down as they were to grow.

Bank of Canada Governor Stephen Poloz told the Vancouver Board of Trade:

A characteristic of a naturally growing economy is a steady increase in the population of companies. However, for five years after the start of the crisis, we saw virtually no increase in the population of Canadian companies.

This matters, a lot.

To maximize our potential we need effective education and skills training programs so that we have innovative companies ready to adapt to a changing global economy. This means doing the best job possible to tap into first nation communities so that they can develop to their full potential, while providing a badly needed skilled workforce, especially in remote areas.

Under the current government, a generation of young Canadians is facing double-digit unemployment; precarious, uncertain, low-paid jobs; and an equally uncertain future. The unemployment rate fell in September, but only because 20,000 young Canadians gave up searching for work. Yet Bill C-4 has only deafening silence to offer on youth employment. Instead, the Conservatives are focused on ensuring that Canadian workplaces will be less healthy, less safe and less secure for workers in the future. It makes no sense.

● (1640)

[*Translation*]

Canadians know that the NDP is the party most focused on the next generation. New Democrats have proposed a job creation tax credit for small and medium-sized businesses as well as large

corporations. Therefore, the NDP is targeting businesses that create new jobs and contribute to economic growth.

Under the NDP proposal, companies could receive up to \$1,000 for hiring a young employee and an additional \$1,000 in compensation for the training of that employee. The tax credit would be doubled in the regions with particularly high youth unemployment rates.

The NDP tax credit for hiring young people would benefit both young workers and the companies that hire them. Canadians do not want to be left behind or told that they have to settle for less.

We want to do better, improve the situation and show leadership. These are our objectives.

● (1645)

[*English*]

In the 21st-century global economy, Canadian cities will be the engines of economic growth. Cities are the economic hub that brings together the mix of investment, technology and talent that allows our economy to thrive. There is a growing body of research that highlights the key cluster effect that cities play in our larger, macroeconomic picture, and the role that government can play in bringing these elements together. In my own city of Toronto, we have a film and television industry that is growing at the rate of 25%, more than double the economic growth rate of China, vastly outpacing the industry as a whole because of a partnership between industry, labour and government that has delivered these results. We need more models like that. Unfortunately, we are faced with a government that does not focus on the vital role that cities play as engines of economic growth.

Bill C-4 offers nothing for cities to address the massive infrastructure deficit that is a drag on our economy. In fact the PBO revealed that under the guise of a long-term infrastructure funding plan of \$50 billion over 10 years, the Conservatives had actually cut infrastructure funding in budget 2013 by \$5.8 billion. This is over the next few years. It is easy to make promises for years when they will not even be in government, I suppose.

What is needed is a serious commitment to sustainable and predictable funding in our urban centres. There are some things we can just do better when we work together. Investing in our future is one of them.

Government Orders

We should be asking ourselves what we can do better as a nation, what we can do together in addition to our efforts as families and communities. The Conservative government keeps telling Canadians, “We’ll cut your taxes, but you’re on your own. Don’t count on us”. Services are being cut back. Programs are being cut back. Conservatives, again in this bill, are telling Canadians that they are on their own to ensure safe and healthy workplaces. When it comes to the needs of the country’s veterans, when it comes to EI financing and taking real action for a more prosperous Canada for all Canadians, they say, “you are on your own”.

Speaking to Canadians across this country, I know that people still believe we need to work together to build for a better tomorrow.

Canadians understand governments have a role to play in supporting the economic conditions that improve their lives. In dealing with broad economic problems, we need solutions that address all sides of the ledger: creating good, high-quality jobs; making life more affordable for families; encouraging Canadians to save and invest for retirement; fostering the conditions for businesses and communities to succeed; ensuring all Canadians have a place to live; investing in needed infrastructure such as transit; taking a co-operative approach with the provinces on education and training; building a future full of opportunities for Canada’s youth.

We need a balanced approach that will help us succeed. New Democrats can do better. We know that Canadians deserve better and New Democrats will stand up for Canadians every day until they get better.

In my time remaining, I move:

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word “That” and substituting the following:

this House decline to give second reading to Bill C-4, A second act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 21, 2013 and other measures, because it:

- (a) decreases transparency and erodes democratic process by amending 70 different pieces of legislation, many of which are not related to budgetary measures;
- (b) dismantles health and safety protections for Canadian workers, affecting their right to refuse unsafe work;
- (c) increases the likelihood of strikes by eliminating binding arbitration as an option for public sector workers; and
- (d) eliminates the independent Canada Employment Insurance Financing Board, allowing the government to continue playing politics with employment insurance rate setting.

• (1650)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The amendment is admissible.

Questions and comments. The hon. member for Medicine Hat.

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to the hon. member’s comments on the budget. It is interesting to note that she really condemned our government for not having an economic action plan. However, somewhere along the line, she has absolutely failed to recognize that we have created over one million jobs since the end of the recession. It sounds to me like we are getting it done.

My question for the member is how a \$21-billion carbon tax, installed by the NDP, would help the Canadian economy.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question and his rapt attention during my remarks.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer estimates that the overall impact of budget 2012, the fiscal update in 2012, and budget 2013 will mean a loss of 67,000 jobs by the year 2017 and that there will be a reduction in GDP by almost two-thirds of a percentage point. I understand that he has some points that have been given to him to make, but we are falling behind other countries that are doing better on growth: the U.S., Scandinavian nations, Australia, and New Zealand, many of our trading partners.

The IMF has predicted that the Canadian economy will continue to be held back by high levels of household debt. Part of this is about the decline in middle-class jobs, growing inequality in the country, and the government’s failure to create good jobs for Canadians so that they can get ahead and give their kids the best start possible.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member made reference to infrastructure. There is absolutely no doubt that investment in infrastructure throughout our country is absolutely essential. We need a commitment to it.

One of the things I have felt is often overlooked when we talk about infrastructure is our national housing stock and the importance of investing in rehabilitation assistance programs for improvements to our housing stock. Some of these programs date way back to the 1970s. It is, in fact, a part of our Canadian infrastructure and something we should be concerned about.

Would the member like to provide some thoughts as to how important it is at the government level that we are prepared to set priorities for investing in and improving our national housing stock?

• (1655)

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for that serious question. In a country where the cost of housing is eating up a bigger share of the budgets of Canadians and where the issue of homelessness is still a massive problem for so many Canadians right across this country, it is shocking that the current government does not even mention housing and homelessness in this budget implementation act, Bill C-4. It is sad that there is so little action taking place on this pressing issue.

I understand the point the member is making. There is housing stock in co-op housing and elsewhere that is in need of investment for maintenance. There is nothing in this budget to provide for that. I am sorry also that in the 1990s, the Liberals cancelled the national housing strategy. That was a terrible blow to housing funding in this country.

Government Orders

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for a very good overview of this budget bill. All I can see here is a tax on Canadians: municipalities, veterans, civil servants, credit unions, scientists, and environmentalists. I can only assume that this is the government's new enemies list.

What concerns me most is how this budget bill would target Canadians in the workplace and change Canadians' absolute right to healthy and safe workplaces. Every April, I go to a day of mourning that recognizes the workers, the men and women, who have lost their lives in preventable situations, in situations where these tragedies should never have occurred. I wonder how putting this kind of change in a budget bill can possibly be good for Canadian families.

Ms. Peggy Nash: I thank my colleague from London—Fanshawe for this question about occupational health and safety. I know her long-time and serious commitment to this issue. It is also an issue that so many of us have lived.

Working people know their own jobs best, and they know if they are working in a hazardous or risky situation. The rights working people have developed over the years to know about dangers in the workplace, to be informed, and to refuse unsafe work were hard fought for. Employers resisted them, but they have made our workplaces safer and healthier over the years. That the Conservatives would want to undermine the health and safety of Canadians in the workplace is unbelievable.

It makes no sense. It is not only dangerous for working people, it makes no business sense. It is bad for businesses. It is a bad direction the current government is taking our country.

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, here we go again. At over 300 pages, Bill C-4 is the latest in a long line of bloated Conservative omnibus bills.

Half of what is in this bill is totally unrelated to the budget. It contains important and worrisome changes to the Canada Labour Code, the National Research Council, the Veterans Review and Appeal Board, the immigration regime, the collective bargaining rights of public sector employees across Canada, and the Supreme Court Act.

In 1994, the leader of the opposition, the current Prime Minister, questioned how members could properly represent their constituents when forced to vote on omnibus budget bills.

Why does the hon. member think the Conservatives no longer recognize the undemocratic, anti-democratic nature of such omnibus bills?

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, I suspect that there are members in the Conservative caucus who are also very uncomfortable with these omnibus budget bills.

Canadians know that this is not good process, that this is not how we should be making our laws. It is not good process to have a grab bag of issues and concerns from different caucus members thrown into one omnibus budget bill. There is no reason to do that, unless the Conservatives do not want democratic debate, do not want Canadians to know what they are doing, or are not proud of what they are doing. It is a sad state of our democracy that the government

persists time and time again with omnibus budget bills. I hear about it at the doorstep when I talk to Canadians.

Part of this budget implementation bill would correct mistakes from previous budget implementation acts that were put through with way too much haste; for example, doubling the amount of tax that credit unions would pay vis-à-vis Canada's major banks. That was a change the government made in a previous omnibus budget implementation act.

It makes no sense. It is a bad way to do legislation.

● (1700)

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time today with my colleague and friend, the MP for Cape Breton—Canso.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Kings—Hants may know that this is the first round in speeches with respect to the bill that is before us.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, I think you will find that there is unanimous consent.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member is seeking unanimous consent of the House to split his time with the hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso. Does the hon. member for Kings—Hants have unanimous consent to proceed in this fashion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak about this latest budget bill.

It is another omnibus budget bill. It is 308 pages in length, and there are 472 separate clauses, including amendments to the Supreme Court Act to ensure that Justice Nadon qualifies for the Supreme Court and to correct a mistake that the Conservatives seem to have made during the nomination process.

There is much in this bill that has absolutely nothing to do with the budget. The government is, in fact, proposing to overhaul labour relations with the public service, which is one of the reasons my friend and colleague, the member for Cape Breton—Canso, will be speaking to that issue today as the critic in areas of labour for the Liberal Party and its caucus.

Last night I saw a spectacle that I have not seen in almost 17 years in this place, which was that of a government that was incapable of organizing a budget briefing for members of Parliament. The budget briefing had to be called off because the government did not have its act together: it forgot to order translations for the meeting.

Sadly, it is part of a growing pattern of incompetence from the Conservative government and its finance minister. This is the finance minister who has added over \$150 billion to our national debt with his reckless spending and his bad fiscal management.

Government Orders

Yesterday the finance minister was asked a very simple question. The throne speech told us recently that there would be balanced budget legislation forthcoming; the question to the minister yesterday was to help clarify what that balanced budget legislation would mean. The throne speech told us that the balanced budget legislation would “require balanced budgets during normal economic times”, and yesterday the minister was asked to define “normal economic times”. He responded that normal economic times are times when the government is not in deficit.

Today the minister seemed to confirm that his balanced budget legislation would only require balanced budgets when the budget is already balanced. It is no wonder that so many Canadians are losing faith both in this minister and in the Conservative government's management of the Canadian economy.

Now we have this budget bill, a bill that utterly fails to address the real concerns facing middle-class Canadian families. Either these failures are part of a systemic problem or else they speak to an effort of the government to distract Canadians from some of its recent scandals.

For instance, the government is picking a fight with the public service, a gratuitous fight at a time when we need to work with the public service to deliver better services for Canadians and better results for taxpayers. The Conservatives are picking this fight, and I believe that it is in fact to distract Canadians. This big fight with the public service is to distract Canadians from the government's growing list of scandals, the most recent of which is the Duffy-Wright-Prime Minister's Office scandal.

We all know that on June 5, the Prime Minister said in the House that Mr. Wright acted alone and that they were not only his decisions but that they were not communicated to the Prime Minister or to any members of his office. It has become very clear in recent days and weeks that this is not true.

On February 13, the Prime Minister defended Senator Pamela Wallin and said that her expenses were fine. He stood by her and her expenses. Now the government realizes it is mired in scandal and is trying to change the channel. That is why it is picking the fight with the public service union at this time.

In this budget bill, over 80 pages of the roughly 300 pages are devoted to overhauling relations with the public service. This is something that ought to have been achieved, if in fact there was a legitimate public policy issue, in a separate piece of legislation dealt with by the government operations committee, rather than by lumping it into a large omnibus budget bill to be dealt with by the finance committee.

The government is having trouble changing the channel away from scandals. It is trying to pick these fights, but the reality is that it cannot change the channel; the Prime Minister cannot even find the remote control. Perhaps Nigel Wright took the remote control with him when he left, along with all those files from the PMO.

• (1705)

Speaking of changing the channel, I have never seen a Speech from the Throne in which one of the principal focuses has been on the unbundling of cable TV channels. I do not think there is any country in the British commonwealth that has devoted so much ink

in a throne speech to cable TV regulation. It is not part of any grand vision for the country that addresses the real economic challenges of Canadian families, and the fact is that middle-class families are feeling squeezed. They have record high levels of personal debt, they can barely make ends meet today when we have record low levels of interest rates, and they are petrified as to what will happen in the future as rates inevitably go up.

Middle-class Canadians have seen good-paying jobs replaced by part-time work, and for young Canadians there are still 224,000 fewer jobs today than before the downturn. The gap between Canada's youth unemployment and the so-called adult unemployment rate for people 25 years of age or older hit an all-time high this year. With the economy sputtering forward, our youth are being left behind, and this is not affecting just young Canadians: it is affecting their parents and, in many cases, their grandparents, who are footing the bills. According to TD Bank, more than half of baby-boom parents are providing financial support to adult children who are no longer in school and 43% have allowed their adult children to live at home rent-free for extended periods.

[*Translation*]

This is also contributing to higher household debt and lower retirement savings for parents.

It is time for the government to get serious about this issue and provide more support for young Canadians in need.

[*English*]

Helping adult children make ends meet is actually leading middle-class Canadian families into taking on a lot of additional debt and dipping into their retirement savings. It is also one of the reasons that Canadian parents 55 years or older are two and a half times more likely to refinance their mortgage if they have children than if they do not, and their average household debt is actually twice that of their childless peers. They are more likely to take on higher non-mortgage debt, such as higher credit card debt and lines of credit, which is one of the reasons non-mortgage debt in Canada continues to climb, with an average Canadian now owing over \$27,000 in non-mortgage debt.

The Conservatives refuse to acknowledge these real financial pressures for young Canadians and their families, and instead of helping youth get meaningful work experience, they have actually cut the government's own summer jobs program by half. In their latest throne speech, more time was spent talking about finding the Franklin expedition than in helping Canadian youth find jobs. This is a government that is out of touch. It wants to make cable TV cheaper for Canadian youth, but it is doing nothing to help youth get away from the TV and into meaningful work opportunities.

Government Orders

The throne speech never once acknowledged the record level of high personal debt in Canada, and neither did this budget implementation bill. This bill does nothing to kick-start the Canadian economy for young Canadians and create jobs. It does nothing to help young Canadians and their struggling families and, consistent with the throne speech, it offers no real vision for the future.

Certainly some freezing of EI rates and keeping the small business tax credit in place helps, but it is nothing new and it is not good enough. Right now the economy is not growing. Just this morning the Bank of Canada slashed its growth forecast for the Canadian economy yet again. It says that the Canadian economy will not rebound to capacity until, at the very earliest, the end of 2015. The fact is that Canada has the worst record of economic growth under the current Prime Minister; R.B. Bennett was the second worst.

Right now there are too many young Canadians looking for work and there are too many middle-class Canadians struggling under crushing levels of personal debt, \$1.65 for every \$1 of annual income being the average. In fact, this bill would actually make things worse, for instance, for the mining sector, and changes to the labour-sponsored venture capital tax credit for investments in innovation in small business will make it harder for small businesses to attract investment and growth.

• (1710)

This budget actually corrects some mistakes made in the last budget implementation act. The last budget implementation act mistakenly doubled taxes on credit unions. Imagine. This budget implementation act corrects mistakes made in the last budget implementation act. One of the laws of unintended consequences of omnibus bills is that we see these mistakes made in the acts in the first place.

This tired, out-of-touch Conservative government, mired in scandal, devoid of vision, is offering nothing to help young Canadians and their struggling middle-class families. Canadians are tired of a government trying to change the channel. What they really want is to change the government. They want hope for a better future, pride in a stronger Canada and some positive vision and ideas for the future. That is what the Liberal Party and a future Liberal government is offering to Canadians.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before we begin the period of time for questions and comments, I would remind all members, particularly when we just have five minutes, to keep their interventions to no more than a minute so more members can participate.

Questions and comments, the hon. minister of state for foreign affairs.

Hon. Lynne Yelich (Minister of State (Foreign Affairs and Consular), CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the areas that helped everyone, including young people, was our cutting of taxes, personal taxes, consumption, business and excise, and much more. It particularly helped young people when we cut the GST from 7% to 5%.

What interested me was the comment the member made on mining. I believe one of his colleagues has introduced a bill that directly targets our mining in Canada. Canadian mining companies

and the sector are very concerned. I wonder if that member will support or speak against that particular bill because mining is very important to Canada, as he suggests, and he is worried about investment. However, the mining companies are very worried about that bill. After we have finished this debate, I believe that particular bill will be debated. I wonder what he would suggest for that bill.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to congratulate the minister on her new role.

I think as minister of state for foreign affairs, it is important for her to have an understanding that strong corporate social responsibility—environmental governance, high labour standards and respect for human rights—is actually something that many Canadian mining companies are providing throughout the world. In fact, we can raise the bar further. We can do more to strengthen the brand of Canada in the world, with strong standards of CSR.

Mining is something that we are exceptionally good at as a country. It is an area where we are creating good jobs in Canada and in other countries. I do not think corporate social responsibility is something that Canadian mining companies are trying to avoid. I think it is something that Canadian mining companies are increasingly embracing.

Through Canadian mining companies acting responsibly as they grow business and develop opportunities around the world, we can build a better, more stable and sustainable world.

• (1715)

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I note with interest that this supposed budget implementation bill is, in fact, a grab bag of things totally unrelated to the budget. One very obvious example is the section about Supreme Court judges.

I find it interesting to see what is happening in Quebec these days. The federal government did a poor job of handling issues raised by the latest Supreme Court appointment. It is now attempting to make some changes, as we can see. However, the catch-all nature of the bill makes it impossible to properly handle such an important issue as Supreme Court appointments, a constitutional issue. This really deserves a separate bill, apart from the omnibus bill.

Could my colleague comment on the grab bag style of the bill? It is even more of a catch-all than the previous ones. It mixes together things that are not connected in any way.

Hon. Scott Brison: I totally agree with my colleague, Mr. Speaker.

The fact that the government would seek to amend the provisions of the Supreme Court Act relating to court appointments in its budget implementation bill is ludicrous. In fact, it makes no sense and it is an insult to Quebecers.

[English]

It is again correcting a mistake that the government made earlier when it followed a process of the appointment for Justice Nadon, ignoring what the requirements actually were. Let us imagine a government that ignores the law in appointing a Supreme Court judge. It makes absolutely no sense.

Government Orders

To double the insult and to actually include that in a budget implementation bill makes a farce of the whole process.

[*Translation*]

BILL C-4—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to advise that an agreement could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Order 78(1) or Standing Order 78(2) with respect to the second reading stage of Bill C-4, A second act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 21, 2013 and other measures.

Under the provisions of Standing Order 78(3), I give notice that a minister of the Crown will propose at the next sitting a motion to allot a specific number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of proceedings at the said stage.

I would like to give the House the courtesy of knowing that I intend to propose that four further days of debate be allotted, in addition to today, for a total of five days.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I have no doubt the House appreciates the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons giving notice.

[*English*]

SECOND READING

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to first thank the House for allowing unanimous consent so that I could take part in this debate, which was noted by my friend and colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour. He was not sure whether it was because the House had anticipated my comments so much and were so looking forward to what I had to say, or more so that they liked to limit my friend and colleague from Kings—Hants to 10 minutes. Whatever the rationale was, I appreciate the House allowing me to go forward.

I want to speak about the principles behind some aspects of the legislation. One of the comments that the parliamentary secretary mentioned when he led off the debate today was that it was not strange to have a bill of this size with so many components in it. It is 321 pages, but he said the last four bills have been of similar size.

The last four bills have been presented by the same government and concerns have been raised. Certainly the opposition parties voiced their disapproval with such a practice on those four occasions, but he was able to justify the bill by saying the last four were presented in a very similar manner. That would be like an NHL coach saying, “I didn’t make the playoffs the last four years, but now you decide to fire me in my fifth year”. The unfortunate part is that maybe we do not get an opportunity to fire the government for another couple of years, but that day too shall come.

I want to talk about what was mentioned by my colleague from Kings—Hants with regard to some of the aspects of this piece of legislation as it deals with changing labour relationships in this country. I will read these into the record.

I want to talk about principles that a government must respect in creating legislation, such as what we are debating today, that affects millions of Canadians. In particular, it affects over 1.2 million hard-

working Canadians who work in federal industries and the public service.

For Canadians, the affected workers in particular, to believe in these laws, they must have faith and trust in their government. However, trust and respect does not come with some gun pointed to their heads. Governing is about striking balance, a balance between things such as the environment and the economy, between one part of the country and the other, between social and economic values, and between the interests of the employer and the employee. Part of figuring out that balance is listening to people who may not agree with us and respecting the principles of fairness and due process when creating laws that fundamentally affect them. I do not believe there has been a government in recent history that has thrown so many things out of balance and replaced due process and fairness with political expediency than the current Conservative government.

The amendments to labour legislation in the bill are just another example of this. The government is using this omnibus budget bill as a back door to making major changes to the rules affecting collective bargaining in the public service. These changes, without doubt, are being made to weaken the public service unions by stacking the deck in favour of the employer and in this case, the employer is the government.

This type of behaviour only breeds mistrust and disrespect. It is not how we as individuals would expect to be treated and it simply lessens the institution of government when it continues out of control as we have seen under the current government. In order for our employees to prosper, whether it is in private industry or in government or workers in society or the economy at large, we need to have good labour relations. That is fundamental. We need labour relations that respect the interests of the workers and the employer in a fair and balanced manner, respecting due process and developed through real consultation.

● (1720)

Everything the government has done concerning labour relations since getting its majority has not been about striking balance. Instead, it has been about weakening the labour movement as much as possible in both the public and private sectors, from record use and methods used to impose back-to-work legislation to using—and one could say abusing—the private member legislation process as a backdoor way to introduce anti-labour legislation.

Bill C-377 was an obvious example. As we went through the testimony and the witnesses on that particular bill, we saw experts raise concerns about privacy and about the costs incurred, and not just by unions. The government tried to say that Bill C-377 was about union transparency by posting their actuals online. That would be a cost to not just the unions but also to administer it. This is the party of small government. The burden this would have placed on the CRA to administer such a mammoth undertaking would be significant to the treasury.

Government Orders

The government said it was all about openness and transparency. We threw a poison pill in there. We brought an amendment requesting it take the same rules it is asking of organized labour and ensure that our professional organizations play by them as well. Therefore, lawyers, doctors and chambers of commerce would have to post in the same manner as it is asking organized labour to. The Conservatives voted against that. It was not about openness and transparency. It was a poison pill. We did not think those organizations should have to post either. However, we knew that the Conservative government would vote against it because this was an attack on organized labour in this country.

Bill C-525 is now the second example. I expect we will see many more examples soon to come.

Never mind due process. Never mind fairness and balance. These terms mean nothing to the government. Political expediency at all costs is the motto across the aisle. Its fight with labour is based on an ideology that Canadians do not fundamentally believe in, an ideology that believes that if Canada is to prosper, the rights and benefits of workers must be sacrificed.

As a Liberal, I can say that I do not always agree with the labour issues. In past governments we fought with unions and we brought forward back-to-work legislation. However, we have always tried to respect due process. We know that the number one enemy for the Conservative government is labour. There is nothing in this bill that changes my mind. Giving federal employers the power to unilaterally declare parts of the public service an essential service, taking away its right to strike, and removing the option of unions to seek arbitration and settle a dispute to avoid disruption, stacks the deck unequally in the government's favour.

• (1725)

Balance in governing is an ideal every government should strive for, fostering trust and mutual respect as a goal. Labour relations are no different.

We have heard from FETCO, the organization that represents federally regulated industries. We heard from the CLC, which represents the people in those industries. They are both saying that the way to get this right is through consultation and consensus. They want the government to keep its nose out of their business. Instead, it continues to get engaged through private member legislation and aspects of these omnibus bills that continue to tip the scales. It is not just the unions or those workers who are saying this is unfair. The companies themselves see this as being unfair.

That is one of the problems we have with this omnibus approach to presenting legislation. If the government were confident about it, why would it not bring that forward to the House? It has a majority anyway. All we have to do is count. It will pass it anyway. Let us have the debate so it can tell us why it is doing that.

• (1730)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, we again find ourselves with another omnibus budget bill, the second one which the current administration of the government claims to be related to the budget of 2012. Yet there are many provisions, one in particular, that could not possibly be related to the budget. That is the change to the Supreme Court Act because the

difficulty encountered with the appointment of Mr. Justice Nadon only occurred after the Conservatives put forward the budget, so that makes a mockery of the idea that this is a budgetary matter.

However, certainly there are the changes to the Canada Labour Code, as my friend referenced, the systematic attempt to attack fundamental collective bargaining rights and labour rights. I am troubled by what the impact would be on the individual worker, and every worker has the right to refuse dangerous work. The definition of “danger” has been quite watered down and would no longer, for instance, protect the worker from exposure to a threat that could create a chronic health hazard or a threat to reproductive health.

Does my friend have any comments on that?

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, we should not be surprised, but nonetheless every now and then the Conservatives throw one at us and we wonder what they are thinking, as is certainly the one with the Supreme Court reference in it.

In our country, our system is based on three pillars: judicial, administrative and legislative. For the Conservatives to take the highest court in the land and to tweak something that impacts on that court through a budget bill is a first, I am sure. I am sure many are amazed at that particular one.

I do not know the answer to that direct question, though. If the Conservatives pick these fights through these omnibus bills to divert Canadians' attention away from some of the scandals that are going on, such as members of their caucus being charged by Elections Canada or what is going on in the Senate, we opposition members, including I am sure my colleagues in the NDP, would say to break those bills out from the omnibus bill and let us have a discussion. If the planets line up, maybe they could even take some kind of an amendment to improve the legislation. That would be a rare day. I would go out and buy Insta Piks that day because the planets would be aligned.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Cape Breton—Canso for his speech. I travelled to his beautiful region last summer.

Once more, we see the government using an omnibus bill to amend legislation related to employment and labour relations. These pieces of legislation have nothing whatsoever to do with budget implementation.

Last time, the government attacked construction workers by eliminating the Fair Wages and Hours of Labour Act, which guaranteed some trades a minimum wage on federal work sites.

The government is doing the same thing again by meddling in how essential workers are defined, something that was previously negotiated between employers and unions.

Now, the Conservatives are going to impose a definition like petty dictators, limiting the legal right to strike for many workers in public service jobs. On top of that, they are slashing arbitration, which will drive other workers to strike.

I would like to know whether my colleague feels the government wants to force workers to go on strike so that it can then force them back to work with other special laws.

[English]

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, I sat beside my colleague in the hearings on Bill C-377. I know he is very passionate and very capable on labour issues. We heard witness after witness give testimony. We saw none of that reflected in the final report on that bill. It is when ideology really trumps the needs of Canadians and Canadian workers that we all lose.

What is fearful, through the debate here today, is that the number of Canadians who are working for minimum wage has doubled under the current government. The Conservatives are intent on driving wages down in our country, hollowing out the middle class, and it is unions that have really contributed to developing a middle class. It is egregious and it is shameful.

• (1735)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before we recognize the member for York Centre on resuming debate, I would just let him know there are only three minutes remaining in the time allocated for government orders this afternoon. He can at least get started, and of course the remaining time will be available to him when the House next takes up debate on the question.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for York Centre.

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we all know, it is not the quantity of time but rather the quality, as the opposition has so aptly demonstrated to us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to add my comments to the debate on Bill C-4. As my colleague has already so eloquently stated, we are proud of our government's achievements since the storm clouds first gathered over the global economy in 2008. Today, I will focus on the ways economic action plan 2013 helps strengthen Canada's economy in these uncertain times. Be assured, our government remains committed to what matters most to Canadians. That is jobs, job creation and economic growth.

First, our government firmly believes in helping small businesses grow. That is why we have lowered taxes and tariffs, cut red tape and improved conditions for small business. These steps have established a solid foundation that has allowed Canadian businesses to create jobs and drive economic growth. Indeed, by implementing Canada's economic action plan Canada has experienced one of the best economic performances among the G7 countries, both during the global recession and throughout the recovery.

Contrary to what the opposition leaders may believe, Canada is on strong economic footing. Since the depth of the recession over one million net new jobs have been created, most in high-wage

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industries. There are now 605,000 more jobs than at the pre-recession peak. This is the strongest job growth in G7 countries over the course of the recovery. Almost 90% of all jobs created since July of 2009 have been full-time positions with close to 85% of those being in the private sector. Also, growth levels are above pre-recession levels.

That is the best performance in the G7. Both the IMF and the OECD expect Canada to be among the strongest growing economies in the G7 over this year and next. The World Economic Forum has rated Canada's banking system as the world's soundest for the fifth year in a row. Three credit rating agencies, Moody's, Fitch, and Standard and Poor's, have all reaffirmed their top credit rating for Canada and expect it will maintain its triple-A rating in the year ahead. Canada's fiscal fundamentals are solid and they are sustainable.

However, to truly understand the strength behind this performance, one has to consider the hard work that took place long before, through the actions our government took to pay down debt, lower taxes, reduce red tape and promote free trade and innovation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for York Centre will have 17 minutes remaining in his time when the House next resumes debate on the question.

It being 5:38 p.m., the House will proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

TRANSPARENCY OF PAYMENTS MADE BY MINING, OIL AND GAS CORPORATIONS TO FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS ACT

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood is not present to move the order as announced in today's notice paper. Accordingly, the bill will be dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

• (1740)

[English]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise and speak on behalf of the official opposition New Democrats about the important news recently of the tentative agreement reached between Canada and the European Union regarding a comprehensive economic and trade agreement.

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There has been a bit of confusion about the New Democrats' position on this issue, mainly because the Conservatives are attempting to confuse Canadians about the official opposition's position. I am going to talk a bit about that later on, because it does not help the debate on such an important issue in this country and it certainly does not speak well of the political process in this country when politicians are actively trying to mislead Canadians about positions of parties on such important subjects as this.

New Democrats welcome progress toward a comprehensive new trade agreement with the European Union. We believe in expanding and diversifying our trade relationships, particularly to reduce our dependence on the United States. As important as that relationship is, we believe it is healthy for our economy to have a diversified trade relationship with many different regions and countries around the world because we believe that is important for Canadians' economic security.

The NDP has long maintained that Canada should have deeper economic relations with the European Union. These are democratic countries with some of the highest environmental, safety, human rights, and labour standards in the world.

However, New Democrats have said all along that when it comes to trade deals, details matter. Unfortunately, the Conservatives have kept Parliament and Canadians in the dark throughout the negotiations. Talks have been conducted in unprecedented secrecy and with an unacceptable lack of transparency. Despite the recent announcement of a deal, the government still has not shared the text of this agreement with Canadians. In fact, we do not really have a deal yet; we have an agreement in principle, and as we speak right now, negotiations are still continuing in Europe over some of the substantive issues with this agreement. As any lawyer knows, an agreement to agree is no agreement at all.

Significant concerns have been raised by a number of stakeholders in Canada about a potential deal's possible effects on a range of Canadian interests: the future of Canada's dairy farmers, the ability of local governments to pursue economic development, the liability of taxpayers to international lawsuits by multinational corporations, the ability of government to legislate in the public interest, and increases in the cost of prescription drugs. These issues and others all remain big question marks.

We know that there are advantages and compromises in every negotiation. New Democrats will continue to take what we believe is the only responsible approach: we will wait until the full text of the agreement is released, we will analyze its contents carefully, and we will engage in wide consultations with a diverse range of stakeholders—stakeholders ignored by the government, including industry sectoral groups, labour, municipalities, academics, ordinary Canadians, and first nations—to find out what their views are about this agreement so that we can find out how this agreement may impact their interests.

The numbers that the Conservatives have been floating about growth in jobs and GDP as a result of CETA are at best speculative and at worse gross exaggerations. What is undeniable is that they are four years out of date and based on modelling that has been demonstrated to be unrealistic. For instance, for any Canadian watching, this modelling assumes that Canada has full employment,

an unemployment rate of 0%. That is a ridiculous fiction in economic terms, and it shows why we have to be careful about the spin that is being applied by the government.

The Prime Minister has, charitably speaking, been having some serious problems with his credibility recently. When he stands up in the House and says the NDP is opposed to CETA when our position is that we will wait and see what the details are and make up our mind when we have a responsible examination of its impact, he is absolutely doing a disservice to this chamber and to the Canadian public.

Mr. Dan Albas (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to rise in this House to address some of the concerns of the member for Vancouver Kingsway.

I would like to start off by welcoming the question and asking the member to be open-minded, because there are a lot of great things happening in this country, and the comprehensive economic and trade agreement with the European Union is one of them.

The Canada-European Union trade agreement is by far Canada's most ambitious and historic trade initiative, broader in scope and deeper in ambition than the North American Free Trade Agreement. It will open new markets to our exporters throughout the EU and will generate significant benefits for all Canadians.

Our Conservative government has made opening new markets through agreements like the Canada-Europe trade agreement a priority, just one way it is creating jobs and opportunities for Canadians in every region of this great country.

We have released a comprehensive overview that shows clearly that this is a good agreement that will generate significant benefits in every region of Canada and across key sectors of our economy. As with all trade agreements, technical and legal work remains. Our goal is to work as expeditiously as possible through the remaining steps, including ratification, so that Canadian workers and business can access the vast benefits as soon as possible.

The European Union, with its 28 member states, half a billion people, and annual economic activity of almost \$17 trillion is the world's largest economy. A joint Canada-European Union study concluded that a trade agreement could boost Canada's income by \$12 billion annually and bilateral trade by 20%. Put another way, the economic benefit of a far-reaching agreement would be the equivalent of creating almost 80,000 new jobs or increasing the average Canadian household's income by \$1,000.

Of the EU's more than 9,000 tariff lines, approximately 98% will be duty-free for Canadian goods when CETA comes into force. European Union tariffs can be so high as to impose a real burden on Canadian exporters and limit considerably their ability to compete in the EU market.

I will just take a moment to give an example from my riding of Okanagan—Coquihalla. A cherry farmer had sent his crop to a European Union country. He phoned me in quite a bit of distress, because the tariffs had risen dramatically. I think it was in the neighbourhood of 60-odd per cent plus. He was very concerned that he would lose his livelihood.

It is the role of government to make sure that we can deal with these things, to make sure that our growers, whether they be in the Okanagan Valley or right across this great country, can have access.

The member said he does not have the details. He does, but maybe he just has not taken the time to read them and appreciate the wide scope of this agreement. Almost 94% of agricultural tariff lines will be duty-free when this agreement comes into force, rising to 95% when it is fully implemented.

This is a great agreement. We are moving forward to create more opportunities for every sector across this great country, and I encourage the member opposite to be open-minded.

• (1745)

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, if my hon. friends in the Conservative government listens to what the official opposition is saying, they would hear that we, in fact, are exactly open-minded. As for our position, once again stated for them, it is that we are optimistic and are willing to sign and support a good deal with the European Union. The question is whether this is a good deal.

Trade deals are not inherently good or bad. The government could sign a horrendously bad trade agreement. It could sign an excellent trade agreement. It depends on the details, particularly with an agreement that is touted as the most comprehensive and largest trade agreement in Canadian history. Some 28 or 29 chapters of very dense technical information is not something that can be evaluated without understanding the details.

It is like the government selling Canadians a car and talking about how wonderful a car it is, how fast it can go, and all the great features it has, but it will not let Canadians look under the hood or take it for a spin. Nobody would buy a car on those grounds. Nobody is going to accept the agreement on those grounds.

The New Democrats will be open-minded. We will look at this in good faith. We will wait to see the text of this agreement and will evaluate it and consult with Canadians to determine if it is of net benefit to Canada. If it is, we will support it. If it is not, we will not.

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to hear that the NDP is open-minded.

I want to come back to the member's original points and his statement that it was this side of the House that was being misleading on the NDP position. On the day this agreement came out, the NDP was against it; now it is for it, and in between it was not sure about what its position was.

Adjournment Proceedings

We have released a comprehensive overview that shows clearly that this is a very good agreement that will generate significant benefits in every region of our great country and across key sectors of our economy. The NDP just cannot see these benefits. It is blinded by its anti-trade ideology. Canadians will not be fooled; they know the NDP's track record on trade.

I will go back to my area of Okanagan—Coquihalla. When the North American free trade agreement first came in, or its predecessor, the Canada-U.S. free trade agreement, let us bear in mind that there were some vintners who literally said it was going to ruin the B.C. wine industry and ruin the Canadian wine industry and that we should pull out our grapes.

Some people bought into the naysayers, but some people saw it as an opportunity for Canada to compete on the international stage. Now when we look at our industry here in this country, we are very proud of Canadian wines. There is opportunity just like that today in the European Union.

• (1750)

INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I really appreciate about the House is that we have this procedure after hours to be able to do a bit of a follow-through on question period. It is something that I would love to see other legislatures pursue, in particular in my home province of Manitoba.

Having said that, yesterday I was afforded the opportunity to ask a question to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs in regard some of the statements we hear from the government on some critically important issues here in Canada. The question I posed was on the principle of consistency.

In this particular case the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs was talking to francophone media in the province of Quebec, reflecting on the charter of values or even on the issue of the Clarity Act or Bill 99 in regard to a simple majority or a clear majority. The minister was saying one thing in one region of country; then we have other members of the government saying something different in other regions of the country.

It is really very important in normal situations to get the same consistent message out, whether it is to francophone media or anglophone media. That is the reason we chose to ask the question yesterday. In fact, one of my colleagues raised the issue first, and then I was able to follow it with a supplementary question to the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister tried to give the impression that the government was giving one consistent answer. We would like to think that is in fact the case, but the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs still has not come forward and been as clear and decisive as the Prime Minister was in his answer.

This is why I wanted to be able to follow up on this issue. What we are talking about is national unity and human rights, that being the charter of values, and the comments by the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs in regard to that and in regard to the simple majority or 50% plus one in reference to the Clarity Act.

Adjournment Proceedings

What I would ask as a follow-up to the government is for a very clear and relatively concise statement as to what the government's official position is, whether here in Ottawa or in whatever region of the country, coming from ministers, parliamentary secretaries, or members representing the government, on issues such as the charter of values and the Clarity Act. What is the government's perspective on a clear majority? I would be very interested in receiving a detailed response.

• (1755)

Mr. Dan Albas (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, certainly this is an issue that is before the courts. The Prime Minister said it best the other day when he said that the process for dividing the country is best left to the courts.

More importantly, we all believe on this side that debates on the process for dividing the country are best left to the courts. Everyone on this side, including the Minister of Infrastructure, Communities and Intergovernmental Affairs, is an unconditional supporter of the unity of this great country.

I attend French lessons in the beautiful province of Quebec, and when I speak to people, they are very concerned about jobs and economic growth. They are concerned about their families. They are concerned about crime. When this government says that it is going to be focused on the priorities of Canadians, it means all Canadians, including Quebecers. We are working hard on those issues, just as we are working hard on creating more opportunity and growth with the Canada-European Union free trade agreement we discussed earlier and on other matters before us.

I would invite the member opposite to accept my answer but also to join with us as we seek to make sure that every region of this great

country, including his own riding, receives the benefits from that approach focused on the important issues of jobs, growth, and long-term prosperity.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I am sure the member recognizes the importance Canadians assign to having clear, decisive, strong leadership on important issues facing our country.

On the issue of the Clarity Act, for example, Liberals have been very clear that a clear majority would be necessary. We have been very clear on the issue of the charter of values. It is just not acceptable. Would the member not agree that there is a need for strong leadership from the Prime Minister's office and that the same message should be echoed in both languages, no matter what region of the country one happens to be living in or what media personality might be conducting an interview with a particular minister?

Mr. Dan Albas: Again, Mr. Speaker, this government has worked very hard on the priorities of all Canadians. We believe in a strong, united Canada. We believe that our focus should be quite squarely on the economy, on creating opportunities, and on making sure that our families are safe on the streets.

I certainly welcome this discussion tonight, but I would again suggest that the member join with us in seeking to continue to serve Canadians' interests by focusing on their priorities, not waging referendums no one wants.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 5:58 p.m.)

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