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(HANSARD)

Thursday, January 29, 2015

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, January 29, 2015

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1000)

[*English*]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the report of a Canadian parliamentary delegation concerning its visit to the United Kingdom from May 16 to May 20, 2014.

[*Translation*]

I have the honour to lay upon the table the report of the Canadian parliamentary delegation concerning its visit to Macedonia from September 1 to 3, 2014.

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[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the following reports of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Pursuant to Standing Order 104 and 114, I have the honour to present the 30th report regarding membership of the committees of the House. If the House gives its consent, I intend to move concurrence in the 30th report later today.

In addition, I have the honour to present the 31st report of the committee. The committee advises that pursuant to Standing Order 91.1(2), the sub-committee on private members' business met to consider the items added to the order of precedence as a result of the replenishment of Monday, December 8, 2014 and recommends that the items listed herein, which have been determined should not be designated non-votable, be considered by the House.

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 91.1(2) the report is deemed adopted.

ZERO TOLERANCE FOR BARBARIC CULTURAL PRACTICES ACT

Hon. John Duncan (for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration) moved for leave to introduce Bill S-7, An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the Civil Marriage Act and the Criminal Code and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

(Motions deemed adopted and bill read the first time)

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the House gives its consent, I move that the 30th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs presented to the House earlier today be concurred in.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member 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)

* * *

• (1005)

PETITIONS

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of numerous residents of my riding and surrounding areas who are asking the Government of Canada and the House of Commons to commit to adopting international aid policies to support small family farmers, especially women, to recognize their vital role, and to ensure that Canadian policies and programs are developed in consultation with small family farmers and that the rights of small family farmers in the global south are protected.

[*Translation*]

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have before me hundreds of petitions, which I am pleased to present in the House today.

Business of the House

Some of these petitions have to do with creating an ombudsman position for the extractive sector.

CANADA POST

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, other petitions are calling for an end to the cuts at Canada Post.

BELUGAS

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, some of the other petitions are calling for the protection of beluga whales in the St. Lawrence.

CBC/RADIO-CANADA

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Lastly, Mr. Speaker, the final petitions are calling for an end to the cuts to the CBC.

[*English*]

SICKLE CELL DISEASE

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to present to the House today regarding sickle cell disease. Red blood cells harden into long slivers that block veins and arteries, causing injuries to the blood vessels of organs, including the brain and lungs. About 10% of children develop strokes. Children with sickle cell disease are also extremely vulnerable to infection and have periodic health crises that cause terrible pain and difficulty breathing.

The petitioners call upon the House of Commons to adopt Bill C-221.

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to present petitions signed by thousands of Canadians in support of my initiative to secure 10-year multiple entry visas for Canadian citizens travelling to China.

Last year, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry announced an agreement with China that entitles American citizens to receive 10-year multiple entry visas for tourism and business purposes and five-year multiple entry visas for students studying in China. Accordingly, today I introduced a motion calling on the Canadian government to secure the same rights for Canadian citizens.

Our idea would help our business community, assist family members to visit each other, and improve cultural exchanges. It would reduce costs, increase flexibility, and secure maximum opportunities for Canadian citizens who are living in an increasingly global world.

[*Translation*]

PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present two petitions here today.

The first has to do with proportional representation.

[*English*]

The petitioners are from Victoria, Sidney, within my own riding, and Nova Scotia, Langley, and New Brunswick. They are all calling

on the House to review the current perverse, first past the post voting system and to move toward a form of proportional representation based on public consultation.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from residents of the Vancouver area. They are calling for the government to act to make the tanker ban, which is a moratorium established in 1972, legislated and permanent to protect the coast of British Columbia from oil tankers.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to present a petition with respect to affordable child care. The signatories to the petition want to draw the attention of the House to the fact that after nine years of Conservative government, child care costs are soaring, and almost a million kids with working parents have no access to regulated child care spaces. Further, quality child care and early learning offer children a head start in life while easing poverty, strengthening our economy, and expanding women's career opportunities.

Therefore, the petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to work with the provinces and territories to implement the NDP's plan for affordable child care across Canada.

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QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

The Speaker: The Chair would like to take a moment to provide some information to the House regarding the management of private members' business.

[*Translation*]

As members know, after the order of precedence is replenished, the Chair reviews the new items so as to alert the House to bills which at first glance appear to impinge under financial prerogative of the Crown. This allows members the opportunity to intervene in a timely fashion to present their views about the need for those bills to be accompanied by a royal recommendation.

Points of Order

[English]

Accordingly, following the December 8, 2014 replenishment of the order of precedence with 15 new items, I wish to inform the House that there are two bills that give the Chair some concerns as to the spending provisions they contemplate.

● (1010)

[Translation]

These are Bill C-356, An Act respecting a National Strategy for Dementia, standing in the name of the hon. member for Nickel Belt, and Bill C-640, An Act respecting VIA Rail Canada and making consequential amendments to the Canada Transportation Act, standing in the name of the hon. member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

[English]

I would encourage hon. members who would like to make arguments regarding the need for a royal recommendation for these bills, or any of the other bills now on the order of precedence, to do so at an early opportunity.

[Translation]

I thank hon. members for their attention.

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POINTS OF ORDER

DECORUM IN THE HOUSE

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

[English]

Yesterday after votes I would have liked to rise on this point of order regarding the use of telephones in the House. However, I was aware that as you had been interrupted by members of marginal parties, Mr. Speaker, and that you also had an appointment with a dead Scottish poet, I thought I would hold off until this morning.

In chapter 13 of O'Brien and Bosc, House of Commons Procedure and Practice, page 638, on rules of order and decorum, it is clearly stated that the use of cellular telephones is not permitted in the Chamber. Yesterday we voted for about 50 minutes. It took seven pages in yesterday's *Hansard*. During the whole time, there was a member of the House stuck in the corner over there who was animated, talking, using his iPad.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: An iPad is not a telephone.

An hon. member: It is a telephone. It can be used as one.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if I would be allowed to make my point of order, and other members, if they wish to respond, could respond after.

I will give you the reference, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

In response to a point of order raised on September 28, 2005, by the late MP Michel Guimond regarding the hon. Joe Volpe's use of a cell phone in the House, the distinguished and certainly honourable

Karen Redman, who was the chief whip for the Liberal government of the day and whom the member for Ottawa South supported, said:

Mr. Speaker, collectively we know the rule is that no cell phones are to be used in the House and we take this rule very seriously...I certainly take this criticism very seriously and I will endeavour to make sure the members of the government adhere to the rule of no cell phones in the House.

[English]

This is how Speaker Milliken dealt with this:

The use of cell phones is not supposed to happen on the floor and that does include behind the curtains. I have had occasion to chastise hon. members for making this error even behind curtains. They are supposed to go to the lobby to use these things. I would urge all hon. members to cooperate.

We can find this ruling on page 8151 of the House of Commons *Debates*.

The ruling by Speaker Milliken is serious. There are two issues. One is the disturbance telephone calls or using iPads or whatever can cause in the House. Second, the risk that members of Parliament can become subject to outside instructions during votes is serious. It does not matter how gentle is Charlie McCarthy. We have to worry about who really is Edgar Bergen.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Just in case it is not clear, the member who did this during 50 minutes was the hon. member for Ottawa South.

● (1015)

The Speaker: I appreciate the hon. member for Ottawa—Orléans raising this issue. Perhaps we will hear from the member for Ottawa South later on today.

In the future, I would take this opportunity to remind members that with the advancements in telecommunications, members have to be extra sensitive in what they are doing. I am not sure if the member is suggesting that he was using his iPad in some kind of telephone mode, such as FaceTime or Skype.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Mr. Speaker, in response to your query, he was using it either as FaceTime or Skype or some other means. It was definitely in contravention of Speaker Milliken's ruling.

Actually, the member was in the House when Speaker Milliken gave that ruling.

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after the votes last night, I had numerous other members of my caucus who were sitting toward that end of the chamber tell me that they had actually witnessed this and that at several points, the tablet, or whatever device it was, was displayed in such a way as to pan what was going on here. It was clearly visible to other members of the chamber.

This is very disruptive. This is completely inappropriate. It is against all the rules. It went on for an extended period of time and created a fair amount of consternation.

I think this should be nipped in the bud, just to ensure that we do not have a perpetuation of this kind of activity.

The Speaker: Certainly, I will look into it further, and as I said, perhaps we will hear from the hon. member himself and see what comes of that.

*Business of Supply***GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[Translation]***BUSINESS OF SUPPLY**

OPPOSITION MOTION — ANNUAL FIRST MINISTERS' CONFERENCES

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the Prime Minister of Canada should hold annual First Ministers' Conferences.

He said: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Liberal caucus, I am pleased to rise in the House to support one of the commitments made by my leader, the member for Papineau. This is a very simple and obvious commitment completely removed from partisanship. I invite all members of all parties to get behind this commitment by voting for the following motion:

That, in the opinion of the House, the Prime Minister of Canada should hold annual First Ministers' Conferences.

As I said, I am pleased to speak in favour of this motion because it is very clear to me that it has become necessary; however, I am not pleased that it has become necessary. It should not be necessary. It was not necessary under any of the prime ministers before this one.

Since Laurier, all prime ministers of Canada have felt the need to meet with their provincial and territorial counterparts regularly. They met as a group and also held bilateral meetings. It just made sense. It makes sense for any civilized federation. It makes sense to everyone but the Prime Minister.

[English]

In 1906, Prime Minister Laurier called the first joint meeting of premiers and the prime minister. As time went by, these meetings became a regular occurrence. In 2003, the premiers formed the Council of the Federation. The council generally meets twice a year. Unlike traditional first ministers' conferences, where the prime minister invites the premiers, the provinces play the lead role in council meetings, which are coordinated by a provincially funded secretariat.

The Council of the Federation has met 23 times since the member of Parliament for Calgary Southwest became Prime Minister. The Prime Minister has not met his colleagues as a group since January 2009. It is the longest such gap between first ministers meetings in 97 years.

●(1020)

[Translation]

The provincial and territorial premiers are criticizing this affront to the smooth operation of our federation, and rightly so. Meetings between the federal and provincial governments in Canada are almost always complicated. They have caused a lot of headaches for many politicians. They have not always led to successful outcomes. However, they often do, and I am confident in saying that, overall, these meetings have been positive for Canadians.

The Kelowna accord, which was signed with first nation, Métis, and Inuit peoples in 2006, was one of the great success stories of these federal-provincial-territorial negotiations. The current government refused to honour that agreement. One can only imagine the

progress that could have been made had the Kelowna accord become a reality.

Another success story was the 2004 health accord, a joint action plan with a 10-year funding commitment. Unfortunately, the current government ignored the joint plan and unilaterally refused to extend the funding agreement.

Those are the results of the current Prime Minister's unwillingness to collaborate on a joint project. Much of the blame for the problems with the health care system and the poor living conditions of aboriginal people in Canada can be attributed to the current Prime Minister's unwillingness to work with the provinces and territories.

The provincial and territorial premiers are not the only ones the Prime Minister is ignoring. He does not appear to be any more inclined to meet with his NAFTA counterparts. The entire country is suffering because this Prime Minister does not know how to work collegially with others.

If the Prime Minister had a greater sense of collegiality, he would understand what a federation is. He would therefore avoid wasting so much of Canadians' time, money and energy on ventures that undermine the very foundation of our country's federative nature. A sad example of such waste is the pointless and botched Senate reform saga.

[English]

The Prime Minister has spent eight years attempting to achieve fundamental Senate reform, despite the Liberal opposition and literally every expert telling him that he needed to work with the provinces to change the nature of our Senate. In April 2014, the Supreme Court ruled that the Liberals and the experts were correct. Shamefully, the Prime Minister blamed the Chief Justice for this predictable fiasco, when he had only himself to blame for that monumental waste of time and money.

Is he that ignorant of our institutions, or is it plain contempt? A simple, frank, face-to-face meeting between the Prime Minister and his constitutional colleagues could have avoided that debacle.

[Translation]

This is not just about a constitutional principle or a principle of federalism. The absence of first ministers' meetings is having tangible negative consequences for Canadians. Let us look at what is happening right now.

[English]

As oil prices and the dollar fall, as our economy faces uncertainty, it is the responsibility of the Prime Minister of Canada to meet with the premiers and develop a united plan. Under such circumstances, a Liberal government would hold a first ministers' conference.

Because they know how important it is to work together, the premiers will meet tomorrow, a few blocks away from Parliament Hill. Regrettably, they have no scheduled meeting with the Prime Minister in the foreseeable future.

Business of Supply

This is not a symbolic issue. Our federation faces real and significant challenges, from infrastructure renewal to retirement income security and climate change. These challenges can only be tackled successfully if all levels of government are sitting around the same table.

By refusing to meet his constitutional partners around the same table, the Prime Minister shirks his constitutional responsibility. By refusing to pull together the strengths of our federation, he fails all Canadians.

Why does the Prime Minister refuse to live up to his responsibility? Considering the huge challenges we are facing, why does he refuse to bring together the premiers of Canada's provinces and territories in order to work toward solutions that benefit all Canadians?

One has to wonder why the Prime Minister would choose to postpone tabling his budget unilaterally with no consultation with his constitutional colleagues. Most provinces and territories typically table their budgets in April or May of each year, having had the opportunity to see what the federal budget has in store and fine-tune their own budgets accordingly. By delaying the budget until April at the earliest, the federal government has deprived the provinces of that opportunity at a very critical time for all of them.

Regrettably, the Prime Minister's lack of collegiality and understanding of what the federation means does not stop there. Here are a few more ways in which the Prime Minister is hurting Canadians in all provinces and territories.

On infrastructure, the 10-year new building Canada fund, announced in budget 2013, is heavily back-end loaded; until after 2019, very little money will be available to the provinces and municipalities to help them tackle their urgent infrastructure challenges, stimulate the economy, and create jobs. This is wrong. A first ministers' conference would help clarify the needs and establish priorities.

On pensions, the Government of Ontario is currently creating its own version of the Canada pension plan. It is expected to phase in on January 1, 2017.

• (1025)

Other provinces are considering following along. The lack of federal leadership is leading to a patchwork of public pension systems that will act as a barrier to labour mobility in Canada. This should not be allowed to happen. There are much better options, which the Prime Minister might discover should he agree to sit down with his colleagues.

For instance, the Prince Edward Island finance minister, Wes Sheridan, has proposed an expansion of the Canada pension plan that would target the segment of the middle class that Jim Flaherty himself said was not saving enough for retirement.

With respect to old age security, while in Davos, Switzerland, the Prime Minister announced by surprise that the qualifying age for old age security would be raised from 65 to 67. Not only will that unnecessary measure penalize Canadian seniors, particularly the less well off, but it will also have a big impact on the provinces, since many Canadians between 65 and 67 years old will be left to rely on

provincially funded social assistance in the absence of old age security.

With respect to refugees, in April 2012, the federal government announced it would no longer provide money to the provinces for the cost of refugee claimants' health care, a cruel measure, as the Federal Court said. Some provinces have decided to deliver this essential service on their own.

With respect to manpower training, in budget 2013 the federal government announced it would cut the transfers to provinces under labour market development agreements. It simply expected the provinces to contribute their own money to its new unilateral Canada job grant. It took years to sort out a half-baked solution to this mess, which a good first ministers' conference, held at the outset, would have avoided.

With respect to climate change, in the absence of federal leadership, some provinces have taken the lead on Canada's efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. While this has led to some positive results, the absence of federal leadership has prevented much better results from happening for Canada.

The comprehensive economic and trade agreement, CETA, is particularly outrageous. The Province of Newfoundland and Labrador gave its approval to CETA after the federal government agreed to provide \$270 million toward a \$400 million transition fund for its seafood canning industry. Once the agreement was signed, the federal government changed its mind. It is now telling the province that the money was for demonstrable losses in that industry after the agreement was in force. This has resulted in the province signalling a willingness to rescind its support for the agreement, thus breaking our federation's united front on this needed agreement.

In the 18 years I have been actively following federal-provincial relations in this House, never have I witnessed such blatant betrayal of a federal government's commitment toward a province. The letter exchange makes it crystal clear that the federal trade minister did concede that there would be a transition fund to help not only the displaced workers but the whole industry. The expression "demonstrated loss" is nowhere to be seen in the trade minister's letters. This is a pure invention.

The good functioning of a federation requires negotiating in good faith and living up to commitments. The federal government should not retroactively invent conditions that were not in the written agreement between ministers. Premiers, like all Canadians, need a prime minister they can trust.

It is because the Prime Minister is so often unable to live up to his commitments and stick to his words that he does not want to meet his colleagues all together? A lack of trust may be the real issue here.

Business of Supply

•(1030)

However esoteric federal-provincial relationships might appear to many Canadians, all Canadians want their leaders, especially their Prime Minister, to be trustworthy. Sure, a first ministers' conference agenda might include many other items, such as interprovincial trade barriers, energy policy, pipelines and so on, but I think I have made my point clear.

The leader of the Liberal Party has committed to inviting all of the provincial premiers to an annual first ministers' meeting. Today more than ever, that is the right thing to do. This is why I invite all my colleagues to support the following motion:

That, in the opinion of the House, the Prime Minister of Canada should hold annual First Ministers' Conferences.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it goes without saying that the Prime Minister of Canada should meet with Canada's premiers. The NDP fully agrees with that and we have been saying it for a long time now.

I believe this goes beyond collegiality. The Prime Minister has a duty here. This is how Canada was founded.

I fail to understand the Prime Minister's attitude or his vision for working with Canada's premiers. In fact, he has no vision with regard to working with them.

Does the hon. member agree that this goes beyond collegiality, that there is a duty here and that in the future, prime ministers, such as our leader, the hon. member for Outremont and future prime minister, will indeed work with the premiers?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for supporting a motion that, I agree should be self-evident, but is not, for the reasons he mentioned.

The Prime Minister has a hard time working collegially. He likes to meet with people face to face to tell them what to do. He does not like being part of an actual dialogue among peers in a group.

He has a hard time doing that with his own caucus—we know how he treats them—his own ministers, his provincial counterparts and all municipal representatives. Canada as whole is paying the price in every area that I mentioned in my speech, and I am sure that over the course of the day many other areas will be mentioned.

This has tangible consequences. This is not just a question of a constitutional duty, although my colleague is right. This is a question of effectiveness, especially given the economic difficulties we find ourselves in.

•(1035)

[*English*]

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, clearly the Prime Minister meets with premiers of the provinces. He has met with the premiers of Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia, and Alberta. He meets with them to hear their individual concerns and moves forward with those concerns when he meets with cabinet so that everyone understands what those concerns may be.

I will also add—and the member for Trinity—Spadina should know this as well—that when municipal leaders get together with provincial leaders, they are collectively told in advance to show up with a group solution and not individual solutions, because if they do, they are going to fail. That is the way it works. As a former mayor, I know that we work better collectively than we do independently. The fact of the matter is that the Prime Minister, in all likelihood, would want to meet with all of the ministers, but clearly all of the ministers must have a group consensus on what they want to move forward with.

What I would like to know from the member is this. From the perspective of first ministers, can he tell me of one instance when first ministers collectively came together with one sole purpose? I know they never have.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, they will not do so under the current Prime Minister because he is not allowing them to do so. Leadership by the Prime Minister does not mean waiting for a consensus of the provinces; it means building one with them. How can he do that if he does not meet with them?

My hon. colleague is making my point. It is not enough for the Prime Minister to meet his constitutional colleagues one by one. He needs to build a team by sitting at the same table with them as soon as possible. It is his duty to face the challenges our federation is facing.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments from my colleague. I would ask him to provide some comment on the great things that can happen if the Prime Minister decides to meet with the premiers.

We can talk about the Kelowna accord. We can talk about the health care accord. We can even talk about the constitutional changes from the past. Great things can happen if a prime minister is prepared to meet, through invitation, with the premiers and try to build on that consensus. Could the member provide some further comment on that issue?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the comments of all my colleagues up to now. They are all making good points, as I was trying to express in my speech.

I thank my colleague from Winnipeg. I think he is completely right, and I would add something else: meeting with premiers may avoid mistakes.

I gave the example of the saga of the Senate. Over the years, we had this completely useless attempt by the Prime Minister to unilaterally change the nature of the Senate. He could have sat with his colleagues, and all the premiers would have said to the Prime Minister that it would not work, that he could not do it without them. Maybe then the Prime Minister would have listened, or maybe I am too optimistic. Maybe the current Prime Minister is unable to listen in any circumstances.

However, let us try. Let us try a good conference with our constitutional partners. It is certainly something that is needed.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have been a member of Parliament for many years, and this is the first time in Canada's history that a prime minister has refused to meet with the provincial premiers. Nevertheless, we are a federation. The leader of our country does not want to meet with the leaders of each province.

This begs the question: is the Prime Minister the type of person who does not like criticism? Can he take criticism? Is that why he also has difficulty meeting with journalists? He could cut himself off from everything going on around him. You might say that he wants to isolate himself.

If he had the opportunity to hop on a plane every week and travel around the world, to be in the news and meet with leaders of other countries, he would do it. However, he refuses to meet with the leaders of our own provinces to solve our economic and social problems. That is how he is not living up to his responsibilities as the Prime Minister of Canada.

• (1040)

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague, but I believe that he is being somewhat optimistic about the Prime Minister's ability to work with his counterparts in other countries.

For example, he recently refused to meet with his NAFTA colleagues, which is indicative of a prime minister who has trouble working in a collegial manner.

Furthermore, the fact that he has difficulty working with his provincial and territorial counterparts in Canada hinders his ability to do what he has to do for us abroad. For example, his dealings with the province of Newfoundland and Labrador are shameful. After signing an agreement, the government unilaterally revised the agreement and invented conditions that were not originally in it.

It is clear, it must be said and there is no way around it: the Prime Minister is about to turn his back on the Premier of Newfoundland, and therefore all of us, because the agreement has been undermined. Furthermore, this means that all provincial and territorial premiers are wondering whether they can trust this Prime Minister when they sign an agreement with him.

[English]

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am sitting here a bit incredulous, because between the years 2000 and 2006, Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin only found time to meet with the first ministers twice.

I absolutely agree that we need to have a Prime Minister who has meetings with the first ministers. However, looking at the track record of the party at this end, I am really hit by the fact that they only met twice in six years, and at a time when people are losing more and more jobs and the Conservatives are missing in action when it comes to a real job action plan, what we have here is one proposal from the Liberals, which is to have an annual meeting.

Is this the best the Liberals can do?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, my colleague should check the record.

I remember very well the Prime Minister of Canada, Jean Chrétien, had a very successful meeting with premiers on health care just before the 2000 election, and that meeting resulted in a plan.

Then after Prime Minister Martin met with them in 2004, they ended up with an agreement that gave funding to provinces to the point that the current Conservative government did not add a penny over nine years to what had been decided about health care.

If the member wants a successful example of federal-provincial relations, she should look at the Liberal time. She can be confident that the Liberals will be back, and we will have a full relationship with the provinces and territories.

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POINTS OF ORDER

DECORUM IN THE HOUSE

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to respond, if I could, to the point of order raised by the member for Ottawa—Orléans and apologize without equivocation to the House, to the Chair, and to my colleagues.

I did receive a call yesterday during the votes. It is something I should not have done. I can assure the House it is something that will not happen again in the future.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I appreciate the intervention on the part of the hon. member for Ottawa South. Is the member for Ottawa—Orléans rising on the same point?

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Ottawa South for being so forthright. I congratulate him.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I thank both hon. members for their attention to the matter. I think we will consider the matter closed.

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BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—ANNUAL FIRST MINISTERS' CONFERENCES

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today on behalf of the government in response to this opposition day motion. With all of the different challenges facing our country today, this is the best that the Liberals have. It should not be surprise to Canadians. I feel sorry for some of the people in the gallery watching this today who probably come from across this country, and sorry for Canadians who are tuned in and thinking that there are a number of challenges, such as the terrorist threats we face, safety and security, or the economy. There are students and seniors in the gallery who are probably thinking about health care or the environment. They probably thought they would hear about that in the House of Commons today. Instead they hear the Liberals' second priority, because the Liberals' first priority is the legalization of marijuana so that people could go to a corner store and buy a gram of pot. That is their number one economic policy.

Business of Supply

However, their second policy is to have a meeting with provincial premiers. They are so bankrupt of ideas that the only idea they have is to meet with provincial premiers. I could be wrong, but I saw a clip of the Liberal leader when he was asked what he would do on the first day as Prime Minister, and he hummed and hawed at the question. He did not know. It is very uncomfortable for a member of Parliament to watch someone who wants to be the Prime Minister and does not have a clue. He did not know what he would do and said that he would meet with his municipal and provincial counterparts. That is his number one priority, and his party members are providing him some cover here today.

He did not say that he would meet with his finance minister, or the Chief of the Defence Staff, or the public safety minister to make sure of Canada's safety and security. That was not his number one priority, and neither was it to meet with his cabinet. His number one priority was a call other people, because he has no ideas. I have said this a number of times.

Very rarely do I agree with anything the NDP says or any of its policies, but at least New Democrats bring something forward and put it on the table for Canadians to look at. I would vote against it because I think it would ruin the country, but at least they bring something and put it on the table for Canadians to look at, because that is what responsible political parties do who want to govern the country. I might disagree with them. I know that the NDP members clearly disagree with many of the policies we bring forward. That is why members vote against them time and time again, as the member for Acadie—Bathurst said. That is fine, but at least they put something on the table for Canadians to look at.

The best the Liberals have to suggest is to hold a meeting. If they form government, they are going to hold a meeting. They have no ideas of their own, but people will be able to buy pot at the corner store under a Liberal government led by the leader of the third party. They have that policy.

The other policy Liberals have is to close down manufacturing in southwestern Ontario because it is apparently bad for the economy to have manufacturing there. The Liberals want to close that down. In Alberta and Saskatchewan they actually want to transition away from the oil and gas industry because apparently that industry is bad. The Liberals' economic policy is to transition away from manufacturing in Ontario, transition away from oil and gas in Saskatchewan and Alberta, and handcuff our western farmers like they did for generations. Neither do they support the shipbuilding industry in Halifax. We have brought in the largest procurement contract in Canadian history to rebuild that industry in Nova Scotia and British Columbia. They do not support that and want to close those industries down. And with the aerospace industry in Montreal and Quebec, well, not so much because Liberals do not want to buy planes for our Air Force or contribute and be a part of international efforts and have new planes for our military.

●(1045)

Their foreign policy is even funnier. Let us talk about the Liberal leader's solution when it comes to safety and security. What was his solution when people in Iraq were being terrorized, as they still are, by ISIL terrorists, forced onto a mountain and starved? Our Prime Minister said that we were going to deliver humanitarian aid, send

advisors over, and combat these terrorists head-on. He said that we would send the Royal Canadian Air Force. The Liberal leader's plan of attack was to drop Tim Hortons coffee, blankets, and coats for them so they would be a little warmer in the winter. That was it. That was the full Liberal plan.

What have we done since we got into office? We came into office in 2006 when federal-provincial relations were probably at their lowest point in the history of this country, coming off of a decade and a bit of Liberal rule. Anyone who served in provincial politics during the Liberal time in office will never say those were good times for Canadian provinces.

The member talks about Liberal investments in health care. Is he kidding me? I do not recall the first ministers' meeting where the first ministers and territorial ministers of this country agreed to the unilateral cuts of \$50 billion to health and education that were the hallmark of the Liberal government. I do not recall that first ministers' meeting. Perhaps the member might refresh my memory on the date of that particular meeting, when Prime Minister Martin, who was the finance minister at the time, came in and unilaterally cut health and education across the country.

That is the history of Liberal first ministers' meetings.

Remember, of course, that one of the other promises the Liberal government made was regarding the Kyoto accord. We remember that one. The Liberals were going to make massive changes across Canada and our environment was going to get clean. The only problem with that was that it was later found out that not only had they not talked with the provinces about it, but they never had any intention of doing anything about it. In fact, the chief of staff to the former prime minister said that they only said they would do it because it seemed popular and thought it would help them win an election, but they never actually had any desire to implement it.

What have we done? Since 2006, we started to reverse that legacy that the Liberals left. The Prime Minister has met with his provincial counterparts. I think the Prime Minister has met with premiers of this province over 300 times since taking office. Recently, he met with the Premier of the Northwest Territories and with the Premier of Ontario. He recently met with Premier Prentice. These are continuing dialogues that we have.

We know that our first ministers also meet with their counterparts through the annual federal, provincial, and territorial meetings. There are a lot of opportunities for us to discuss issues. I meet with my provincial counterparts, and I would like to think that all members of the House meet with their provincial counterparts on issues that are important to them, regardless of whether they are on this side of the House or not. Members of Parliament have a vested interest in representing their community and bringing those issues back to us, whether they believe in an issue or not. All members of Parliament will try to represent their communities.

Business of Supply

It is not just up to the Prime Minister. Canadians send 308 of us here to represent our communities. If they have no desire to do it through the Liberal Party, then perhaps they should find someone else to do that for them. I would suggest that that is why the Liberal members are in that corner, the NDP members on that side, and we on this side of the House. They forgot what is important to Canadians, and they continue to do so. They can whine and complain about the fact they are not getting their way, but Canadians are getting their way: Canadians are getting a government that represents them.

I will give credit to the NDP. By and large, it is an official opposition that is at least providing a counter. It is providing some solutions, or what it thinks are solutions, and alternatives to what we are bringing forward, and it will be up to Canadians to decide.

● (1050)

What do they get from the Liberals? They get, “We want to talk about it”. The Canadian people do not have time for that. They work hard. In my riding, people get up very early in the morning and make their way to the GO train or the highway to get to work downtown, or they are farmers and get on their tractors. The farmers in my riding have to look at what prices will be for their crops. They have to worry about all kinds of things. The last thing they want, and the last thing they are calling my office about, is whether or not we had a chance to convene the premiers together and have a chat with them. They do not care about that. What they care about is whether or not they will have enough money to invest in their businesses. Do they have enough money to pay their bills? At the end of the month will they have enough money to put savings away for their kids' futures? That is what Canadians actually care about.

When they elect us, and our provincial and municipal counterparts, they assume that we will work to improve our economy and communities. Canadians can assume that if there is a problem, they can approach their member of Parliament. I know my provincial counterpart is a Liberal member of Premier Wynne's cabinet. I have no problem calling her and she has no problem calling me if there is something we need to work on together.

I look at Canada's economic action plan. The Liberals said it could not be done. They said there was no way we could bring forward a stimulus program, an investment program, working with our provincial and municipal counterparts. There was no way we could bring it in on time and on budget and create the kinds of jobs we were saying we could. They said it could not be done with NDP, Liberal, and Conservative governments across the country.

What did we do? We brought in one of the most successful programs in the history of the country. We did it together. I worked with my Liberal counterpart in my riding. I worked with my mayors. We identified what was important for our communities and we made those investments. We got the job done, because people want us to get the job done.

Canadians do not want talk about getting the job done; they just want it done. They want to know that when they go to work, they will have a new paved road they can get to work on. They want to know that their kids will not have to spend hours on a bus to get to school. They want to know that when they need health care, it is going to be there for them. They want to understand, after \$50

billion worth of cuts by the Liberal government, if they can rely on a federal government in the future never to do what the Liberal government did in the 1990s.

On this side of the House we understand that, and that is why we work closely with our provincial counterparts to make sure that it will never happen again. That is why we have increased transfer payments to the provinces. We are continuing to work with our provincial and municipal counterparts because, ultimately, as much as we say it in this place, there is only one taxpayer. It does not matter who or how many times we go to someone, it is the same person.

It does not matter if the person sitting in the gallery watching this is from Ontario or Alberta; they only have one pocket to take money out of, and when almost 50¢ of every dollar goes to politicians at every single level, they do not want us sitting around talking about it. They want us to just get the job done, to roll up our sleeves and do what we are elected to do, and they think that if someone does not have the ideas, they should get out of the way and let the people who do have the ideas get the job done. That is what we are doing. Time and time again, Canadians know they can count on our government to get the job done for them.

The Liberals said that we could not increase transfers to the provinces, cut taxes, and balance the budget. Did we? Absolutely, we got the job done.

I remember as a young kid watching the Liberals when they said there was no way we could have free trade with the United States, that it was impossible, that it would kill Canada if we did it. A Conservative government got it done. The Liberals said that we would never reach a free trade agreement with the European Union and bring the provinces along with us. What did we do? We included them in the negotiations. We achieved a free trade agreement. We got the job done. They said it could not happen. We did it.

The Liberals could not conclude a deal with South Korea. They could not do it. We got the job done. We did this for the Canadian economy. We did it in co-operation with our provincial partners, because that is what a responsible government does. It works with its partners.

● (1055)

Let us look at some of the other things we have accomplished.

I look at our immigration system. For decades, the immigration system did not properly reflect or provide for Canada's needs. We had lost our way. It was not the same system that brought my parents to this country in the fifties and the sixties. The Liberals gave up. They said it could not be done. They said that it could never be changed in a way that the provinces would agree upon. They gave up. We got the job done.

Business of Supply

In the economic action plan we said that we had to bring in a new Canada job grant so Canadians from coast to coast to coast would have access to better jobs and better training. The Liberals gave up. We said it could be done. We got the job done.

The Liberals gave up on labour agreements in the provinces of Ontario and British Columbia. We got the job done.

We continuously work with our provincial, territorial and municipal partners because it is important to all Canadians that we do this. We will continue to do that.

When issues of vital national interest called on us to convene the first ministers' conference in 2009, when the Canadian economy was in trouble, we brought the premiers together. That is how we came up with Canada's economic action plan. It is why it has been so successful in creating over one million net new jobs. We worked together.

When Ontario found itself in difficulty with respect to the auto sector, we worked with the Liberal provincial government to save the auto sector. We will continue to do that.

What the federation is and what this reflects is the fact that from province to province, territory to territory, and community to community in each of these provinces, it is very different. The realities, the requests and the needs are not exclusive. The premiers and the territorial leaders who approach the Prime Minister have needs of their own in their own communities. That is why it is important to meet with them where they are. That is why the Prime Minister met with Premier Wynn in Toronto. That is why he met with Premier Prentice in Calgary. When our ministers visit different parts of the country, they meet with their provincial and municipal counterparts. They do that because we have to meet them where they are.

It does not reflect the Canada of today to simply suggest that bringing the leaders of the governments to one spot will solve all the problems of the country. That reflects an old view of how this federation works. That is not the new reality of Canada and Canadians do not want to go back to that reality. They do not want to go back to the long, drawn-out constitutional battles that were the hallmark of the Liberal era. Canadians want a government that focuses on their priorities. They want a government that can and will work together with the provinces and has a track record of doing just that, whether it is on the economy, the environment or natural resources. This government gets the job done on behalf of Canadians in communities from coast to coast to coast. We will continue to do that because it is right for Canadians.

We will continue to cut taxes. We will continue to work with our provincial partners. We will continue to open up new markets for our manufacturers. We will not abandon them as the Liberals have suggested we will do. We welcome the Liberals to a debate about policy on the issues that our country faces. They could maybe join us and the NDP in putting things on the table so Canadians can take a look at them. We know it will not happen.

● (1100)

Mr. Bob Dechert: Don't hold your breath.

Mr. Paul Calandra: I will not hold my breath, Mr. Speaker, as the member for Mississauga—Erindale said.

The policies the Liberals have brought forward are quite frightening. The few that they have brought forward, such as the sale of marijuana at corner stores and the closing manufacturing down, are quite frightening. This includes high debt and high taxes. These are the only policies they have brought forward. Based on that and based on what they have brought forward already, maybe it is better for Canadians that the Liberals do not talk about policy.

Our Prime Minister, this government and our members of Parliament have got the job done because we work closely with our provincial and municipal partners, and we will not stop doing that because we understand one thing. There is one taxpayer and that taxpayer does not elect us to talk but elects us to get the job done.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Trinity—Spadina, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, another meeting that never seems to take place is the member's meeting facts. His arguments have never met a fact. It is astonishing to hear what he just said, and I would ask the Speaker to correct the record. However, after listening to 10 minutes of that whining and whimpering, I would be afraid he would start crying all over again.

Meetings do happen. In fact, the member opposite listed the meetings that were successful, but then said that meetings would never provide any basis for success.

One of the most important meetings happened when I was a reporter covering Parliament Hill. It was a meeting between the big city mayors of our country and the then finance minister, Paul Martin. The meeting delivered the gas tax. The meeting delivered the infrastructure funding. These are two policies which the Conservative government has refused to change because they are so successful.

My question is for a group of people that seem to meet only not to meet. The member opposite said that there were 300 meetings with premiers and the Prime Minister since he took office. Besides saying the word "no", could he give us one solid example of when the Conservatives have met and accomplished something? If they have met and accomplished something, why will they not do it again?

● (1105)

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, the member comes from the city of Toronto, which will enjoy some of the massive benefits of Canada's economic action plan, and it does enjoy those massive benefits, whether it is on housing or subways, which will benefit his community. The only people crying in Toronto are the people who elected that member of Parliament to a party that has completely given up.

Members of this caucus met recently with the new mayor of Toronto to talk about Toronto's priorities. We are doing that day in and day out.

What do the people of Toronto want? They want better transportation, which is why we are making the billion dollar investment in transportation.

Business of Supply

When politicians, like that member, on Toronto city council flipped and flopped and could not make a decision, it was up to the federal government to step in and make the decision for the people of Toronto so they could have better transportation. That is what our record is.

Again, the member proves just what the Liberal Party has become: a collection of big talkers with no action. We will take action and we will let him talk, and we will make sure that the people of Toronto are not—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, talking about getting the job done, the member from the Conservative Party will agree that a cut to health care by \$36 billion got the job done. Cutting postal worker door-to-door delivery got the job done. Where there used to be a person delivering mail to people's doors, now those people are having to go out to get their mail. Moving the retirement age from 65 to 67 got the job done. That is a good record for the Conservative government.

However, on the case before us today, we are here not only for action, but to talk. In a democracy we have the right to talk. The premiers of the country have asked to meet with the Prime Minister to talk about their issues, but he has refused. That is an insult to every premier.

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, I just want to correct the member's math. The Liberals actually cut \$50 billion from health care, not \$36 billion. We have increased health care spending to the provinces by 6% a year. Unfortunately, when we look specifically at the province of Ontario and the Liberal premiers of Ontario, they have only reinvested 3% of that 6% into health care. I am not sure what they have done with the other 3%, but their big deficits and failed gas plants might explain where those billions of dollars went. We will continue to do what is right.

When it comes to Canada Post, the member raised a good point. It is unfortunate that decades worth of Liberal lack of action has left Canada Post in a position now where I think it is delivering one billion fewer pieces of mail a year. They never put in place a plan many years ago to reflect the new emerging Canadian economy and how people would communicate. We are doing that. We are allowing our crown corporations to succeed. We are allowing Canadian people to succeed.

When we talk about our seniors, income splitting has benefited our seniors. We increased the old age security. The opposition parties would both take those away from our seniors, from Canadians. We will fight to keep more money in their pockets.

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to the member's speech. He had tons of great information on the history of our country, and on the Prime Minister meeting with the premiers from coast to coast to coast.

Recently Canada has worked with all the provinces and territories to negotiate the labour market agreements and establish the Canada job grant, which will provide literally thousands of Canadians the opportunity to use federal and employer dollars for training so they can build better lives for themselves and their families.

These negotiations took a long time. We negotiated with governments of Conservative, Liberal and NDP stripes. Working together as a federation, we now have a Canada job grant available in every province across the country. Quebec had a great system already in place. It is very similar to the Canada job grant that we have now established in all the provinces and territories.

Could the member elaborate on the impact the Canada job grant can have in providing employment, and why it was so important to work with the provinces to establish this program?

• (1110)

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, the member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley is one of the best members of Parliament that community has ever seen. He is also one of the people who worked very hard to bring forward the Canada job grant, and I thank him for that. I know the people in my community who will use this job grant want to thank him as well.

What this grant does is match skills with people. It gives people the opportunity to find employment and to get the training they need. We did this, magically, by actually working with our provincial partners. They said that it could not be done. Was it done? It absolutely was.

We have brought in the Canada job grant across the country. We got the job done.

What is the Liberal plan for the economy? It is high debt and high taxes. Canadians rejected it once, they rejected it twice, they rejected it three times, and they will reject it a fourth time.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for my friend and colleague from Acadie—Bathurst, I will try to help him out by finishing off some of the thoughts I am sure he did not have time to share.

The \$160 billion added to the national debt, the Conservatives got it done. A 66% increase in Canadians who work for minimum wage under the government, they got it done. A youth unemployment rate that is twice the level of the national average, congratulations, they got it done. Closure of veterans' offices from coast to coast, they got it done. Getting booted off the UN Security Council, the pride of the international community, the Conservatives got it done.

How could meeting with the premiers of the country make it any worse than the job the Conservatives have done?

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, we now have a transition in the Liberal policy.

Business of Supply

Now the Liberals are saying that the Government of Canada, through the economic downturn, should not have been working with the provinces to stimulate the Canadian economy. Now all of a sudden the Liberals do not want us to talk with them.

What did we do? We put together the Council of the Federation in 2009. The Prime Minister met with the premiers. We tackled Canada's economic downturn.

We are one of the first and most successful countries that will bring back a balanced budget. We are the envy of the world in job creation. We are balancing the budget, reducing taxes, making our communities safer, investing in infrastructure and investing in people. We cut taxes for our seniors. We reinvested in health care. We reinvested in education. We brought in the Canada jobs grant.

On every count that matters to Canadians, we are building a bigger, better, stronger, safer Canada despite the fact that the Liberals have given up. We will never give up on making Canada bigger, better and stronger. We will not do it like the Liberals, by increasing taxes and running deficits long into the future.

The kids in the gallery do not deserve that. They deserve a government that will roll up its sleeves and get the job done. That is what the Prime Minister and this government are doing. We will continue to do it long into the future.

Mr. David McQuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties, and I believe if you seek it you will find unanimous consent for the motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, at the conclusion of today's debate on the opposition motion in the name of the Member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion be deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred to Monday, February 2, 2015, at the expiry of the time provided for Government Orders.

• (1115)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Does the hon. member for Ottawa South have unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): 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)

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to join in the debate.

Before I get to the remarks I prepared ahead of time, I just have to comment on the whole notion. The premise of the government's argument was that we do not need to meet at the premier level because all the other meetings we are having work out so well, so there is no need for us to do that. It makes no sense whatsoever, and I think anyone watching this will understand that there really is no defence for a prime minister who refuses to meet with the Council of the Federation. It is just that simple.

I need to say right from the outset that an NDP government would commit clearly to meetings twice a year with the Council of the Federation, once here in the capital and then rotating across the

country, once in a province or territory, then back in the capital. It would be part of the ongoing national discussion that Canadians would have, the kind of discussion we should be having, particularly given the challenges we are now facing here in this country.

I have to also say that I find this passing strange. I understand why the Liberals have brought this in, and this is the only sort of side shot at the Liberals. However, with an election coming, we do not normally lead with our chin. In this millennium, while the Liberals were in power from 2000 to 2006, they met a whole grand total of twice with the Council of the Federation. If the Liberals are saying they will up their game, then indeed let us call it that and they have to up their game, because the last time they were in power they did not live up to what this motion says here today.

If I might, I would like to just take one step back in terms of the context for the discussion we are having today. Under our constitution, the federal government and the provincial governments exist as equals. Again, in our constitution, the federated government with its capital and seat of government here in Ottawa is no more important, has no veto above, and has no ability to dictate to the provinces, because the provinces are 100% equal and sovereign in the areas that they represent and that the constitution defines for provinces.

As a former Ontario cabinet minister myself, I have attended federal-provincial-territorial justice ministers conferences. The key to two equals talking and working together is respect. Respect is the cornerstone for a relationship based on equals.

Here is a bit of housekeeping. I need to mention that I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Victoria.

There is a notion that the federal government and the Prime Minister will decide when they will visit the little peons there in the provinces—when it suits them. When they come together, the government and the Prime Minister may or may not go by and say hello. They will decide that, because of course, being the federal government, they are the big shots. They are number one. They decide when we will meet and when we will not.

That is the attitude, and that is the core of the problem. It is that attitude towards provinces and territories. It is the disrespect shown to sovereign governments under our constitution. That is why it is so important that the Canadian people hear clearly that an NDP government would honour and respect that relationship, and we would meet twice a year, once in the capital here in Ottawa and, rotating around, once in the provinces and territories.

• (1120)

If we accept that it is a relationship of equals and we look at what the government is doing, it makes sense that we would go back and look at what the government said it would do in terms of this relationship when it was running to get that strong, stable, Conservative, majority government that it wanted.

Business of Supply

What was the commitment? On page 42 of the platform on which the government ran are the promises they made to the Canadian people, when they asked them to give them 39% of the vote and they would take 100% of the power. When they also said this is what they would do with this relationship, it sounded so good. The platform states:

Support the important contribution the Council of the Federation is making to strengthening intergovernmental and interprovincial cooperation, expanding the economic and social union in Canada, and advancing the development of common standards and objectives of mutual recognition by all provinces.

What happened to living up to that promise, because that is sure not what we are seeing? That obligation is not being honoured. Instead, we hear, “I will deal with you when I choose to”. That attitude is what has led to this impasse.

The Constitution provides the division of powers. However, there are overlaps. It is not 10 sovereign nations and 3 territories. We are still within one nation. That is why it is called Confederation, as opposed to a unilateral system, which is the way the government wants to act, as if there is only one government and what it says goes.

We have a Constitution that says the delivery of health care is the responsibility of the provinces and yet, from a confederated point of view, the health of all Canadians is obviously in the interest of the national government, which is the government that has the biggest levers of power to leverage the kind of funding that can provide the support for our universal health care system. Therefore, how can it be that a government that says it stands up for Canadian values on a file like universal health care feels it can just ignore the Council of the Federation and there is no need whatsoever to be talking collaboratively about ensuring that, arguably, the most precious thing that Canadians have is the universal health care system? That should be top of mind of every premier and every prime minister at all times, as well as coming together to talk about how to deliver a health care system that meets the needs of our people, especially as the population is getting older.

There is an awful lot of us boomers. We are getting older. The population around the world is getting older. It is not a new problem, not unique to Canada, but we have a unique opportunity to solve it in a made-in-Canada way, which is through the Council of the Federation meeting with the federal government, as equals.

Retirement security is a huge issue. In 2009, the council called for a national summit on retirement security. What was the government's response in the interim? It was a unilateral cut to our income security by telling people that they do not get to collect OAS until they are 67; and let us not forget the insult of announcing it outside of Canada. Not only did the Conservatives not raise it during the election, but they did not have the guts to do it here on our soil when they attacked Canadians' income and retirement security.

In closing, to tackle the issues that matter most, such as the environment, jobs, our health care system, and retirement security issues, we need to be working in co-operation, and that means showing respect, a respect that has been missing from the Prime Minister and the government, and a respect that an NDP government would make front and centre in our relationships with provincial and territorial governments.

● (1125)

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Trinity—Spadina, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before I pose my question, I will just remind the member, as he said he took one shot at the Liberal Party, that there was a premiers conference scheduled for 2006, I believe, and when the election was called not only did we lose the national day care policy, not only did we lose \$2.7 billion for housing, and not only was the Kelowna accord thrown to the rocks, but that meeting went by the way as well. I would just like that to be corrected and shown on the record.

The value of meeting is critical. I know that the member who just rose in the House understands that this is nowhere more critical than in the city of Hamilton, where the steel plants are at risk despite federal meetings that produced a bailout package, where pensions are at risk despite federal meetings where pensions were discussed, and where the economy of southern Ontario and the diversification of the manufacturing base—a goal that I hope all of us in the House share—are at risk because of the fact that we are losing traditional jobs in traditional factories and in traditional steel plants.

I was wondering whether or not there was any indication that anybody from the party opposite, which seems so averse to meeting and cancels free trade talks and trade talks with Mexico and the United States at the drop of a hat, and despite the fact that it has elected people from Hamilton, has convened a meeting to try to save the steel industry and put it back on a solid footing so that all of the industrial base of Ontario—in fact, all of the cities of Ontario—have local steel and local supplies they can rely on as we diversify our economy.

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the response from my friend from Trinity—Spadina. In response to his response to me, I would just point out that in '06 it was not the NDP that threw the Liberals out of power; it was the Canadian people who decided the Liberals needed to be removed from power.

More importantly, moving to ground that we agree on, particularly as it relates to southern Ontario and our shared economy around the Golden Horseshoe, I certainly agree with everything the member has said in terms of the government's record with respect to the steel industry in Hamilton. I think it is fair to say that we could probably apply that right across most of what has been happening in southern Ontario: the lack of concern and the lack of caring.

The member talked about local members. I do not like to attack local members unless there is a really good reason. This is a really good reason. There has not been an adequate response from the government members in our area and from the government. The jobs that matter and the pensions that matter were all treated in a cavalier fashion by the government in terms of the unilateral actions it has had. To this day, the government will still not make public the actual document it signed that has put these jobs and pensions in jeopardy.

Business of Supply

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think it is on the record and absolutely beyond dispute that, since the current Prime Minister took office, he has met with his provincial and territorial counterparts more than 300 times. That is over the course of nine years. I have done the math on that. That is in fact almost three meetings per month. It is a meeting with a provincial or territorial counterpart approximately every 10 days. In fact, it is a meeting with a provincial or territorial counterpart approximately every 7.8 business days.

The member opposite stood up and said that the NDP policy would be to reduce the number of meetings by the prime minister to twice a year, if they are elected.

I know the member's leader, the Leader of the Opposition, does not like to answer yes and no questions, because I tried that with him and he would not do it. However, I will give this member the opportunity to answer a simple yes or no question, which is this. When the member stood up to propose a reduction in the number of meetings by the prime minister, did he know that our Prime Minister has met more than 300 times with his provincial and territorial counterparts since he was elected?

• (1130)

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member can demand that I answer him whatever way he wishes, but I will still answer the way I wish. The way I wish to answer is to go right back to the first point I made.

The member stands up and brags about these 300 meetings. Can he imagine what would happen if there was just one with all the premiers at one time?

The member is trying to suggest that the 300 number would go down to two. That makes absolutely no sense at all, just as it makes no sense at all for the government to talk about how productive it is when, at the ministerial level or at the minister of state level or even at a parliamentary secretary level, there is respectful dialogue between the federal government and the provinces and territories.

I would extrapolate from the member's comments that the 300 times is meant to say that those were 300 good meetings and 300 good things happened. I am not questioning the veracity of that. However, I am suggesting that starting to have more regular meetings with the Council of the Federation makes a lot more sense than telling it to hit the road.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before we go to resuming debate and the hon. member for Victoria, I just want to make a note to hon. members.

There is considerable interest in participating in the debate today. I remind members that in the segments that are only 10 minutes for a speech and five minutes for questions and comments, if there are a lot of people standing up, I am going to ask members who intervene during that five-minute period, both the questioner and the member responding, to keep their responses to about a minute so that more of their colleagues can participate, as I said, there being great interest in this particular question today before the House.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Victoria.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to speak to this important measure. The motion is:

That, in the opinion of the House, the Prime Minister of Canada should hold annual First Ministers' Conferences.

It is so trite. Of course I wish to say that I will be supporting that motion, but I want to go much further than that.

I am delighted to be the official opposition critic for health. In that particular context, I want to illustrate why this is so important. We have a crisis in the funding and the creation of innovation in our health care system, yet the Prime Minister's lack of leadership and lack of willingness to meet with provincial and territorial counterparts is very telling.

This is a multibillion-dollar industry. The health care program in Canada is something Canadians are justly proud of. When asked in surveys over and over again, Canadians recognize this is a signature part of our Canadian identity. The father of medicare, former premier Tommy Douglas, set up the first of these programs in the country, and of course, it has been adapted at the federal level. We have to sustain that signature program of the federation.

To do so, we need leadership at the highest level. To do so, we need to have a Prime Minister who deigns to meet with the Council of the Federation, something the Prime Minister, in his platform that brought him to power, said very clearly:

Support the important contribution the Council of the Federation is making to strengthening intergovernmental and interprovincial cooperation, expanding the economic and social union in Canada, and advancing the development of common standards and objectives of mutual recognition by all provinces.

What happened? Apparently there is a meeting of the Council of the Federation here in Ottawa, and the Prime Minister cannot find the time to go. What happened to that promise? What happened to the promise to the Canadian people, the respect, of which my colleague from Hamilton Centre spoke, for a sovereign government within its sphere? That has apparently disappeared.

We live in a vast, very decentralized federation called Canada. There are many powers that are shared, some that are given to the provinces in section 92 of the Constitution Act, 1867, some that are given to the federal government, and some that are not mentioned, health being one of them.

The Conservatives seem to think that a few meetings at the deputy level and a few meetings perhaps with the ministers responsible once in a while is okay. They seem to think that what some people have called "chequebook federalism" works, where they just do a transfer of money and suddenly that is all we need to make a dynamic system like health care function in such a vast and complicated country. All the experts say that if they believe that, they are wrong.

We need to find ways the federal government, using its spending power, can incent the kind of behaviours we need to sustain our precious health care system.

Business of Supply

We have a law called the Canada Health Act, which was passed unanimously. It has several core principles: public administration of our health system, comprehensiveness, universality, portability, and accessibility. Those are nice words. How do we make those words translate into action? How can we afford a program, with an aging population, and the need for new services, expensive pharmaceutical care, home care, and long-term care? How do we do that without having a dialogue with the provinces at the highest level to figure it out? Apparently, the Conservatives do not think we need to do so. We do.

The Leader of the Opposition has committed that no less than twice a year there would be meetings with all the premiers, not one-offs with various premiers, which seems to be the style of the current Prime Minister. Rather, in a respectful way, they would sit around the table and dialogue about these serious problems. I am simply using health as one illustration of the kinds of problems we need to solve as a country and as a federation.

The Canada Health Act is lovely, with those principles I mentioned, but does the federal government enforce it? Non-compliance is rampant. User fees and private clinics seem to be in absolute contrast to what the principles suggest, yet people are not doing much about it. Are there penalties to address those, or sanctions, as expected, as any law that should be enforced would suggest? No, there is no attempt to enforce those conditions on user fees, extra billing, and private clinics. Indeed, we have a case that is in the B.C. Supreme Court in March that will go on for months. It will deal with private clinics and whether they are okay under our Canada Health Act. Is the federal government involved? Is the Prime Minister interested?

• (1135)

The Canada health transfer is a block transfer that gives money to the provinces and territories to deal with the health care system. It is tens of billions of dollars. In 2004, the government made a 10-year commitment to something called a health accord. That expired last year, on March 31. It was \$41 billion over 10 years.

One day in 2011, the then-minister of finance came into my community of Victoria and said that they were not going to do that anymore. They were not going to fund it the way it was funded before, with a guarantee of a 6% health care funding increase. He said that it would end in the 2016-17 fiscal year, conveniently after the next election.

The Conservatives only committed to a floor of 3% in that document. Henceforth, as the population grows, as the aging population grows, and as pharmaceuticals get more expensive, there will not be enough money. Effectively, the critics have pointed out, there will be a \$36-billion cut in health care costs going forward. As I said, coincidentally it will be just after the next federal election.

This is a problem. Canada needs a national pharmaceutical strategy. We started one, but it was scrapped. We need a continuing care plan that integrates home care, facility-based long-term care, respite care, and palliative care. We need a universal public drug plan. We need adequate and stable federal funding, including the old 6% escalator to deal with the growth in our population. We need innovation.

Why am I mentioning this in the context of the debate today? It is for a very simple reason: it is one of the signature programs of our federation, and we need to sustain it. We need leadership from the Government of Canada. We need the Prime Minister to take an interest. All the premiers are fixed on this crisis facing us, the “grey tsunami”, as it is called, of the aging population.

We need innovation. We do not just need more money, although we do need a commitment to the escalator we had in the old health accord. We need a commitment to stable, long-term federal funding, and we need a government that enforces the Canada Health Act. However, we also need a Prime Minister to sit down with his counterparts at the provincial and territorial level on a regular basis for a checkup on this signature program.

Canadians are so proud of the Canada Health Act. They are so proud of our medicare system. When asked, they continually tell us that it is one of the things that makes them most proud as Canadians. We could lose all of this if we do not have this kind of dialogue at the senior level.

I hear the government members saying that they meet lots of times and that they have ministers who meet. It is called executive federalism, where the deputies get together and chat. I absolutely respect that and understand that it is a necessity in various programs, including those for health. However, we need leadership from the top.

Leaving it to a number of officials to deal with is not going to cut it. Canadians want to see their Prime Minister engaged with the provinces on this issue. I have had people come to my office from the Canadian Health Coalition, Canadian Doctors for Medicare, and other leaders in my community saying that we have a crisis coming. The Council of Canadians has also spoken passionately about this. Yet what do we hear from the government? In 2011, it announced unilaterally and with no dialogue that it was going to throw the health accord out, not renew it, and no longer commit to a 6% escalator, despite everyone saying that the need is there.

People are asking if we are going to be able to sustain this. The jury is out on that question, but one thing is clear. If we had dialogue at the highest level, at the Council of the Federation, with the Prime Minister, in good faith and with the respect my colleague from Hamilton Centre mentioned, we could solve this. Canadians have rolled up their sleeves and solved things before.

Business of Supply

We had a crisis with the Canada Pension Plan and we fixed it. We decided as a country, federally and provincially, that we would put more money into it, that we would deal with what was going to be a crisis if we did not address it, and we fixed it. We can fix medicare as well, but it needs leadership and respectful dialogue.

To think that the Prime Minister will refuse to meet, when the members of the Council of the Federation are right here, should shock all Canadians. When they look at the problems, of which this is just one example, they will see the self-evident need for us to agree with this motion to have that regular meeting between the Prime Minister and the Council of the Federation.

Our leader has committed to that no less than twice a year. The government is apparently not doing it.

• (1140)

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Trinity—Spadina, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the member speak about the effectiveness of the meeting that then prime minister Paul Martin had with the ministers of the provinces to deliver that health care accord. I am assuming that the NDP is looking to build on that very successful model that delivered such a strong health care policy.

I am interested to hear the member's reaction to this notion of 300 meetings. It seems that every time the Prime Minister passes a premier in an airport lounge or sits with one at a hockey game, he chalks it up as a meeting.

The Prime Minister has had as many meetings with our premier in Ontario as he has had with Mr. Putin from Russia, and the meetings have been about as effective. Not much has been accomplished, beyond the words “get out” being muttered, in terms of what happened.

When the NDP talks about these meetings, is the Martin health care accord reached in 2004 the model it wishes replicated?

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Speaker, I agree with my friend from Trinity—Spadina that there needs to be an accord. Whether that accord in the future is one that takes the form of the one that was signed in 2004 is what the parties will sort out in that respectful dialogue that one would expect to occur.

The 300 meetings that might happen in the course of a year sounds a lot like the lack of respect the federal government has when it negotiates with aboriginal people. Conservatives keep a log of how many meetings they have and call it consultation. I suppose if we add up 300, one might think we have had a good dialogue.

We are talking about a sit-down meeting of the kind that Canadians are famous for in finding compromise and going forward with practical suggestions, not just a number of meetings that can be counted up in some mechanical way.

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague to comment on this notion of the parliamentary secretary who said that people did not elect us to talk and to listen to the provinces' needs but want the government to act.

What I get from the government is that Conservatives cannot walk and talk at the same time. This is ridiculous. Sorry, we do not want to go too fast for the Conservatives, but we are discussing some serious issues. Why is it that the Prime Minister, who was elected on a

platform, on a promise to Canadians, to act as a prime minister and listen, now does not want to listen or talk. The Conservatives just want to act.

I would like to name some of the problems on which the government did not meet with the provinces or consult with the provinces and just acted.

• (1145)

[*Translation*]

The securities commission is one example. The federal government decided to move forward without consulting the provinces, even after the Supreme Court ruled in favour of the provinces. The job program is another example. After months of opposition, the government decided to admit that it may have made a mistake, that Quebec had a different system and that perhaps the government should have listened to Quebec. As for the EI program, the government decided to modify this program without even consulting Quebec, which is home to 40% of seasonal workers.

Can we really have faith in this government?

[*English*]

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Speaker, I have to say that the list could go on. My colleague mentioned employment insurance and the securities commission the government wishes to establish nationally, despite vehement opposition from certain provinces. Perhaps if there were respectful dialogue, with listening and acting, then we might be able to find solutions to these problems, as we need to find them so desperately in the context of health care.

I would add one example; the safe injection site legislation. The Supreme Court told Conservatives that they had to do it, and what did the government do? It found 101 ways to make sure it does not happen. That is not the kind of leadership we need. If we sat down with the provinces at the highest level and figured this out, we could solve some of these pressing crises Canadians understand we are facing.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to join this very important debate. I am sure that Canadians who are watching understand how important it is to have positive relationships among one another. That is very helpful when it is possible, but it is quite difficult in this environment. Certainly positive relationships with our provinces would be much more helpful.

As members of this House know, one of the unique characteristics of Canada's federal system is something dubbed by many as “summit federalism”. The key component of this kind of federalism is commonly known as the first ministers' conference, which brings together the Prime Minister, provincial premiers, and territorial leaders. This allows the first ministers to tackle collective problems in a collaborative way that is good for every Canadian, regardless of the province of residence.

I think that makes sense to anybody who is watching. That sounds like the kind of Canada that they would want.

Business of Supply

Since 1906, Canada's first ministers have been meeting every year to discuss ideas of pressing federal-provincial concern, to exchange notes and best practices, and, most importantly, to avoid misunderstandings or a misallocation of resources and even duplication. In short, they meet to build a consensus, to craft common policy responses, and to work co-operatively to make Canada an even better place in which to live and work. That has been happening since 1906, and we have had a lot of success up until the last eight or nine years.

Most experts agree that it is critical for these deliberations to be chaired by the Prime Minister, the head of our country, the elected official guided on a broader, more national perspective. Sadly, the current Prime Minister's vision for Canada is much smaller and much more inward-looking than all of that.

As evidence of this, the last time the current Prime Minister met with the premiers and territorial leaders was in 2009. There has not been another high-level gathering of all of the premiers and territorial leaders and our Prime Minister for six years, which means that for six years the Prime Minister has hidden in the proverbial closet and abdicated his national leadership responsibilities to others.

I have to wonder what he is so afraid of that he cannot sit down in a room with all of the premiers collectively. Does the Prime Minister lack the confidence? Is that the issue? Is it that he is concerned he will be challenged on his ideological mantra and be rebuked by many of them?

Previous Conservative leaders have not been afraid to meet with the first ministers, and in many cases their meetings have been very fruitful. However, the current Prime Minister continues to hide in his office and avoid working on any kind of pan-Canadian vision for the future of Canada, as is very evident when we talk to the premiers or territorial leaders on a variety of issues and hear their frustration.

Certainly there are several issues on the federal agenda that would benefit from a national approach. The establishment of a national securities regulator has been talked about a great deal. The government has done quite a job at trying to push that forward, but it requires the co-operation of the provinces and territories.

Infrastructure renewal is a major issue facing Canada. Yes, money has been put into infrastructure, but has it been put down in a collaborative way? Has it been one project versus another? Was it always done in the best interests of Canada as a whole? That is what our job is and that is what the Prime Minister's job is: to do what is best for Canada as a whole and not benefit just one province versus another.

The economic recovery continues to be a significant problem for all of us. That is especially the case in southwestern Ontario, where we are concerned about the manufacturing sector. There has been a lot of emphasis put on the oil industry, much to the detriment of many of the other provinces.

I forgot to mention at the beginning of my speech that I will be splitting my time with my great new colleague from Trinity—Spadina.

Let us talk about employment and the huge unemployment that is facing many of our young people. They are graduating from

universities and colleges with debts of \$20,000 or \$30,000, and there are no job opportunities. Little investment has been done in that area.

• (1150)

The government can talk about creating 1,200,000 jobs, but it does not talk about the 300,000 that have been lost, especially in southwestern Ontario.

These are issues that could be dealt with much more effectively if the Prime Minister would set aside his personal fears and inadequacies and sit at the same table with the premiers and talk seriously about how we can together get Canada to move forward.

As an Ontario MP, I know that the manufacturing sector alone has bled more than 300,000 jobs since the premiers last met six years ago. Middle-class families are in trouble, and they are looking to government for leadership and help.

Imagine what could have been done to stem the tide if the first ministers, including and led by the Prime Minister, had set their collective minds to stabilizing the manufacturing sector instead of ignoring it for nine years. Instead, the Premier of Ontario was forced to deal with this crisis and many more. Only recently did the Prime Minister squeeze in a brief meeting on the way to a hockey game. It shows how much respect there is for the Province of Ontario.

It is no secret that the Prime Minister does not play well with others. He prefers the bully pulpit over the conference table. However, after six long years of locking the doors of 24 Sussex to the rest of Canada, surely it is time to plan for the collective and long-term success of the nation.

I understand that the Prime Minister detests these meetings because he cannot control conferences or those sitting around the table. One never knows what is going to come out of them, although usually they are very positive things. I understand the preference for absolute and total control over a situation, environment, and message, but that is not the way to move a country as big as Canada forward. It cannot continue in this way without serious harm being caused.

There has been a regrettable inclination on the part of the government and the Prime Minister to rely on reference cases and the Supreme Court of Canada to resolve federal-provincial disagreements, but this is hardly an optimal way of dealing with these disputes and it is hardly the way to manage a country.

As we speak, there are several pressing policy issues on the table that demand a more collective approach. Pension security is one of them. Others include infrastructure spending, the environment, changes to employment insurance, health care funding, and many more, not to mention that the premiers should have the right to speak to the Prime Minister directly on issues such as the status of the comprehensive economic and trade agreement, the CETA, with the European Union, which they will all presumably have to ratify at some point. Clearly Newfoundland and Labrador has some very serious concerns that are going to have to be listened to, one way or the other.

Business of Supply

The Prime Minister needs to take a leadership role and start working with his provincial and territorial counterparts. By hiding in his office in the Langevin Block or on the Hill, he is undermining the proper functioning of a federal state and weakening the federal government's central role in the process. He is also forcing the premiers to move collectively to fill the gap and to move ahead with their own policy initiatives. For example, on the pension front, Ontario is relegating the national voice to a whisper on the sidelines.

Perhaps this is all part of a well-known firewall strategy. As the Conservatives move deeper and deeper into their bunker, who will speak for Canada as a whole? Why would any political leader not take advantage of the impending first ministers meeting to re-establish the federal government's role and the desire to be part of the process, unless there is no desire to be part of it?

The Prime Minister assumed office by promising open federalism. It is long past due for him to sit down and meet with the premiers and territorial leaders. Refusing to do so is an admission of his own failures and shortcomings and is no way to run a country.

•(1155)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in saying the Prime Minister is basically hiding in his office, my colleague lays the issue out fairly well. That is what we are seeing.

However, would the member not agree that what is worse than hiding in his office, where he maybe could not do too much damage, is that the Prime Minister's Office has a message machine fully staffed by the bureaucracy of Canada in every department to put out messages that are really deceptions in many ways?

I will use one example that the member talked about, and that is infrastructure. The government announced the biggest infrastructure spending program in Canadian history. It was to take place over 10 years. The problem is the spending really does not start to take place until 2019.

What a first ministers' meeting would do is give premiers the opportunity to lay out before Canadians some of the deception that the current first minister is involved in. I wonder what the member's thoughts might be on that aspect.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, I really find it quite astonishing that taxpayers' dollars are being used to present messages in the public media that for the most part are 90% false.

I do not recollect exactly what amount of taxpayers' money has been used for advertising programs that have yet to be approved by Parliament. There have been countless times when these programs being used to tell people about all kinds of different issues were close to being complete lies, and taxpayers' money is being used to do it.

What we are asking is why the government is not meeting with the premiers and coming up with some positive results. I think that would be a much better way to win the next election, but clearly the government has its own ideology about what is or is not required.

I very much look forward to the next election, because Canadians are getting tired of being told the outright lies that are being fed to them with their own money by this government.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated my Liberal colleague's speech. This motion is a relevant one, especially at a time when the Conservative government continues to make cuts to provincial transfers. The people of Rivière-des-Mille-Îles are worried about the \$36 billion in cuts to health that will be made in the coming years.

The Conservatives also cut disaster assistance to the provinces, without consultation or warning. This Conservative government has a habit of secretly offloading costs onto the provinces, as the Liberals did when they were in power.

My colleagues have already mentioned the Liberal Party's poor record when it was in power. Between 2000 and 2006, Liberal prime ministers only held two meetings with the premiers. It is clear that we cannot really have faith in a Liberal government either.

The NDP is committed to holding at least two meetings a year with the provincial premiers. Would my colleague support such a measure?

•(1200)

[*English*]

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, there was a period of time when I had the good fortune to be a minister in the Paul Martin government. Let me tell the members how beneficial those meetings were.

We sat down with the premiers and the bureaucracy to hear about some of the issues. In advance of that meeting, officials in the bureaucracy, who knew there was a meeting coming up, would be in contact with each other all across the country.

When the meeting actually started, the bureaucracy already knew some of the issues that would be raised and had already started working toward finding solutions. At the end of the meetings, we were always able to come up with recommendations to deal with the pressures that the different premiers or territorial leaders were experiencing, rather than just coming forward with a press release that said there was a meeting and that was it.

We were always able to find solutions to problems, and if we could not find solutions for everything, we could at least commit to working more closely with the premiers of those different provinces to find those solutions.

I am very proud of the record of both the Chrétien government and the Paul Martin government. The relationship we have with the municipalities is the result of the Liberal government. That is how we build a country: by building on a continuous basis, talking to each other, and understanding the pressures that our cities and municipalities and communities are facing. That is how to build a country. It is not by ignoring them, staying in the office, and not meeting with people

Business of Supply

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Trinity—Spadina, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I recall a comment that was made yesterday when people were having trouble following the debate. The thumping and the knocking they thought was from construction might have been the nervous hearts of some Conservative ministers, in particular the finance minister, as they try to contemplate a way forward in very troubled times. It was either that, or the door of the Prime Minister's Office was continuously being knocked on by vets, by cities, by provinces, by the medical community, and by universities. The knocking continues, but no one is answering the door. That is why today's motion is so critically important. It is not thumping we are hearing; it is people knocking on the door trying to get in, trying to build a consensus, and trying to move this country forward.

The reason it is so critically important to bring the first ministers of this country together is that it is only when those who have the capacity to move forward together meet together and agree on a common agenda that we can achieve more than simply unilateral action.

I find this passing strange as someone who has watched members of the government in other jurisdictions in provincial capitals unilaterally download, unilaterally amalgamate, unilaterally act without consensus, and seeing the disasters that flow from that. The city of Toronto is a perfect example. One member talked about the dithering by Conservatives' over transit. The irony is that it is exactly this lack of consensus that has been driven by someone who refused to meet, at times, even with his own council, that led to the very crisis of which he spoke.

Meetings are important. When we have significant trade issues with a buy American policy causing havoc in the manufacturing sector right across this country, pursuing a meeting with the U.S. president and our NAFTA partner Mexico is a good thing to do. What does the Conservative government do? It walks away from yet another meeting. That is how we now resolve international trade issues. We do not resolve international issues by refusing to meet; they are resolved by meeting. It is a shame that the Prime Minister does not understand that. It is a wonder that he even meets with his cabinet sometimes.

The hallmark of Prime Minister Paul Martin's behaviour in the Prime Minister's Office was meeting with others. I know that because I covered Parliament Hill at that time. I was here for the health accord in Ottawa when it was negotiated. When an agreement could not be reached in the set time, the meeting continued. They sat around the table until they achieved consensus. However, it was not just consensus, but a policy that the NDP has already said it would like to renew without even meeting with the premiers. That is how good a consensus and how strong a legacy was built up by meeting with the premiers.

After that meeting Prime Minister Martin sat down with the media for over half an hour to explain exactly what had been achieved and exactly how the health ministers were going to meet afterward to continue the progress. Again, that was such a strong policy that the Conservatives now try to claim it as their own investment in health care when it in fact was the premiers and the Government of Canada that created that agreement.

That is why meeting with the premiers is not simply about holding a meeting. It is not searching for things to do or searching for policies to pursue. The premiers have agendas. For example, the Premier of Newfoundland would love to see the Conservative government honour its commitment on the CETA agreement and processing in fisheries. Instead what we get is a minister and a parliamentary secretary standing in the House and claiming that the other provinces are bitter about this, that they are upset that Newfoundland is getting special treatment. It is not getting special treatment: Newfoundland is asking for agreements to be lived up to, agreements that the government had negotiated in good faith and now is walking away from.

It moves way beyond just the premiers. The government does not meet with the big city mayors. When the big city mayors met in Winnipeg and sat down with Paul Martin and the federal leadership, they created two policies that the Conservative government continues to claim as its own. I am speaking of the gas tax and infrastructure funding. Both of those policies were not unilaterally delivered to cities, were not dictated on high by the Prime Minister's Office. Conferences were called, negotiations were held, policy was developed, and accords were reached. The grievance that led to cities being given a more stable funding formula was addressed. That is what happens when people work in consensus.

It is not a question of always having your own policy lead the conversation. Sometimes we have to do something the current Conservative government has become incapable of doing, and that is listening. That is a problem. It hurts cities, it hurts provinces, it hurts Canadians wherever they live, and no group knows this more fundamentally than the first nations and aboriginal communities of this country.

• (1205)

Yes, we can have encounters. We can stage a meeting here, there, and everywhere, but if we do not bring the decision-makers together around the table, long-term, permanent resolutions to long-standing issues fail to materialize. That is what the problem is. Without a first ministers' meeting, progress on critical issues where provincial and federal jurisdiction overlap is next to impossible, and playing the premiers off against each other is not what this country is built upon. In fact, if we read the first three words of the constitution, "Whereas the provinces...", the provinces govern all of us, and we have to govern with them if Confederation is going to work.

At the end of the day, the Liberal Party is asking for a commitment by the House and the government of the day, regardless of which party holds power, to meet annually with the first ministers so that the agenda of this country can move forward on a consistent basis, on a consensual basis, and in a collective way. That is not too much to ask of a confederated government, but apparently it is too much to ask of this government. That is a shame.

Instead of standing here and exploring the opportunities, instead of sitting in concert with the premiers and listening and building a stronger country, it is the Conservatives' way or the highway. The irony, because it is their way or the highway on infrastructure in particular, is that no highways are getting built in this country.

Business of Supply

The Conservatives talk about what their consensus builds. Their infrastructure funding does not arrive for two to three years. We are in the middle of a crisis right now, and instead of sitting down and trying to figure out how we could fast-track that and get critical infrastructure built, what we get are five-minute meetings next to an airport in front of a hockey game, which have nothing to do with solving problems and are not much more productive than simply telling people no.

As I said at the start of my remarks, the knocking we hear in the halls of this building is Canadians and premiers; it is provinces and cities; it is cities, manufacturers, and universities; it is groups of Canadians and individual Canadians looking for more than a cold shoulder. That has got to fundamentally change if we are to change the way this country operates.

Unfortunately, what we have heard today is the Conservatives saying, “We have met enough. We have done enough”, and Canadians are saying that it is not good enough.

• (1210)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my Liberal colleague for his speech and for the motion before us. I will support the initiative because I believe that the Prime Minister of Canada should meet the other first ministers at least once a year. We think twice a year would be better, but we know that, as the Liberals see it, once is an improvement.

I would like to ask my Liberal colleague a question. Naturally, these meetings are about respect. The goal is for people to get along, show mutual respect and help each other. However, I find it a bit hypocritical of the Liberals to try to restore their image by setting up this kind of annual meeting because, in the past, they themselves cut provincial health and social transfers, and that is what got them in trouble. We are still dealing with the negative consequences of that.

I would like my Liberal colleague to comment on that inconsistency: pushing for greater respect for the premiers even though they themselves cut health and social transfers in the past.

[*English*]

Mr. Adam Vaughan: I apologize for not having the motion in French in front of me, but the motion in English is plural. It is not defined as “a meeting”, but says “conferences”. Rather than prescribe a set number of meetings per year, because I think that may vary from time to time, it talks about meetings. I assume that means more than one is possible, but not necessarily prescribed and set out in that regard. Elections and other issues sometimes take precedence.

On this notion of unilateral behaviour, as I said, I represent a riding in downtown Toronto that has a significant amount of transit in it. I would note that an NDP government at Queen's Park, when it held power, unilaterally and without notice cut operating funds for transit in Ontario. It was the beginning of the end of operational subsidies for the Toronto Transit Commission, so no party has a stranglehold on poor behaviour in its history.

What we are talking about is fixing the future. If members want to debate the budgets and the behaviour of the 1990s, they should go on all they want about it. We are talking about the next decade and the

next century in this country and how we will behave as a government.

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member comes from Trinity—Spadina. I am surprised that he does not realize there is a \$622 million federal investment in the subway in Trinity—Spadina, which will connect the people of York region to the subway system going through his area. I guess he forgot about that. He also must have forgotten about the more than \$300 million investment in the York region Viva system, which connects the subway through York region and down Highway 7. It is another investment that this government has made in the city of Toronto. There are also expansions in roads and infrastructure happening through that area. Highway 27 and the 407 are being extended.

We have made a number of investments by working with our provincial partners, uploading some of those investments that give the provincial government more room. In fact, in the current round of the building Canada fund, like the previous round, the priorities are actually set by the provincial Liberal government. That is how we are working with it.

I wonder if the member might reflect on the investments being made in transit in his own riding and if the example he talks about with respect to meeting people is similar, for instance, to his nomination, which actually did not occur because he was appointed by his leader, as opposed to meeting with people in his own riding and his own party.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Once again, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has never met a fact he cannot mangle. There was a contested nomination and I defeated someone in that nomination race, but he should not allow the facts to get in the way of a good argument.

The transit funding that he speaks of is so profoundly insufficient that it boggles the mind. We have yet to get a 30-year commitment on transit. The reality is that the transit funding that was secured came after the fact. The provincial Liberal government at Queen's Park is the government that actually drove this agenda. If it had not had the ability, together with the City of Toronto, to force Ottawa into this conversation, it would have gotten nothing, just as when the stimulus package was unveiled. We had asked for money to expand our streetcar and light rapid transit lines and were turned down by the government. Instead, we had to build tiny parks everywhere in the city, in particular in the ridings held by Conservatives.

I will take no lectures from a government that has no national transit policy, which sporadically invests in transit, has never provided an operating subsidy, and only funds projects when Rob Ford asks.

Business of Supply

•(1215)

Mr. Peter Braid (Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased today to rise to speak about the very great partnerships that our federal government has developed and how they have contributed, and continue to contribute, to making our country, Canada, one of the best countries in which to live.

Infrastructure is the backbone of our communities. It supports economic growth and a better quality of life because it provides Canadians with the essentials they need, transportation, clean water, recreation and cultural facilities, to carry out a safe, healthy and productive life. Public infrastructure has always been, and will continue to be, a key driver of Canada's success as a nation. Whether it is investments in highways, water treatment technology or airports, these investments help our industries reach global markets, protect our environment and support our cities and our communities. Investment in quality public infrastructure builds strong communities, but it cannot be done by one single order of government.

I remind members of Helen Keller's words of wisdom. She said, "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much". This, I believe, is how progress is achieved, meeting challenges through co-operation across all levels of government.

As the Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Communities, I am very proud of the achievements that have been made possible through the steady collaboration with our provincial, territorial and municipal partners. In Canada, the vast majority of core public infrastructure is in fact owned by municipalities, provinces and territories, with the balance, less than one-tenth, owned by the federal government. This means that provinces, territories and municipalities are ultimately responsible for building, expanding, maintaining, rehabilitating and operating almost all of Canada's public infrastructure. As a result, provinces, territories and municipalities are also best positioned to identify local and regional needs and priorities.

In order to provide a better quality of life for Canadians, to maintain a competitive edge over other G7 countries and to keep our economy on track, we are making record investments in public infrastructure. We are doing so through the \$53 billion new building Canada plan, which provides the necessary funding to other levels of government for their critical projects and initiatives. While these funds are used to fund priorities identified by provinces, territories and municipalities, these projects could not proceed without federal collaboration and contributions.

In recent years, Canadians have seen the benefits of partnership and the historic infrastructure investments that the federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments have been making under the leadership of our great Prime Minister.

When the original building Canada plan was launched in 2007, it marked a new era for infrastructure partnership funding, and a new relationship among all orders of government. The plan was the result of engagement and discussions with provinces and territories, as well as the municipal sector. The intent was to identify an approach to provide federal funding for provincial, territorial and municipal public infrastructure in a way that was more predictable and long term in nature. In fact, the development of the plan itself, in 2006,

clearly set the tone for a new approach to public infrastructure, a much better approach.

Our Conservative government consulted with all provinces and territories and a number of municipal associations with the purpose of putting federal funding on a predictable long-term track. This series of meetings at all levels resulted in a coordinated suite of infrastructure programs that recognize provincial-territorial jurisdiction for municipalities, as well as the diverse needs and opportunities across Canada. This collaborative approach laid the groundwork for a fast and efficient response to the global economic slowdown in 2009.

•(1220)

Budget 2009 announced the acceleration of existing infrastructure funding under the building Canada plan, as well as new infrastructure funding over two years, in order to stimulate economic growth and employment, while also supporting Canada's long-term productivity.

Strong and effective partnerships with provincial, territorial and municipal governments were essential to the success of the economic action plan's infrastructure elements. A concerted national effort was made to overcome the challenges of developing and rolling out this funding in a very short period of time.

There have been literally thousands of projects funded across the country. Regardless of their size or scope, they all improved the quality of life in the communities in which they were built. At the end of the day, this is what Canadians care about most, and this is something of which we can all be very proud.

The results of the economic action plan are a testament to the high degree of co-operation that was shown by all levels of government across Canada under the leadership of our Prime Minister. It is based on this level of co-operation and success that our government forged ahead with the new building Canada plan, which is currently under way.

In budget 2011, our government committed to developing a long-term plan for public infrastructure that would extend beyond the expiry of the building Canada plan in 2014. To meet this commitment, we engaged provinces, territories, municipalities and other infrastructure stakeholders to shape a new plan. This involved taking stock of our achievements and lessons learned, identifying priorities for the future, and building the knowledge required to address Canada's future infrastructure needs.

As part of this engagement, in the summer of 2012, the then-minister of state, the member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, and the minister of infrastructure both chaired regional round tables with our provincial and territorial counterparts, where they met with close to 150 provincial, territorial, regional, municipal and private sector stakeholders from across the country to discuss the development of our new plan.

Business of Supply

Over the course of 2012 and 2013, Infrastructure Canada officials also met with provinces, territories, municipalities and other stakeholder groups to discuss the development of the new plan. During this process, we took note of a great variety of ideas and opinions. However, a few key themes emerged, namely: the need to build on the success of past programs; the need for long-term, stable and flexible funding; the need for infrastructure programs that support economic growth; and the need to identify a role for the private sector.

These consultations had a real impact on the development of the new plan, and we could not have done it without the feedback from our partners.

Let me explain the results of this collaborative work.

Our partners indicated that infrastructure funding programs needed improvements, so we improved them. In order to provide the flexibility that the provinces, territories and municipalities asked for, categories under the new plan were realigned to give our partners the freedom to decide where they needed their funding to go. Predictability was a major request. The new building Canada plan is a 10-year plan. Our partners requested that processes be more efficient. We reorganized our processes to streamline both funding applications and expense claims.

Not only have we heard our partners, but we acted upon what we heard, and the new plan speaks for itself. The overall federal investment in infrastructure will be more than \$75 billion in the next 10 years. At the heart of these investments is, of course, the new building Canada plan.

• (1225)

The new building Canada plan provides \$53 billion for provincial, territorial and municipal infrastructure. Most important, our plan is set for 10 years so our partners can focus on delivering infrastructure for Canadians over the long term.

The plan includes the \$14 billion building Canada fund which has two parts: a national infrastructure component and the provincial-territorial infrastructure component.

The national infrastructure component will support investments for major economic projects of national significance, in particular, those that support job creation, economic growth and productivity. It focuses on highways, public transit, disaster mitigation, and gateway and trade corridor infrastructure, which are very important for our country.

The provincial-territorial infrastructure component supports projects of national, regional and local significance such as highways, public transit, drinking water, waste water, connectivity and broadband, and innovation, for example.

In addition, we have also provided another \$1.25 billion over five years to renew the P3 Canada fund. The renewal of the P3 Canada fund will continue to support innovative ways to build infrastructure projects in the country. Public-private partnerships can achieve greater savings and efficiency in the delivery of much needed infrastructure projects, which will provide better value for Canadian taxpayers.

Let us not forget that in Canada, as I mentioned earlier, the vast majority of core public infrastructure is indeed owned by municipalities, provinces and territories, with the balance, less than one-tenth, owned by the federal government.

The biggest part of our plan is the community improvement fund, which includes \$21.8 billion for the gas tax fund transfer. This is permanent, stable, predictable funding. There is another change, one that has been repeatedly asked for by municipal leaders, a change that will keep it growing. The gas tax fund transfer is now indexed so municipalities will not be penalized as inflation grows.

The program is also more flexible than ever before. It will continue to support community infrastructure projects such as roads, public transit and recreational facilities, and we have doubled the number of eligible categories. Gas tax transfers will now also support projects in categories such as culture, tourism, sport and recreation, disaster mitigation, broadband communication systems and local and regional airports.

We have a flexible plan that lets local councils set their own local priorities. For example, many cities have focused on transit. Thus far, more than one-quarter of the gas tax fund has been directed to public transit projects. That is \$2 billion in transit funding since 2006 from just one program.

In five of Canada's largest cities, all or nearly all of the gas tax transferred goes toward public transit. We did not decide to invest there, municipalities did, but we ensured it was an eligible category based on our discussions with our municipal partners.

Other municipalities have other priorities that also fit within the parameters of the programs we have collectively built together.

That is how we do business. We consult our partners and we are in constant contact with them. More than one-quarter of the federal gas tax fund has been invested in local roads and bridges to date, while 16% of the gas tax fund has gone to water and over 10% has been used for waste water.

Across Canada, local councils are making the right choices for their communities, and we are happy to help them make this important progress. Let us not forget that provinces, territories and municipalities are ultimately responsible for building, expanding, maintaining, rehabilitating and operating almost all of Canada's public infrastructure. As a result, provinces, territories and municipalities are also best positioned to identify their own investments for local and regional needs and priorities.

• (1230)

Let us recap. The municipalities asked for more flexibility. Let us look at those 18 gas tax fund categories. They asked for a long-term plan: the plan is a decade long. They asked for more funding: we gave them \$53 billion over the next decade. They asked us to index the gas tax fund: indexing is in the new plan.

Business of Supply

We did not waste any time implementing this new plan with our partners either. Important projects worth more than an estimated \$5 billion in total project costs have already been approved and identified for funding under the new building Canada fund. These projects contribute to getting goods to market, to connecting people and businesses with the world, and to reducing gridlock on our roads and highways, which in turn boosts our productivity and competitiveness. This includes projects such as the Valley Line stage one light rail transit expansion in Edmonton, water and wastewater projects across Manitoba, improvements to Nova Scotia's 100 series highway systems, and our recently announced funding for key upgrades to the Port of Montreal.

This spirit of co-operation has taken us a long way and will be even more essential as we go forward. We worked shoulder-to-shoulder to develop a long-term infrastructure plan that meets the needs of Canadian citizens from coast to coast. Now we are working together with the provinces and municipalities to implement that plan.

Going forward, strong partnerships will remain key to continued investments and world-class modern infrastructure across Canada. Through these investments, and in partnership with the provinces, territories, and municipalities, we are delivering results, not just talking, as the opposition does. We are delivering results that matter to Canadians, such as a stronger economy, a cleaner environment, and a more prosperous and vibrant Canada with more prosperous and vibrant communities.

We look forward to this continued collaboration, to continued action, and to continued results.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Trinity—Spadina, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the municipal sector it is called the “inaction plan”. As someone who has struggled with eight years of city budgets, trying to put them together without consistent, predictable, and robust funding, the very things the Federation of Canadian Municipalities is asking for, I just listened to that and it blew my mind.

I have talked to more than a dozen mayors in the last two weeks. There is no infrastructure money in their budgets from last year and none is expected this year. It is a problem that needs to be addressed. Part of the problem is that the subscription process is so complicated for the provinces that even they cannot figure out how to get the federal money flowing. The only thing that has happened is the \$29 million worth of billboards that have been posted at the sides of roads as we wait for someone to come to pave the highway. It is a problem. If the government would meet with the premiers, as this motion requests it do, it would find out why its rhetoric does not meet reality.

The programs the government talked about were hand-picked programs during the bailout that had nothing to do with municipal priorities. No matter how much the cities cried, no matter how much the provinces demanded to meet, there was absolutely no consensus and no ability for local governments to drive local priorities.

Will the government sit down with the provincial premiers and figure this out before we lose another season of construction and wait 10 years for the money to arrive?

●(1235)

Mr. Peter Braid: Mr. Speaker, that entire preamble to the question is all horse hockey.

The municipalities and provinces fully understand the processes under the new building Canada plan. The new building Canada plan has been open for business since March of last year. As I mentioned in my remarks, projects representing \$5 billion have already been approved and are proceeding.

Let us talk about the gas tax fund and what we have delivered for municipalities. They asked our government to double the gas tax fund. We did that. They asked our government to make the gas tax fund permanent. We did that. They asked our government to index the gas tax fund moving forward. We did that. They asked us to increase the flexibility of the gas tax fund program. We have done that. There is stable, predictable funding over the next 10 years. Municipalities know to the penny exactly what amount of gas tax funding they will be getting over the next number of years. That is delivering results.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am really glad the member mentioned infrastructure in debating this issue before the House, because this reminds us of the problems related to this government's failure to consult the provinces and municipalities.

First of all, Quebec has yet to sign an agreement with the federal government regarding the building Canada fund. Here we are nearly a year after it was announced in budget 2014, and a funding agreement for the building Canada fund still has not been signed with Quebec.

Second, regarding the building Canada fund, the initial announcement was in 2013, when the budget was presented by the Minister of Infrastructure, Communities and Intergovernmental Affairs, who is also the former mayor of Roberval. For a year, he took advantage of every possible opportunity to boast that the program was finally going to allow the municipalities to seek funding for sports and cultural infrastructure, based on municipal priorities.

In 2014, however, that disappeared, even though municipalities like Rimouski—whose mayor, Éric Forest, is also a past president of the Union des municipalités du Québec and knows the Minister of Infrastructure, Communities and Intergovernmental Affairs very well—want the municipalities to be able to set their own priorities.

How can the federal government talk about good relations with the provinces, frequent meetings with the provinces and respecting the provinces' and municipalities' priorities when this same federal government imposes its will and its priorities regarding the infrastructure that the municipalities really need?

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Braid: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the question. However, I need to clarify for my colleague how the new building Canada plan works.

As I just explained, gas tax funding is being delivered today as we speak to all municipalities across Canada, including, of course, Quebec.

Business of Supply

With respect to the provincial component of the plan, contribution agreements between the federal government and the provinces are not required. We only require an agreement on a project-by-project basis. As a federal government, this is critical to our philosophical approach. We respect the jurisdiction of our provincial partners. It is the responsibility of provinces to identify their own infrastructure project priorities, and Quebec can do that today. We await its list. It is the responsibility of provinces to identify their project priorities. Once those project priorities are identified, we have a full discussion, we closely review those project priorities, and will consider them very closely.

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his comments and the hard work he has been doing on infrastructure. However, I have to get up briefly to follow-up some of the comments made by the member for Trinity—Spadina.

It is becoming more and more evident why the member is sitting in the Liberal caucus. It is because, as he admits, he was unable to get the job done as a Toronto councillor for the people there. Nonetheless, what was striking about his comments was that he talked about the fact that the infrastructure investments being made are not the type of investments people want.

I wonder if the parliamentary secretary could comment on the fact that it was this government that made a \$622 million investment in subways through that member's riding, with \$95 million for the people of Brampton, \$85 million for the people of York region, \$83 million for the people of Mississauga, and \$15 million for the people of Oakville. We have expanded the GO train system into Durham and are expanding the 407 into Durham.

Of course, this is the only level of government that has made a commitment and fulfilled its commitment of \$500 million for Toronto's waterfront. The Minister of State for Sport has been working extraordinarily hard to see our \$500 million investment in the Pan Am and Parapan Am Games, which will take place in Toronto and the surrounding region this year, come to fruition.

The member for Trinity—Spadina said that these are unimportant investments that people do not care about, while acknowledging that he was unable to get the job done as a councillor. I wonder if the parliamentary secretary can comment on how important it is get people moving and to continue making these investments while working with our municipal and provincial partners.

● (1240)

Mr. Peter Braid: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister for that excellent question and for listing the significant recent investments that our federal government has been making in public transit in the GTA and across Ontario. In fact, no government in Canadian history has invested more in infrastructure writ large, and no government in Canadian history has invested more in public transit. Since we became government, over \$8 billion has been invested in public transit alone.

As I explained earlier, we respect the jurisdiction and ability of municipalities and provinces to identify the infrastructure projects that are best for them, that meet their needs and priorities. Therefore, if public transit, is an important priority in the Toronto area, as it

indeed is, the federal government is there supporting those project priorities. We will continue to provide that support.

In my own community of Waterloo region, investments are being made in a brand new light rapid transit system there. It will increase our economic prosperity as a region. The federal government is there as a full funding partner. We are supporting the region of Waterloo's identification of that important infrastructure project as a community priority for it.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Bourassa.

It is indeed with great pleasure that I stand in the House today to support this motion:

That, in the opinion of the House, the Prime Minister of Canada should hold annual First Ministers' Conferences.

My background is in the farm movement. As the national president of the National Farmers Union, I had the opportunity to travel in Canada, to all regions of this country, to stay in people's homes, to see the diversity, and to see the opportunity there is across Canada as a whole.

In those travels I learned that regions are very different, and all have their strengths and weaknesses. However, that diversity can be a good thing. In our diversity we can find many strengths. However, to find those strengths and seize them, we need national leadership.

From my experience, I believe that Canada can be stronger than the sum of its parts. We have seen that under previous leaders. They might have been of different political stripes, but they seized that opportunity to make Canada stronger than the sum of its parts by building national programs, be it medicare or pensions. We have seen that strength under various political stripes.

We are certainly not getting it today, not from this Prime Minister. We are a much weaker nation than when this man came to power.

I am old enough to remember the first ministers' conferences, especially those held by Pierre Elliott Trudeau on the Constitution and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the Mulroney conferences that tried to deal with some of the problems as a result of the initial constitutional conferences.

Many Canadians, and I was one, watched those discussions. We actually became involved in the debates in our communities. I remember a lot of those first ministers: Peter Lougheed, Allan Blakeney, Bill Davis, René Lévesque, Hatfield, Alex Campbell, Gerald Regan, and others. They had their differences, but they were all trying to build a better nation.

They represented their regions and their provinces, but also out of the discussion there was that theme that they wanted to build a better country. They wanted to build understanding and have their intense debates, some of them behind the curtains, but out of it all we could sense that they were trying to build a better nation.

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All the different parties, the Parti Québécois, the NDP, the Liberals, and the Conservatives, were represented at those meetings. They had different ideologies, but they came together to find compromises and to build the nation.

There is none of that today. The government is doing the opposite. It is using its spending authority and the big whip of federal laws to often cause divisions. Here is a prime example. When Prime Minister Martin developed the health accord in 2004, we all benefited. The current government has benefited from that health accord, because every year it talks about the 6% escalator in terms of funding. That all came out of the health accord Paul Martin designed. It was nothing the current government did. In fact, when the health accord was about to end, the minister of finance at the time went to the ministers of finance meeting, which I believe was held in western Canada at the time, and said, "Folks, this is the way it is going to be". There was no discussion, just the big whip of the federal government with its spending power and authority. That was the end of the discussion.

That is no way to build a country, but that is the way this Prime Minister works.

As well, we have seen changes to the employment insurance system, which has hurt us in Atlantic Canada. We have seen changes to the foreign workers program, which has hurt industry right across the country.

• (1245)

There is no engagement by the current government and the Prime Minister to involve the others to build a nation. It is all based on the Prime Minister's ideology, and I am saddened to say that backbench members over there just stand up and say "yea, yea" rather than think about the concerns of their constituents and what could be better for the country as a whole.

My province of Prince Edward Island is a small province whose main industries are agriculture, fisheries, and tourism. Those industries are seasonal, but when they are operating in season, the economy from those industries spreads across the country. Whether it is inputs like fertilizer, fuel, and transportation or their production moving across the country to spread the economy elsewhere, those industries, although they are in a small province and are seasonal, add to the whole of the country. Given the seasonality of these industries in Prince Edward Island, we require federal equalization payments. Those programs are discussed at some of those first ministers' meetings.

First ministers' meetings provide premiers of both the have and have-not provinces with the opportunity to state the people's case for funding for their provinces directly to the Prime Minister, and to other premiers across the country, and to develop an understanding of how we can pull this country up together.

The success in Prince Edward Island of its industries can change from year to year, given that there may be a drought in the agriculture sector or poor landings in fisheries. Even a low dollar in the United States in terms of the tourism industry can have an impact. In those discussions with other premiers and the leader of Canada, they can try to find ways and measures to accommodate those problems that may develop in an industry.

There was an article in *The Globe and Mail* by Peter McKenna, a political scientist who was formerly from the University of Prince Edward Island. The article is headlined "It's beyond time for [the current Prime Minister] to call a First Minister's Conference". He said this:

It is worth emphasizing here that one of the unique characteristics of Canada's federal system is something dubbed "executive federalism." The key component of summit federalism is commonly known as the First Ministers' Conference or Meeting, which brings together the prime minister, provincial premiers and territorial leaders (along with their officials)....

The point of these conferences is to discuss ideas of pressing federal-provincial concern, to exchange notes and best practices, and to avoid misunderstandings, a misallocation of resources and even duplication. The hope, of course, is to build a consensus, to craft a common policy response, and to work co-operatively to make Canada a more united and stronger federation. But it is critical that these intergovernmental deliberations should be chaired by the prime minister of all Canadians – and thus guided by a broader, national perspective.

He went into the reasons why the current Prime Minister is avoiding meetings, such as that there is usually the provincial demand for money, and we can understand that. However, Mr. McKenna also said the Prime Minister "...detests these meetings because he can't control the conferences or those sitting around the table". In other words, the Prime Minister loses control, and we know that the current Prime Minister believes in control. He believes in controlling the message, although it is not always the facts. As a result, because the Prime Minister is so based on his ideology rather than on looking at the country as a whole, we are all losers in this country.

I encourage backbench members to support this motion and build a better Canada by basically forcing the Prime Minister to do what he ought to have done long ago.

• (1250)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this motion and debate. I have heard concerns continuously from my constituents about the refusal of the government to work co-operatively with the other levels of government. As my colleague from Victoria previously stated, top of mind for Albertans is the future of medicare, particularly given the forecast cutbacks by the Government of Canada and the refusal to meet with provincial and territorial officials.

However, there is an order of government that is missing, apart from a very brief mention by my colleague who sits behind me, which is first nation governments.

The government held out, I believe it was two years ago, that it would move toward a nation-to-nation respectful relationship with Canada's first nations. It has also been very clear from the courts that the federal government has a similar responsibility to the Métis people of Canada.

I would like to ask the member whether he would like to consider adding the need for a dialogue not just with representatives of the provincial and territorial governments but with first nation governments.

Business of Supply

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, the member makes an absolutely excellent point. Of course, the first nations should be at the table. When Paul Martin was prime minister, that in fact happened, and out of that came the Kelowna accord. I remember that in caucus, the minister, Andy Scott, worked strenuously to develop that accord. The prime minister and others were brought in, and we got the Kelowna accord. The sad reality is that the government across the way destroyed it right off the bat.

The member makes an important point. We need the players at the table. All the key leaders in the nation affected by policies can unite the nation and make it stronger, and that sector has to be involved.

• (1255)

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to pick up on a theme raised by my colleague, which is very important. Most Canadians would expect that their federal, provincial, and municipal governments, first nations, civil society actors, and economic trade associations work together. We are in a competitive world, and coming together is not a form of weakness. It is actually a form of strength. That is what they are doing in the United States, the European Union, and China.

I want to raise with the member a couple of issues that are languishing in the Canadian context. Successive Alberta premiers have raised the need, for example, for an adult conversation about Canada's energy future, a national energy strategy. They are not Liberal premiers, not Liberal governments. They are Conservative governments. That has fallen on deaf ears.

In the United States, the American governors meet at least once, if not twice, a year, and usually the Oval Office is represented by the vice-president of the United States. They have an adult conversation about American challenges.

Third, I would like him to address perhaps the most egregious example of a failure to work together, and that is internationally. Internationally, Canada lost a prized seat on the Security Council. We lost out to Portugal. It is a great country. Do not get me wrong. I could understand if we lost out to Portugal in soccer, but it is another thing to lose out to Portugal on the Security Council. Just months before the Russian-Ukrainian crisis broke, when we were trying to exert and exercise influence, we had no seat. Why is that? It is because we were not playing nice. We were not co-operating with or talking to fellow countries, and we did not earn that vote.

I would ask my colleague to draw on those examples and help explain why it is so important for us to come together, meet, and compete.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Malpeque, a short answer please.

Hon. Wayne Easter: I am good at short answers, Mr. Speaker. The key point is whether it is nationally or internationally. There are ways and means of not allowing our differences to become conflicts, but allowing our complexities and differences to become strengths. Our country can be stronger than the sum of its parts if we have the national leadership to bring the folks around the table to try to find the compromises and solutions to move us there.

The member raised the point on Alberta and energy. Right now we are seeing how important it would have been to have listened to the

Council of the Federation and developed a national energy strategy, not having all our eggs in one basket in one energy source or one big industry in the country but having diversity in our manufacturing sector in Ontario, agriculture, fisheries, tourism elsewhere in the country, energy and on and on. We can see that and gain that understanding by bringing first ministers together.

[Translation]

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague from Saint-Laurent—Cartierville for his eloquent speech on the co-operation that we want and need between the federal and provincial governments. Members on both sides of the House know of his expertise in this area and, as parliamentarians, we all benefit from his informed perspective.

He very effectively summarized the difficulties that naturally arise during meetings between the federal and provincial governments, as they do in any proper democratic debate. However, mostly, he spoke eloquently and fairly about the historic achievements resulting from such co-operation under Laurier, Borden, Diefenbaker, Mulroney and Martin. Finally, he talked about this government's failure to adequately address the challenges facing our country today. It is clear that in our role as representatives of Canadians' interests in Parliament, we cannot sit idly by while this government refuses to co-operate with others.

I cannot claim to rival my colleague when it comes to federal-provincial relations, but I would like to share my perspective as someone who worked for a provincial government for many years and who saw with his own eyes the untold cost of the Prime Minister's unilateral approach. I would also like members to think about our children and imagine what our country will be like if all of the provinces and territories continue to address the challenges of the future in their own way without federal leadership to make such action efficient and consistent.

Students graduating from high school know one thing about Canadian federalism, and that is that it is a system of checks and balances that requires co-operation.

I am deeply concerned to think that our Prime Minister's attitude toward his provincial counterparts is one of occasional contempt and constant avoidance. Although bilateral relations between the Prime Minister and the provinces have not gone completely by the wayside, they are becoming increasingly infrequent and partisan. We are talking about a total lack of interest in working together and the rejection of Canada's federalist model.

If we ask Ms. Wynne, the premier of the biggest province in the country, with a third of Canada's population, she will tell us what sort of response we get from the Prime Minister when we want to work together despite our disagreements.

I know that the Prime Minister is not used to being surrounded by people who disagree with him. Perhaps he does not appreciate the benefits that come with having his ideas challenged. Why does he refuse to meet with people elected by the very Canadians he claims to represent? That is not asking too much.

Business of Supply

The benefits of this co-operation are clear. My colleague from Saint-Laurent—Cartierville illustrated that quite well. What about the costs to Canadians every time a challenge is addressed by one federal government and 13 provinces and territories, instead of by just one country? Those incalculable costs will be part of this government's legacy. It is about time we turned the page.

The challenges our country is facing require a coordinated effort. How are we going to protect the waterways we drink from, reduce our impact on the climate we live in, and nourish the land that feeds us unless we all sit down at the same table to make sure we are all on the same wavelength, on the same page? The St. Lawrence is neither Liberal nor Ontarian, the rain in Alberta develops in British Columbia and the chemical waste in New Brunswick does not recognize the borders of the maritime provinces.

Speaking of borders, the Prime Minister likes spending taxpayers' money on celebrating his international trade agreements, more than once, but here at home there are still far more significant trade barriers than there sometimes are abroad.

● (1300)

The provincial premiers are well aware that this problem needs to be addressed, but they are also well aware of their trade interests. Where is the Prime Minister when it comes to an issue as vitally important as our domestic economy?

The provinces have been dealing with our generation's socio-demographic challenges for several years now. I would like the Prime Minister to tell us whether he believes that the aging population is a provincial or federal jurisdiction. I believe—and I think I also speak for my caucus—that this is a Canadian issue. We need to look for Canadian solutions to the issues of health and retirement, and also the issues of finance, income, employment and immigration, at both the provincial and federal levels. It worries me that the Prime Minister refuses to sit down with his provincial counterparts to consult with them on how to approach these issues.

Instead of health care, retirement and the environment, perhaps we should talk about something the Prime Minister truly cares about: oil. Why is this Prime Minister, who loves touting our country as an energy superpower, the same prime minister who has not managed to get a single pipeline built? Perhaps he should sit down with the provinces to talk about that.

The railway and the Trans-Canada Highway were not built by prime ministers who refused to listen and avoided co-operation. This Prime Minister will never be accused of having too much vision for the country, but projects that require a little vision also require some co-operation.

Furthermore, authorities need to work together in order to apply a fair, just and efficient taxation policy. At the federal level and in a number of provinces, entire forests are wiped out every year to add pages and pages to the Income Tax Act, which just keeps getting more complicated. To ensure that the system is achieving its original objectives, in keeping with the fundamental principles of taxation, we need a Canada-wide discussion on the compatibility of this country's tax laws.

Instead of simply trusting what we are saying, I encourage my colleague to consider the words of former justice Louis LeBel, who

just retired from the Supreme Court. He clearly expressed what Canadians expect from their government, and I am referring to all governments.

● (1305)

[English]

He said:

...I have a certain federalist vision that is more co-operative, based of course on respect for the powers of each level of government but also on a need for co-operation.

[Translation]

That is all we expect of this Prime Minister and all those who follow him: co-operative federalism. Canadian federalism is an important legacy that is required in order to meet the challenges we face and a legacy that Canadians deserve.

Therefore, I invite my colleagues to vote with me in favour of this motion:

That, in the opinion of the House, the Prime Minister of Canada should hold annual First Ministers' Conferences.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a general question for my colleague. In first ministerial conferences, where a prime minister has taken the time to meet his or her federal obligation to the premiers, good things can happen. One that comes to my mind is the health care accord.

We often hear government members talking about how many health care dollars are being transferred from Ottawa to the provinces, these record highs. The record highs that the Conservatives like to boast about would never have happened had it not been for the prime minister at the time having all of the premiers come together to work out a health care accord.

Does my colleague not agree that when we have a vision for Canada, or if we start working together, we can accomplish some pretty good things? Does he agree we can do that when we are prepared to sit down at the table, work with people and build consensus, like Paul Martin did on the health care accord?

[Translation]

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his question.

He was dead-on when he spoke about vision. To really have a vision for the country, why would the Prime Minister not want to take the time to sit down with his provincial counterparts, not just to share his own ideas, but also to listen to those of people who, as I mentioned in my speech, were elected by the very Canadians the Prime Minister claims to represent?

My colleague said:

● (1310)

[English]

“Good things can happen.”

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[Translation]

That is true. When all the first ministers sit down together, they can pool their ideas and come up with even better ideas. It is important for the Prime Minister to take the time to sit down with his provincial counterparts and listen to them in order to improve conditions here in Canada.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Bourassa for his comments on my speech and what I have been trying to do in this federation for the past two decades. I am truly appalled at the Prime Minister of Canada's attitude.

I have a question for him in light of his first-hand experience in preparing provincial budgets in Quebec City.

When a Prime Minister of Canada so unexpectedly delays his budget until April instead of meeting with his provincial and territorial counterparts to marshal the forces of the federation in response to falling oil prices and economic uncertainty, does that unexpected delay not have negative consequences for the provinces as they prepare their budgets?

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: Mr. Speaker, once again, I thank my colleague.

I did mention his expertise in that area. He hit the nail right on the head because the Conservative government's decision to delay the budget until April will have a definite impact on the provinces.

I was in the National Assembly of Quebec for six years. During that time, I was parliamentary secretary to two finance ministers and we held consultations. However, before tabling a provincial budget, it was pretty important to know what direction the federal government was heading in. We sent our experts here to Ottawa to hear the budget speech so that we could make any necessary adjustments. Now it is almost the end of the fiscal year, March 31, and the Conservative government has postponed the budget until April.

How are the provinces supposed to factor in the measures that will be announced in the budget? It would have been better for the Prime Minister to take the time to get in touch with the provincial and territorial premiers, discuss it with them, be transparent and ask them what they could do together to make it better for the country.

We think it is a real shame. That is why we are inviting the Conservative members to vote in favour of this motion.

[English]

Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity to stand in the House today and respond to the motion brought forward by the hon. member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville. I want to begin by reassuring the hon. member that our government has worked, is working, and will work in close co-operation with the provinces and territories.

In addition, even a rough consideration of our current system makes clear that our government's overall approach to partnership with the provinces and territories is based on the principles of fairness and co-operation. Those principles are also the foundation of our economic action plan.

Our Canadian federation works. It is a federation founded on co-operation, mutual understanding, and compromise and it has served us well for generations. It has offered us a standard of living among the best in the world.

Fortunately, our government not only believes in a principled approach to federalism in Canada's intergovernmental relations but also acts on the basis of these principles. Let us look at how these principles were applied in guiding our government's response to the worst fiscal crisis to sweep the globe in generations, that is to say, our economic action plan.

It is also important to bear in mind that the action plan not only ensured that stimulus resources flowed out on time and on target to help Canadian businesses and families through these challenges at a time when stimulus was needed the most, but that it was also focused on making strategic investments that leveraged the unique advantages of regions and sectors across Canada to support longer-term growth, create and protect jobs, raise living standards, and assist those most in need.

Developing an effective stimulus package meant that governments in Canada had to work together. Approximately 40% of the stimulus set out in the action plan consisted of joint actions of federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments. Together, by providing over \$63 billion in timely fiscal stimulus, Canada's action plan made important investments that contributed to Canada's long-term economic prosperity while supporting those most affected by the global recession.

The fact is that since we introduced the economic action plan to respond to the global recession, Canada has recovered both more than all of the output and all of the jobs lost during the recession. Real GDP is significantly above pre-recession levels. That is the best performance in the G7.

Canada's economic resilience and job growth also reflect the actions our government took before the global crisis in lowering taxes, paying down debt, reducing red tape, and promoting free trade and innovation.

However, our government understands that our job is not done yet, and in our efforts to continue Canada's economic success story, infrastructure plays a critical role.

In the short term, investments in infrastructure create jobs for the construction industry; in the long term, they position us to succeed in the competitive global economy. Our government's investments in infrastructure have been historic. Through the \$33 billion Building Canada plan, the government has helped to build over 12,000 provincial, territorial, and municipal projects from coast to coast to coast.

Economic action plan 2013 included \$70 billion for public infrastructure over the next decade. This includes the \$53 billion new Building Canada plan for provincial, territorial, and municipal infrastructure. This plan is unprecedented. It is the largest and longest federal infrastructure commitment in Canadian history.

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A key part of that plan is the gas tax fund. This is federal money that goes to municipalities to support their infrastructure priorities. It was originally a temporary program, but when we saw how important it was to Canada's cities, towns, and villages, we took action: we made it permanent, we doubled it, and we indexed it. It grows annually now, representing an additional \$1.8 billion in funding over the next decade.

In November 2014, the Prime Minister announced an additional \$5.8 billion investment to build and renew on-reserve schools and federal infrastructure assets across the country. This funding will support the modernization and repair of important infrastructure assets to create jobs in communities across Canada and to contribute to Canada's long-term economic prosperity. Many of these projects could not have been accomplished, or will not be accomplished, without the co-operation of every single province with our government.

Let me now address today's recommendation for a first ministers' conference.

• (1315)

The member must be unaware, apparently, that the federal, provincial, and territorial finance ministers generally meet semi-annually to discuss priorities in the lead-up to budget preparations, as well as meeting after the tabling of budgets in all jurisdictions.

Further, deputy ministers and assistant deputy ministers meet with their provincial and territorial counterparts on a regular basis to discuss issues within their respective areas of responsibilities, including taxation, economic and fiscal matters, and fiscal arrangements. For example, work on retirement income adequacy over the 2009 to 2013 period required the creation of additional ad hoc committees at the ministerial, deputy minister, assistant deputy minister, and working group levels.

Another example is the work with provinces on harmonizing the provincial sales taxes with the federal GST, most recently with Ontario, Quebec, and Prince Edward Island. These discussions demonstrated how the department moves from organized multilateral forums to bilateral discussions in order to achieve a long-standing priority with interested jurisdictions.

While the hon. member's party continues spinning its wheels trying to breed acrimony and sow discord, the Government of Canada has been actively and successfully building on a stronger and more prosperous Canada by working with the provinces day to day and meeting by meeting, in accomplishment after accomplishment.

This practice is something that we employ quite regularly in my riding, in my province, and in my communities. All three levels of government work closely. It is about getting the job done. It is about working together and it is about seeing results.

That unheralded co-operation is enhanced by real support for Canadians in all regions where it counts the most: in dollars. In fact, major federal transfers to provinces and territories will total \$68 billion in 2015-16, an increase of \$3 billion from the current year and almost 63% more since 2005-06. The government is ensuring that they will continue to grow. Specifically, equalization will grow in line with the growth of the economy: the Canada health transfer will grow at 6% per year until 2016-17 and also in line with the

growth in economy starting in 2017-18, with a minimum assured growth rate of 3% per year. The Canada social transfer will continue to grow at 3% annually in 2015-16 and in future years.

As the hon. member can see, comparable treatment for all Canadians is fundamental to the government. That is why, through budget 2007, the government legislated an equal per capita cash allocation for the CST and, beginning in 2014-15, the CHT. To ensure that no province or territory is unduly affected by the CHT change, economic action plan 2012 put in place protection to ensure that no province or territory experiences a decline in its CHT cash entitlements relative to its 2013-14 cash levels.

Programs that help address fiscal disparities among provinces and territories are important components of Canada's system of fiscal federalism. That is why the government continues to provide significant and growing support through both equalization and territorial formula financing programs.

Let me also remind the hon. member that equalization payments are determined based on the province's ability to raise revenues at national average tax rates, also known as its fiscal capacity, compared to an average of all 10 provinces. Therefore, a province's ability to raise revenues varies with its underlying economy conditions, and a subsequent decrease in equalization payments reflects a relative strengthening of a province's economy compared to other equalization-receiving provinces.

Equalization amounts for provinces are based on a legislative formula and change from year to year, based on a province's economic strength relative to other provinces. That is a good-news story, and it is exactly how equalization is supposed to work.

I can reassure the hon. member that provinces can continue to count on long-term, growing support from this government as we work together in this uncertain global economy.

That relationship is what provinces want. Provinces want to know that they can depend on what the federal government is telling them is coming their way. They do not want to be surprised. They want sustainable funding. They want dependable funding. This government has demonstrated over the last nine years that we have been able to provide that support and provide that level of sustainable funding that they require to move forward and to provide for their constituents. This is what the provinces need.

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●(1320)

In my past life, as I generally refer to it, I was a provincial politician. I understand how important the relationship with the federal government is. We used to come and meet with federal ministers. I was a provincial minister, and the idea that the opposition members have of ideal federalism certainly did not work out that way in practice. I remember being at those meetings. They make it sound as though they sat around and discussed the issues, brought forward solutions, and acted on them. That is not exactly how it worked. I remember very clearly those days when I sat there, as a provincial minister of agriculture, fisheries, and aquaculture. I remember very clearly the situation. A federal minister would walk in the door and basically say, "This is how it is, and you guys deal with it". There was no relationship, as they suggest, wherein they walk in the door and sit down, we all work it out together, leave hand in hand, and happily go on our way and everything works out great. That certainly was not the case.

What happened was that the Liberals had a heavy-handed approach that they employed the whole time they were in government. We saw this through the downloading they did on provinces. I remember those days when transfers were cut. I can remember those days when equalization was cut and health care funding and social transfers were cut. It was unbelievable.

They talked about themselves as great fiscal managers. They talked about what they did for the economy here in Canada. Well, they downloaded those issues. They put the problem off onto someone else, yet they like to tell us here today that they worked it all out together. If it had been worked out together, that would not have been the solution. That is not how it would have worked out. If those discussions were as they try to portray them, their portrayal of federalism is something that is almost a fairy tale. It is unbelievable, the way they remember it. It would be nice if that were how it was, but that is not how it was.

The provinces can depend on our government. They can depend on the transfers that come from our government. They can take the word of our government and take it to the bank. That is what the provinces want and appreciate. That is what the relationship should be between the federal, provincial, and municipal governments. It should be a relationship that is built on trust and sustainable funding. We have delivered that over and over again.

To conclude, the facts show that our government is keeping its word. Contrary to what the hon. member may believe, we are co-operating with the provinces and territories. I can assure the member that we demonstrate that every single day. With total transfers at record highs, growing predictably at a sustainable and affordable rate, we are providing unprecedented support to the provinces for the delivery of the health and social services on which all Canadians rely. Even during the global economic crisis, our government increased transfers to the provinces and territories to help Canadians across this great country of ours, and they can continue to count on our government as the days go forward.

I would therefore urge the hon. members to act as Canadians expect all members of the House to behave, to work together in good faith, mutual respect, and understanding to build a better life for all Canadians, as we are doing and have been doing through our

economic action plan. I would encourage all members to reject the motion before the House.

●(1325)

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is really remarkable to hear the government say it does not believe in sitting down together with its provincial counterparts once a year or more. I cannot for the life of me understand how a governing party could believe that we are not stronger and more competitive together and that they would reject out of hand the notion that we would sit down and talk to each other, arrive at some priorities as a federation, and address those priorities one by one. It is what Canadians expect us to do, not just between the federal and provincial governments, but with municipalities, first nations, the private sector, and civil society. That is how we are strongest.

Let me give the member one example that brings it right home to him in his riding of Saint John. The Government of Alberta and the federation of premiers have been calling for an adult conversation about Canada's energy future for several years now. They have been asking the Prime Minister to meet with them about this. They have been asking for a new national approach to our energy future.

In a decade or less, we are going to have a million barrels a day of excess oil, which cannot be transported by pipeline, likely going by rail, if present production trends continue. The member's city is going to be deeply affected by this question, through refineries and transportation. Why would he not want an adult conversation as a major point of discussion with the premiers once a year to address, for example, a national energy strategy?

Mr. Rodney Weston: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments from the member opposite. I do appreciate his bringing it close to home for me, because that is where all politics belong. All politics are local.

When he talks about the relationship between the province and the other partners, whether it is the municipalities, first nation communities, or the like, he is so right that they talk about wanting to have a relationship upon which they can depend. People want results. They want results when they work together with different partners. As I said in my speech, we are delivering results and have been delivering results.

When the member takes it back to the energy discussion and debate, he is right when he talks about the energy east pipeline and the benefits that would come to my riding in particular, to the refineries and to the community as a whole. The citizens from my riding are excited about the prospects that lie with the energy east project. They are excited about the potential we have to play such a huge role in the building of this great nation, bringing this nation together. One of the things they are so happy about, when they talk about the energy east potential, is that this government put in a definite timeline to have this project approved. This government did that. It is not a discussion that will go on and on. This is a government that has developed a practice of delivering results, and this is a perfect example of having a definitive timeline when it comes to projects such as this.

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• (1330)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, fortunately, ridicule has never killed anyone.

My Conservative colleague opposite said that his party and his government have good relationships with the provincial and territorial governments based on respect. I really doubt it, especially since the Conservatives decided to impose new health transfer provisions on the provinces and territories. I was absolutely appalled when I read the transcript of the ministers' meeting in the media.

I would like to give my colleague an opportunity to convince me of the respect his party has for the provinces. During that meeting, when negotiations were taking place—I hope it was a negotiation—on the new health transfer provisions, what concessions did the federal government make? Did it make any concessions, or did it simply impose its will on the provinces?

[*English*]

Mr. Rodney Weston: Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate, as the member said, the opportunity to convince him of the respect the government has for the relationship with the provinces.

We certainly respect the positions of the provinces and want to ensure that they have sustainable, dependable funding. As the member refers to, one of the things we have done is have discussions with respect to the health transfers. We have guaranteed that the provinces will see growth in that health transfer, going forward. We have made sure to continue to build upon that growth. People can depend on that, not like with the governments in the past that cut transfers to programs, such as social programs and health funding, which are so vital to the lives of the provinces and their citizens.

Our government has done no such thing. We continue to grow the transfers to the provinces. We are very proud of that. When we talk about respect, there is no better way to demonstrate respect than by keeping our word, and that is what this government does.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, although I do not share my esteemed colleague's background in provincial politics, for 40 years I have been watching the development of politics in Canada. What I have observed over those years reflects something that my colleague mentioned, which is that the nature of co-operation has changed. We have program after program, from immigration to homelessness partnering to infrastructure, where there are continuous and ongoing consultations between the provinces and the federal government, not to mention the fact that our current Prime Minister has had more than 300 meetings with his provincial and territorial counterparts in nine years. Therefore, we do not need the photo ops and the opportunity for selfies that I am sure the leader of the third party would miss.

I would like to ask my colleague this. Based on his experience in the provincial sphere and now his hard work in the federal sphere, has he observed the same evolution toward almost continuous co-operation and meetings between federal and provincial officials, from the lower-rank officials right up to the leaders, over the last 20 or 30 years?

Mr. Rodney Weston: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from my colleague. I have had the benefit of serving the people of my

province at the various levels of government. I served at the municipal, provincial, and now federal level.

When I served at the provincial level, I served in the capacity of the chief of staff to the premier, as well as being a minister of the Crown. When I was chief of staff to the premier, we had the benefit of dealing with three different prime ministers during that timeframe.

I have to say that, throughout all of those meetings we had with those prime ministers, any of the work we got done, any of the results we achieved, any of the progress we made for the province of New Brunswick was basically done in one-on-one meetings.

I have to be very frank. Every province is different. Every province's needs are different. When we sat down on a one-on-one basis with the prime minister, the premier, the chief of staff from the prime minister's office, and the chief of staff from the premier's office, we were able to iron out the details. We were able to get the job done and delivered for our constituents.

As I said previously in my speech, that is what Canadians want. They want us to put aside the rhetoric. They want us to put aside the photo ops, as my colleague said. They want us to deliver results for them.

• (1335)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my challenge for the member is that he seems to disregard the importance of a prime minister inviting the premiers to come around the table to have a healthy discussion on important issues to Canadians.

We never would have had the health care accord. We never would have had the Kelowna accord. There are achievements that can only be achieved if in fact the first minister truly cares about the nation and is prepared to sit down with the provinces collectively to be able to achieve some of the important things on which Canadians want their first ministers to have dialogue.

The question I have for the member is this. Why does he believe his Prime Minister refuses to sit down in a collective room with the premiers? It is not that difficult.

Mr. Rodney Weston: Mr. Speaker, obviously the member missed the point I tried to bring forward in my speech, and I apologize for not being able to articulate that more effectively.

However, the point was that it is about delivering results. That is the point I was trying to make. The Prime Minister of this country has delivered results over and over again. As my colleague has said several times here today, there have been more than 300 meetings with various premiers since he came into office, and results were delivered over and over again.

That is where Canadians are seeing the benefit. They are seeing benefits for their own individual needs in their own individual provinces. That is what Canadians want. They want action on the issues they face personally. As far as photo ops go, we can leave them for the leader of the third party.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the member for Vancouver Quadra.

Business of Supply

Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to this debate in the House and think that the government side misses the point here.

We are a nation. We are the Canadian government. Canada is the second-largest country in the world. We are a huge land mass. We span very many different regions. We have very many different realities in these regions, realities that may create different challenges and problems in the regions.

I want to point out that it was Robert Borden, a Conservative prime minister, who started these yearly and very consistent and continual meetings, inviting the premiers to the table to talk about things. I think that even then a Conservative prime minister had a concept of what nation-building was about, what it meant to want to form one great nation from sea to sea to sea, all rowing in one direction. That is the only way we can foster this kind of nation-building, this of sense of unity, and the feeling that Canada is competing in a very competitive global economy right now. If we do not all pull together and do not have some common action plan in various areas, whether on economic development, jobs, care, or an energy strategy, we will not be able to have a vision for this nation.

We all know, because of the Constitution, that the provinces have to deliver on some of these issues. However, finding that common ground is what this is about, finding the ability to pull together to say that this is where we want to go as a nation called “Canada”, this is where we can compete economically in this global stage, this is where we can take our best practices and share them and be able to build some solid solutions to difficult problems.

There is something else that happens when people sit around the table—and I know the hon. members have been talking about photo ops. It is not about photo ops. I think the Prime Minister is concerned that if he sits at the table and all the provinces gang up on the feds, as they have been known to do, he will not be able to control the agenda and outcome.

However, this is not about the federal government controlling anything. This is about the federal government listening. This is about the federal government beginning to understand the nature of this country. This is about premiers in other provinces realizing that it is not all about themselves and their own province. It is about how they can understand the challenges that face their neighbours. I do not want to have grievances that I cannot air in front of my neighbours. I do not want to have problems that I cannot discuss and cannot find a resolution to with others. I want to be able to say that we are working together. We cannot work together if we do not meet. No team functions well, for instance on the ice, if its members do not practise together. We have to get together. We have to take our greatest strengths and learn how to develop them.

The current Prime Minister has been the first prime minister in 95 or 97 years not to have met with premiers for such a long time, since approximately 2006 in his case.

I think my hon. colleague talked about the great things that came about from meeting and talking, things like the Canada pension plan, things like a national housing strategy of the day, things like a student loan program that works with the provinces, and things like medicare. Those are the things that define us as a nation. Those are the things that reflect who we were and how we got to where are

today and to our having been known, at one point in time, as one of the greatest countries in the world to live. It was because of some of these social programs that were built by people sitting around the table, arguing, debating, fighting. Yes, it is not always pleasant, but it has also brought about the very strong reputation that Canada has had over the years. We have been known as the world's negotiators, because as we sit around this table and fight and argue, we actually find common ground. We build a sense of purpose in which we will all go in this direction, with this vision.

• (1340)

Therefore, in sitting down, arguing, debating, and fighting with each other to find that common ground, we inadvertently and fortunately learn some very important skills. Our bureaucrats and politicians are known around the world, in every multilateral forum. When we were in government and I was a minister, everywhere I went if there was a problem that countries could not resolve, invariably, 9 times out of 10, they called in the Canadians to chair a group to cut through the differences and find commonality.

That is what we became good at. It is no coincidence that our own general, John de Chastelain, was sent off to northern Ireland. It is no coincidence that when North Korea began to flex its muscles, people asked for Maurice Strong to go, or that the United Nations continues to call on Canadians to come to build that negotiating skill to find common ground.

The Council of the Federation, in which the premiers are meeting and talking among themselves, has absolutely no power to do anything or make the kinds of changes premiers would like to make to ensure very important programs.

We should be talking about energy, as one of my other colleagues said. We should be sitting down and devising a plan. There is a richness of energy resources across this country, including oil or fossil fuels on the east coast. There could be tidal energy. We could have solar energy. We can build wind energy. We have hydroelectricity. In my province of B.C., we see natural gas. There are so many ways that we could tap into all the various and diverse forms of energy. We could create an energy strategy. We could create a strong nation that could compete in providing energy for the rest of the world as things go to hell in a handbasket.

We need to talk about the fact that we once were at the top of the heap in health systems. In 2004, we ranked fourth in health system performance, outcomes, et cetera. I hear people talking about outcomes and performance. I do not see any outcomes and I do not see any performance. All I see is a fragmented country that is beginning to bicker internally, just 13 little nation states developing and trying to find a way to move forward.

Business of Supply

This is where the leadership of federal government comes in. We have always been the glue that holds this country together. We have always been the government that is responsible for ensuring that every resident of this great nation, no matter where they live, no matter what province they live in, no matter what region they live in, territory, or wherever, has equitable access to whatever, whether it is justice, health, energy resources, or jobs.

These are the things, especially at a time like this when we are facing so many challenges in being competitive in a global economy, that we need to pull together on. This is when a visionary leader in the federal government would bring premiers together to talk about how we can help each other face challenges.

When I was a practising physician, and also as minister visiting and listening to communities, I found that when people sit at a table they come together and start talking about their own specific grievances. I heard someone say today that individuals are only worried about their own provinces, as they should be. I do not think that is nation-building. Of course, people want their provinces to prosper, but they also want their nation to prosper. If it does, then everyone prospers as a result.

When people sit around a table, I have always found that a great outcome is that they suddenly get the other person's problem. People begin to understand the challenges that the other people and groups face, and in this case the challenges that other provinces face. Then they begin to start getting it. As they get it, they begin to form common ground in developing a strong economy, in making sure that all of their people get jobs across the country. We want to talk about mobility, the ability to go from province to province. We want to talk about pan-Canadian strategies that would move us forward.

We have seen how this country has moved with that kind of leadership at the helm. That is the federal government's ultimate task, to build a nation, to be the glue that holds this country together. In health care we see that the premiers are begging. It is not the premiers who should call these meetings, but it is for the Prime Minister to go to the Council of the Federation, whose next meeting will be here on January 30. They are hoping that the Prime Minister will attend and talk about how we can build these things together.

Health care is losing. People in every province are not achieving the same access to health care. These things are happening.

● (1345)

There is one important thing the Prime Minister can do that would bring back trust, and that is to sit down, face the premiers, and talk about where we go as a nation on four or five specifics, including growth, the economy, social programs, the health of our people, et cetera.

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for that speech. Rarely in my 10 years in the House have I heard someone speak extemporaneously without notes so passionately and comprehensively about what we can do together as a country. I implore my colleagues in the Conservative caucus to wait for the blues, print that speech and read it again. I think it would be particularly instructive for them about the nation-building opportunities we have.

The member alluded to many challenges, but I want to return one specific challenge. This is something we are all dealing with on all sides of the House, the increasing challenge Canadians are having with their retirement and pensions. It is a profoundly important issue. I see in my own riding of Ottawa South those who have public sector pensions and those who do not, those who have RRSPs, those who rely on CPP and OAS, those who are now waiting for a longer period of time, those who have OAS clawed back, and those who do not. However, when is the last time the current government, in nine years, sat down to address this pension crisis for Canadians together? We have the Province of Ontario now moving alone as opposed to our taking a national approach.

Can my colleague speak to that specific issue, given that it is so fundamentally important to our seniors?

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his kind words, but also for what is an extremely important question.

As baby boomers age, we are going to be facing, as the Canadian Medical Association calls it, a tsunami of seniors, many of whom are not prepared for retirement. As the member pointed out, they may not have pensions. For some of them, income security will be a huge issue if all they have is the OAS and GIS.

Here we go with the regions. In my province of British Columbia, seniors cannot afford to rent anything, because it is so expensive, but in some provinces they can. When we have unequal access to a basic thing like housing across this country, how are people able to manage? That is where the federal government comes in to sit down to talk about it, to try to find a common solution and common ground to help seniors.

We know that poor seniors suffer worse health outcomes. They become sicker and they need the health care system, which has now degenerated. As the Health Council of Canada said to us in March in its last report, we have now been seeing, for the last three years, inequitable access to health services and services for seniors across this country.

● (1350)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I must admit, my Liberal colleague's speech was full of passion, but I think she deliberately left many things out.

That hon. member served during the Paul Martin and Jean Chrétien years. There is no denying that at that time, meetings of the federation were held. However, those two prime ministers attended only two of those conferences.

Jean Chrétien was a very close collaborator of former prime minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau, at a time when federal-provincial clashes were at their peak.

Business of Supply

It is great that the Liberals proposed this. I am really glad they did, because it is an interesting proposal and a good starting point. Unfortunately, if the past is any indication of the future, as the saying goes, the Liberals do not have a good track record. Why should we trust them?

[English]

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, I love the word “trust” and how people bandy it about so easily and readily. In fact, between the two governments of Pierre Elliott Trudeau and Brian Mulroney, there were 37 meetings between the prime minister and premiers. We are talking about a Liberal prime minister who met almost every year. Prime Minister Chrétien met with premiers five times and Paul Martin met three times in his very short tenure.

How else does the member think the Kelowna accord came about? How else does he think a national child care and day care early learning strategy was negotiated? How else does he think that the 10-year Canada health accord was negotiated? It was by sitting down with premiers and talking about the problems they and all of us face and finding common ground.

I would ask the hon. member to go back and review his history and get the facts right next time.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to also join the debate on the opposition motion, which states:

That, in the opinion of the House, the Prime Minister of Canada should hold annual First Ministers' Conferences.

Most Canadians would think that happens, or at least there are meetings with premiers of the provinces and territories, because it makes so much sense, as the member for Vancouver Centre so eloquently pointed out. However, that has not happened.

When the member for Oak Ridges—Markham spoke earlier in the debate, he commented that if people had been in a provincial government during the time of the previous Liberal government, they would have been very critical of it. I have news for the member for Oak Ridges—Markham. I was in a provincial government. I was in the B.C. government from 2001 until 2005, under a previous Liberal government. I was at the front lines around the cabinet table when our premier would come back from these first ministers' conferences. He would talk about what had been sparked, where there was a growing consensus on a big issue that Canadians across the country faced, and what he personally would like to do about it. We were all engaged in how we could help move these issues forward, hand-in-hand with the provinces and territories and our federal government.

I would like to point out for the members of the Conservative Party that Canada is a federation, which means that it is a union of partially self-governing states or regions under a central or federal government. We are not a monarchy. We are not a republic nor a dictatorship. We are a federation, and that means we need to work together to advance the big public policy issues where there is a common interest across the country. They may not always be exactly the same interests, but they are common interests.

As my colleague mentioned, a number of those initiatives came out of these meetings of the first ministers with the prime minister,

and that was while I was in the provincial government. I saw first hand how the 10-year national health accord started to bloom as an idea through those premiers and the prime minister working together. What came out of that, for the first time, was a consensus and a way forward on how to join forces, reduce duplication, reduce overlapping initiatives, learn from each other and begin to tackle the huge challenges that people faced across the country with wait times for surgeries and other matters that cost them their good health. That came from a meeting of first ministers and the prime minister.

There was the Kelowna accord. Today, our indigenous peoples are suffering. They do not experience the kind of forward movement that would have happened had the current government not scrapped the Kelowna accord. The accord, once again, was from the premiers meeting with the prime minister. The premier of British Columbia, in particular, decided that this would be a real priority for the Province of British Columbia, so he joined in a leadership role with the prime minister of the day, Paul Martin. He decided to help advance it by working with premiers from across the country, enrolling and eliciting their support for the concept. In the end, we had an agreement among all of the provinces and territories and, most important, with the representatives for all indigenous peoples across Canada.

What do we have today? Our indigenous peoples feel they need to rise up across the country, with demonstrations like “Idle No More”, to get the point across that they are being left out. The comprehensive framework of addressing the inequities and Canada's shameful carry-over of its colonial history have not been resolved. The Kelowna accord would have set the foundation to do.

● (1355)

A national child care plan was another for which I sat at a cabinet table and we wrestled with how we would enter into an agreement for a national program and maintain the unique characteristics of the child care funding, support and principles in British Columbia. Those kinds of conversations at first ministers' conferences helped to power through those complicated differences among us to the point where there were some real outcomes, and the national child care plan was not only negotiated, but was agreed on right across the country.

The first year of funding from the federal government actually flowed to the provinces, and they had one year out of that five-year plan to address the desperate inadequacy and lack of child care in the provinces. Sadly, that is another critical program that the NDP, under its previous leader, voted against, brought down the Liberal government, and the national child care plan was scrapped to the detriment of families across the country.

Statements by Members

It is not just about the things that were done through this collaboration. I also want to speak briefly to some huge failures that are a result of this kind of collaboration not happening. This includes all of the wasted time and energy on Senate reform by the Prime Minister, who never bothered to reach out and meet with colleagues to learn what their appetite for change would be and what kind of change they would support.

● (1400)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. I regret that I have to cut off the member for Vancouver Quadra, but she will have three minutes remaining when this matter returns before the House after question period.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

HYDROELECTRICITY

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with the first ministers meeting in Ottawa, the third party is eager to deflect attention away from the wasteful record of its Ontario cousins.

A report by the auditor general, Bonnie Lysyk, into the smart metre hydroelectricity confirmed the fault lies with the high electricity rate policy, known as the “Green Energy Act”, developed by the same small clique of advisers who have fled Toronto and now surround the inexperienced leader of the federal party in Ottawa. Just like the federal Liberal gun registry that ended up costing billions of dollars, the smart metres have already reached almost \$2 billion, a billion dollars over budget and still climbing.

Their carbon tax, called “the global adjustment”, has caused an increase in bills of almost 1,200% right now from 2006, while the average market price of electricity has dropped by 46%. Ontario Hydro customers are actually paying to have U.S. customers take our excess electricity.

The reason I mentioned this here is that the architects of the provincial carbon tax are now the key advisers to the Liberal Party, and just as they transformed Ontario from the economic engine of Canada into a have-not province, so too will they do this to our country.

* * *

[*Translation*]

FRENCH ACADEMY

Mr. Tarik Brahmi (Saint-Jean, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on January 29, 1635, or 380 years ago today, the Académie française was officially created in Paris, at the behest of the Cardinal de Richelieu, who lent his name not only to the mighty river that runs through my beautiful riding, but also to the town of Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu.

His goal was that the immortal wise people of that august institution would defend and perfect the French language, so that we, francophones from all backgrounds, could all speak a polished French. The Académie française does not belong only to the

Parisians; it belongs to all francophones around the world, from Port-au-Prince to Brussels, from Algiers to Quebec City, and in all francophone communities across Canada.

It was a great honour for Quebec and for Haiti when, in 2013, Dany Laferrière received the highest honour in the French language to become the first Quebecker and the first Haitian to be elected to the Académie française. Long live the Académie française.

* * *

[*English*]

DOMINION CURLING CHAMPIONSHIP

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate Mr. Don Lypchuk and all members of the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 122 in Birch Hills for hosting the Royal Canadian Legion Dominion Curling Championship later on this year, March 15 to 19. This follows closely on the heels of the success it had in hosting the Saskatchewan legion's provincial championship in 2012.

Curling was introduced in the legion in 1952 to encourage friendship, sportsmanship and physical fitness. The Dominion Command sports committee oversees the competition at all levels, from local bonspiels to provincial championships, all of which lead to the annual national dominion championship, which will be held in Birch Hills this year. This is the first time the national dominion championship has been hosted by a small town such as Birch Hills, and I know it will be a huge success.

I am very much looking forward to attending, and I would like to wish the best to all the participants. Happy sweeping.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CAROLINE ANDREW

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last month, Caroline Andrew, a constituent of Ottawa—Vanier and the Director of the Centre on Governance at the University of Ottawa, was appointed to the Order of Canada, our highest honour.

Ms. Andrew has long been working on promoting cultural diversity in Canada, including among Ontario's francophonie. She is also recognized for her contribution to urban and feminist studies, and for her social engagement.

She was the dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences from 1997 to 2005. Ms. Andrew remains humble and genuine. Through her active and lengthy career and in the context of her community involvement, Ms. Andrew's efforts have had a positive impact on the growth of our community.

An appointment to the Order of Canada is an excellent way to recognize the scope and impact of her contribution.

Bravo, Caroline. On behalf of my colleagues, I wish to express our most sincere congratulations and best wishes for all your endeavours.

*Statements by Members**[English]***MENTAL HEALTH**

Mr. Jim Hillyer (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, many people who are living with a mental illness report that the negative stereotypes about mental illness cause them more suffering than the illness itself. As a result, two-thirds of those suffering from mental illness are too afraid to seek the help they need.

Mental illness affects people of all ages and from all walks of life. It can take many forms, including depression, anxiety and suicidal tendencies. The stigma is a key barrier that stops people from seeking help.

Stigma has surrounded many diseases in the past. Imagine somebody feeling ashamed for having cancer or scolding people with cancer. However, concerted efforts to confront these attitudes resulted in a change for the better around these physical diseases, including better treatment, more funding for research and greater understanding from family, friends and colleagues.

The goal is to achieve the same level of acceptance and understanding regarding mental illness. Something as simple as being nice can save a life. Let us talk about mental illness.

* * *

● (1405)

*[Translation]***PRIVACY**

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we learned that every day the Communications Security Establishment Canada examines up to 15 million documents shared online without a warrant or the consent of Internet users. Even though the government refuses to admit it, yesterday's revelations show that, since 2012, the surveillance program has spied on Canadians. That is clearly prohibited by law.

However in 2013, the Minister of National Defence said, here in the House, "I would point him, again, to the fact that CSE does not target the communications of Canadians."

The minister mislead Canadians. The NDP believes that tighter security and safety should not impinge on the right to privacy. We must find the right balance and security agencies must be accountable to Canadians.

One thing is clear: Canadians can trust the NDP to protect their country while protecting their right to privacy.

* * *

*[English]***MIKE SANDS**

Mr. Randy Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honour constituent Mike Sands, who passed away this month, four years after being diagnosed with ALS, a terrible disease that also claimed my grandfather's life many years ago.

Mike, a psychiatric nurse, was an active, athletic, politically engaged community volunteer who also made trips to Malawi,

Africa, with Project Wellness to improve the lives of orphans by drilling wells for clean drinking water.

Mike lived life energetically and enthusiastically, but perhaps his greatest impact on those of us who knew him was his incredible courage and determination to embrace life in the face of death from a cruel, debilitating disease.

His wife Nadine provides an inspiring account in her upcoming book of how the family held on to faith, hope, and love as they learned to let go.

I invite my colleagues to honour Mike Sands' life by making a commitment to do all we can to find a cure for ALS.

* * *

NAUTEL LIMITED

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to recognize a great example of small business in my riding of South Shore—St. Margaret's. Nautel Limited, headquartered in the community of Hackett's Cove since 1969, manufactures and designs high-power transmitters for radio and TV stations and navigation equipment for airports and the offshore.

A company known for its innovative products, Nautel is a Nova Scotian and Canadian export success story, shipping to over 177 countries worldwide. During its 46 years in business, the company has contributed over half a billion dollars to the Nova Scotia and Canadian economies. Nautel has been recognized as a Profit 500 company, as a Passion Capitalist winner, and most recently as Halifax's Business of the Year—all this from a rural company located on the shores of St. Margarets Bay near the scenic landmark of Peggy's Cove.

Congratulations to the management and employees of Nautel. Well done.

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EVENTS IN THE WEST ISLAND OF MONTREAL

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Valentine's Day is approaching, and a lot will be happening in the West Island of Montreal. Here are some ideas to show our love for our communities.

On February 7, Associazione Italo-Canadese del West-Island will be celebrating Valentine's Day and the 22nd anniversary of the founding of their association.

[Translation]

The 14th annual RBC Valentine's breakfast fundraiser for West Island Community Shares will be held on February 10.

[English]

Big Brothers and Big Sisters of the West Island will be holding their 15th annual Valentine's Day breakfast on February 12.

[Translation]

The well-known annual St. Valentine's ball in support of the West Island Palliative Care Residence will be held February 13.

Statements by Members

I would like to congratulate all the organizers, volunteers and participants for their dedication to their community.

I invite everyone to be generous this Valentine's Day and to join us.

* * *

• (1410)

[*English*]

MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

Mr. Bob Dechert (Mississauga—Erindale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, manufacturing remains critical to our nation's economy and to achieving long-term prosperity. Nowhere is this more apparent than in southern Ontario.

Our government, under the leadership of this Prime Minister, is ensuring that Ontario's manufacturing sector is benefiting from our support. While the opposition parties have turned their backs on the hard-working families of southern Ontario, our government continues to create jobs and stand up for them.

In fact, just last week, the leader of the Liberal Party said he wanted to transition away from manufacturing-based employment as a driver of the economy. Canadians deserve better. Comments like this show that the Liberal leader is an economic novice who is not capable of managing the Canadian economy.

That is why the economic leadership of our government will continue to create jobs, foster economic growth, and ensure long-term prosperity for all Canadians. We live in a complex and challenging world. This is no time for amateurs.

* * *

[*Translation*]

STANSTEAD

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week, I had the opportunity to visit some businesses in Stanstead's granite industry.

They make custom countertops, as well as monuments and cenotaphs. I had the opportunity to speak with the executives at Granit Design, Rock of Ages Canada and Rouleau Granit and saw for myself how dynamic these business people are and how hard they work.

However, Stanstead is more than just granite. For example, there is the *Stanstead Journal*, Quebec's oldest weekly newspaper, which was founded in 1845. The Colby-Curtis Museum across the street houses the newspaper archives and the printing plates.

Stanstead is also home to the Haskell Opera House, the only one of its kind in North America. It was built in 1901 astride the boundary line separating Canada from the United States, with half of its seating on American soil and half on Canadian.

Let us not forget the Pat Burns Arena and the Lapin de Stanstead. There is also Granit Central, which houses both the granite museum, with over 160 years of history, and the miniature train museum, which has the biggest collection of Lionel trains in Canada.

Stanstead is a great place to live. Congratulations to the elected officials and all those who make this such a vibrant community.

* * *

[*English*]

TAXATION

Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have heard from many families in my riding of Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar who are pleased with our fantastic new family tax cut plan and benefits.

Every single family in my riding and across Canada will benefit by an average of over \$1,100 per year. Parents in Canada will now receive almost \$2,000 per child and \$720 for older children.

While our plan will help 100% of families with kids, the NDP plan would help only 10% of families. The Liberal leader has pledged to reverse our tax cuts and threatens to do exactly what Liberal Party elites always do: raise taxes for ordinary Canadians.

Unlike the NDP and the Liberals, who will take this money away from Canadian families and put it into the pockets of big bureaucracy, our Conservative government believes Canadians should keep more of their hard-earned money, and with our family tax cut plan and benefits, we are proud to be doing just that.

* * *

AUTISM

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to celebrate Etobicoke North's extraordinary and unstoppable Dee Gordon, who today completed walking over 500 kilometres to raise awareness for autism spectrum disorder.

While Dee walked, her son Tim drove the support truck, and together this mother-son team collected thousands of signatures to ask the federal government for a pan-Canadian autism strategy.

Dee does not want other Canadian families to have to fight for early diagnosis, affordable treatment programs, and support programs as she has had to fight for her amazing son Jacob. She hopes the government will implement recommendations in the 2007 Senate report called "Pay Now or Pay Later: Autism Families in Crisis".

Dee's children, Tim, Krystal, and Jacob, are proud of her, as is her Aunt Mary. Our office and our community are proud of her and her tremendous undertaking for Canadian families.

I ask all members to join me in recognizing Dee Gordon and the walk to Ottawa.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal leader suggested that we should provide military support to our allies only if the outcome is known and only if others are doing the heavy lifting.

Oral Questions

This is an insult to the brave men and women who took Vimy Ridge, who stormed the beaches of Normandy, and who battled the Taliban in Kandahar. On those hallowed fields, Canadians fought tyranny against insurmountable odds.

Now the Liberal Party has sunk to a new low. According to *The Hill Times*, the member for York West suggested that ISIL may attack Canadians because the Prime Minister put us in that position. The events of late October are proof that these jihadi terrorists have declared war on us. It is not the other way around.

It is beyond reprehensible to suggest that since we are supporting our allies in this fight against brutality, Canada and Canadians deserve what we get. Statements like this prove that the Liberal Party is not capable of protecting Canadians. It has a dangerously naive view of the world and the threat posed by jihadist terrorism.

The Liberals do not have the resolve, strength, determination, or leadership that is needed to fight ISIL. Thankfully, Canadians can count on us.

* * *

• (1415)

[Translation]

PRIME MINISTER'S ONLINE VIDEO SERIES

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's latest online video clip is not very subtle.

The video is nothing but a crass election ad paid for with public funds. It is truly unacceptable. What is worse, the Conservatives are exploiting the fear of terrorism and using military images to promote their partisan agenda and their war in Iraq.

I am not sure that our soldiers are happy to be used in this way, especially considering how our veterans are treated. Not only is this ad in poor taste, but it is also a huge waste of public funds.

The Prime Minister should spend less time in the studio turning out propaganda and more time working with the provinces to stimulate the economy and create jobs. In fact, this video clip is a perfect example of how out of touch the Prime Minister is with Canadians' reality.

Fortunately, our leader is ready to step up. This week he presented a responsible, costed plan to revitalize the manufacturing sector and create jobs.

The end of this government is near. After the 2015 election, the Prime Minister will have all the time in the world to make videos on his own dime.

* * *

[English]

TAXATION

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government is delivering an unprecedented package of benefits to hard-working families through the expanded universal child care benefit and the family tax cut plan.

In my riding, in places like Airdrie, Cochrane, Crossfield, Olds, Canmore, and Banff, and in communities all across Canada, the vast

majority of these benefits will go to low- and middle-income families, and 100% of them will benefit from our plan.

However, time and time again, the Liberals and their NDP comrades have made it clear that they want to take this help away from Canadians. Shame on them. On this side of the House, our Conservative government stands with hard-working Canadian families.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, another foreign takeover approved by the Conservatives and another round of pink slips for Canadian workers. Hundreds of staff summarily fired at Tim Hortons headquarters are just the latest sad reminder of the Conservatives' failure to protect Canadian jobs. Many of these people had put their whole careers into this company, only to be let go with no notice when the new foreign owner swept in.

Why did the Conservatives yet again fail to stand up for Canadian workers and their jobs?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Industry, CPC): Of course, Mr. Speaker, any time someone loses their job, we feel great sorrow for those who are going to be affected by that, but what the member for Hamilton Centre leaves out is that because of this foreign investment in this firm, Tim Hortons is now going to expand, with over 500 new restaurants in Canada, creating jobs all across this country. They are also going to be moving Burger King from Florida to Canada and launching a global platform, creating jobs in Canada and around the world.

Foreign investment into Canada that creates jobs in Canada and allows Canada to be a true leader on the international scene in terms of job creation and growth is something Canadians should be proud of.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): So if I get this right, Mr. Speaker, losing jobs is good news for the Canadian economy, according to the Conservatives.

Hundreds are being shown the door with no warning, yet this minister expects congratulations because he signed a secret deal to only fire 20% of the staff.

Conservatives rubber-stamp these deals with no transparency and have a record of failure when it comes to holding these companies to account when they break their promises. Just ask any of the thousands of former Stelco workers in my hometown of Hamilton.

When will the Conservatives stop signing secret deals like this that consistently sell out Canadians and their jobs?

Oral Questions

● (1420)

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Industry, CPC): First, that is ridiculous, Mr. Speaker. As I just said, this is an investment in Canada. Those people at the head office who unfortunately will be getting difficult news, of course our hearts go out to them, but this is an investment that will allow a company to grow in Canada. Had this investment not happened, the situation actually might be significantly worse for the employees of this firm.

However, because we have low taxes in this country—taxes are 46% lower to create a business in this country than is the case in the United States—jobs in Canada are being created. Almost 1.2 million net new jobs have been created in Canada, and because of this investment, Tim Hortons will grow by over 500 new outlets.

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INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as layoffs continue to pile up even higher, Conservative economic credibility is dropping even lower. Canada just had its worst year of job growth since 2009. Plunging oil prices and federal downloads are set to tear multibillion-dollar holes in provincial budgets.

With the health of our economy and the jobs of so many Canadians at stake, why does the Prime Minister continue his political petulance and refuse to even meet with the Council of the Federation?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and the members of this cabinet regularly meet with their provincial and territorial counterparts. In fact, the Prime Minister has held over 300 meetings with provincial and territorial premiers since taking office in 2006.

With respect to the economy, it continues to grow. We are very proud of the fact that close to 1.2 million Canadians are working now who were not before.

The economy continues to grow. It is a very positive record. We are balancing the budget and growing the economy while cutting taxes for Canadians. That is good news for all Canadians, and the opposition should celebrate that with us.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the provincial premiers are meeting in Ottawa to talk about the economic crisis this country is facing. They will talk about energy, infrastructure, trade barriers and the sad state of the labour market.

We are seeing more and more job losses and bankruptcies, so why is the Prime Minister not attending this meeting of the Council of the Federation? What is more important than working with the provinces to create more jobs in this country?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have already said, the Prime Minister regularly meets with his provincial and territorial counterparts. In fact, he has held over 300 meetings with his counterparts since 2006.

[*English*]

The job creation and economic numbers in this country are spectacular. They are spectacular because we do work with our provincial and municipal partners. We brought in one of the largest stimulus and infrastructure programs in Canadian history. We did that by working with our provincial and municipal partners, despite the fact that the Liberals and the NDP voted against it.

* * *

[*Translation*]**EMPLOYMENT**

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are seeing the results with Tim Hortons.

Nearly 400 Tim Hortons employees will lose their jobs as a result of the merger with Burger King. Between 20% and 40% of the employees in Montreal, Oakville, Calgary, Debart, Kingston and Langley will be laid off.

What is worse, the Conservatives approved this agreement, despite warnings from the NDP, and refused to disclose the details of the agreement at the time.

How could the Conservatives do such a deal behind the backs of Tim Hortons employees?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not the case at all.

As I just said, it is certainly sad for the employees in Oakville and elsewhere who will be losing their jobs, and also for their families. As the government, it is our job to ensure that our economy grows so that jobs are created all across this country.

[*English*]

With regard to this transaction and this investment, had this investment not happened, more jobs would have been lost. It is important for the NDP to understand that drawing investment into this country and allowing Tim Hortons to expand by over 500 more franchises, which will create more jobs in Canada, is good for the Canadian economy in the long run.

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[*Translation*]**INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS**

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since Laurier, Canadian prime ministers have seen fit to meet regularly with their provincial counterparts, as a group, in addition to bilateral meetings. That went without saying. It goes without saying in any civilized federation. It goes without saying, except for this Prime Minister.

Why does he not see that, in light of falling oil prices and economic uncertainty, he must meet with his counterparts, join forces and develop a plan with the entire federation?

Oral Questions

• (1425)

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has held over 300 meetings with his provincial and territorial counterparts. The members of this cabinet continuously meet, and so do the members of Parliament. We meet with our provincial and municipal counterparts.

Let us look at the results. We brought in the largest economic stimulus and infrastructure program in Canadian history by working with our provincial partners. The opposition members said we could not do it. We did it. We reformed our immigration system to better respect Canada and the provinces. They said we could not do it. We did it. We increased funding to our provincial partners with respect to health and education. They said that we could not do it. We did it while balancing the budget and cutting taxes. We act; they talk.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the Governor of the Bank of Canada says the collapsing energy sector is unambiguously negative, when investment, exports, jobs, and growth are all slumping, when the Conference Board projects the risk of a recession in Alberta, and the Parliamentary Budget Officer says federal revenue will drop by \$8 billion this year, why is the Prime Minister not working with the premiers this week on a truly national effort to cope with issues seemingly so serious that they caused his budget to be delayed into the next fiscal year? Why is he snubbing the premiers?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, we have held over 300 meetings with our provincial partners.

Again, let us look at some of the results. When we said that we wanted to bring in a new national job grant that would help Canadians seeking employment across the country and that we wanted to do it while working with our provincial partners, the opposition members said we could not do it. We did it. That is the record on this side of the House.

When it comes to building a bigger, better, stronger, more prosperous Canada, we get the job done. They talk.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, snubbing the premiers only underscores the dysfunctional relationship. The critical thing they should be doing together is accelerating infrastructure, but this government missed most of last summer's construction season. It punched a \$1.5 billion hole into the building Canada fund, and 75% of new funding is punted beyond 2019, but it is not too late. Cancel income splitting for the wealthy, put that \$10 billion into infrastructure, call the premiers over to dinner tonight, and get infrastructure going before spring.

Mr. Peter Braid (Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in actual fact, this Conservative government is making unprecedented investments in infrastructure. This high level of investment will continue for the next decade. These infrastructure investments are creating jobs and prosperity. They are enhancing our growth and prosperity.

Contrast that with the Liberals' approach, who hope that through hocus-pocus, the budget will balance itself. Instead, we know that

they will hike taxes, run a deficit, and leave a burden of debt to our kids and our grandchildren.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are in no position to talk about federal-provincial collaboration because they offloaded their deficit onto the provinces and destabilized the country's health care systems.

The Conservatives can rhyme off their list of actions, but the fact is, their plan is not working. Despite their piecemeal approach and their upbeat press releases, the manufacturing sector has lost half a million jobs in the past 10 years. Their so-called action plan is not working.

Would it be too much to ask the Prime Minister to show a little humility and sit down with the provinces in the interest of boosting the economy and employment in this country?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are most certainly working with the provinces.

Take infrastructure, for example. We have agreements with all of the provinces to invest in infrastructure across the country. I am working with Jacques Daoust on Canada's domestic free trade system to create jobs in Canada and around the world.

I am working with my Ontario counterpart, Brad Duguid, to improve Ontario's manufacturing sector. We are constantly working with the provinces to improve things for families and the economy.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, free trade is fine, but reciprocal trade is even better.

The Conservatives are not vigilant enough when it comes to protecting our manufacturing sector. The steel industry, for instance, provides 17,000 jobs in Quebec, but because of an increasing number of protectionist provisions introduced by the Americans, including the buy American act, our exports have dropped 18%.

When will the government finally do something to ensure that trade with our partners is based on a win-win relationship?

• (1430)

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we will certainly protect the interests of our manufacturers and job creation through our free trade approach.

Oral Questions

[English]

As a Conservative government, we of course will take no lessons from New Democrats when it comes to expanding free trade and ensuring that we are creating Canadian jobs through world sales and free trade. We are the only country in the world that has tariff-free access to the two largest economies in the world: the United States and Europe.

We have gone from having free trade agreements with five countries to now 43 countries around the world. We are expanding free trade opportunities, creating Canadian jobs through world sales, and of course, with all of these free trade deals, we have New Democrats dragging their feet, saying no, and opposing free trade. We will continue to lead.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, here is another example of the Conservatives' incompetence: we have learned that the government knew for 18 months that the temporary foreign workers program was adversely affecting youth employment.

It took this government 18 months to do something. For 18 months, the Minister of Employment ignored his departmental officials' warnings. He did nothing.

Why did the minister bury his head in the sand while his program was throwing our youth into the unemployment line?

Why did the media and the official opposition have to get involved before he finally decided to act?

[English]

Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is precisely why we began reforming the temporary foreign worker program in 2012. In fact, the Minister of Employment and Social Development cited specifically youth unemployment as a reason to make these reforms.

One of the new requirements, which, by the way, the NDP did not support, is that workers would have to show that they have aggressively pursued hiring people who are under-represented, like youth, like people with disabilities, like aboriginal Canadians.

The changes are delivering results. We want to ensure that Canadians—young Canadians, aboriginal Canadians, Canadians with disabilities, all Canadians—are first when it comes to jobs in Canada.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, youth unemployment is at 14%, and Conservatives are making it worse. The minister was warned 18 months ago that the temporary foreign worker program was making it harder for young people to find jobs. He was warned that the industries that are the top employers of young workers were filling those jobs with temporary foreign workers. He did nothing until CBC shone the light.

The minister sat on this information for over a year, while our young people were denied jobs. Why?

Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fact is we have made major reforms that started in 2012-13 and just recently.

When we are talking about youth unemployment, certainly we want the temporary foreign worker program to not exclude any Canadian, but there are a lot of other things we are doing to help young people get jobs, things like the apprenticeship grant, the apprenticeship job creation tax credit, and the tradesperson tools deduction tax credit. There is a list of things we are doing to ensure that young people get trained for the jobs available, things like the Canada job grant. New Democrats voted against every one of those initiatives. Instead, they want to create big bureaucracies, raise taxes, and kill jobs.

* * *

MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, except that none of this is working because we still have persistently high unemployment in the country.

The Conservatives have watched while over 400,000 manufacturing jobs have disappeared and middle-class families in southwestern Ontario are paying the price: 800 at John Deere in Welland; 2,000 at GM in Oshawa; 2,500 at Ford and Sterling in St. Thomas.

The tax writedown on new manufacturing equipment is expected to expire at the end of this year. How can manufacturers invest and create middle-class jobs when the finance minister is delaying the budget and leaving them in limbo?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, this 400,000 job number that the NDP keeps wheeling out has been disproved in *Maclean's* magazine. She should pick up and understand that. The NDP math on this is a joke. So, too, is the joke of the NDP pretending that it is in favour of tax cuts for small business.

We put forward the accelerated capital cost allowance. The NDP voted against it. We have expanded free trade that is creating jobs in southwest Ontario. The NDP has voted against it. She talks about the auto sector. We put in place the auto innovation fund that is creating 1,200 new jobs in Oakville. She voted against it.

When it comes to the unemployment rate, it has gone from 7.2% to 6.5%. We are—

● (1435)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we get our statistics from Statistics Canada. The Conservatives get theirs from *Maclean's* and Kijiji, and they call themselves competent.

Oral Questions

Job growth is at its lowest level in 5 years, labour participation is at its lowest level in 15 years, and the Prime Minister's spokesperson just said that the economy was doing spectacularly.

The Conservatives have delayed their budget and are arrogantly refusing to meet with Canada's premiers. The provinces are here to talk about solutions to our anaemic job growth, our growing infrastructure needs and our weakening energy sector. The premiers are meeting just down the street, for heaven's sake. All the Prime Minister has to do is roll out of bed, get into the limo and show them a little respect.

With tens of thousands of Canadians losing their jobs, when is the Prime Minister going to do his?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I just said, the Prime Minister has met with his counterparts over 300 times.

When we look at Canada's economy in comparison with our partners around the world, we are, and will continue to be, the envy of the world.

We will always reject the Liberal and NDP priorities of raising taxes on Canadian families, killing jobs and running high debt. That is not our priority on this side of the House.

Our priority is continuing to grow on the close to 1.2 million jobs that we have created, helping our manufacturers, not transitioning out of manufacturing like the Liberals and the NDP would do. On every matter that counts to Canadians, lower taxes, lower debt, they can count on us.

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Éleine Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, our soldiers have been in Iraq for months now, and we still do not know the exact nature of the mission. The Chief of the Defence Staff said today in committee that, for now, there are very few Canadian Forces members on the ground.

Does that mean that the government plans to send more combat troops to Iraq?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member says that she does not know the object of the mission. It is to fight ISIL terrorists. That is what it is all about. That is exactly what we are doing with our special operations forces and the attacks by our fighters out of Kuwait. We are doing the right thing. We are standing up to these terrorists, at home and abroad.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today, before the joint committee meeting on the mission in Iraq, the Chief of the Defence Staff said that he gave the order that special forces could call in air strikes at the front lines as part of the advise and assist mission. He described this as an evolution and agreed the situation had changed.

Canada is now an outlier in its operations compared with our allies.

Was the Minister of National Defence aware of this expansion of the mission and did he give his approval?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the mission of our special forces is to advise and assist. Yes, there is progress being made.

As for the committee this morning, it was pointed out that the Iraqis were making progress and retaking their territory and solidifying the areas they already controlled.

I appreciate the hon. member and his party want nothing to do with this in the sense that they cannot support it, but I think most Canadians support this fight against ISIL and terrorism.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is an issue requiring the minister's immediate attention, and that is the continuing tragedy of suicide by Canadian Armed Forces members.

Sadly, there were 19 suicides in 2014, one of the highest levels in the last decade. In fact, suicide has now claimed the lives of more Canadian soldiers than combat in Afghanistan.

DND has rightly pointed out that this is related to the "significant" increase in post-traumatic stress disorder in the Canadian Armed Forces.

Could the Minister of National Defence tell us if there will be new measures in the forthcoming budget to deal with this serious crisis?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our thoughts and prayers go out to all military families that have lost loved ones.

We have significantly increased investments in mental health services over the years. We now have over 400 full-time mental health care workers. This is one of the highest ratios in NATO, and it is appropriately so. We have to give them the help they need. This is a priority with the government.

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INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Trinity—Spadina, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, I asked the Minister of Finance to announce his municipal infrastructure budget for Canada's cities and to do it now. He ducked the question. He is not just hiding his budget, he is hiding under his desk.

In town halls across Canada, mayors are asking for a partner in Ottawa. Here is part of what one city, Regina, is looking for: \$30 million for a new transit facility; \$38 million for highway overpasses; \$67 million for the railroad revitalization project.

Does the minister not want a strong Regina? Does he not want people working in Regina? Why will the Minister of Finance not release the budget for municipalities and get the money flowing now?

Oral Questions

●(1440)

Mr. Peter Braid (Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me recap what municipalities have asked for and what our Conservative government has delivered.

Municipalities wanted a long-term infrastructure commitment. We did that, 10 years. They wanted the most significant investment in infrastructure in Canadian history. We did that, \$53 billion over the next decade. They wanted the gas tax fund doubled. We did that. They wanted it made permanent. We did that. They wanted it more flexible. We did that.

We are delivering for Canadian municipalities.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Trinity—Spadina, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the knocking we are hearing is the Minister of Finance's knees beneath his desk.

Yesterday, I met Cecil Clarke, the mayor of Sydney, Nova Scotia. I asked him about how much federal money he was going to get this year. The answer was, "I don't know."

Federal infrastructure has been cut by 90%. In Cape Breton that means no money last year, no money the year before, nothing, not a penny from Ottawa.

Cape Breton needs a federal partner. It is looking for \$60 million to remediate the harbour and \$450 million for a new water plant. What does it get from this minister? Nothing. He is afraid to answer questions.

That city, and every city across the country, needs an answer. Where is the budget? Where is the money? Where is the commitment? Get it here now.

Mr. Peter Braid (Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the preamble to that question is horse hockey.

The new building Canada plan has been open for business since last March. In less than a year, infrastructure projects representing almost \$5 billion have already been approved. Some of these projects include public transit in Edmonton, highway systems in Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, and the airport expansion in Brandon, Manitoba.

We are getting this job done.

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VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in June the veterans committee published a report in which every member agreed on immediate changes necessary to the new veterans charter, which the government keeps kicking down the road.

Recommendations included ensuring enough case workers so veterans like Ron Clarke are not forced to wait up to six weeks for assistance. The government has had over six months to act on the recommendations.

Will the minister confirm he will table, by tomorrow, an update on their progress on implementing these recommendations, and provide

a concrete timeline for when veterans can finally expect the changes for which they have all been pleading?

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as that member well knows, and if he does not, he should ask his colleague from Markham—Unionville, when the Liberals created the new veterans charter, we implemented it over the course of our government. The sad part is that every time we have made investments to improve the new veterans charter, who has voted against it? The Liberals who created it.

We are committed to updating the standing committee on our progress on its recommendations, not just in this week but throughout the coming months.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 83-year-old disabled veteran, Basil McAllister, of Burton, New Brunswick, fought the Department of Veterans Affairs through the review board for 10 years, along with 2 court decisions, to finally realize his compensation benefits because of the chemical spraying at Gagetown.

In 2005, the Prime Minister, then the opposition leader, said that everyone affected by this spraying would be cared for. Thousands upon thousands of military personnel, their families and civilians are without proper compensation and care for the terrible injuries they suffered from the chemical spraying at Gagetown.

Will the government now do the right thing and ensure that all of them get the proper dignity they so rightfully deserve?

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank Mr. McAllister for his service to Canada and for being a passionate and engaging advocate.

As the member well knows, because he has been in the House some time, several years ago our government committed—

The Speaker: Is the translation working? It seems to be fixed, so I will allow the hon. Minister of Veterans Affairs to answer the question.

●(1445)

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, I started by thanking Mr. McAllister, a veteran who served our country and someone who has been an engaging advocate.

Hopefully, that pause allowed my colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore to process the time he was in the House when the government committed \$100 million to address historical claims related to that base.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, just recently, the government spent some \$700,000 on legal fees in a court battle against veterans. I think the government does not get it. The men and women it is going after are the ones who fought for our values, our rights and our way of life.

Oral Questions

Why does the government prefer to take veterans to court instead of providing them the services they are entitled to?

[English]

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, many of his colleagues voted for the new veterans charter, which is at the root of that lawsuit. I would remind him, as well, that as our government has continued to update and invest in items that the Liberals missed in the new veterans charter, his party and his fellow critic have voted against that every time.

My sincere hope is that he can get on board as we continue to improve a program that is working for many, and we need to ensure it works for all.

* * *

[Translation]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we cannot accuse the Conservatives of being inconsistent in their approach to veterans and asylum seekers because on both counts the Conservatives would rather go to court than provide the services those people are entitled to.

Legal wrangling and proceedings alone have cost Canadians \$1.4 million. It is a waste because all that the Conservatives managed to get out of this is a court order telling them that their policies are inhumane.

Instead of creating work for their lawyers, the Conservatives should try to actually take care of refugee claimants' health.

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are quite pleased with our reform of the asylum system, which is working much better than it did before.

What is even more baffling to us is that the NDP insists that health care be provided to asylum claimants whose applications have been denied or are fraudulent. That is what the NDP is asking for.

We will continue to protect the interests and health of refugees as well as the interests of taxpayers.

[English]

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, instead of building a country where no one gets left behind, the government goes to court to try to ensure that people get left behind. Those court costs come right out of the pockets of hard-working Canadians. We know that the justice department spent more than \$1.4 million defending a refugee policy that the Federal Court called "cruel and unusual".

It is a simple question for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. I am sure he has the numbers right there in front of him. How much has his department spent fighting a vindictive campaign against refugees?

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, why does the member opposite insist on fighting a vindictive campaign against honesty?

We have done nothing but support the health of refugees. What we object to is asylum claimants who have failed to be deemed refugees by the Immigration Refugee Board, some of whom have fraudulent and bogus claims, receiving gold-plated health care that goes beyond what Canadians receive. That is why we are the only party in this place standing up for Canadian taxpayers and the only party that will speak honestly about protection of the health care of refugees.

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● (1450)

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, recently we learned that Correctional Service Canada has replaced milk with powdered milk in all of its prisons. This measure will save taxpayers over \$6 million per year by reducing the cost for milk by over 40%.

However, this does not sit well with the hug-a-thug crowd in the NDP. The member for Shefford said yesterday that it lacks "decency" to serve powdered milk to convicted murderers and rapists.

Can the Minister of Public Safety tell the House if the government agrees with the NDP member for Shefford?

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is a strong supporter of Canada's dairy industry.

It is indecent and shameful of the NDP to put criminals ahead of taxpayers and victims.

The purpose of federal penitentiaries is to provide rehabilitation, not fancy meals.

[English]

On this side of the House, we will continue to put victims first and make our streets and communities safer.

* * *

HOUSING

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 41 seniors at the Beech Hall Housing Co-operative in my riding are at risk of becoming homeless as a direct result of the Conservatives' refusal to renew federal funding. Why does the government not recognize its responsibility to ensure that the most vulnerable are not left behind and made homeless?

Why are Conservatives putting vulnerable seniors in my riding at risk by refusing to renew funding?

Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reason that funding is not being renewed is that mortgages are generally paid off, and when the mortgages are paid off, the agreements end.

Oral Questions

Provinces are in charge of housing; it is their jurisdiction. What we have done is to provide funding to the provinces to the tune of \$1.25 billion. We have allowed them flexibility. If they want to help co-ops where the agreements have expired, they definitely can do that. We have provided support in that way. We have also provided support in previous budgets to help retrofit and provide for new buildings.

We are following through on commitments and are helping the provinces do their job.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is totally irrelevant. There is no mortgage, because they lease the building.

[*Translation*]

We cannot stand idly by. More than 1.5 million families in Canada do not have adequate housing. Again, 1.5 million. We live in one of the wealthiest countries in the world and we cannot even ensure that our families have adequate housing. That does not make any sense.

Will the government finally do something about this and support our motion to renew the funding for social housing?

[*English*]

Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, we have done more than that. In fact, we have a homelessness partnering strategy to help those who are chronically and episodically homeless. We also have provided funds to the provinces who are in charge of housing.

Here is another idea for the NDP. How about helping Canadians, those who are vulnerable, to have more money in their pockets so they can afford the housing in their regions? How about things like keeping taxes low, creating jobs and opportunity for them, things like the universal child care benefit expansion and increase?

Instead, the NDP want to create huge bureaucracies, increase the debt of all Canadians, and make vulnerable Canadians even more vulnerable.

* * *

[*Translation*]

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, unlike the Conservatives, the NDP believes that it is a right to have a roof over one's head.

The Conservatives are so incompetent that even when they throw \$60 million at private consultants, they are unable to answer access to information requests. If they would only respond instead of dragging their feet, there would be no problem.

If only the PMO would answer questions instead of wanting to control and check everything, like a small gang of busybodies, there would be no problem.

When will the Conservatives realize that their lack of transparency and culture of secrecy makes it impossible to respond to access to information requests?

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Albas (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government treats taxpayer money with the utmost respect. Professional services are needed to acquire special expertise and to meet unexpected fluctuations in workload. In some cases, the government contracts private sector companies to deliver or improve services, without maintaining an expensive government bureaucracy. Professional service contracting means that the government is only paying people when there is work to be done.

Professional service costs are down \$200 million since 2010-11. Temporary help services are down \$11 million since last year and by \$75 million since 2010-11.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, by now Conservatives have become famous for the way they have sabotaged our access to information system, but now we have discovered that instead of using professional, non-partisan public servants to do the job that access to information requests require, Health Canada is paying private consultants over \$200 an hour to do the job and the replies that we get are slower, with more information being held back.

It is bad enough to block Canadians from seeing what their own government is doing. Why does the minister waste so much money doing it?

• (1455)

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we take the issue of openness and transparency at Health Canada very seriously. We want to build the utmost confidence in our regulatory framework and that is why we have embarked on our transparency and openness framework in the last year.

We want to make sure that any access to information request that comes in is addressed quickly. People have the right to know things about the medical devices or the drugs their families are using.

* * *

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when our special forces were deployed to Iraq, the Prime Minister explicitly promised the House that they were there to advise and assist the Iraqis and not to accompany them.

Last week we learned that our forces are at the front working on targets for air strikes.

Can the minister explain to the House how this mission, which was initially to advise and assist the Iraqis, has become a mission where our troops are at the front and participating in combat operations?

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has been very clear. They are there to advise and assist. As well, they are conducting air strikes out of Kuwait.

Oral Questions

The government's position is very clear, but after the doublespeak I heard from the Liberals earlier today, I have no idea where they were. Could he confirm that they are still on side with their colleagues in the NDP?

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is too important an issue to be speciously insulting like that.

Today at committee the Minister of Defence and the Minister of Foreign Affairs did a spectacular job of not providing any new information or—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Vancouver Quadra still has the floor and I will ask members to come to order.

The hon. member.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, today at committee the ministers of defence and foreign affairs did a spectacular job of not providing answers or new information to Canadians, who deserve it. They still will not provide a mission cost estimate, as our allied countries have done and as Canada has done in the past.

However, I would like to ask about a next step and would like a real answer for a change. When the Iraqi forces begin to push in earnest to recapture ISIL territory will Canadian Forces continue to accompany them to the front lines in that advance?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to be very clear. We will continue to advise and assist, which is exactly what we are doing. Yes, we are supportive of the Iraqis in the air and with our special forces. That is going to continue.

Again, I would be very interested to hear exactly where the Liberals are. They are all over the map on this one and I think they should do some explaining.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today on Parliament Hill Canadians are calling for action to free Raif Badawi. Sentenced in Saudi Arabia to a thousand lashes, he has received 50 lashes and faces hundreds more. Canadians fear for his very life.

How many lashes will it take before the government uses direct action? Canadians expect their government to take clear, strong stands against human rights violations. What kind of real pressure will the minister put on the Government of Saudi Arabia to pardon this free speech activist?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada considers the punishment of Mr. Badawi to be an insult to human dignity. It is of extreme concern for us. We continue to call for clemency in this case. The promotion and protection of human rights is tremendously important in Canada's foreign policy. While Mr. Badawi is not a Canadian citizen, I want to assure the member opposite and the whole House that we will continue to advocate on his behalf.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have been hearing the same thing for two weeks now, but we have yet to see any real action. How many other vigils and marches like the ones in Ottawa today do we need before the government realizes how urgent this is?

Raif Badawi is still being held and has 950 lashes remaining in his sentence. All that for a blog.

What does the government plan to do? When will the minister pick up the phone, call his counterpart in Saudi Arabia, resolve the situation and ensure that Mr. Badawi is sent to Canada as soon as possible?

• (1500)

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I spoke to Saudi officials directly more than a week ago.

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SMALL BUSINESS

Ms. Joan Crockatt (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, recently our government was awarded the Golden Scissors Award, not by the hairdressing association but by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, for cutting taxes on small businesses when they are filing their taxes.

Cutting red tape is something that residents of my constituency are really concerned about. I would like to hear from the Minister of National Revenue what our government is doing to eliminate red tape for small businesses.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Calgary Centre for that question and for her advocacy on this issue.

We are committed to keeping taxes low and ensuring that Canada remains one of the very best places in the world to do business. When we take the lead to reduce red tape, we free small businesses to grow and are standing up for employers and job creation.

Today, the overall federal tax burden is at its lowest level in over 50 years. We also know, in contrast, that the Liberals and New Democrats would reverse that and increase taxes and the burden.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, contrary to what was suggested to me in a briefing note by the minister's office, Health Canada had the authority to regulate the reprocessing of surgical instruments and other single-use medical devices well before Vanessa's law. However, the government has been remiss in using this authority. So far, only one type of reprocessed single-use device has been licensed, a low-risk one at that, and the reprocessor apparently applied for the licence on its own initiative, not at the request of the department.

Oral Questions

When will the government finally produce a robust system for certifying reprocessed medical devices?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is correct that this issue did come to light, and I thank him for the work he did on this when discussing Vanessa's law at committee. I can assure him that this issue is with Health Canada, and if he would like to discuss it further with me, I would be happy to do that.

* * *

TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, hundreds of truckers and their families depend on their work at Port Metro Vancouver. Last year an agreement was negotiated in good faith to end the strike at the port. Now truckers are understandably upset. They are still waiting for this agreement to be honoured.

Last week, the port instituted a new licensing system that is raising a lot of concern in the trucking industry. All the while, Liberal and Conservative governments continue to play political football with hard-working middle-class families. What is the minister doing to avoid future disruptions at Port Metro Vancouver and help these families now?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Port of Metro Vancouver is a critical hub of transportation in this country. That is why we invested so much in the infrastructure in that gateway.

It is true that we had a disruption last year. As a result, the Province of British Columbia has set up a new truck commission that will be available to the truckers to ensure that there is smooth transit out there.

The Port of Metro Vancouver has also revised its trucking licence system. There will be some members of the trucking community who will not receive licences, but we are providing transition assistance through the Port of Metro Vancouver for those who are affected.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this past November the Minister of International Trade launched the Go Global workshops to provide Canadian small and medium-size enterprises with the tools they need to seize new opportunities created by the most ambitious pro-jobs and pro-export plan in Canadian history.

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade please update the House on the progress of these workshops and how this government is helping to boost Canadian exports and jobs?

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today the Minister of International Trade is in Kitchener-Waterloo hosting the Go Global workshops, which provide SMEs with the tools, services, and information they need to succeed. By tomorrow, over 500 participants will be reached.

Our government is committed to working shoulder to shoulder with Canadian SMEs in every sector across the country to seize export opportunities and create jobs.

Only this Conservative government can be trusted to create jobs and opportunities by advancing a pro-export, pro-jobs plan.

* * *

● (1505)

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, FD): Mr. Speaker, an independent study that was conducted in Quebec and made public today has confirmed communities' concerns about the possibility of an oil spill from the energy east pipeline. These concerns were not unfounded.

The study shows that the systems used by TransCanada could not detect a leak of less than 1.5% of daily volume, which is the equivalent of 2.6 million litres a day, and that it could take weeks before anyone realized that a disaster had occurred.

Will the minister acknowledge the negative impact on municipalities of both the pipeline and the planned port, whether it is in Lévis, Cacouna or Baie-des-sables?

Hon. Greg Rickford (Minister of Natural Resources and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we will not take a stance before the review is completed. It is up to the National Energy Board to listen to those who are directly affected and have relevant information or knowledge in that area. We base our decisions on science and facts, and we have been clear. Projects will be studied only if they are safe for Canadians and will not harm the environment.

* * *

PENSIONS

Ms. Manon Perreault (Montcalm, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are showing no interest in protecting the middle class, claiming that the economy cannot survive if we keep respecting the agreements that were made in the past. The increasingly poor treatment of our pensioners, prompted by the government's unfair policies, is unacceptable.

When will the government members review pension protection legislation in order to protect our seniors, who keep getting poorer?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we certainly agree with protecting our seniors. That is why the Minister of Finance has taken a very serious approach to this issue in order to protect them.

[English]

The Speaker: Before moving on to the Thursday question, I wonder if members would indulge the Speaker in taking advantage of my position. I would like to wish Regina native Jon Ryan, my brother-in-law, who is taking part in a relatively large sporting event on Sunday, the best of luck.

Business of Supply

Luke Willson, another Canadian from LaSalle, Ontario, is also taking part, which is of interest to some of my colleagues from the Windsor area. The Speaker would appreciate it if my colleagues would join me in wishing these two Canadians the best of luck in Sunday's game.

It is relatively shameless of me, but of course it is not for me that I point this out: it is for the University of Regina Rams program and high school football in Saskatchewan. It is a mark of great honour for us to watch Jon play in the Super Bowl.

Thank you, colleagues.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I can only say, as a British Columbian, go Seahawks. We will have to see what the result is.

[Translation]

There are 14 sitting weeks left before Canadians decide on the fate of this government. There will be a pre-election period at the end of those 14 weeks.

[English]

As far as the NDP official opposition is concerned, the leader of the official opposition this week talked about the NDP plan to kick-start good jobs in Canada. He talked about measures to help small business, the manufacturing sector, and research and development. Those are some of the NDP priorities.

I would like to ask my colleague, the government House leader, what the agenda is for the government in the week to come and when the budget is going to be tabled in the House of Commons.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me first say happy new year to my counterpart and all hon. members.

We are back in Ottawa for another hard-working, orderly, and productive sitting of the House of Commons, a sitting in which our respective parties' policies and plans will be debated. Only one party, though, has a plan that will benefit all Canadians, and that is the Conservative plan to create jobs, keep taxes low, and keep our communities safe from crime and the threat of terrorism.

This afternoon we will conclude debate on the Liberal opposition day motion.

Tomorrow we will wrap up debate on Bill C-44, the protection of Canada from terrorists act, at third reading. This bill is the first step in our legislative measures to ensure that our law enforcement and security agencies have the tools they need to meet evolving threats.

The other part of our program to counter that terrorist threat is a bill that will be introduced tomorrow. It will be called for second reading debate during the week after our upcoming constituency week. That should allow all hon. members an opportunity to study these thoughtful, appropriate, and necessary measures and to hear the views of their constituents before we start that important debate.

● (1510)

[Translation]

Before we get to that constituency week, though, there is one more sitting week. On Monday, we will debate the NDP's pick of topic, on the third allotted day. Before question period on Tuesday, we will start debating Bill C-50, the Citizen Voting Act. After question period, we will return to the third reading debate on Bill C-21, the Red Tape Reduction Act, which will help ensure job creators can focus on what they do best, not on government paperwork.

[English]

Wednesday and Friday of next week will be dedicated to Bill C-32, the victims bill of rights act. This bill would put victims where they belong: at the centre of our justice system.

Finally, next Thursday will be the fourth allotted day, when we will again debate a proposal from the New Democrats.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—ANNUAL FIRST MINISTERS' CONFERENCES

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that I have a few more minutes to participate in this important debate on the first ministers' conference.

[English]

I have talked about how those kinds of conferences were essential from a provincial minister's perspective in bringing forward key initiatives to address some of the big challenges, and how in the past they were unfortunately frustrated by a Conservative government that wiped out the Kelowna accord and Canada's national child care plan and essentially neglected the 10-year health accord and other important national initiatives in our federation, such as the national housing strategy of 2005 and the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartier's Project Green, which was also the product of much consultation with premiers across the country and included work done on a provincial level by ministers and their staff, who all participated in, supported, and created a national approach to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

This has been an abject failure on the part of the current government. It ties into the current Prime Minister's hubris and refusal to meet with the other premiers from across the country.

In my final minute or so, I would like to touch on some of the key challenges we have that absolutely demand the kind of collaboration that comes out of these meetings with premiers. Premiers can undertake to champion certain issues and can work with the federal government and the Prime Minister to bring colleagues from across the country on board so that we can have a national approach to these national issues.

Business of Supply

One is the health and independence of seniors, including support for caregivers. With the changing demographics in Canada, this is a huge concern for Canadians. In its polling, the Canadian Medical Association identified this as a current key issue right across Canada and one that will become more pressing in the years ahead.

We cannot say in good conscience that we are addressing the concerns of Canadians adequately if we fail to come together to collaborate on a new strategy and method of ensuring that the health, independence, and caregiving of seniors can be better supported in the years to come. That is the kind of thing the Prime Minister should be talking about with premiers in an annual meeting. That is just one.

Of course, there is also dealing with the environment and climate change, but that requires leadership—not dictatorship and not autocracy, but actual leadership. That is what we are asking from the Prime Minister. That is what the Liberal Party leader is promising to provide to Canadians should he have the opportunity to do that in the future.

• (1515)

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague mentioned that Project Green, which we negotiated with the provinces and would have helped Canada fulfill its commitments under the Kyoto protocol, was cancelled and replaced with nothing. The government gave the money to the provinces, but with no plan.

It is the same with health care. We had an agreement. The government provided the money. It did not add to the money over the years. It gave the money but forgot the plan.

Will my colleague agree that it is good to have transfers to provinces, but that it is also good to have joint action on environment, on health, and on all files?

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville is an excellent example of the kind of collaborative work that does address key issues.

I will give one more example, which is with respect to the Clarity Act. The Clarity Act addressed a very difficult challenge across this country. The very unity of our country was a conundrum after a referendum that came within less than a percentage of breaking Canada up, but our colleague from Saint-Laurent—Cartierville was able to consult across the country with premiers and the prime minister of the day and ensure there was support for this concept. The Supreme Court approved the concept, and we now have a very different situation in our country with respect to unity, thanks to the Clarity Act.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, as this is the first time I have been able to take the floor in today's opposition day motion, I want to signal that I will be supporting the motion put forward by the Liberal Party.

We do need to have a regular schedule of first ministers' conferences. This is a federation. It is not a one-person rule. It is not a one-level of government rule.

A patchwork of failing policies across the board does not make for a healthy or prosperous Canada. I would particularly note our lack of an energy policy. We are the only country in the G8 with no energy

policy. The barrier to energy policies has always been that at least one province has said that it did not want the federal government involved. I will not mention that province's name, although it starts with an *a* and ends with an *a*.

Now all provinces, including Alberta, are coming forward and saying that they want a national strategy. It is the Prime Minister who is saying no. It has never been more urgent to have an energy policy that includes climate action.

I want to ask if my friend from Vancouver Quadra would like to expand on that.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the leader of the Green Party.

Absolutely, we need to make progress on an energy strategy. We can only do that with the kind of collaboration we are talking about in our federation. That is exactly what happens when a prime minister sits down with premiers from all of the provinces and territories.

There are the meetings themselves, but there is also conversation in the hallways, over coffee, and over lunch. The premiers chat together. They find out who is in support and who needs to have more information. They work together to have a solid front, as they achieved on issues like Kelowna and our national child care plan. That is absolutely the only way to go with an issue as complex as the one the member has just raised.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to stand up in the House today to inform members of the various ways that the provinces and territories engage and co-operate with the federal government on environmental issues of concern to us all.

First of all, let me begin my remarks with a view to the Constitution Act, 1867. The environment, as such, is not listed in the Constitution and it is not a matter that neatly fits within the existing division of powers.

In several of its key decisions regarding the environment, the Supreme Court of Canada has recognized that the protection of our environment is a matter of shared jurisdiction among the federal and provincial governments. Furthermore, the federal government has devolved many of its environmentally related responsibilities in Canada's north to territorial governments. It is, therefore, incumbent on federal, provincial, and territorial governments to work together in assuring that the health of Canadians and that of their environment is protected and managed in a sensitive manner.

Various mechanisms exist to achieve this objective among governments. We have the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment. Multilaterally, the CCME is the primary intergovernmental forum for ministerial discussions and for action on environmental issues of mutual concern. The Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment comprises all 14 federal, provincial, and territorial ministers responsible for the environment.

Business of Supply

In the case of the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment, which is incorporated as a not-for-profit organization, as a Manitoban member of Parliament I am very pleased to say that it is located Winnipeg. It is chaired on a pre-determined rotational basis. The CCME is currently chaired by Manitoba, and Quebec is set to become the chair in June of this year.

My colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment had the privilege of attending the last meeting of the CCME in Prince Edward Island this past September. At this meeting, federal, provincial, and territorial governments shared their respective views and came together in agreement to pursue collaboration in a number of areas, including climate change, waste management, air quality, cumulative effects, and hazardous spills response and prevention.

By working collaboratively to protect the environment, federal, provincial, and territorial governments are able to share best practices, reduce unnecessary duplication, and maximize our collective resources to the benefit of all Canadians. Together, we are achieving results for Canadians in managing the air we breathe, pursuing action to reduce our waste footprint, and protecting our shared water resources.

We look forward to continuing the discussion of these important matters with our provincial and territorial colleagues at their upcoming ministerial meeting in Winnipeg this June.

Regarding the issue of air quality, through this close collaboration between federal, provincial, and territorial governments, the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment has made a number of noticeable accomplishments in recent years. In 2012, the ministers approved a new national air quality management system. Once fully implemented, the air quality management system will protect the health of Canadians and the environment with measures to improve air quality right across Canada. It is a comprehensive system that includes stringent outdoor air quality standards, emission requirements for major industries, and provincial and territorial actions to address local sources of air pollution.

The air quality management system was developed through years of extensive collaboration with provinces, territories, and stakeholders. The result is a system that lets all levels of government work together to address air pollution in a coordinated and effective way, and governments are well under way in implementing all components of this system.

For example, in 2013, we established new outdoor air quality standards for ground-level ozone and fine particulate matter, the two main components of smog. To further help improve the air that Canadians breathe, federal, provincial, and territorial governments are currently working together on new outdoor air quality standards for nitrogen dioxide and sulphur dioxide.

In addition, in June 2014, we published in *Canada Gazette* Part I proposed mandatory national performance standards on specific sector and equipment groups. Once they are fully implemented, Canada will have, for the first time ever, consistent emission limits for regulated industries right across the country.

Provinces and territories are also establishing mechanisms for enhanced local and regional action targeting individual sources of

pollution in communities across the country to ensure that poor air quality improves and good air quality remains.

• (1520)

This system is a model of successful intergovernmental cooperation in that it has been designed to allow different levels of government to act within their jurisdictions while still collaborating on an overall approach to manage air quality effectively. That was done under the leadership of our Prime Minister.

Waste water is another area where federal, provincial, and territorial ministers have come together and agreed to a Canada-wide approach for the management of municipal waste water effluent. Through working with provinces, territories, and engaged municipalities, the Government of Canada is proud to have enacted the country's first national standards for waste water treatment. The waste water systems effluent regulations, enacted in 2012, address one of the largest polluters of Canadian waters and protect our water quality for generations to come.

I used to work in the forest industry and I recall in 1989, under then prime minister Mulroney, the Conservative government implemented the pulp and paper effluent regulations, which had a dramatic effect on cleaning up waterways close to pulp and paper facilities.

Waste water systems posing a high risk will have to meet the effluent standards by the end of 2020, those posing a medium risk by the end of 2030, and those posing a low risk by the end of 2040. Thanks to changes to our Fisheries Act brought forward by this government, the Government of Canada has been able to conclude equivalency agreements with Yukon and Quebec and has also concluded administrative agreements with New Brunswick and Saskatchewan.

The Government of Canada will continue to work with interested provinces to ensure efficient and effective administration of the regulations and to reduce regulatory duplication. This government, however, is also sensitive to the challenges Canada faces to meet these new regulations.

That is why our government has committed over \$2.3 billion to waste water infrastructure since 2006 through a number of programs. Waste water treatment infrastructure is eligible for funding through the provincial-territorial base fund, the green infrastructure fund, the gas tax fund, and the building Canada fund. Under the gas tax fund, which is now permanent at \$2 billion per year, municipalities can choose to spend 100% of that funding to upgrade their waste water infrastructure.

Business of Supply

Regarding the issue of conservation, wildlife, and biodiversity—an area that is near and dear to my heart given that I represent a beautiful and diverse constituency—although the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment constitutes the major federal-provincial-territorial forum on environmental issues, there are several other issue-specific fora and engagement mechanisms.

I am pleased to report to the House that our Minister of the Environment will be convening a meeting with her provincial and territorial counterparts responsible for conservation, wildlife, and biodiversity matters in Ottawa this February. This will provide a shared opportunity to advance important matters related to the protection of species at risk, the management of invasive alien species, and other biodiversity-related matters.

In addition, we consult with provinces and territories through the Wildlife Ministers Council of Canada, which provides an inter-jurisdictional mechanism for dialogue and advancement of key issues related to terrestrial wildlife conservation.

Our Conservative government also engages with jurisdictions through the Canadian Endangered Species Conservation Council, created under the federal-provincial-territorial accord for the protection of species at risk and formally constituted under the federal Species at Risk Act.

The current program of work with these two councils is being overseen by federal, provincial, and territorial officials under the Canadian Wildlife Directors Committee and a biodiversity steering group at the assistant deputy minister level. Current areas of work include species at risk; population conservation of various species of bats, migratory birds, and polar bears; invasive alien species; habitat conservation; and public engagement.

In recent years this federal, provincial, and territorial engagement on biodiversity matters has resulted in accomplishments in a number of areas. For example, Canada is in the process of developing national biodiversity goals and targets for 2020. These 2020 goals and targets will help Canada to focus on biodiversity priorities and provide the basis for measuring and reporting on progress.

Like those of many countries, Canada's national goals and targets are informed and inspired by the global Aichi targets, which were adopted in 2010 under the Convention on Biological Diversity's 2011-2020 strategic plan and tuned to the domestic context.

• (1525)

Some other examples of work undertaken jointly by federal, provincial, and territorial governments are the development of an ecosystem status and trends report and a value of nature to Canadians study.

The ecosystem status and trends report provides accessible and integrated scientific information on the status and trends in Canada's ecosystems. It serves to inform policy and program development on biodiversity and conservation in all jurisdictions.

For its part, the value of nature to Canadians study provides strategic and current data and analysis on the social and economic value of Canada's ecosystem goods and services, including wildlife and biodiversity.

This information will serve to substantially strengthen the decision-making capacity of federal, provincial, and territorial governments on the environment and the economy.

In terms of climate change in Canada, it is a shared responsibility between the federal government and the provinces and territories. Given the unique circumstances in each jurisdiction, the Government of Canada works with our provincial and territorial counterparts to inform the development of Canada's long-term climate change approach.

In the lead-up to the next Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Canada has committed to announce its intended nationally determined contribution as part of a global climate change agreement. The Minister of the Environment has been engaging with her provincial and territorial counterparts to obtain their input in determining Canada's post-2020 targets.

The Government of Canada has been doing its part by implementing a sector-by-sector regulatory approach to reducing greenhouse gas emissions that protects the environment and supports economic prosperity. This government has already taken action on two of Canada's largest sources of greenhouse gas emissions: transportation and electricity. Moving forward, the government will continue to take action to reduce greenhouse gases from other major emitting sectors of the Canadian economy.

In conclusion, our Conservative government agrees that coordinated action between governments is crucial to advancing an array of environmental initiatives. That is why we are in constant contact with our partners and other levels of government right across the country. We are committed to working with provincial and territorial governments to advance environmental goals that contribute to improving the health of Canadians and their environment.

• (1530)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have a national budget that has been indefinitely delayed. The government's response is that it is delaying it because of the oil crisis situation and other economic factors.

I think we have heard every premier across our country express concern with respect to what is happening in terms of Canada's economy. It seems to me that in the past, whether it has been Progressive Conservative prime ministers or Liberal prime ministers, when a prime minister has detected tension and the need for a get-together with all the premiers, the prime ministers have responded positively.

Does the member not see that the situation is severe enough that the government itself is not in a position to even table a budget or to provide a date on which it is going to table a budget? That in itself should be justification for it, not to mention the length of time since we have had a first ministers' meeting at the call of the prime minister. When we live in a federalist state such as Canada, it is more than symbolic. There is a real need for all the premiers and the prime minister, on occasion, to get together.

Business of Supply

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Speaker, what I find interesting about the Liberal approach to most public policy questions is that it is always focusing on process. I just gave a detailed speech outlining clear and significant results in the field of environmental protection and enhancement.

What this Conservative government focuses on is not process. We focus on results. Sure we have to have process. We have to have meetings in certain areas and so on. However, the goal is clear and measured results.

I would note, as well, that we can count on the assurances of the minister and the Prime Minister in terms of the budget.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague said that it was important to hold meetings before making decisions; however, the government has, on many recent occasions, neglected to take this step and to get a consensus before making decisions that affect the provinces and sometimes the provinces' jurisdictions.

The Conservatives decided to cut annual Canadian health transfers by 3%, from 6% to 3%, without consulting the provinces. Out of the blue, the Conservatives told the 10 provinces that they would be getting \$30 billion less every year to fund their health care systems.

There was also no consultation on the EI reforms, the temporary foreign worker program or the Canada job grant. All 10 provinces at the Council of the Federation opposed this new change. Search and rescue infrastructure is another area where the federal government did not consult the provinces. There is certainly no shortage of examples to show how they neglected to consult the provinces.

If consultation and discussions are so important, as the member just said, why are there so many examples like this?

• (1535)

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Speaker, I just listed a number of areas on the environment on which the federal government consults with provincial and territorial governments right across the country.

Again, the member opposite points out the flaw in the Liberal and NDP approach to the economy. It is always process, process, process.

This government has delivered 1.2 million net new jobs since the recession in 2008. We have the best economy in the G7 of all the G7 countries. Again, because we are diligent and disciplined in terms of the management of the budget, we are able to deliver for Canadian families in a way that no other government has ever done. That is a record I will stand by very proudly.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the member completely ignored my question. Instead he gave one example of consultation by the federal government, whereas I gave several examples where it consulted no one. Thus, he deliberately ignored me by answering my question in the way he did.

I would like to ask him again why the government takes action most of the time without consulting anyone. The hon. member told

us that it is just process, as if it were not important to consult the provinces, which are members of the federation, when programs that will affect their areas of jurisdiction—and sometimes even their budgets—are implemented.

This is not about process, but about what needs to be done in a federation. Canadians deserve a federal government that assumes its responsibilities.

Why is the government shirking its responsibilities in so many cases? I hope that the member will not cite one of the rare cases where the government did conduct consultations?

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Speaker, what motivates this government is the well-being of Canadian families and the well-being of our economy.

Again, as has been pointed out numerous times in this chamber, the Prime Minister has, over the term of his time in office, talked to the premiers some 300 times. In my own speech, I outlined areas on the environment on which we are consulting with municipalities, provinces, and territories right across this country. We do this all the time.

It is our focus on results that has created the strongest and best economy in the entire G7 family.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in a federation, representatives of all levels of government are elected by the people. They elect us to represent them at the federal level, just as they elect provincial and municipal representatives. People expect us to work together for the well-being of all Canadians.

Why then is the government systematically refusing to bring together all interested parties to talk about the major issues, such as health, labour, the environment and the economy? It is fine for the member to say that there have been more than 300 meetings, but when did everyone get together to do some good, productive work, as Canadians expect of all elected officials?

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that the member was not listening to my speech, and I reject the premise of his question completely.

Of course we consult. We consult all the time. As I said, the Prime Minister has held some 300 meetings and discussions with provincial premiers right across the country.

The NDP and Liberals do not realize is that it is very important to respect the constitutional jurisdiction of the various levels of government. That is how one creates an efficient federation.

Business of Supply

Ensuring that each level of government does the work they are supposed to do will ensure the smooth functioning of our government. I go back to the results for our country: the best economy in the G7 and 1.2 million net new jobs since 2008. That is a record I will proudly run on.

● (1540)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at the outset, let me say that I will be sharing my time with a very distinguished member of this House, the member for Markham—Unionville. I know members will want to be here not only to listen to my remarks but to stay for the incisive remarks that will follow my presentation.

[*Translation*]

Of course I am very pleased to rise to support the motion moved by my colleague from Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, who has set an important example to all Canadians across our country of how to manage a federation that works.

Throughout the years when my colleague was the minister responsible for intergovernmental affairs, there was a constructive and positive relationship between the federal government and its partners in the Canadian federation.

For instance, many important agreements were signed between the two levels of government. There was co-operation and mutual respect not only regarding their respective areas of jurisdiction, but also regarding the difficulties shared by all those who represent Canadians and are seeking significant solutions to the economic, social and environmental problems facing our country.

[*English*]

The motion today I think sets out a very simple premise. The simple premise is that the Prime Minister of Canada has a responsibility, as head of the executive of the national government, to work constructively with other orders of government and with his partners in the federation: other first ministers.

This Prime Minister has resisted so vehemently sitting down in a structured first ministers' conference, where all premiers would have an opportunity to express their shared concerns about economic issues facing their populations and their citizens and what the national government can do in partnership with them to better serve the citizens that all of us have been elected to this place to serve.

[*Translation*]

I wanted to give some concrete examples from the regions, especially my province, New Brunswick, where a constructive and respectful commitment on the part of the Prime Minister towards his provincial counterparts would give them the opportunity to come up with regulations, a solution or some way to move forward on difficult and complicated files, while respecting jurisdictions and the spirit of partnership and constructive engagement.

It is no secret: my province, New Brunswick, is in a very difficult economic situation. In many respects, that province has performed the worst when it comes to job creation and economic growth. We have suffered significant job losses. Industries that have traditionally been very important to New Brunswick are struggling, and this has led to job losses in other sectors.

The situation is serious. This is a critical time, and that is not a partisan statement. These circumstances have meant that the former Progressive Conservative government, the Liberal government that preceded them and the current Liberal government have all faced issues that do not fall solely under provincial responsibility; they also require an engaged federal partner.

[*English*]

Take, for example, the question of employment insurance. The current government decided to make changes to employment insurance benefits, particularly for those who work in seasonal industries across many regions of this country. In New Brunswick, those changes obviously have a disproportionate impact, because a certain percentage of our economy will necessarily be seasonal. However, right across the country, in Quebec, northern Ontario, and the Prairies, the decisions the Conservative government made around employment insurance benefits had a negative consequence.

The Atlantic premiers decided to commission an independent study to look at the direct impact these changes would have on the revenues of families in their provinces at times of the year when there is no employment. In my province of New Brunswick alone, hundreds of millions of dollars, over \$400 million, was taken out annually from the pockets of New Brunswick families who depended on employment insurance benefits. As I said a minute ago, at a time when the unemployment rate increases, if the corresponding employment insurance benefits are reduced and limited, it has a devastating impact. It also has a devastating impact on the provincial treasury, as many of these people land on income assistance and social development measures, the instruments that the province has to look after income security.

Was the Prime Minister willing to sit down and talk about employment insurance with the Progressive Conservative Premier David Alward for the last four years? Of course not. Was he willing to engage with the newly elected Liberal government of Brian Gallant on the important issue of employment insurance? Of course not.

This is an example of a problem that is shared by other premiers. It is an example where the national government has a program that has a punitive effect in many regions and provinces of our country and where the premiers asked the Government of Canada and the Prime Minister to sit down with them to look at solutions, to understand the impacts, and perhaps constructively and collaboratively find a solution.

● (1545)

[*Translation*]

The current Prime Minister was not interested. Think of the changes to provincial health transfers. The former finance minister, the late Mr. Flaherty, went to a premiers' meeting and announced that a certain amount was available. There was no negotiation, no discussion, no acknowledgement of the demographic realities of each province.

Business of Supply

The province of New Brunswick has an aging population, and many people live in rural and remote regions. Its proportion of people who live in regional centres and rural areas is one of the highest in Canada. We have two official languages, and I am extremely proud of that. However, that means New Brunswick's provincial government has to spend more money to provide adequate services in both official languages.

Instead of engaging in constructive collaboration with the provincial premiers on this important issue—providing high-quality health care in all provinces of Canada for the long term—the current Prime Minister is unavailable.

[*English*]

We talk a lot about infrastructure in the Liberal caucus, because we hear from premiers, mayors, community leaders and citizens about the negative effects right across the country of the recent reductions and cuts to infrastructure spending. The premiers are in Ottawa today and tomorrow. They would have given anything for an opportunity to be invited by the Prime Minister to sit down and talk about a positive and comprehensive infrastructure investment that would not only create the much needed immediate jobs right across the country that, but also prepare our economy to be a sustainable green economy, a growing economy, and a productive and competitive economy.

Route 11 in New Brunswick is one of the important north-south highways from one end of our province to the northern part. The provincial government of Premier Alward, who was defeated this fall, had asked for the Government of Canada to be a partner, twinning with them in making this highway a four-lane highway. We have seen tragic accidents, with people losing their lives on an overcrowded, dangerous two-lane highway, often through difficult winter conditions, but the government refused to sit down with its provincial partners to find a way to make this important economic project a reality.

[*Translation*]

Even federal infrastructure, such as wharves, ports and smaller infrastructure, lacks funding. For example, the town of Richibucto in New Brunswick needs money for infrastructure repairs. The mayor of Richibucto asked for money. Provincial elected representatives have once again realized that they do not have a federal partner.

For years, the restoration of Moncton's Petitcodiac River has been a provincial government priority. It is the right thing to do for the environment and the Moncton region. The government refused to get involved in any constructive way.

•(1550)

[*English*]

Projects like the energy east pipeline and other energy projects that are vital to the economic future of my province are stalled because we have a Prime Minister who will not engage with his provincial counterparts. We think the Prime Minister has a responsibility to hold annual first ministers' conferences and to discuss issues like this that are important to citizens right across the country.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to the remarks of my esteemed opposition colleague. I would like to reassure him. He is lamenting the fact that there was not enough contact between the Prime Minister of Canada and the former premier of New Brunswick.

As far as the new premier of that province is concerned, the Prime Minister was honoured to meet with him. In fact, he stopped in New Brunswick to visit Premier Gallant on his return from the Sommet de la Francophonie at the end of November.

[*English*]

The premiers can meet, they can enjoy meeting, and they can enjoy drafting lists of things they want the taxpayers of Canada to pay for. That is fine. However, at one point we will run out of other people's money. That is probably why they want a shopping list for us to pay for, not for them to pay for.

Former prime minister Pierre Trudeau, a friend of this hon. member, warned us about not being the head waiter to the provinces. Frankly, it is all here in the *Memoirs* by Pierre Elliott Trudeau.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Ottawa—Orléans for his question. I did not entirely understand the references to Mr. Trudeau. We have never suggested that the Prime Minister of Canada should behave in the way that my colleague from Ottawa—Orléans described in his comments, which were uncalled for.

We asked the government to hold group meetings where the provincial premiers could share their joint concerns with the Prime Minister of Canada. Often, the problems facing my province are not so different from the ones Quebec or the other provinces have to deal with.

The hon. member for Ottawa—Orléans talked about a stop that the Prime Minister made on his way home from the Sommet de la Francophonie. That is news to me. I do not recall the Prime Minister of Canada being in New Brunswick in the past few months. I know that at the last minute he offered the Premier of New Brunswick the opportunity to travel with him by air to Senegal. The Premier of New Brunswick accepted that generous offer. However, the thought that an in-flight conversation constitutes a first ministers' conference is disingenuous and is akin to claiming that there were 300 meetings on flights and on the tarmac, and maybe even at a cocktail party. These are brief conversations. Frankly, claiming that there was a meeting with the Premier is just ridiculous.

Business of Supply

[English]

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskaing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I heard the member talk about long-term health care for the provinces and Conservative governments' impacts on this. I agree that the policies the Conservative governments are putting in place are creating a void in health care. However, let us look at the Liberal record. There was \$25 billion in funding cuts in 1997, a broken promise on pharmacare, and there has been private delivery of health care. Under Paul Martin, the cut to health care funding was more than anyone could have imagined, and it created a waiting list.

We have a government that is refusing to work with the provinces. We have a Liberal third party that is now saying that when it becomes government, it would want to meet with the provinces. However, when the Liberals were in power they met with the provinces and ignored or refused to meet them completely. Therefore, why should we believe the Liberals now?

• (1555)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskaing chose what I think are a few somewhat exaggerated examples. She wanted to talk about first ministers' meetings that were productive and that led to important changes in health care. Let us use the example of the 2004-05 meetings, the three meetings in two years that the previous Martin Liberal government had with all of its provincial counterparts. What happened? We saw the creation of a 10-year accord, which saw very important investments made in our health care system, something the current government pretends it invented.

When Conservatives stand and talk about health care, they talk about the investments they have been making since 2006. What they fail to say is that these investments were decided at a first ministers' meeting under the previous Liberal government, which Liberals think was an example of collaborative and constructive federalism.

I would also point out that at the time the previous Liberal government left office in 2006, almost all of the provinces right across the country were in budgetary surplus. That is something the current government cannot say.

[Translation]

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Beauséjour for his supportive words.

The first thing I would like to say is that it is almost unbelievable that, since 2006, this Prime Minister has not attended an official meeting of premiers. That is contrary to what previous prime ministers of Canada have done. They all wanted to hold such meetings in order to run the federation. It is very simple. Canada is a very decentralized country and we must work together in order to run it.

[English]

If we look at the jurisdictions, we see there are very few areas, apart from monetary policy and to some extent foreign affairs and defence, that are purely federal. Virtually everything else is a joint jurisdiction in one way or another, or else provincial, so if one wants

to achieve things that are important to the people of Canada, there is no choice but for the levels of government to work together.

In this regard I would like to give a quote from Kathleen Wynne, the premier of my province of Ontario. Just a few days ago she said:

Fifty years ago, Lester Pearson, John Robarts and Jean Lesage and their contemporaries helped build a Social Union that strengthened our federation and bound us closer together. Today, our generation needs to take inspiration from that as we work in co-operation to build a better Economic Union for all Canadians. We know that when we are investing in infrastructure we are building, and when we are building roads and transit, or hospitals and schools, or energy networks and ports, we are growing.

That is the vision from the Premier of Ontario, and I agree with it. I would not expect the current Prime Minister to go that far, as he seems to have a history of not totally agreeing with Kathleen Wynne, but at least he should have meetings to effectively run the federation.

Let me begin by thinking of two reasons that he perhaps does not want to do that and then go on to think of some areas that are particularly important for my province and for my premier.

I think the first reason he is averse to such meetings is that he has a very strong ideology, which could be called a constitution in watertight departments. He sees things in black and white. Health care belongs to provinces, so why meet provinces? It is their area.

If we go through the list, everything is in watertight compartments. He somehow thinks that he can run his jurisdictions independently from provinces, and vice versa. However, in the complex world in which we live, that is an unrealistic proposition, because in virtually all areas we have overlapping jurisdictions and overlapping interests.

The second reason is that for our Prime Minister, the concept of partners is somewhat alien. He likes to decide things himself, but in order to run the federation one has to be collaborative. There has to be an atmosphere of give and take. There have to be negotiations, sometimes messy, and this is not an environment that our Prime Minister relishes. As a consequence, the country is losing a great deal.

Let me just illustrate a few areas. I will begin with infrastructure and pensions, which have been of critical importance to Premier Kathleen Wynne and to the people of Ontario.

Kathleen Wynne, somewhat unexpectedly, won a majority government after going to the people with two major propositions. One was an expanded role for infrastructure and the other was a made-in-Ontario version of an expanded Canada pension plan.

On the first point, I live in the greater Toronto area, where traffic gridlock has become worse and worse. A major part of the Ontario platform was the idea of focusing a lot of resources in this area of infrastructure. As we heard in question period today from the member for Trinity Spadina, cities like Sydney, Nova Scotia—and I think he mentioned Regina, and others—are waiting, with nothing happening from the federal government.

Business of Supply

•(1600)

The federal government has back-end-loaded its funding to such an extent that we have a 90% drop in actual funding in upcoming years, so the infrastructure program, which is so critical to Ontario, so critical to Canada, so critical to jobs and growth, is floundering. This is one area where I think a partnership is needed, involving not just the federal and provincial governments but also municipal governments, which, while they have just 8% of total revenues, have approximately half of all the country's infrastructure. Here is one area that calling out and pleading for co-operation across governments to get a program befitting the needs of our country to deal with the massive infrastructure deficit of hundreds of billions of dollars, and it is an area in which the government has not acted.

A second area crying out for federal-provincial co-operation—not just meetings for the sake of meetings, but active co-operation—is pensions.

Some months ago the provincial governments and the federal government were having a series of meetings, and they appeared to be heading towards a consensus on a moderate expansion of the Canada pension plan on the grounds that Canadians today are not saving enough to live comfortably in their retirement years. That, whether the government likes it or not, is inherently federal-provincial, because any change in the CPP requires the agreement of both the federal government and a majority of the provinces.

However, the government simply vetoed any change in the Canada pension plan, abandoned the meetings, and left the provinces to their own devices. I think this was an extraordinarily short-sighted move that was detrimental to the well-being of future Canadians in their retirement years, but that issue was one of the election platforms of Kathleen Wynne. She won the election apparently on the basis of developing a made-in-Ontario version of an expanded CPP, which her government is now working on. I think she has given up on the current government on this issue and is hoping that our party might win the election, in which case we have committed to move forward with an expanded Canada pension plan.

Those are two main areas on which the Ontario party of Kathleen Wynne just recently won a majority government. Infrastructure and pensions are two areas that have suffered not from benign neglect but from malignant neglect, if you will, by the federal government, which is not helping out in either of these areas.

Another area is environment. Where there is a void, other governments will occupy that void. For many years the federal government has done very, very little on the environment and greenhouse gas emissions, with the result that we continue to get these fossil prizes at international conferences. The provinces have stepped into the void, setting up their own systems of cap and trade or carbon taxes to fill the void that the federal government has vacated.

Here is an example of a total lack of leadership, co-operation, or federal-provincial meetings on the environment. The provinces have stepped up to the plate and acted when no action was coming from the federal government, so at least that is better than nothing.

Another example is pipelines. This should be the forte, the strong point, of this federal government, because it has always thought of

Canada as a super energy power and put all its eggs in the energy basket. If there is one thing we would think the government would be able to deliver on, it is pipelines to get all of that oil to market. However, the Conservatives have failed so far on pipelines in all three directions. On pipelines to the south, they have failed to get the agreement of the United States. On pipelines to the west, the northern gateway remains bogged down, partly through a lack of federal leadership on environmental and aboriginal issues. Now the pipeline to the east is also running into problems.

•(1605)

We have seen the premiers of Alberta, Ontario, and Quebec get together to discuss a national energy approach, and the federal government has again been notable in its absence. Again the provinces are working together without any significant involvement by the federal government to devise a national energy strategy. Clearly that initiative is floundering today, not just because of the price of oil but primarily because of the inability of the federal government to work with provincial governments to find a solution to the pipeline issue and to resolve those questions of environmental and aboriginal concern.

I could go on with other issues, but there is the list of flagrant derelictions of duty on the part of the federal government in failing to work with its provincial and municipal counterparts.

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is so much I could talk about, but I want to specifically ask the member one question about something he referred to in his speech. He talked about the partnership between Kathleen Wynne and his leader and the admiration he has for some of the policies of Kathleen Wynne. I want to focus on one in particular. We saw it a bit earlier today when his leader and the Premier of the province of Ontario talked about working co-operatively for a carbon tax for the province of Ontario.

I want to ask the member specifically if he supports a carbon tax for the people of Ontario. Does he support his leader, who is calling for a carbon tax for the people of Ontario? I want a yes or a no on this question. Does he support his leader and the Premier of Ontario, who want the carbon tax? Yes or no?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, one cannot give a yes or a no answer to a question that is formulated in a completely inaccurate way. I think what the member had in mind was a price on carbon, and I think—

Hon. Maxime Bernier: It is the same thing.

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, it is not the same thing. There are various different ways of achieving a price on carbon. I am not sure I need to give Environment 101—

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

Is the hon. parliamentary secretary rising on a point of order?

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, I just want to clarify. Does he support a price on carbon?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): That is not a point of order.

The hon. member for Markham—Unionville.

Business of Supply

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, the point I am making is that the discussion involved a discussion on the price of carbon.

As I said in my speech, given the total absence of leadership on the part of the federal government, the provinces have already moved in their various different ways on this issue and have filled the void left by the total inaction on the part of the federal government.

The leader of the Liberal Party said that he would work with the provinces and provide leadership within their own actions without rescinding the actions that have been taken already by various provinces in this area.

• (1610)

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity. I want to follow up a bit on the last question, because it is incredibly unclear as to what exactly the Liberal position is when we talk about the relationship between the federal government and the provincial governments, which is exactly the focus of the motion before us.

On the one hand, we are hearing that the party that sponsored the motion in front of us today has said that it should be the provinces that deal with the issue of pricing on carbon, not the federal government, but at the same time it says that the federal government should be stepping up to the plate and playing a leadership role.

Which is it? As well, if the federal government is to play a role, specifically what is the member saying that his party would have the federal government do on the issue of carbon pricing?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, the member is actually quite right. It is possible to do two things, and both of those things he mentioned are things the Liberal Party is committed to do.

On the one hand, he mentioned that the provinces have already taken action on this issue. That is correct. We applaud the provinces for that. It would not be the intention of a Liberal government to repeal what the provinces have done.

The second component that he mentioned, which is also true, is that a federal Liberal government would provide leadership on this issue in terms of the direction of the country as a whole. The Liberal government would do something that the current government never does, i.e., we would actually meet with the provincial governments and discuss what each is doing and forge, together, a national and responsible plan for the environment.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform you that I will be sharing my time with the member for Hochelaga.

I am pleased to rise today in the House on behalf of the people of Sherbrooke to address a subject that is very important to me, federal-provincial relations. These have been neglected in the past by both the current Conservative government and previous Liberal governments.

This subject is of great interest to me, and so I am pleased to add my voice, on behalf of my constituents, to those of my colleagues. I hope that the motion moved by the Liberal Party on its opposition day will be adopted. I will be supporting it, and I hope that all my

colleagues will support it as well. I will focus my arguments on convincing my colleagues to support the motion because there does not seem to be clear support on the other side of the House. I will do what I can to convince them.

Before I get into the details, I want to give a little background on how the Council of the Federation was created. This very important intergovernmental organization was created in 2003 by the provinces, thanks to the leadership of Quebec, led by Premier Charest, who represented Sherbrooke at both the federal and provincial levels. He was the one who initiated talks on the creation of the Council of the Federation, which was designed to be a place where provincial representatives could come to a consensus and involve the federal government in discussions, in order to advance Canada and the provinces' common interests with respect to the interests of the federal government.

I will read the letter written by Mr. Charest that was in the initial agreement, because I think it is important:

The Council of the Federation, initiated by Québec, is inspired by the view of politics that the best way to advance ideas and societies is through extending one's hand, not by turning one's back.

The Council paves the way for a new era of cooperation between the provinces and territories of the Canadian federation.

This permanent organization for exchange and dialogue will bring the relationships among Canada's federated partners into a renewed dynamic. This *internal diplomacy* [an interesting term that I will talk more about later] will aim to build alliances based on common priorities; it will promote greater mutual understanding of the partners' particular hopes and needs; it will increase the influence of the provinces and territories on the evolution of Canada.

The same document recalls the foundation of our country, which was created in 1867 based on the federative model. It is important to remind those watching us of the principles of this model:

It is worth remembering that [almost 150 years ago] the governments of the former British colonies north of the U.S. Republic deliberately agreed to join together as a state with a federative mode of governance. In choosing federalism, the new partners could preserve and promote their individual identity and autonomy while establishing a new order of government, one that would encourage their development by pooling their resources and sharing risks and opportunities.

At the time, Canada was the first federal experiment in the British Empire. Today, over 40 per cent of the world's population lives in states that have chosen a federal regime.

Canada was the first country in the British Empire to adopt such a system. It goes on to say:

Many countries are planning to adopt this model while others have chosen some of its ideas and features. For these reasons, we must conclude that the decision of the former colonies in 1867 was indeed a wise one.

Further on in that document, they talk about the importance of cooperation and respect for the different levels of government in a federation.

• (1615)

Early in the history of the Canadian federation, the London Privy Council's Judicial Committee emphasized, with regard to the Constitution Act, 1867, that the goal of the act was not to merge the provinces into a single entity or to subordinate the provincial governments to a central authority, but to create a federal government in which they would all be represented and to which would be assigned only the administration of business in which they had a common interest, with each province preserving its independence and its autonomy.

Business of Supply

I wanted to provide that brief historical reminder of the Canadian Constitution, the country in which we live and the way that decisions are supposed to be made when they concern several levels of government. That is not what the Conservative government is doing. We have many examples of that, and it is a shame. In 2006, one of the Prime Minister's big promises was to implement open federalism accompanied by a new relationship between the provinces. This is from page 42 of the platform that carried the current Prime Minister to power:

Support the important contribution the Council of the Federation is making to strengthening intergovernmental and interprovincial cooperation, expanding the economic and social union in Canada, and advancing the development of common standards and objectives of mutual recognition by all provinces.

However, even if it was elected in 2006 on the promise of such cooperation, it is now obvious that the federal government has ignored the provinces many times and that it has made unilateral decisions that had an impact on areas of provincial jurisdiction and sometimes even on their budgets.

For instance, the Canada health transfer has been reduced by 3%. There was an agreement under which the federal transfers for health care were to be increased by 6% every year. Out of the blue, the federal government decided that the increase would be 3%. That amount was therefore cut by 3%. That was announced by the finance minister of the day. All of a sudden, it was decided that that was the way things were going to work and the provinces had no say in the matter. They were against it, but the government moved ahead with the change all the same, without any regard for what the provinces wanted. It is the exact opposite of what should have happened. At the very least, there should have been some consultation about it, or some discussion that would lead ideally to a consensus. This is the very basis of our federal system. We are supposed to consult with the other levels of government when they are affected by our decisions. We are supposed to try to build a consensus that ensures the decisions we make will be satisfactory to all the partners involved.

Another example is the employment insurance reform that was put forward unilaterally by the federal government, despite opposition from many provinces that did not agree with the changes. They knew the changes would have an impact on their economies.

A further example is the temporary foreign worker program, a rather controversial program that was finally changed by the Conservatives and that did not meet the needs of the provinces. Another one is the Canada job grant. Without even warning the provincial premiers, the government decided to cut \$300 million from the funding for training, which is usually paid to the provinces, in addition to creating a program that infringes on areas of provincial jurisdiction. Quebec spoke against it. I remember very clearly when Quebec's minister of labour and employment went to Ottawa and did everything she could to meet with the federal employment minister, who did everything he could to avoid her questions and any meetings with her. She tried her best to tell him that his decisions were wrong and that they would have a devastating effect on Quebec's job training programs.

Another example is search and rescue. When the federal government closed the maritime search and rescue centre in British Columbia, there was no consultation.

Furthermore, there was no consultation on the infrastructure programs. The infrastructure programs were imposed. The government does not like consulting. It probably does not like being criticized. I have the impression that the government is afraid of criticism. As soon as it organizes a meeting, the government knows it is possible that it might be criticized and that people may not agree. When there is no agreement, we must not run away and try to do everything by ourselves. The best thing to do is to talk about it and have productive discussions.

I know I do not have much time left, so I will speak briefly about a very important document that I would urge Canadians to read. I am talking about the Sherbrooke declaration that was adopted by the NDP. It was drafted in Sherbrooke and I am very proud of it. One of the things it talks about is co-operative federalism.

• (1620)

I would like to invite all Canadians to read the document and learn about our vision, the NDP vision, for a co-operative Canada.

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the House for this opportunity to recognize and pay tribute to my colleague from Sherbrooke for an enlightening speech. There is one thing on which I would like him to further comment.

In the early part of his speech he made some interesting remarks about the structure of our federation and the history. I had the opportunity to be one of the ordinary Canadians in the citizens' assembly regarding the Charlottetown accord in 1992. I remember learning a fact that the federations were the most difficult form of government to cobble together. They take nurturing.

In fact, in 1992 there were only 20 federations of all the world's countries and three of those were at risk of blowing themselves apart: the Soviet Union, which failed; Yugoslavia, which failed; and Canada, which was at risk. As my colleague from Sherbrooke points out, it is a fragile construct. The very notion of a federal state is the most difficult form of country to cobble together.

Would he comment further on the importance of robust federal-provincial negotiations to keep the fabric of a federation intact and therefore the importance of the resolution we are debating today?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his excellent question.

Clearly, there is nothing more important than maintaining good relations among the various levels of government when a federation is involved. In fact, there is nothing more important, because this is what sets the foundations and ensures they are solid in moving forward, toward the future.

Without the discussions that the Council of the Federation makes possible in order to reach a consensus, this would not be a viable federation. Over the long term, we would risk losing it if we did not maintain good relations and preserve co-operative federalism.

Business of Supply

There are risks in this kind of situation. The current government is taking a risk by always attempting to proceed unilaterally; these risks certainly make our federation more fragile. It is high time that we had a government, before the end of the year, that would make our federation a priority and ensure that we have a stable and solid federation that will be in good shape well into the future.

•(1625)

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to follow-up on the earlier question by the member for Winnipeg Centre. He was a member of the constituent assembly, I think that is what he called it, in 1992. He stated that Canada was in a fragile state at that point. If I look back, Canada had undertaken a number of federal-provincial meetings throughout the seventies and the eighties. Specifically, they always dealt with the Constitution. It seems to me that if Canada was in a fragile state at that point, constantly meeting the premiers and the prime ministers seems to have brought it to a fragile state. It did not seem to make it better for Canadians. I am not following that logic.

Fast-forward to our Prime Minister who has met with premiers and members of other governments over 300 times and look back at what we have done. When the economy needed help, the Prime Minister in both 2008 and 2009 came forward with Canada's economic action plan and he did that by working together.

Could the member comment on how the over-meetings of the seventies and eighties somehow helped to build our country when the member for Winnipeg Centre said that Canada was in such a fragile state following all of those federal-provincial meetings?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, I think the comments by my Conservative colleague are quite funny, since he seems to think that too many meetings create problems. If there had been no meetings and if no one had spoken with anyone else, can he imagine how the situation might have deteriorated and become a lot worse?

I recall that a few times during question period, my colleague mentioned that he has several children. When there is a problem, does he ask his children to talk about it to resolve the conflict or does he ask them to think about the problem on their own so that it will be resolved magically after a few minutes?

It does not work that way, as I am sure he knows. It is through discussion that problems are resolved. If problems are not dealt with as they come up, they only get worse and become more serious. His comments make no sense.

Discussions do not create problems. Discussions make it possible for us to resolve problems.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for Ahuntsic, International Development.

The hon. member for Hochelaga.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to the motion moved by my Liberal colleague from Saint-Laurent—Cartierville. The motion reads as follows:

That, in the opinion of the House, the Prime Minister of Canada should hold annual First Ministers' Conferences.

I find it somewhat ironic that the Liberals are moving this motion, considering that between 2000 and 2006, as we have heard a few times today, when the Liberals were in power, former prime ministers Chrétien and Martin only met with their provincial counterparts twice in six years. However, this is not the first time that the Liberals have contradicted themselves, and it will probably not be the last time, either. As my leader, the member for Outremont, likes to say, the Liberals like to signal left but then turn right.

As my NDP colleagues and I have pointed out repeatedly in the House, this government has a serious problem with consultation, co-operation and transparency. It is as though the government were allergic to those things, or they are simply not part of the Conservative vocabulary. Sitting down at the table with anyone who is not part of the Conservatives' inner circle does not seem to be part of this Prime Minister's management style or that of any members of the Conservative government. One only has to sit down at a parliamentary committee meeting to understand what I am talking about. The Conservatives do not listen to the opposition's comments or the witnesses' comments, and they automatically vote against everything put forward by another party.

Furthermore, to date, the Prime Minister has been refusing to even meet with his provincial and territorial counterparts on a regular basis. For the sake of the record, I would simply like to remind the Prime Minister that Canada has been a federal state since 1867 and, accordingly, the Parliament of Canada and the legislatures of the federated entities or provinces are sovereign in the areas of jurisdiction granted to them in the Canadian Constitution. With that in mind, in order for everything to run smoothly, the various levels of government need to co-operate and work together effectively. When the Prime Minister fails to consult or discuss things as equals with his provincial counterparts, he is simply denying that fact and harming federal-provincial relations.

Nevertheless, in 2006, this same Prime Minister promised to promote an open federalism and create new ties with the provinces. Indeed, the Conservative Party's 2006 election platform indicated that the party would do the following:

Support the important contribution the Council of the Federation is making to strengthening intergovernmental and interprovincial cooperation, expanding the economic and social union in Canada, and advancing the development of common standards and objectives of mutual recognition by all provinces.

Business of Supply

Unfortunately, history decided that this party would take office, and since then, the Prime Minister has been denying the wonderful promises he made regarding co-operation and openness by simply ignoring the requests of his provincial counterparts and taking a unilateral approach to governance. A unilateral approach can have serious consequences for a federal state. Since it took office in 2006 and especially since the 2011 election, this Conservative government unilaterally made major changes to a number of federal-provincial programs. Take for example the \$36 billion in cuts that the Conservatives made to health care transfers. I do not need to spell out the devastating effects that that decision had on the provinces, which have jurisdiction over health care and will now have to manage with considerably fewer resources.

That is not even to mention the employment insurance reform, the reform of the temporary foreign worker program, the \$300 million in cuts to the Canada job grant or the search and rescue centre closures. Did the Conservatives consult the provincial premiers before making those decisions? The answer is obvious.

There is no shortage of examples when it comes to the challenges of housing and homelessness. I will elaborate on that. For years, the NDP has been proposing a collaborative approach to housing. My colleagues from Vancouver East and Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot have both introduced a bill in the House to implement a national housing strategy.

The main purpose of this bill was to ensure that the federal government would sit down with the provincial and territorial governments and stakeholders from across Canada to address the housing crisis in this country.

When I say crisis, I mean crisis. According to the 2011 national household survey, 30.7% of households in Canada live in rental housing because many do not have real access to home ownership; and 40% of them pay over 30% of their income on housing. That means that two out of five families live in housing that is not considered to be affordable.

• (1630)

In Toronto, Vancouver, Edmonton and Halifax, this is even higher. Fully 19% of families spend more than 50% of their income on rent. In Montreal, it is about 20%, and in my riding of Hochelaga it is still higher. In Vancouver, it is 24%.

One in ten families who rent in Canada spends more than 80% of its income on housing. My colleagues heard right. That excludes food, diapers and school supplies for the children.

This situation is unacceptable for me and my NDP colleagues. To address this problem, we were simply asking the different levels of government to work together on a plan to address the housing crisis. What did the government do? It used the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation as a propaganda machine to assess the alleged costs of implementing such a strategy and justify its refusal to support it. That is unreal. Since when do discussions about a possible collaboration to implement a strategy to deal with a crisis come with a price tag? There is no price tag. I just could not get over it, and that is not all.

In the meantime, the federal government is slowly and unilaterally pulling back from funding social housing by refusing to renew the

funds allocated to the long-term agreements with a number of social housing projects across the country. This represents \$1.7 billion in investments that enable the poorest Canadian families to find housing at a reasonable price so that they can meet their children's needs.

Once again, instead of working with the provinces, the government is off-loading this problem onto them, and they will have to foot the bill.

In the fight against homelessness, the Conservative government has also acted unilaterally and has taken a paternalistic attitude towards the provinces by refocusing its homelessness partnering strategy. Now, a large portion of an already too-small envelope for homelessness initiatives will be used to finance projects that the government has deemed to be better than the existing ones.

There was an outcry in Quebec, which recently adopted a homelessness strategy. Organizations, mayors of several major cities and two unanimous motions in the Quebec National Assembly called on the federal government to mind its own business and to maintain the general character of approaches to addressing homelessness. This would not have happened if the federal government had worked with Quebec.

Nevertheless, the Conservatives are staying the course. Obviously, the members opposite will say that, in the end, Quebec signed a framework agreement to implement the homelessness partnering strategy's new strategic direction. However, when a province is backed into a corner and told that they can take or leave an offer, we are no longer talking about free negotiation.

Just ask the public sector union members under both this government and its Liberal predecessor. They know exactly what I am talking about.

It is great that one or more of the other provinces agree with the new approach imposed by Ottawa. Federalism is about responding to different regional and cultural realities. Meanwhile, many groups in Quebec are going to lose their funding and some will have to close up shop because of the stubbornness of a paternalistic Conservative government that does not think about the long term. You can imagine who will suffer.

In closing, I obviously agree with the principle of this motion. However, I think that the Liberals could have used their opposition day to talk about another subject. There are so many important ones. All they had to do was wait a few months and vote for the NDP. Once the member for Outremont is elected prime minister, there will be not just one but two first ministers' conferences a year.

• (1635)

Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her speech.

Some of the things she talked about were a bit different from what I have heard so far from other members. We tend to think about the relationships between the different levels of government from a purely economic perspective, but there are other things in life, such as culture and housing.

Business of Supply

I would like the member to elaborate on this thought. A federalism that works is a federalism of co-operation. The current government, like its predecessor, does not seem to understand that co-operation does not mean unilaterally imposing measures and it is not just about funding for infrastructure, even though that is important.

I would like the member to elaborate on what kind of attitude is needed in co-operative federalism.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question. I will talk about two things. I am from Abitibi, and when my grandparents moved there, they founded co-operatives because life was hard. Co-operatives were the best way to survive in many ways, including at work, when buying groceries and so on. Co-operation is still an effective way to help each other survive by working together.

I also have an excellent example from my riding, Hochelaga, where there are many great examples. A lot of people in my riding do not have a lot of money. Some people are actually quite poor. Because of that, over more than 30 years, many groups have formed to help people in need. For instance, some community kitchens have sprung up in Hochelaga.

As Jack once said and as our leader continues to say, by working together we can work better for people. We were elected to represent Canadians. Yes, there is the whole economic aspect and the social aspect, but if we want to do a better job representing people, we need to work for them and not against one another.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for supporting the motion. I would also like to take this opportunity to clear up a misunderstanding that my NDP colleagues seem to have.

Their Liberal colleagues are not trying to say today that the Liberal Party's practice at the time is one that we are going to repeat. At the time, the Liberals were not holding annual meetings, but they were holding them at fairly regular intervals. However, contrary to what my colleague said, Prime Minister Martin brought the provinces together three times in two years, and those meetings resulted in extremely important agreements.

I am asking the NDP to check the numbers. The members are giving us incorrect information, and every member is repeating the same thing. We tell them every time that that is not the case. Three meetings took place while Mr. Martin was in office. They need to stop saying that there was only one meeting. That is not true. Those meetings led to an important agreement for aboriginal peoples, the Kelowna accord, which was unfortunately thrown out by the Conservative government. They also led to the health accord. We are talking about a 10-year agreement that is still in force today. The Conservatives have not added a penny to that agreement since they took office. They simply did not put in place the joint agreement on the action plan with the provinces. That is serious.

I just wanted to clear that up. I would like to thank my NDP colleagues for supporting the motion.

• (1640)

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Mr. Speaker, I did not hear a question. I just wanted to say that the point of my speech today was to show that we can accomplish things by working together. I also

wanted to point out the extent to which the Conservatives fail to work with others.

Decisions are made and consultations may be held after the fact. We were talking about infrastructure earlier. Consultations were held on the overall infrastructure plan but not on the specifics. The municipalities were very surprised and concerned to find out the specifics because the government did not set aside a specific amount for the municipalities. Perhaps consultations are held, but they are not done right or they are not held until after the fact. That is not how the Parliament of Canada should be doing things.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today to address what I believe is a very important motion. It should be a wake-up call to the government, in particular to the Prime Minister and the staff in the PMO, that their behaviour toward federalism and their attitude, or lack thereof, in recognizing their responsibility to work with the provinces by not having premier conferences with the first ministers is wrong. I would like to take the opportunity to add a few thoughts I have with respect to why I believe first ministerial meetings are of critical importance.

My seatmate pointed out to me that we had our first first ministers meeting in 1906. The current Prime Minister has not had a first ministers meeting since January 2009. I believe that the Prime Minister not recognizing the importance of first ministers meetings represents a loss of opportunity. I will focus on a couple of agenda items at the get-go as to why it is that the Prime Minister has missed the boat by not going forward with the first ministers meeting.

We have heard a lot about the economy over the last little while, primarily because of the fall in oil prices. The Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance have said that there is so much uncertainty with respect to Canada's economy that they cannot even provide a budget date. We believe it will most likely come out sometime in April. If the economy and the forecasting are in such a situation that they had to defer the budget, one would question why the Prime Minister would not want to meet with the provincial premiers to talk about the issue.

We have known about this for a number of months. The impact of the falling oil prices will have an impact on each and every province. We are all concerned about the state of Canada's economy and the impact it is having not only on our national budget but also on the provincial budgets.

Once the federal government provides its national budget, usually within a number of weeks we will see the provinces providing their budgets. That is because, in good part, there is a heavy reliance on knowing how much money the government is investing into social programming and the safety nets that are there. Federal budgetary decisions do have a fairly significant impact on the provincial budgets.

I would ultimately argue that the delay itself could be justification for the Prime Minister wanting to meet with the premiers to get a better sense of what is happening in the different regions of the country, and how a united front with the different levels of government could have a more positive impact for all Canadians.

Business of Supply

Add to that the issue of infrastructure, which has been a serious issue for months now within the Liberal Party. Since the federal government's last budget we have been asking questions with respect to the serious cuts that were being put into place for actual expenditures this year and the upcoming year, 2015-16. At the end of the day, we know it is having a profound impact on virtually every community in our country. There is a need for us to get a better understanding.

• (1645)

If we take that into consideration, along with the government's approach on the delay of the national budget, there is a second item that could easily be placed on a national agenda where we have the premiers coming to the table with the Prime Minister.

I can assure members that the premiers all have issues related to infrastructure expenditures. Timing is important. Timing does matter. Infrastructure is investing in our country. If the government seems to be more interested in the election cycle than it is in the infrastructure needs of our country, I suspect that if the Prime Minister were to meet with the premiers, he would be told about them fairly clearly.

I would like to think that the Prime Minister has also met with some of our mayors and municipal leaders. I believe that they have a shared concern with regard to the amount of monies that are necessary to meet our infrastructure needs and where that money needs to come from, at least in part, for us to realize the benefits of investing in priority infrastructure projects.

When we talk about a first ministers meeting, not all of the work is done during the actual meeting. There is a great deal of effort that is put in and invested in the lead-up to the discussion. I would argue that it is the majority of the effort.

For example, if we were to talk about infrastructure, I suspect that what we would have is municipal leaders working with provincial and federal bureaucracy, trying to get a better assessment of all the needs in the different regions of the country. With that, when the first ministers sat down for the discussion, if infrastructure were placed on that agenda, it would be a very wholesome discussion.

That is one of the ways in which we can build the consensus so that provinces as a whole feel they are all being treated equally, that they are being listened to, and that there is a sense that there is a united front as to how much money should be spent in any given fiscal year, given our economic circumstances.

We cannot have that comprehensive discussion and amount of dialogue by parcelling it out. If we wanted to have a national strategy on infrastructure, one of the best ways we could achieve it is by bringing the premiers to the table. A prime minister who was confident of his or her abilities would not be intimidated by the asks that would be put on the table by the different partners of our federation.

It does not necessarily mean that the federal government's only role is to dole out money. We have a federal civil service that I would argue is the best in the world. It has the ability to get an assessment from a federal treasury perspective and from a community perspective by working with the different civil servants at the different levels of the government. The federal government would be very well represented.

However, if we want to build the consensus in terms of having that national program, quite often it is best had at a first ministers' conference. We have seen great successes to that effect.

• (1650)

I would like to give a real example, one I have had the opportunity to talk about in the past: health care. I am very passionate about health care, because I believe it is a part of our Canadian identity. If we talk to Canadians and ask them what makes them feel good about living in Canada, being a Canadian or a resident of Canada, quite often the number one answer we will get is a reflection on our health care system.

That is the reason we brought it in decades ago and Pierre Trudeau brought in the Canada Health Act. That is an important issue to Canadians. I remember the 1990s when there were first ministers' conferences, when Jean Chrétien, the former prime minister, had premiers come to the table.

Members will say that was when the Liberals cut back on health transfers. However, I was sitting in a provincial legislature debating the issue at the time. The biggest issue from Manitoba's perspective was a fear about a previous agreement that had tax points financing health care, and if the formula was not changed, it was only a question of time before Ottawa would not have cash transfers, just tax point transfers.

I, as a provincial legislator at the time, was saying that I wanted to see cash coming from Ottawa. I believe that was something that was talked about, because back then we asked our premier to raise the issue with the Prime Minister. Maybe I should not take it for granted, but I do take it for granted that it was raised.

I believe Jean Chrétien did a great thing for Canadians by ensuring there would always be an ongoing cash transfer to the provinces. That was a strong statement of policy, and it was in response to what Canadians wanted of their governments, not just the national government but also the provincial governments.

Fast forward to when we had Paul Martin as prime minister of Canada. We are familiar with the health care accord. The health care accord was achieved at a first ministers meeting. It was the prime minister sitting down with the different premiers. Whether it was Pierre Trudeau, Jean Chrétien, or Paul Martin, they understood how important this issue was to all Canadians.

In essence, they came up with a 10-year health care accord that guaranteed finances. They also wanted to make sure there was opportunity for Ottawa to have some influence in terms of the way in which health care is ultimately being delivered, if the government wanted to ensure some sense of accountability.

I send out questionnaires and I am constantly consulting with my constituents. If members canvassed their constituents, I have no doubt they would find that they want Ottawa to play a role in health care. Paul Martin recognized that. The best way to deal with that issue was to talk about it in a premiers conference. He sat down with the premiers and came up with this wonderful agreement.

Business of Supply

Earlier one of my colleagues made reference to the fact that every other week when we are sitting we will hear a Conservative member of the caucus talk about how wonderful the government is because it is giving so much money to health care. The dollars they are referring to are the dollars that Paul Martin negotiated with the premiers over a decade ago at a first ministers' conference. That is the benefit.

One of the reasons I got intrigued by and involved in politics was Pierre Trudeau and his constitutional discussions.

• (1655)

We have the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We have our own Constitution. Why? It is because we had a prime minister who had a vision that saw Canada as an independent nation that needed its own constitution. I took a great deal of pride in that. It would not have happened had there not been first ministers getting together to achieve a national goal.

We can talk about the Kelowna accord. The issues today in our aboriginal community are severe and serious. The Kelowna accord was a massive accomplishment of Paul Martin. He got premiers, first nations leaders, and others coming together and working together. At the end of the day, they produced a document that Canadians as a whole, I believe, supported and that the chamber, with the exception of the Conservatives, I suspect, supported.

These agreements and accords are something best achieved when we have a government that is not intimidated by attending premiers or first ministers meetings, by a prime minister who has some vision, some sense of what he or she would like to see the country look like. That is why I am so proud that the leader of the Liberal Party has made the commitment to ensure that we will have first ministers' meetings in the future. We should.

One issue, and I suspect that my leader does not need to be lobbied on it, is the Canada Pension Plan. The Canada Pension Plan is an issue Canadians from every region are concerned about. We understand the value of that program. It is only the Conservatives who seem to want to turn a deaf ear to what Canadians are saying about the issue of pensions.

We now have at least one province going it alone on CPP, and I believe one of the NDP provincial leadership candidates was talking about going it alone. There may be others talking about it. Let there be no doubt that a number of provinces would support a first ministers meeting to deal with pensions for our seniors, whether it is the OAS and the government's desire to increase the age from 65 to 67 for retirement or the need to invest more in the CPP. These are the types of issues that can make a difference in the lives of Canadians. What they want is strong leadership from the Prime Minister's Office.

I believe this Prime Minister does not have a national vision on the different issues out there. He takes issues day by day and makes decisions without consultation. The OAS is a great example of that. He was overseas, and while he was somewhere in Europe, he said that they were going to increase the age from 65 to 67. There was no real consultation at all. Then he came to Canada and we saw the reaction. The Liberal Party is going to correct that. We are going to leave it at 65.

We are going to meet with the premiers to talk about the CPP, because we are concerned about pensions. We understand that Canadians want good pensions when they retire. The Liberal Party is committed to working with the premiers, because if we are not prepared to work with the premiers collectively, we will not be able to achieve some of the things Canadians want.

By supporting this motion, one is saying one supports the idea that there is an important role for our national government in building consensus and making a real difference in the lives of each and every person who calls Canada home.

• (1700)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know what happens when Liberal prime ministers meet with provincial premiers. The people of Alberta will recall the national energy program. They remember that.

The member talked about being in the provincial legislature. I wonder if he was in the provincial legislature when the Paul Martin Liberals and the Chrétien Liberals unilaterally cut \$50 billion from health and education. I wonder if he spoke up against those unilateral cuts at that time.

The member talks about the Kelowna accord, but he and his party vote against matrimonial rights on first nation reserves. They vote against and would repeal accountability and openness and transparency for our first nations as well.

The member for Markham—Unionville was having a very difficult time with this. I know that the province of Manitoba does not have a price on carbon or a carbon tax. We know today that the leader of the Liberal Party, along with the Premier of Ontario, supported a carbon tax for the people of Ontario and other provinces. I want to be very clear. Does the member support his leader in placing a carbon tax, a price on carbon, whatever they want to call it, not only on the people of Ontario but on the people of Manitoba? Does he support his leader in overtaxing his own people? We know that they resisted it in Manitoba, but today his leader suggests that they want to do that. Does he support that, yes or no?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I am going to take the most relevant part of the member's question and attempt to address it. It was in regard to health care. I indicated to him that I was a member of a provincial legislature in the nineties, when we saw a cut in health care transfers. However, there was also a solid commitment made to get rid of the tax point transfer, which would have gotten rid of all the cash transfers. That was a commitment that I suspect came from meetings that were ongoing from first ministers' conferences.

The member talked about how much money the Conservative government is giving toward health care. When he stands up he should be crediting Paul Martin, because he gave the health care increases that we have today. The reason we are investing record high health care dollars is because of Paul Martin and a first ministers meeting that occurred over 10 years ago. That is the reason we have record high health care transfers.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Business of Supply

●(1705)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): It is getting awfully difficult to hear. There is an abundance of noise this afternoon.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksasing.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I find it really hilarious when we hear the Liberals talk about how important it is to meet with the provinces, yet when they were in government, it was something they hardly did, and when they did, they ignored what was being asked for.

With respect to the government, one of the Conservatives' big 2006 campaign promises was to establish an open federalist framework and to build new bridges with the provinces. It has not happened. We know what happened when they said that they were going to forge a better relationship with first nations, as well.

Paul Martin removed 40% from health care. He basically did away with social housing in the budget in 1995. Why should we believe the Liberals, when there is no difference between the Liberals and the Tories?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, if the member does not understand the difference between the Liberals and the Conservatives, it gives me some understanding as to why the NDP members voted with the Conservatives to defeat issues such as the Kelowna accord.

It is almost as if the NDP MPs have been given marching orders. They walk in and criticize the Liberals, no matter what, even if they are somewhat fictitious in their criticism.

At the end of the day, whether it was Paul Martin, Jean Chrétien, or Liberals before, since 1906 there have been Liberal and Conservative governments that have been meeting with the premiers.

In the last go-round, when we had 13 years of Liberal government, there were first ministers' conferences seven or eight times. I think the member would probably be better advised to see the benefits of the first ministers' meetings we had in the past and maybe start talking more positively about those in hopes that we can somehow convince the current government of the benefits, as opposed to having these bizarre comments about the Liberal Party that just are not based in fact.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the record, and for the benefit of my NDP colleagues, I would like my colleague to comment on the chronology of the meetings under Liberal governments.

They happened on December 21, 1993; July 18, 1994; June 20-21, 1996; December 11-12, 1997; February 4, 1999; September 10-11, 2000; February 4-5, 2003; January 30, 2004; and November 2005.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I think the member's dates speak for themselves. When we had those types of meetings taking place with Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin, we were able to achieve a great deal, as I have made reference to, whether it was the health care accords, guaranteed payments, the Kelowna accord, or building relationships. There are many positive things, no doubt, that would have taken place at every one of those discussions.

Liberal prime ministers were not intimidated or afraid in any way in terms of meeting with the premiers. Liberal prime ministers, and Brian Mulroney as well, saw the benefits.

By meeting with premiers, one can make a difference. If one does it right, good things can happen. It is something we will continue to commit ourselves to. As the leader of the Liberal Party has said, we are going to be meeting on an ongoing basis with the premiers, because we believe in a strong Canada.

●(1710)

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, again, the member's leader today supported placing a price on carbon, a carbon tax, on the people of Ontario. He said that should happen across the country.

Manitoba currently does not have a price on carbon. It does not have a carbon tax. Does the member support his leader in placing a price on carbon, a carbon tax, on the people of Manitoba, or was this just another bozo eruption from his leader?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, well, that says a lot in terms of the very last comment the member made. The issue we are actually talking about today has—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. parliamentary secretary on a point of order.

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, I am remiss. I should say that the “bozo eruption” was quoting the Liberal member of Parliament for Scarborough—Guildwood.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I thank the hon. member, but I do not think that is a point of order. However, I would say, as members do know, that when we get into these characterizations of other hon. members, we are usually going in a direction that is never helpful to the decorum in the House.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I do not see any humour in the comment by the member.

Having said that, the leader of the Liberal Party has put a very important motion, through the Liberal critic on the issue, on the floor today. It is all about first ministers meetings, where the Prime Minister has a responsibility to meet with premiers to develop that national agenda and build on the consensus. That is what the debate is all about now.

I know that the Conservatives have little things here and there they would like to be able to talk about, but it is important that we be relevant to the issue before us. I would suggest that the member reflect on many of the speeches that have been given and maybe suggest to his Prime Minister that he should be meeting with our premiers.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): There are only two minutes remaining in the time provided under the business of supply for this afternoon, but we will resume debate with the hon. member for Mississauga South for about two minutes.

Private Members' Business

Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this motion. I would like to focus my comments, as brief as they must be, on Ontario and the Premier of Ontario, who has publicly called on the Prime Minister to meet with her to discuss Ontario's woes. I would like to mention the things she may want to talk to our Prime Minister about.

As we know, and as has been discussed today, when our Prime Minister believes there are pressing matters to be discussed, he does hold a number of meetings. We have heard about the over 300 meetings he has had with premiers.

As I was listening to the debate today, I wondered what the Premier of Ontario would want to talk to the Prime Minister about.

Perhaps she might want to discuss the misguided Ontario pension plan, for example, which really is just an additional payroll tax that would benefit contributors after 40 years of regular contributions. I am hoping that I do not have to work another 40 years, but if I do, I will receive a pay-out from the Premier of Ontario's pension scheme. This has uniformly been decreed to be a complete waste of an idea and a terrible tax on small business that will drive away investment from our businesses.

The premier might also want to talk to the Prime Minister about her failed green energy program, which has led to higher power bills for homeowners and small businesses, and is also driving investment away from businesses in Ontario.

She might want to talk about Ontario's \$12 billion deficit, which is so large that we just received another credit downgrade in Ontario.

I am hoping that perhaps the Premier of Ontario can give our Prime Minister an idea of the kinds of things she would like to talk to him about. I for one would be interested in knowing what those agenda items might be.

• (1715)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): It being 5:15 p.m., pursuant to an order made earlier today, all questions necessary to dispose of the opposition motion are deemed put, and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Monday, February 2, 2015 at the expiry of the time provided for government orders.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Mr. Speaker, although I am disappointed to see an end to this debate, I believe if you seek it you would find consent to see the clock at 5:30.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

STATISTICS ACT

The House resumed from November 7, 2014 consideration of the motion that Bill C-626, An Act to amend the Statistics Act (appointment of Chief Statistician and long-form census), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sure you are glad that the previous debate is over and that this will be a much quieter period of time.

I am very pleased to rise, both as the representative of the people of York West and the Liberal industry critic, to lend my support to Bill C-626.

I would also like to congratulate my great colleague from Kingston and the Islands for his leadership and perseverance on a matter that is really of the utmost importance to all Canadians.

This is a perfect example of how science does matter in politics. Certainly there are those of us on this side of the House who understand the short-sighted actions of this government when it comes to census cuts. Bill C-626 would go a long way to righting many of those wrongs.

I think most would agree that in order to run a country that is fiscally prudent and socially responsible, which I know is very difficult for the government to understand, governments have to use real science and collect reliable data from the people they hope to serve. That is precisely what Bill C-626 is about.

The bill seeks to restore Canadians' trust in Statistics Canada by strengthening the political independence of the chief statistician over matters related to data sources, methodology, and professional standards.

Politicians need to focus on politics and leave scientists and statisticians to do what they do best. Muzzling and stymieing them serves no one.

In simple terms, Bill C-626 seeks to re-establish the role of internationally recognized best practices for official statistics in guiding the work of StatsCan. This reliability issue strikes to the heart of this discussion and many other discussions like the one we had today.

Census data allows governments to understand and become more aware of vulnerable sectors in Canadian society that require addressing. It allows governments to plan how and where to deliver services such as health care and education. If the information available is incomplete, skewed, or faulty, the ability of governments to respond effectively to the needs of Canadians is directly impacted. We are already seeing that on a daily basis.

The Liberal Party is committed to evidence-based policy. In order to develop this evidence-based policy, we must have access to reliable and trustworthy data. This is the bottom line and it is the spark that led to Bill C-626 being drafted in the first place.

Private Members' Business

The government's ill-fated 2010 decision to cancel the long form census was short-sighted and driven by a misinformed ideology again, but true to form this government plunged forward regardless.

Replacing the long form census with the national household survey has already compromised data quality and means that the data cannot be reliably compared with earlier census data. Worse than losing the ability to track population trends, the national household survey will cost taxpayers \$22 million more than the census would have. This will not save even one penny for the public purse. Instead, the government is spending more than ever for incomplete and unreliable data.

Perhaps this back-of-the-napkin approach can help to explain why the Conservatives has been so hard-pressed to balance the books. Perhaps it is time to hire a real economist to help them out? In contrast, Liberal Party remains fiscally aware and committed to evidence-based policy.

So what does all of this mean from a public policy perspective? How would Bill C-626 help us to serve Canadians better? Put simply, in order to develop effective, evidence-based policy, governments need access to reliable and trustworthy data, but that is no longer the case and this government cares more about partisan advantage than about helping middle-class families, seniors, and students to get ahead.

Experts agree that the cancellation of the mandatory long form census has damaged research in key areas, from how immigrants are doing in the labour market to how the middle-class is faring. It is also making it more difficult for cities to ensure that taxpayer dollars are being spent wisely.

Sadly, the impact from the loss of the long form census extends far beyond Parliament Hill and the federal government. Everyone from planners and researchers to the Canadian Chamber of Commerce agree that the government has no idea where to credibly spend taxpayer dollars to best deliver key programs and services.

• (1720)

Worse yet, as the available data become more and more outdated, the problem will get worse. Unfortunately, we have seen the government's economic incompetence, but now the dearth of information promises to compound Conservative fiscal ineptitude even further. Yet again, Canadians of tomorrow will suffer because of decisions the government has made today.

Allow me to be clear. The government's decision to cut the long form census will have an impact in every single community in Canada. The switch to a national household survey has created difficulties in determining income inequality trends, housing needs, and whether low-income families are getting adequate services. I do not think the government cares an awful lot about any of those, though. What this means for a resident living on Jane Street, or Islington Avenue, or Hucknall Road in my Toronto riding is that they will potentially not receive vital government services in the years ahead, because no one will know what they need.

The people living in my riding and every other riding are expected to continue working and paying their taxes, but the government is taking steps to ensure that they will not get the help they need and deserve. Some may have trouble seeing the connection, but we are

already witnessing the negative impacts caused by the lack of a mandatory long form census. This will only get worse in the years ahead. Broadly speaking, lack of reliable information has inhibited research on inequality and on identifying winners and losers from economic growth, research into understanding the national problems of the have-nots in the economy, and research into how best to help local government services.

The Canadian Chamber of Commerce, whose network represents 200,000 businesses across the country, knows this. The chamber is publicly calling on the federal government to restore the mandatory long form census. I join it in that call.

Yet again we are seeing a government that is entirely out of its depth. It does not understand science, it does not understand long-term planning, and it does not understand the economic impact of its decisions. It only understands what is politically expedient for it to do.

The government may try to blame others, as it does every single day, for its woes, but this issue demonstrates that the government is out of its depth and struggling under its own incompetence.

Mr. John Carmichael (Don Valley West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to the proposed amendments to the Statistics Act.

Canadians expect their government to make informed decisions in order to put in place effective policies and programs. This government has been consistently committed to collecting reliable statistical data, while ensuring the privacy rights of Canadians are respected. We have a robust statistical program that governments, municipalities, associations, businesses and researchers rely on for their work.

Statistics Canada is one of the most highly regarded statistical agencies in the world. It participates in close to 200 international groups, including the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund and the OECD. The agency is often asked to play a prominent role on committees and it is viewed as a strong leader in terms of data quality and management of its statistical programs.

The amendments to the Statistics Act that my colleague across the floor is proposing would have a negative impact on the governance of Statistics Canada, the timelines of data collection and the work that has already been done to alleviate undue burden on Canadians. These changes would be costly to taxpayers and would reverse the strides already taken to ensure the statistical program upholds the privacy rights of Canadians.

Private Members' Business

The bill proposes to change the method for appointing the chief statistician, shifting the responsibility from the Governor-in-Council to other players. This would blur the accountability of the chief statistician, who is currently appointed in the same manner as other deputy ministers. This government believes in ensuring that the lines of accountability for Governor-in-Council appointments remain clear and transparent. We cannot support a proposal that seeks to impose a separate process.

The bill also seeks to make the chief statistician ultimately accountable for the overall statistical program, including decisions regarding content for the census. This change would disrupt the important balance between the advisory role of expert officials and the accountability of elected officials of Parliament.

When Canadians are asked to provide information on a mandatory basis with legal ramifications for not responding, it is elected officials who should decide the question to be asked. It is elected officials who should be accountable for the content of these surveys as they are responsible to Parliament and ultimately to all Canadians for the overall statistical program. Furthermore, the chief statistician already has a wide range of legally mandated responsibilities to ensure the integrity of the statistical program and to maintain a high standard for protecting the privacy of Canadians.

The bill also seeks to impose unrealistic requirements on Statistics Canada by forcing the agency to comply with ambiguous international best practices. Statistics Canada already follows international standards when they are in the best interests of Canada. Instead, what the bill proposes is to bind Statistics Canada into adopting international practices that may not be suitable to our national context and that may go against the agency's better judgment.

The bill also seeks to force Statistics Canada into publishing all surveys. That is over 350 surveys annually in the *Canada Gazette*. This would significantly increase costs to taxpayers and add red tape to what is currently a streamlined and transparent process. Statistics Canada already publishes its surveys online and where mandated to do so, publishes questionnaires in the *Canada Gazette*. To legally bind Statistics Canada into putting all surveys into the *Canada Gazette* is an unnecessary, burdensome and costly proposal. Statistics Canada's ability to respond to data users and their need for timely information would be severely restricted.

The bill also seeks to turn back the clock and demand that Canadians answer detailed questions about their private lives by reinstating the long form census. The proposed changes to the bill will legally compel Canadians to answer these intrusive questions. This government has already taken numerous steps to ensure that we collect necessary, reliable data, while reducing the undue burden on Canadians and protecting their privacy.

● (1725)

We have ensured that particular census questions, the ones that help to enumerate the population, to calculate transfer payments, and to make informed policy decisions, remain mandatory, but certain other questions that have been determined to be intrusive and challenge the privacy rights of Canadians are now voluntary. It is this government's view that no Canadian should ever be forced to answer detailed questions about their personal lives with legal recourse if

they fail to respond. For that reason, we do support the notion of removing jail time penalties for Canadians who do not respond to mandatory surveys.

Unfortunately, the bill would not even properly address the issue, as it would leave jail time penalties for other sections of the Statistics Act.

This government believes that no Canadian should ever face the threat of jail time for failing to fill out a survey. Nor should Canadians who refuse to disclose certain data face the same penalty. A jail sentence is a penalty meant for real criminals, child predators and terrorists, not for elderly citizens who fail to respond to mandatory surveys.

In keeping with our election promise, the member for Elgin—Middlesex—London has introduced Bill C-625, which proposes to remove the threat of jail time, both for those who refuse or fail to respond to all mandatory surveys, not only for the consensus. I would encourage my colleagues to support Bill C-625, as it would ensure Canadians never have to respond to surveys under the threat of jail time.

Canadians deserve a world-class statistical program that collects reliable data and is properly accountable to Parliament. This government will work hard for Canadians to ensure they continue to get just that.

● (1730)

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise on this bill today. Bill C-626 concerns the Statistics Act and Statistics Canada.

I am glad to follow on the heels of my colleague on the government side because, frankly, the government has such a sorry record of denying science, ignoring evidence and silencing experts with whom it disagrees. It is more prone to ideologically based decisions rather than evidence based decisions, and the evidence of it stifling science is just proof of that.

Many of my constituents in Parkdale—High Park have contacted me. They are very concerned about the impact on the quality of the statistics in Canada and their impact on the important social programs that we deliver in Canada. They include everything from immigration and refugee policy and labour statistics, right down to whether we will charge fees for certain programs in local communities across the country.

Private Members' Business

The bill we are debating today follows on the heels of bills from two NDP colleagues during the government's time, my colleagues from London—Fanshawe and Windsor West. They introduced similar bills. It really comes down to the fact that the New Democrats believe in good data. We believe it is essential to have good data to make government work. Having good data allows a government to effectively target and evaluate programs in order to improve service quality and lower the cost of the programs we deliver.

The NDP fought tooth and nail to prevent the Conservatives from eliminating the long form census. The NDP believes that the long-form census must be restored in order to provide social scientists, governments and business with the data they need.

Here is a brief bit of history. The modern census was created in 1971. It was taken every fifth year until 2006, and it included some very short, basic questions, such as age and marital status, as well as some longer questions on housing and socio-economic factors. Response to the census was mandatory, and it carried penalties, including fines and possible imprisonment, for failing to respond or knowingly providing false information. This was to ensure the integrity of the data, so people filled it out completely and accurately.

In June, 2010, the Government of Canada quietly announced that it would be eliminating the long form census without any consultation with stakeholders, the users, or even government agencies, and it replaced it with a voluntary survey, the national household survey. This created a huge uproar from municipalities, researchers and others, including the chief statistician, who ended up resigning when the long form census was replaced.

In the past, these mandatory surveys typically had a response rate of about 94%. That is a very high response rate. In contrast, the voluntary survey has a response rate of 68%. That is a lot of missing data. We are finding that rural communities are especially under-represented. There are also certain parts of the country out west, east and north, as well as first nations communities, and some very low and high-income people not filling out the census.

Under the mandatory census—and I remind my Conservative colleague across the aisle about this—not one person has ever gone to jail for not filling out the mandatory census. This census had a 94% response rate. There are a couple of people who refused to fill out the form because they disagreed with certain government policies and it went to court, but they were not convicted. Someone else received mandatory community service as a result of not filling it out, but not one person ever went to jail.

The Conservatives eliminating the long form census to avoid mandatory prison sentences was completely irrelevant. It is a red herring.

• (1735)

It seems as though the intended consequence is that we would not have reliable statistics telling us that in fact inequality in Canada is rising. We do not know the level of labour force participation on first nation reserves. We cannot tell where social programs would be best implemented and be most effective because we cannot get proper, accurate, up-to-date data.

Other countries have tried to eliminate their long form census. None has replaced it with a voluntary census, as this government has done. That is a big waste of money right there. The U.S. tried it, but found the data so unreliable it went back to the mandatory census. What do they know that these guys are ignoring?

We are finding that not only are the data unreliable and the results poor, but it also costs more than a mandatory census did. That is unbelievable. These guys are such bad managers. The Auditor General has reported that the national household survey, their voluntary survey, cost \$30 million more than the mandatory census, not including the \$22 million that was spent to switch over to the new format. These guys are great at spending money, at losing money and wasting money for nothing. That money could have been more effectively invested in creating jobs, in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, in helping young people and taking people out of poverty. I do not know what makes these guys tick.

It is not just New Democrats who are criticizing the government on this. In the Report On Business in today's *The Globe and Mail* there is an article by Tavia Grant. She says:

The cancellation of the mandatory long-form census has damaged research in key areas, from how immigrants are doing in the labour market to how the middle class is faring, while making it more difficult for cities to ensure taxpayer dollars are being spent wisely, planners and researchers say.

She also references in the private sector the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, whose network represents 200,000 businesses across the country. It is publicly calling on the federal government to restore the mandatory long form census. We have been saying this all along.

She also goes on to say:

It's now tougher to know whether free programs, such as swimming lessons or skills training, are being offered in the most high-need communities. It's more difficult to plan subsidized child care. And there are now "huge gaps" in the ability to understand health trends in... [populations].

It is affecting city finances, because cities have to spend extra money to buy data privately, rather than having access to good-quality, more cost-effective public data. The government is down-loading. It makes no sense.

Let me just conclude by saying that New Democrats believe that good data is essential to make government work. We also believe in science, unlike our counterparts across the aisle. We believe that good data allows government to effectively target and evaluate programs and thus improve the service quality while lowering costs.

We fought tooth and nail to prevent the Conservatives from eliminating the long form census. We believe the long form census must be restored to provide social scientists, governments, and businesses the data they need.

We also believe that the world is not flat. It is round, and we believe that greenhouse gas emissions are being created by the activity of people in the world. We know some really good scientists who could help our counterparts on the other side understand these things.

• (1740)

[Translation]

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, sometimes it seems to me that the Conservative government is nurturing a simplistic and outdated image of the society in which we live.

It thinks that modern society is exactly like a little old-fashioned town where everybody knows everybody and the local economy is based on exchanges between buyers, producers and sellers that are all the same size and nobody has more power than anybody else. The market is truly free and unfettered, with no distortion of competition. Everybody is on an equal playing field. The market and the economy are efficient.

In this imaginary society, everything is out in the open and people get the news by word of mouth. There is no need for statistical data to paint a picture of one's community. Problems are simple and so are solutions.

However, the society we live in today looks nothing like the Conservatives' notion of it. The infrastructure is complex. Even small towns are linked together within administrative regions that provide increasingly complex services, including health services, to the people.

People in the same region do not necessarily all know one another. To paint a picture of an area and its needs, we need to be able to collect data, often with the help of sampling techniques. In other words, we need to take a census of the population. To analyze long-term trends, we must collect data consistently over a long period.

For the data to be accepted by the public and used as a basis for decisions that are truly democratic and in the public interest, the public must be of the opinion that the data are accurate and were not compiled somewhat artificially in order to influence public debate and promote the political, economic or socio-cultural interests of one group of citizens over another.

[English]

In a complex, modern world, statistics are our collective lens. They allow us to see a reality that otherwise would be invisible to us, invisible to democratic decision makers. When the government decided suddenly to eliminate the long form census, it broke a piece of that lens. It distorted our view of how things really were.

There is perhaps no more convincing an example of how the government's sudden decision to end the long form census has compromised informed decision making in the interest of community than the case of David Hulchanski. As an aside, the government claims to care about community, but its decisions in fact undermine the community interest.

As the *Toronto Star* has pointed out about the Hulchanski case:

This is one of the first documented cases of the damage done by the Conservative government's 2010 decision to scrap Canada's mandatory, full-length census.

Private Members' Business

David Hulchanski is a pioneer urban planner who dedicated five years to create the "the most sophisticated tool to track urban poverty ever devised". The project used 531 census tracks to discern changes that had been taking place over time in the city of Toronto. I hope my colleagues from that area are listening carefully. Through his research, Dr. Hulchanski discerned that the assumed demographics of Toronto had changed over time, that areas of poverty had gradually moved from the centre of the city, which was becoming gentrified, to the city's outer rings.

These findings were somewhat counterintuitive, but they led to the conclusion that most of Toronto's social service agencies were in the wrong place.

Using the same methodology, Mr. Hulchanski developed maps for Montreal and Vancouver. According to the *Toronto Star*:

He secured funding to expand his project to Halifax, Winnipeg, Calgary and Chicago, waiting expectantly for the 2011 census so he could move forward.

Just as the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council approved his seven-year grant, [the President of the Treasury Board] dropped the guillotine.

• (1745)

Without the accurate data that the long form census provided, his methodology was "useless". Not easily discouraged, Mr. Hulchanski tried to patch together other indicators, including income tax files, real estate data, municipal and school board records and the like, but these were insufficient to allow him to realize his statistical objectives.

Then he attempted to use the national household survey, which proved to be a dead-end. In fact, using the survey, his results contradicted the patterns that emerged in the long form census data. That, no doubt, was because the household survey was plagued by high non-response rates.

Sadly and ironically, Mr. Hulchanski's work ground to a standstill, except outside Canada in Chicago. So it was Chicago, not Toronto, that would ultimately benefit from the Conservative government's decision to kill the long form census.

In closing, I congratulate my hon. colleague for this bill. Because of his educational and professional background as a nuclear physicist, and later as a financial trader, he understands the vital importance of accurate information as the basis for effective decision-making. He is also someone who respects the institutions we have built for ourselves here in the northern half of the North American continent.

Colleagues will remember that in 2013, he was chosen by his colleagues in the House as the parliamentarian who best represented his constituents. The member for Kingston and the Islands does not let blind and emotional partisanship inhibit his search for truthful answers to the challenges we face as a nation. He brings through the bill that same ethical spirit to his vision for Statistics Canada, which should be free of political interference so that data can be gathered accurately and in a consistent manner, allowing us to draw comparisons on the state of our communities over time so that we can observe meaningful trends in the evolution of our great country and be able to make wise public policy decisions that can make Canada even greater.

Private Members' Business

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to the proposed amendments to the Statistics Act. The amendments that my colleague is proposing would have serious negative implications on the governance and accountability of Statistics Canada, the timeliness of the data collection, and the privacy rights of Canadians. This government has taken several steps to ensure that we collect reliable statistical data while maintaining the privacy rights of Canadians at the highest standard. We are committed to safeguarding this balance and we are prepared to defend it. The amendments being proposed would increase costs to taxpayers and impose an undue burden on Canadians, one that we have already eliminated. It is therefore impossible for our government to support this bill.

There is, however, one proposed amendment to the Statistics Act that we do agree with, and that is the removal of jail-time penalties for Canadians who do not fill out mandatory surveys. We are pleased to see that members of the official opposition and the third party recognize the need for this important change. Unfortunately, the proposed amendments in this bill do not go far enough. While the bill seeks to remove jail-time penalties for Canadians who do not fill out mandatory surveys, it does not speak to jail-time penalties that exist in other parts of the act.

When Canadians are asked to respond to surveys about their private lives, there should not be the threat of jail time if they do not comply. This government believes that when Canadians participate in a survey, whether as individuals or as representatives of an organization, they should not have to answer questions or divulge administrative data under the threat of jail time.

That said, this government has a strong record of being tough on crime and standing up for victims. We have committed to re-establishing Canada as a country where those who break the law are punished for their actions, where jail time is proportionate to the crime committed, and where we stand up for the most vulnerable victims. We have brought in many initiatives to ensure that victims remain a priority and that Canadian families from coast to coast can feel safe in their communities. We have ensured that combatting serious crimes and protecting the most vulnerable members of our society, such as children and the elderly, remain top priorities. Our justice system should put the rights of victims ahead of the rights of criminals. Canadians expect criminals to serve sentences that reflect the severity of their crimes. Our government will continue to work to ensure that violent criminals face serious time.

That brings me to my point. Jail sentences are meant for real criminals—terrorists, child predators, and murderers—not for Canadians who fail to complete mandatory surveys. To threaten elderly census protestors with a jail penalty if they do not comply with a survey or if they do not release administrative records makes light of a punishment that we believe should be treated very seriously.

Canadians value the census and understand that their participation is crucial. Canadians know that their responses help to enumerate the country's population in order to define electoral boundaries and calculate important transfer payments. In 2011, the census response rate was 97.1%. Canadians understand and value supporting the

collection of reliable data so that we can make informed policy and program decisions.

● (1750)

However, this government believes that no Canadian should have to respond to a mandatory survey or release administrative records under the threat of jail time. Instead of the bill before us that only goes half way, the member for Elgin—Middlesex—London has brought forth Bill C-625, which would remove jail-time penalties in all parts of the act for those who refuse or neglect to fill out surveys or do not grant access to their administrative records.

This government has already made strides to ensure that Canadians are no longer forced to answer questions that challenge their privacy rights. This government has worked hard to find a balance between collecting reliable statistical data and protecting the privacy rights of Canadians. We have found that balance and we are committed to maintaining it.

I would encourage my colleagues to support the changes proposed in Bill C-625.

● (1755)

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on Bill C-626, an act to amend the Statistics Act. I am pleased to enthusiastically support the bill.

I would like to thank the critic, our MP for Parkdale—High Park, for her work on this and also the staff who worked diligently on this and other files, including Florian Olsen, Stéphanie Haché, and from my office, Andrew Cuddy. They did great work in helping us understand the bill, and helping us with our speeches and procedures in the House.

I would also like to extend kudos to the member for Kingston and the Islands for bringing forward Bill C-626. It has been great to work alongside him in trying to make science, social sciences and hard sciences, better in this House. I am really sad that he is not going to be standing in the next election, because I think he has made a good contribution to Canada. I wish him well in his future endeavours and thank him again for putting this forward and allowing us to vote on it.

From my reading, this is a very good bill, which would bring back the long form census and empower the chief statistician. It would remove, as we have heard in speeches, the possibility of imprisonment for failing to complete surveys, which I think is something the British probably brought in when they were doing the survey census way back when, for tax purposes and that type of thing. Perhaps the mandatory requirements in those bills are past their day. However, I notice that there are still provisions for fining people if they do not complete these surveys, and I think that is something we have heard the Conservatives will be trying to change. I hope they at least make some incentive for people to fill out these surveys.

Private Members' Business

The bill put forward by the member for Kingston and the Islands is very similar to bills we have put forward in the past, notably Bill C-346 by our MP for Windsor West. Therefore, of course, we support Bill C-626, and I think all Canadians, with the exception of those sitting across the aisle, would support strengthening our most important data source for planning and business purposes in this country.

Good data is essential to make the economy work, as census data provides social scientists, governments, and businesses the information they need to make good policy and business choices.

The NDP fought to prevent the Conservatives from eliminating the long form census and bringing in the national household survey in 2010. However, the Conservatives went ahead, without really any consultation, and now we are feeling the effects.

If members look up their community in the census and look at the statistics that are provided with the national household survey, up in the top right corner, members will probably see a little yellow triangle that warns that the data is questionable. It is there for almost every community across Canada. In fact, I just pulled up Burnaby, and the non-response rate in Burnaby was almost one-quarter of the people. It means that statisticians do not have the kind of data they need to make accurate projections. Burnaby is not a big community, just 220,000 people. It should be fairly easy to collect information there, but because of the changes that have been made, now we do not know whether the information is credible.

In fact, the national household survey that has now replaced the mandatory long form census survey has caused quite an uproar. It not only had municipalities and researchers upset, but just after it was introduced, the chief statistician resigned.

I hang around with statisticians, and they are very dedicated to their jobs. They are not political people. In fact, scientists get quite nervous when partisan politics are brought in. Therefore, when a chief statistician resigns, it shows us that something very significant has happened, which was something he did not feel he could put his name to. In fact, I think if members asked any statistician in this country, they would see what a grave error the Conservative government has made.

There are very good reasons for complaints. When we had the mandatory long form census, we had a 94% response rate. This is a high enough rate for us to accurately say every five years what was going on in each community in Canada. Now we have a 68% response rate. I think a lot of people at home probably are not getting closer to their televisions wondering what that means, but it is very important for ordinary Canadians.

Local government is an area that I have studied in the past. I am just finishing a text book on local government in Canada. There are 4,000 municipalities in Canada, but now more than 1,000 of them do not have any census information.

● (1800)

I used to work in the planning department of the City of Vancouver. One of my jobs was to take the census information to create profiles of communities to show how age groups and ethnicities had changed. This allowed planners to say, "We need new

facilities there", or allowed businesses to say, "Maybe this is a place where we should locate or move".

For thousands of communities across Canada, this information does not exist. We are basically back to the 1800s in planning where new facilities should go and where businesses need to locate. If a Tim Horton's is looking where to put the next Time Horton's, the first place it would go is to census information to find out where the market is that will buy its product.

For a lot of communities in Canada, that information does not exist any more. When companies go to the Election Canada website to pull up the statistics sheet, a little yellow triangle will now show up in the right-hand corner. That undermines their confidence in their ability to predict where they should locate their businesses. Over the long term, this will have very serious economic impacts. I really think the Conservatives should reconsider this and vote in favour of the bill to ensure that we do not fall behind the international community.

If they continue along this path and keep removing these kinds of requirements to report our statistics accurately, there is some potential for international ramifications; for example, we have to provide the International Monetary Fund and World Bank accurate unemployment numbers and those types of things. I hope they do not start tinkering with the labour force survey, as was suggested a little while ago, because we may very well get kicked out of these international organizations if we start acting like North Korea in how we collect statistics. It is not a very good idea.

In Saskatchewan, over 40% of communities have no census data, and because the Conservatives want to stick with this as we move forward through the next census-taking, once again, another 40% of communities in Saskatchewan will have no census data for more than a decade. If we think of the population that is exploding there, especially first nations, there will be no accurate census done. When we are trying to plan for education, where to locate schools and perhaps where to close schools, and all of those types of things, we are making our local planners fly blind. That is a huge mistake. More than 25 per cent of communities in Yukon, Newfound and Labrador, P.E.I., New Brunswick, Manitoba, and Alberta do not have accurate information either. This is a real problem.

Nowhere else in the world have they done this. In the U.S., the Americans tried it and immediately reversed course because it damaged their economy.

Private Members' Business

We debate the economy a lot here and hear a lot of rhetoric, but what is really important is that we base our economic projections, locally, provincially, and nationally, on the best data we can get. Unfortunately, this data source, our most important data source in the country, has been destroyed by the Conservatives who say they are protecting basic rights to liberty or whatever. We can do that in other ways, but messing with this census was a big mistake. I think the Conservatives will pay the price. This is what we hear from people on the ground who say they would like to get information about their community but cannot get it. They get angry hearing that the Conservatives abolished this for no reason.

It is not just municipalities, it is not just businesses, but it is also social scientists who are concerned about this. I think this move adds to the Conservative war on science. Not only do the Conservatives muzzle scientists, not only have they fired over 4,000 scientists from the federal rolls and cut a billion dollars billion from science funding, but this is also just another knock against intellectual work in this country. I really think this is building up to something. People have written books about this accumulation of attacks on knowledge and science in Canada.

Again, I would like to applaud my friend for bringing this forward. I definitely will be voting for the bill.

I would also like to call attention to my efforts to bring in a parliamentary science officer, an independent officer of the legislature, perhaps an auditor general for science, who would protect science and give us good, accurate advice on whether these types of actions are something we should be doing and ensure that we are making science-based policy decisions in the House.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank you very much for your time today and, again, I congratulate my friend on a very good bill.

● (1805)

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this year is the 350th anniversary of the first census done in what is now Canada. We have been doing a census for centuries here in Canada.

I want to thank my great colleague, the member for Burnaby—Douglas, for his thoughtful remarks. I also want to thank all the people from across the country who have communicated and spoken out about the issue of the long form census over the last few months.

I want to start by addressing the criticisms of my colleagues from the Conservative caucus.

The Conservatives claim that Stats Canada would be required to publish information on more than 350 surveys a year in the *Canada Gazette* and that this would be burdensome. This is not at all the intent of the bill. The legislation would only require publication of a minister's order, and then only if the order was with regard to the technical, scientific, or professional guidelines established by the chief statistician. I believe that this is a misreading of the bill, but I would be happy to address any concerns of the government and support appropriate amendments in committee.

The government also says that changing the manner of appointing the chief statistician would blur the accountability of the chief statistician and that it would prefer that the chief statistician be treated like any other deputy minister, as he is currently. The point

here is that the Canadian people must trust that StatsCan is providing unbiased, unvarnished information and is not unduly influenced by the government of the day. Is this a real problem? The chief statistician resigned in 2010 in order to protect the integrity of Statistics Canada. My bill would ensure that the chief statistician was still accountable to the minister. However, if the minister wished to use his prerogative to overrule the chief statistician on technical or methodological matters, he could. He just would have to do it in the public eye, that is, in the *Canada Gazette*.

The government also opposes the bill because it would allow the chief statistician to choose the questions. I am happy to compromise on that. That is not central to the bill, and I am happy to compromise on that.

The government is also worried about Canada having to adhere to international standards for official statistics. In fact, it is the other way around. Canada played a significant role in establishing the United Nations "Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics", which members can look up on the Internet. We are actually telling the rest of the world how to do official statistics.

The government also says that the bill does not go far enough in eliminating the threat of a jail term. My bill would eliminate a jail term for refusing to fill out the census truthfully. There are other mentions of jail terms in the Statistics Act, but they do not concern individuals filling out the census and are outside the scope of the bill, so this is not a relevant criticism.

Moreover, since the government brings up this issue, the Canadian people have to ask why the Conservative government chose not to eliminate the jail term itself. It is only one line. In any one of the government omnibus bills we have had in the past few years, the government chose to not eliminate the jail term. This contradicts what the government has said tonight.

People are worried about coerciveness. There is a cost to getting good information. We have to spend many hours and fill out forms and give the government a lot of information when we file our income taxes. We have a duty to pay taxes so that our government can protect us and can strive for values like justice and equality of opportunity. Filling out the census is the same. It is doing one's duty to one's country.

On the question of privacy or intrusiveness, I would submit to Canadians that the Conservatives cannot be counted on as guardians of privacy. For example, one threat to privacy is all the electronic and online surveillance that is going on. StatsCan asks us where we work, then locks up the information. It only releases aggregate numbers. Other groups may know who we sent an email to last night or what website we visited, and we were not even asked.

*Adjournment Proceedings***ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS**

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

[*Translation*]

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, given the regional instability caused by the conflict in Syria, 40 countries participating in the Berlin conference on October 28, including Canada, acknowledged in their communiqué the importance of increasing humanitarian aid to Syria and the entire region.

Yesterday, at the Security Council, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs described a situation that demonstrates the lack of support from member countries to the humanitarian tragedy that is affecting the Syrian people in Syria and in neighbouring countries, including Lebanon.

Since the spring of 2011, more than three million Syrian refugees have been received by neighbouring countries, including Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt. These countries are facing a huge challenge. The countries concerned and the UN High Commission for Refugees called for increased international support in order to cope with the refugee crisis and warned against the threat of a humanitarian disaster.

I remind members that there are more than one million displaced Syrians in Lebanon, a country of about four million people. It is clear that the international community, which includes Canada, is not doing enough. Right now, 40% of Syrians in need—of a total of 12.2 million civilians—are not being reached by UN humanitarian assistance and humanitarian operations. The UN would need \$2.9 billion to fund these operations. However, UN agencies have received less than half of this amount, as their pleas went unanswered last year. They did not even get what they wanted. Hundreds of thousands of people without any financial means were left out in the cold this winter.

Another important issue, which was recognized by the signatories of the Berlin communiqué, is the need to increase opportunities for repatriation, resettlement and humanitarian admission of refugees. Canada has a poor record in that regard. At the ministerial conference on resettlement and other forms of admission for Syrian refugees, which took place on December 9, 2014, in Geneva, we learned that Germany had taken in approximately 20,000 Syrian refugees. According to the Swiss ambassador to the United Nations, his country has given asylum to 10,000 Syrian refugees. However, in two years, Canada has been unable to resettle 1,300 refugees. What is more, the minister recently announced that Canada would accept 10,000 Syrian refugees by 2018. That may seem like a worthwhile announcement, but one has to wonder how that will be done since we have yet to take in even 1,300 refugees. In any case, we do not know how many have been allowed in. One has to wonder how the government will live up to that announcement given the fiasco with the 1,300 refugees. How can we still believe that this government is acting in good faith?

In closing, once the conditions for return are known, will Canada provide financial support for the repatriation and resettlement of Syrians who want to return to their country?

Given that the voluntary national household survey cost \$22 million more than the long form census, how can good Conservatives vote for a voluntary survey that costs taxpayers more and provides poorer data? How can good Conservatives vote to kill the long form census when the Conservative New Brunswick premier said that it is now harder to measure the results of money spent on fighting poverty?

• (1810)

The fight over this bill is a fight over the soul of this country. It is a fight over whether Canadians should collect information about ourselves so that we may have solid evidence with which to govern ourselves wisely.

Let us vote for a competitive country where public health, business investment, economic management, and local government service delivery is done in a smart, informed, and efficient way. Let us vote for a country where we assess social programs using real data and know how to cut the ones that are not effective, where collecting solid data is not about bigger government or smaller government but smarter government. Let us vote for a country that does not accidentally look more middle class and equal than it really is just because of poor statistics. Let us vote for a country where knowledge and wisdom guide us, where we acknowledge our civic duty to provide information for the common good through informed governance.

Let us bring back the long form census.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, February 4, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

Adjournment Proceedings

• (1815)

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for the opportunity to rise and participate in this debate. As the member knows, the Government of Canada is deeply concerned about the ongoing crisis in Syria. Since the crisis began, Canada has supported experienced humanitarian actors to ensure that lifesaving assistance reaches those who need it, not months after the fact, but as quickly as efficiency as possible.

Since the onset of the crisis, Canada has allocated more than \$403 million in support of the humanitarian response, of which \$50 million was announced on January 7 by the Minister of International Development. Canada is channelling this assistance through experienced humanitarian partners, including United Nations agencies, the International Organization for Migration, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and non-governmental organizations.

With DFATD's support, the UNHCR distributed relief items to more than 3.25 million people in Syria in 2014. The World Food Programme distributed food assistance to over four million people inside Syria in 2014, and UNICEF has supported 16.5 million people in Syria to access clean water.

Our government has committed additional humanitarian assistance for people affected by the Syrian crisis for the needs of Syrians within the country and those seeking refuge in neighbouring countries, and it will support UNICEF's "no lost generation" strategy to provide education and protection for conflict-affected children. The initiative invests in the education and protection of children affected by the crisis so that they can build a better future for themselves, their families, and their communities.

Canada is at the forefront of the response to this crisis, and Canadians can be proud of the government's response.

In January, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration highlighted that the Government of Canada has surpassed a 2009 commitment to resettle 20,000 Iraqi refugees ahead of schedule. He also noted that since July 2013, more than 1,285 Syrian refugees have been approved for resettlement in Canada. More than 1,075 of them had arrived by January 5, 2015. More than 2,480 Syrians have been granted protection in Canada through asylum and resettlement programs since the start of the Syrian civil war in 2011.

On January 7, the minister committed to the resettlement of 10,000 additional Syrian refugees. This will mean that Canada is fulfilling 10% of the latest appeal from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees to resettle 100,000 Syrian refugees worldwide.

These are examples of the contributions that Canada is making to this crisis.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Mr. Speaker, if we are to believe my colleague, everything is fine and life is wonderful, but that is not what the UN Under-Secretary-General is saying, and this is not from 10,000 years ago, but rather yesterday.

At the United Nations Security Council, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs painted a rather bleak picture and said that resources are lacking. Not only that, but we have also learned that all the UN agencies my colleague referred to have received less than half of what they were supposed to receive. They need \$2.9 billion, and they are not even close.

As for Syrian refugees, 10,000 or 20,000 have already settled in Germany and Switzerland. It took Canada two years to take in 1,200 refugees. This really worries me.

Will the 10,000 refugees really arrive by 2018, or will it be 2030 or 2040?

• (1820)

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, please let me say again what Canada has said for over four years now: we strongly condemn the violence perpetrated against Syria's civilian population, particularly against women and children. We also denounce the use of indiscriminate weapons, including chemical agents, as a means of bringing even greater harm and hardship to innocent Syrians.

I also want to be very clear and highlight in the strongest possible terms that religious persecution of those seeking to practice their faith in a peaceful and secure way is unacceptable to Canada, and we are supporting efforts to assist in the protection of these rights. Our assistance is also supporting organizations that are responding to incidents of sexual and gender-based violence.

Freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law are values to which all citizens in all countries are entitled. Our contributions so far, and the close attention that we continue to pay to the Syrian crisis, are clear examples of commitment to delivering on Canada's international obligations.

[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 6:22 p.m.)

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