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Monday, June 1, 2015

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, June 1, 2015

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1105)

[English]

ELIMINATION OF PARTISAN GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING ACT

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.) moved that Bill C-544, An Act to amend the Auditor General Act (government advertising), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, my bill, which is supported by the Liberal Party of Canada, by my leader, and by my colleagues, is an attempt to increase confidence and to drive up trust in our Canadian democratic institutions and the way in which government as a whole operates. It is about accountability. It is about value for scarce taxpayer dollars. It is about helping Canadians have more confidence in the way we collect their hard-earned dollars and deploy or spend them on their behalf.

This bill, Bill C-544, is about amending the Auditor General Act to appoint an advertising commissioner to oversee government spending on advertising.

Everyone in this House, from all parties, I have heard, has heard from countless Canadians who are concerned about what can only be described as wasteful advertising spending. It is time to bring Canada's advertising rules into the 21st century, and the appointment of an advertising commissioner, as in other jurisdictions, would provide accountability for all Canadians. This legislation, should it be passed, and I am always hopeful that we can get all-party support in this regard, would apply to all future governments of any political stripe.

It is important to remind Canadians that this bill would permit legitimate advertising. There is a role and a purpose for government advertising. I will come to the details in a moment. What would be expressly prohibited, however, is the kind of partisanship we have seen, which infuses federal government advertising and has for the past nine years under the Conservative government. The common look and feel of government advertising is identical to the common look and feel of partisan political Conservative Party advertising and

is happening at the same time as the government uses public resources for federal government advertising.

It is important to remove partisanship from federal government advertising, because it is anti-democratic. When public resources are used to try to increase the chances for political success in Canadian society, particularly only several months away from a national election campaign, it is unfair. When I described this bill to a group of grade 5 students recently, one of the students, a 10-year old, put up a hand and said, "To me, it looks like it is cheating". It is hard not to agree with that simple description. It is about using public resources and harnessing them for an unfair advantage for a sitting government.

The other reason partisanship has to go is because we are now hearing increasingly from experts and from good, front-line, hard-working, dedicated public servants that this kind of advertising compromises the neutrality and objectivity of public servants and the public service. More and more senior managers are being compelled, forced, to take actions that they know are favourably disposed toward the party in power at the expense of the neutrality and objectivity they signed up for when they decided to become good public servants.

Look at any website operated by the federal government and take a look at the colours. Then go to the Conservative Party of Canada website and take a look at the colours there. This partisanship issue is one that every member in the House of Commons knows cuts to the bone of fairness and accountability.

• (1110)

There has been unanimous opposition to the government's continued advertising. Let us look at some of the headlines.

I will start with the *Toronto Star*: "Tory ad blitz goes simply too far".

The Globe and Mail: "How partisan Conservative ads undermine the rule of law".

The Canadian Press: "Cabinet secrecy blocks rationale behind government's advertising slogan".

The *National Post*: "Canadians growing tired of [government's] Economic Action Plan call government ads 'propaganda' in recent survey".

These draw heavily on eight polls conducted by the government's own Department of Finance.

Private Members' Business

It is also important to always juxtapose choices made by governments in the way they spend hard-earned taxpayer dollars with real needs in Canadian society.

We know that the current Conservative government has spent some \$780 million, likely more by now, on advertising since its arrival. Let us take a look at some of the forms of advertising it has pursued.

The Conservative government paid over \$12,000 per train car to shrink-wrap GO trains in downtown Toronto with Conservative blue plastic shrink wrap that had the slogan “economic action plan” splattered all over them. The Conservatives call that a message. Riders on GO Transit call it propaganda. The Conservatives spent \$12,000 per car.

Let us take a look at one of the more egregious examples that I think highlights the need to take action in this area. The government has compelled municipalities and provinces around the country to spend \$30 million to put up 9,850 billboards. We have now learned, through access to information requests and through working with municipalities, that municipalities were not able to get their federal infrastructure funding dollars unless they met a contractual condition, which was to put economic action plan billboards at the side of every project.

The federal government went to the provinces and said that it wanted a fed-prov agreement. Then it went to the cities involved and said that if they wanted any money, they needed to put up a billboard at their expense. That was \$30 million for 9,850 billboards.

Let us talk about what that \$30 million might do for Canadians at a time when there are scarce resources and so many credible needs in Canadian society.

Thirty million dollars buys 15 MRI machines. It pays for 500 registered nurses' salaries for one year or over 900 personal support workers for home care for one year. It pays for 10,000 hip, knee, and cataract surgeries. It pays for 4,250 insulin pumps for kids who are coping with type 1 diabetes and cannot afford the pumps.

It pays for 300 affordable housing units. It pays for one million bus passes for our seniors on pensions. It pays the tuition fees for 5,000 students. It pays for student jobs for 9,000 students over the summer.

Thirty million dollars pays for 15,000 doses of chemotherapy drugs for cancer patients fighting their heroic battles and waiting for their treatments. It pays for 46,500 injections to treat osteoporosis at a time when our aging population is showing more and more the effects of arthritis and aging.

Thirty million dollars also pays for 20 million meals at the school breakfast programs for hungry kids. It pays for 46 years of the eliminated community access program for any one province, where we were supplying Internet services in our libraries and community centres for those who could not afford the \$70, \$80, or \$90 a month to be connected on the Internet. It pays for eco-energy retrofit grants for 6,000 homes.

It was \$12,000 to shrink-wrap one train at a time when infrastructure funding is being cut 90% this year.

This tells us everything we need to know about the government's priorities. It is shamelessly using federal tax dollars to promote its brand, its common look and feel, its websites, and its Facebook ads. For heaven's sake, the Conservatives are even advertising now on Xbox.

●(1115)

This can all stop. The government, the party in power, can be put out of its advertising misery overnight. All it has to do is adopt the bill and create an advertising commissioner who is empowered to review advertisements before they go to print. The bill goes as far as empowering the advertising commissioner to actually ensure that before a print run is performed, before any government sends out an order to a print house to run, for example, 30,000 or two million pamphlets, it is approved in advance.

The government has lost its way. I think the Prime Minister has really lost his way in this regard. This is a person who came to Ottawa riding a horse called “accountability”. He railed against this for years. He railed against it while he was in office, and he railed against it while he was out of office. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation itself cannot understand why the Prime Minister is pursuing this kind of advertising policy, if we can call it that. It is also supportive of the bill and its measures.

We have a situation where we can do right and better by Canadians. We can look at the \$760 million the government spent and ask, “Did we really get good value for money?”

The bill allows for important messaging. Yes, it allows a government to actually inform Canadians about tax measures or program expenditures or benefits they are entitled to. All of that is available, just not the way it is being done now.

A government would not be able to, for example, advertise measures that do not exist. We can all recall several years ago the Advertising Standards Council of Canada taking the government to task for running ads on television during sporting events for programs for job training that did not even exist. For those Canadians who follow playoff hockey, they are watching ads now. Each spot is a minimum of \$100,000. There is no message. That would provide support for 300 student jobs over the summer.

Private Members' Business

It is important for us to remember when we talk about this kind of advertising that we need to juxtapose it against real needs in Canadian society. That is why I am bringing the bill forward. To go back to that theme, it allows for the important advertisements. If the government is recruiting staff, it is permitted. If the government is looking for contractors to do good work for the federal government, it is permitted. If it wants a message out on health crises, like H1N1 or the SARS crisis, that is permitted. If it needs a message to folks in southern Alberta during a flood, that is permitted.

All of this would go a great distance, to come exactly back to where I began, to drive up confidence and trust in the way all governments operate at a time when too many Canadians are despondent and disappointed and are checking out.

The House has an obligation to do everything it can to drive up confidence. I remain hopeful, and I ask my colleagues from all sides of the House to join us and support me in Bill C-544 so that we can do right by Canadians.

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like the member to respond to the following findings of the Gomery report. The report states:

The Commission of Inquiry found:

Clear evidence of political involvement in the administration of the Sponsorship Program....

A veil of secrecy surrounding the administration of the Sponsorship Program and an absence of transparency in the contracting process....

The use of the Sponsorship Program for the purposes other than national unity or federal visibility because of a lack of objectives, criteria and guidelines for the Program.

Deliberate actions to avoid compliance with federal legislation and policies....

Certain agencies carrying on their payrolls individuals who were, in effect, working on Liberal Party matters.

The existence of a "culture of entitlement" among political officials and bureaucrats involved with the Sponsorship Program, including the receipt of monetary and non-monetary benefits.

• (1120)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. The hon. member for Ottawa South.

Mr. David McGuinty: Mr. Speaker, this gives me an opportunity to speak about other important elements in the bill that all sides should and could support.

For example, the bill would compel the advertising commissioner to ensure that any information to the public is about existing government policies, programs, or services that are actually available. It would inform members of the public with respect to "their rights and responsibilities under the law". It would encourage or discourage "specific social behaviour", for example, in the public interest. It would promote "Canada or any part of Canada as a good place to live, work, invest, study, or visit". It would promote economic activities or sectors of Canada's economy. It would "include a statement that the item is paid for by the Government of Canada". It would "not include the name, voice, or image of a member of the Cabinet, a member of the House of Commons, or a Senator". It "shall not be partisan". Finally, it shall not be used to "foster a positive impression of the governing party or a negative impression of a person or entity who is critical of the government".

Together, we should be looking responsibly at these kinds of measures in 2015 to do right by Canadians.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for bringing this bill forward. This legislation is very important to stopping the corrosive undermining of public trust by the abusive ads we have seen.

When the member's brother was the premier of Ontario, he brought forward legislation to Canada to stop abusive advertising. Therefore, I would like to ask the member if he has read the comments by the Ontario Auditor General about Kathleen Wynne's decision to undermine a bill that his brother brought through the legislature to stop the abuse of taxpayer's money with this kind of advertising. The Auditor General has raised serious questions about the undermining of this principle in Ontario. Has he read the report by the Auditor General? Does he believe that the present Liberal government is undermining the work that his brother did?

Mr. David McGuinty: Mr. Speaker, I would like to get on the record how incredibly proud I am of the work my brother did as the most successful Liberal premier in 75 years in Ontario. Namely, I would congratulate him for the bill that he brought, which has been in existence for 10 years. Right now there are debates going on in Ontario. That is a healthy thing because it is how our democratic system works. I understand that there is a push and pull right now, and there are all kinds of debates going on. However, they will come to ground.

The policy remains in Ontario. The advertising clearance process through the Office of the Auditor General remains in place. It is the only one of its kind in North America. In fact, it is the only one in the history of North America, and by that I mean Canada, the United States, and Mexico. There is no example elsewhere, besides a few state-level examples in Australia. It is an extremely progressive example for us to draw upon, which is exactly what I have done in drafting this bill.

I again ask my colleagues to come together so they can look their constituents in the eyes, particularly those who will run again in the next election, and justify the use of scarce federal dollars for advertising purposes.

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to speak on this issue of government advertising today.

Let me begin by stating that everything we do in our Conservative government is driven to ensure that our activities stand up to the highest level of public scrutiny. This includes our communications and advertising efforts to inform the public about programs and services we have in place to build a strong Canada. This makes me think of the work we do to help Canadians stay healthy and prevent the spread of infectious diseases, as an example.

It also makes me think of the work we do to support job creation and economic growth through our low-tax plan for jobs and growth, as outlined in Canada's economic action plan.

Private Members' Business

As part of these efforts, we want to ensure that Canadians are able to make the most of the programs available to them. This includes vital programs to modernize a broad range of infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, public transit, and parks. It also includes vital programs to support home ownership, help stimulate the housing sector, and improve housing across Canada.

We use a variety of means to expedite funding to individual Canadians and businesses. For example, we work closely with our many partners across the country, including officials in every level of government and countless stakeholders in industry, and, yes, we use advertising.

Advertising has played a key role in explaining the many programs that are part of our low-tax plan for jobs and growth. Like any responsible organization, we make use of advertising because we understand that programs to help Canada prosper cannot possibly work if no one knows about them. That is why we set out to tell Canadians and Canadian businesses what our plan can do for them. As part of our efforts, we have launched advertising campaigns. We have created a strong online presence, and we have travelled from coast to coast to coast to educate Canadians about the programs in place to help them. They need to know.

The communications policy of the government says, "In the Canadian system of parliamentary democracy and responsible government, the government has a duty to explain its policies and decisions, and to inform the public of its priorities for the country". The policy also states, "The public has a right to such information".

Our government takes its duty very seriously, and we are proud of the communications work we have done to ensure that Canadians have received timely, accurate, objective, and complete information about the programs and the services available to them.

Our plan to creating jobs, growth, and long-term prosperity for Canadians is clearly working, and this is something we can take pride in.

I would ask members to consider the following. The Canadian economy has posted one of the strongest job creation records in the group of G7 countries over the recovery, with over 1.2 million jobs created since June 2009. Over 90% of the jobs created since that time are full-time positions. Over 80% are in the private sector, and nearly 60% are in high-wage industries. Real GDP is significantly above pre-recession levels, the best performance in the G7.

Of course, we have balanced the federal budget as promised, and we are now in a position to fulfill our promise to help Canadians balance theirs. We just have to go around the world and listen to leaders and people in other countries to realize this, because they see Canada as a huge success story.

What does this all mean? It means that today we are in an even better position to weather new challenges.

Let me make an important point. The advertisements used to spread the word about our low-tax plan for Canadians have been done in a way that respects the principles of accountability and transparency. They have been done in a way that respects the existing framework of rules found in the government's communica-

tions policy and related administrative procedures. This includes the procedures in the management of advertising.

These procedures ensure that all advertising activities provide value for money and uphold the principles of the communications policy. We also require that all advertising is guided by the Canadian code of advertising standards, which defines government advertising as distinct from political advertising.

The procedures in place on advertising are a key part of good management. They provide detailed, step-by-step information to help federal departments and agencies manage advertising activities and ensure efficiencies and consistent practices across government. As well, they promote strong collaboration among the key organizations responsible for managing government advertising.

Our government is always looking for ways to ensure that its activities are well coordinated, transparent, and managed in a way that provides value for money for Canadians.

• (1125)

I can say that the bill before us today is not one of those ways. We already have a strong system in place. This is completely redundant. It is not clear that the additional financial resources and administrative requirements in Bill C-544 would provide value for money for Canadians. As such, the government will not support this legislation, and we encourage all members to do the same.

Allow me to reiterate that we already have a robust system in place. It includes safeguards to ensure the integrity of government advertising. This includes various mechanisms to ensure that communications across the Government of Canada are well coordinated, effectively managed, and responsive to the diverse information needs of Canadians.

I discussed several of these mechanisms earlier. They include the communications policy of the Government of Canada as well as the procedures for the management of advertising. Advertising is an essential way for the government to inform Canadians about issues that affect them. We continue to make use of this tool to better serve the citizens of this country.

• (1130)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to rise representing the New Democratic Party on Bill C-544 put forward by my colleague from the Liberal Party. This bill is very important to re-establishing some level of trust with the Canadian public.

The other day in the House of Commons, I heard a Conservative backbencher stand to say that he was proud to be in the greatest House in the history of Parliament. I am hoping that was a case of exuberant naïveté because the opposite is true. What we have seen under the current government is a debasement of participatory democracy, the debasement of public institutions, and the corrosive effect on public trust from the increasingly blurry lines between what is supposed to be serving the public interest and the very narrow party interest of the government.

Private Members' Business

We have seen so many examples of this corrosive impact, but, for me, it was during the hockey playoffs. I saw an ad for a young woman who was getting a job, being retrained in the trades, and how important it was that she was starting her life over. On Monday morning, I was getting calls in my office from unemployed people asking me how they could benefit from this program. I had to tell them that this program did not exist, that the ad was lying to Canadian people, that taxpayers' money had been used to promote a program that did not exist.

How does one explain to the Canadian people that the government is so cynical that it would lie to the unemployed and use millions of dollars of taxpayers' money to promote something that does not exist? This is the level of cynicism we see from the government.

Instead of serving the public interest, we have seen an increasingly dumbed-down message box from which the Conservatives believe they can spin the public. All members on the government side stand like marionettes, repeating the same dumbed-down talking points that are often misrepresentations and lies and completely contrary. If the sun is high in the sky, they will say it is a dark night. If it is a dark night, they will say the sun is in the sky, and they will repeat that message again and again. It is like *All the King's Men*, and the politician Willie Stark, who believed that if a lie was repeated often enough, it would somehow be true. To protect those lies—

Mr. Jeff Watson: Mr. Speaker, I believe it is unparliamentary to suggest or, in this case, to flat out accuse members on this side of the House of lying. I believe there are other ways of making the point. The member knows better, as he has been here since 2004. He should apologize and retract the unparliamentary language.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before I go to the member for Timmins—James Bay, I would remind hon. members that there are rules in place about what can and cannot be said. I was distracted for a moment and did not hear all of the comments by the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay. However, I will return the floor to him. If he feels remedial action is necessary, he can take it. The Chair would appreciate if he would be mindful of the rules.

The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker. I thank you for your intervention. I note my colleagues are very uncomfortable with the fact that we talk about the misrepresentation of facts under them. It strikes close to home. They think this is a matter of privilege. It does speak to the Potemkin democracy. I understand it is very unparliamentary to accuse someone of lying, and I never would do that, but it is perfectly parliamentary to lie within this tradition. This is a fact. We see the misrepresentation of fact again and again.

As I was saying, the people who can speak out about that misrepresentation are being silenced: the silencing of our scientists; the shutting down of independent organizations; the use of Canada Revenue Agency to go after everything from birdwatchers to environmental groups because they threaten the government's agenda; and, then, of course, the misuse of advertising. Between \$750 million and \$780 million of taxpayer money has been used to promote the same misrepresentation of facts.

I do not know what my colleague over there thinks is possibly true about telling people they can get a job through a job training grant

when the job training grant does not exist, and taxpayer money is being used on that.

We need to rein in this corrosive, abusive power.

We see so many examples. The Prime Minister has created his own TV network like he is the great leader from North Korea or something, with these 24 Seven videos. The Conservatives go to Iraq and do not allow the media to film, but they have their own imbedded propagandists. What comes out of that is that the lives of soldiers are actually put at stake.

The member for Nepean—Carleton has acted as Mini-Me, deciding he would run his own propaganda videos, using taxpayer money and civil servants.

This is such a cynical abuse of the public trust. It has to stop.

I agree with my Liberal colleague that we need to bring in some kind of rule if we do not want to see this kind of abuse of taxpayer dollars year after year, staggering amounts of money, putting up billboards, shrink-wrapping trains, promoting job creation schemes that do not exist. This is not in the public interest.

My concern with my Liberal colleague's bill is that the model we have for putting in some kind of protection for the taxpayer is in the province of Ontario, which was brought in under the premiership of Dalton McGuinty, and that bill is being gutted right now. It is being gutted by the present Liberal premier, who was stopped by the auditor general for Ontario from using Liberal red all over government ads. The auditor general for Ontario has raised concerns about the Liberal government being able to strip the acts so it can run government ads, such as taxpayers paying for ads promoting the government during elections. It is a cynical abuse by saying that we will not do it as opposition, but if we get into government, we will do the same thing.

Canadians are tired of this. They need to see something better. They need to see Parliament rise and say that it will not only be about the party interest, that is not only the party in opposition squawking when it is convenient to squawk at government abuse, but then abusing the same system once it gets in power.

We saw this when the new leader of the Liberal Party promised he would be the defender of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and then folded like a cheap suit on Bill C-51. He said that the Liberals would have open nominations, that he would do politics differently. How long did that promise last? I do not even think it was week before the Liberal Party was into its first lawsuit with candidates.

The Liberal leader recently wrote to the leaders of all Canada's unions, saying that he supported union rights, while his own members were attacking collective bargaining on Parliament Hill.

Private Members' Business

These are the corrosive cynicisms that make people believe they should not trust politicians when they see naked self-interests being put ahead of fundamental principles.

The House needs to restore an accountable system that wins the trust of Canadian people. One of those steps would be my colleague's Bill C-544 to limit the ability of government to take taxpayer money and abuse the public trust with misrepresentations, propaganda and, in some cases, outright lies. We need to restore the powers of the independent officers of Parliament to hold parliamentarians to account. The Conservative government uses incredible powers of government to hold its enemies to account, to investigate its enemies, while promoting national secrecy for itself. The Privacy Commissioner now says that her office has been completely undermined, as well as her ability to ensure we have open access to information.

Why is this important? It is important because the ability of the Canadian public to hold politicians to account is a fundamental principle in restoring accountability and trust.

• (1135)

We will be going into what will probably be the nastiest, dirtiest election campaign in Canadian history. Already millions and millions of dollars are being used by the government in a massive airwaves war, supposedly to promote government programs when in fact it is promoting the narrow interests of the Conservative Party, with the same narrow tag lines and the same kind of coloured advertising. Canadians see through this. They see this is an abuse of the public.

We need to find a better system to ensure accountability. The partisanship and the airwaves war can continue, but it should not be done through the use and abuse of taxpayer dollars.

We will support the bill. I encourage my Liberal colleagues to call on their provincial colleagues in Ontario to stop the Wynne government from stripping the basic bills in place right now that prevents her from doing such blatant, naked, partisan advertising. While they are at it, they should also call on the premier to stop the privatizing of Ontario hydro. Did the premier not run on a plan to be a progressive premier? She is doing stuff that would make Mike Harris blush. I ask my Liberal colleagues to do the right thing and at least call her out on that.

• (1140)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to speak in favour of Bill C-544, which was introduced by my colleague from Ottawa South. This bill would eliminate partisan advertising. I would like to thank my colleague for drafting and introducing this bill. I believe that it is in Canadians' interest.

I will not respond at length to the comments by my NDP colleague. He said he supports the bill, which makes sense. However, he talked about the Liberal Party's approach with respect to our leader's integrity and the measures he has put forward since coming here to clean up and clear up certain situations, from the Senate to nominations. I will not say much about that because when it comes to using public money for partisan advertising, we must not forget that the NDP spent millions of dollars in parliamentary money

on totally partisan purposes. Several NDP members have to reimburse that money as soon as possible.

This bill is about condemning the fact that most of the advertising done is partisan. Since coming to power, the Conservative government has spent close to \$750 million on advertising, much of which has been partisan. Meanwhile, programs that are absolutely vital to the federal government, from health to defence to public safety, are being sacrificed in the name of a balanced budget that is a long time coming. Even as the government's budget is exploding, it is spending \$750 million on ads.

The Conservatives spend money with no regard for Canadians' interests. They use Canadians' hard-earned money for partisan purposes. They have repeatedly used that money to broadcast extremely partisan ads on television during the priciest time slots, such as during the Super Bowl and the Stanley Cup playoffs, when a 30-second ad costs over \$100,000.

Meanwhile, people are suffocating under the Conservatives' ideological cuts. First, let us look at the Canada Revenue Agency, in an area I am very familiar with. The Conservatives will not reveal which services are being cut at CRA, and instead have created a special communications team to put a positive spin on what they are doing.

When each taxpayer pays his or her taxes during tax season, which just ended, they are not contributing to the Conservative Party; they are paying their fair share to fund public services. This includes immigration services. We learned last week that wait times are out of control, but the Conservatives refuse to talk about these matters.

I want to remind the House that the riding I represent, Bourassa, is very ethnically diverse. We have many services in the area of immigration, which is why some of the data posted on the Department of Citizenship and Immigration website was very shocking. Between 2007 and 2014, there was a 73% increase in wait times for spouses and children, a 146% increase for family reunification and a 546% increase for parents and grandparents.

• (1145)

The Conservatives do not necessarily talk about that and I am not here to encourage them to spend taxpayers' money on disclosing that information. However, it must be said that in reality, things are quite different. All the ads and billboards the Conservatives are spending money on seem to be partisan in nature. This is an election period, and partisan ads are what the Conservatives are really interested in.

They talked about immigration and all sorts of measures. However, when it comes to jobs, they even cancelled youth employment programs. It is summertime and young people need work. How much money is dormant in the coffers? On top of that, we should mention the advertising that the federal government is doing for programs that do not even exist.

Private Members' Business

It is therefore important to take the necessary measures and to say enough is enough, that we will now set up a structure to ensure that such advertising is done in good faith rather than for the Conservative government's partisan purposes. Infrastructure was another area where we saw this. There are so many areas where this government went off track, but they do not talk about that.

Lastly, my colleague's bill also requires that all advertising be submitted to a third-party review process for approval and to ensure that it is an appropriate, proportional, and even prudent expenditure of public funds. It is important to first speak out against these kinds of situations and also recognize that it takes an impartial person to confirm that these ads truly meet the needs of the public.

The Conservatives have proven that they have no problem wasting taxpayers' money, and Canada's democratic system is suffering as a result. No party, be it the governing party or not, should be able to buy an election. The studies have been very clear. Political advertising works. That is why we have very specific limits on our campaign spending. However, when a government picks the pockets of taxpayers to run a partisan advertising campaign just a few months before the election, every Canadian citizen pays the price.

A few months ago, this government said that politicians are too partisan to oversee the activities of our security intelligence agencies, an issue that should transcend partisan politics. It is impossible to escape the irony of a government that then turned around and claimed that a politician, a minister in this case, was the right person to determine prison sentences for criminals given life sentences. It is clear, however, that the issue of releasing a criminal into society could easily become politicized.

Now, if the government members oppose my colleague's bill, that would mean that we should trust politicians to ensure that these ads do not serve the government's political interests. I find that hard to believe.

I will conclude by asking all of my colleagues in the House to rise above the fray, recognize that taxpayers' money should be used for taxpayers and not for the political party in power, and vote in favour of this bill to put an end to partisan ads paid for by taxpayers. Canadians deserve greater transparency.

[*English*]

Mr. Chungsen Leung (Parliamentary Secretary for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today to speak on the subject of government advertising. I am proud to say that I am quite pleased with our government's accountability, responsibility, and transparency.

Let me just say that one of the main issues before us today is whether Bill C-544 would bring more accountability to our system of government. Making government more accountable and responsible to Canadians is a goal that we can all get behind, but it is not clear whether this bill would lead us in that direction. It includes new financial resources and administrative requirements that would not provide value for money for the taxpayer. As such, the government cannot support this legislation, and I urge all members to vote against it.

What is clear is that we already have a number of safeguards in place to ensure the integrity of advertising, which include robust planning and reporting mechanisms. Through the "Annual Report on Government of Canada Advertising Activities", for example, we provide a summary of major campaigns, expenditures, and general information on the advertising and management process. This important accountability report is posted publicly for all Canadians to see. In addition, all allocations from the central advertising fund are reported quarterly on the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat's website.

We also ensure the integrity of advertising by ensuring that it is well coordinated and transparent. For example, a federal department must co-ordinate its advertising with the Privy Council Office and Public Works and Government Services Canada. As required by the procedures for the management of advertising, departments must align their advertising activities with government priorities, themes, and messages.

The government takes this duty to account for its activities and expenditures very seriously. We are intent on ensuring that every taxpayer dollar that we spend is spent wisely and openly.

I firmly believe that our actions speak for themselves. Indeed, over the past few years, the government has undertaken a number of measures to help strengthen accountability, transparency, and oversight in government operations. These measures include the development of a robust regime of a proactive disclosure of information on government operations by departments and agencies, which allows government and public sector officials to be held to account.

Another very important milestone was the implementation of the Federal Accountability Act of 2006 and its companion action plan. Through the Federal Accountability Act and action plan, we implemented numerous measures to make our public institutions more transparent and accountable. Together, these two documents provide assurance that the powers entrusted to the government are being exercised in the public interest.

The Federal Accountability Act includes a number of measures, but let me just focus on a few today.

Through the act, for example, we created a new standard of accountability for the financing of political activities. We did that by reducing the maximum annual contribution by individuals to political entities and by prohibiting unions and corporations from making political contributions. We also banned secret donations to political candidates by prohibiting electoral district associations and parties from transferring money to their candidates from a trust account.

We also strengthened the Access to Information Act by extending its reach and scope. As a result, more government institutions than ever before are subject to the act, including departments and agencies, crown corporations, and wholly owned subsidiaries.

Private Members' Business

We also strengthened the role of the Auditor General of Canada. Thanks to the Federal Accountability Act, the Auditor General now has the authority to follow the money by inquiring into the use of funds that individuals, institutions, and companies receive under a funding agreement with any federal department, agency, or crown corporation. This change has strengthened the role of the Auditor General as an independent and reliable source of information. It also helped to reassure Canadians that their government is using their tax dollars wisely.

In addition, under the act we strengthened auditing and accountability within departments by clarifying the managerial responsibilities of deputy heads within the framework of ministerial responsibility and by bolstering the internal audit function within departments and crown corporations.

In short, we have strengthened accountability in every corner of government and for all Canadians and businesses that receive government funding.

Canadians work hard, pay their taxes, and play by the rules, and they expect accountability and transparency from their government. This is why we continue to pursue opportunities and support efforts that promise to make our public institutions more transparent and accountable. This includes ensuring that Parliament and Canadians are better informed about public spending.

We have achieved this by improving financial reporting, which has admittedly changed significantly in recent years.

● (1150)

For example, each department and agency now publishes its own annual financial statement on the full nature and extent of its activities. This innovation has been in place since 2006, and it is one of the key ways the government demonstrates accountability for its use of public funds.

It has also contributed to Canada's leadership in financial reporting. Indeed, very few jurisdictions publish annual financial statements at the departmental level.

The government is committed to meeting the high expectations of Canadians, and we will continue to explore and implement new ways of providing accountability for Canadians. After all, accountability is the foundation of Canada's system of responsible government. It is key to assuring Parliament and Canadians that public resources are used effectively and efficiently.

The good news is that we have achieved a great deal. As the Prime Minister has said, "Canada now has one of the most accountable systems of government in the entire world and this is something Canadians are rightly proud of."

This is indeed a proud record of achievement, and I can assure my hon. colleagues that supporting the bill before us today will not contribute to that record.

It is not clear whether its new administrative and financial resources requirements would provide value for money to taxpayers, as promised. I urge all members to join me in voting against the bill.

● (1155)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Resuming debate.

The hon. member for Chambly—Borduas has nine minutes left.

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is more time than I thought I had. This will allow me to tell some of the anecdotes that I wanted to share in this debate on my Liberal colleague's bill concerning government advertising, which seems to be increasingly partisan. For example, consider the 2011 election when the Conservative Party slogan was used in the election advertising.

For those watching at home, the bill would give the Auditor General more powers. That was done in Australia and Ontario, despite the best efforts of the Ontario Liberals to relax the law in recent months. This bill would give the Auditor General more powers to check advertising content in order to ensure that it is not partisan.

This is a really interesting issue because it affects the average Canadian during the playoffs, for example. The playoffs are not over yet, despite what I heard today. When there is no Canadian team left, we sometimes forget that the playoffs can last a fairly long time. The Stanley Cup finals will start this week.

On a more serious note, two months ago I went to visit my father in Beloeil to watch the hockey game with my father, stepmother, younger sister and two brothers. At one point, my father went into another room where he could still hear the TV. During the commercial break, we heard the same government ad not twice, but three times. When my father came back into the room, he asked whether he had really heard the same government ad three times. I told him he had, and that that was how the government was spending his money. He asked me how much these ads had cost and I told him that we were talking about several million dollars.

It was recently announced that \$7.5 million had been set aside, but that does not include the approximately \$70 million that has been spent in recent years. That is some pretty extravagant spending.

Obviously, during a hockey game, these ads play over and over and cost a lot of money. We repeatedly saw the same ads, and my family thought that it was absurd that all of the programs announced were accompanied by an asterisk and the disclaimer that those programs were subject to parliamentary approval. It is ridiculous to have such expensive ads for programs that have not yet even been approved by Parliament.

The government will argue that it is no big deal since it has a majority. That shows just how much arrogance and partisanship is wrapped up in those ads. To top it off, the programs are not even available to people yet.

Of course, as others have pointed out in this debate, some of the ads are for programs that do not even exist.

Those programs are a problem because, as we have also mentioned, that money would be better spent elsewhere considering all of the money the government spends and the cuts it has made. For example, we are trying to help people in our ridings who spend hours on hold with Service Canada. There have also been cuts to veterans' services and the CBC, among others. Cut after cut, they keep telling us that it is about accountability and a balanced budget.

In my opinion, that message is a very hard one for people to hear and accept. When they watch television, they see ads. The ads are all over the Internet and on YouTube too. People also see economic action plan signs on the side of the highway all over the place making a big show of the government's so-called record. This is very worrisome.

Every political party understands that, when it is in power, it has a responsibility to spend taxpayers' money wisely. Obviously, that sometimes includes making tough budgetary choices, but the public has far more respect for those choices if the government does not turn around and spend the money on advertising, especially during an election year, but that goes without saying.

• (1200)

The advertised programs are the cornerstone of the Conservative Party election platform, which makes it harder for the public to accept such spending. The number of times we hear people talk about this brings me back to what I was saying at the beginning of my speech. Everyone is talking about this, even those who do not follow politics very closely. They see that something does not add up in the way the government is using money for its ads, especially, as I said, in the context of reduced services.

This is even more troubling when we listen to question period. It is often a sorry spectacle of Liberals and Conservatives debating who was the worst government when it comes to certain issues. Immigration is an example of an issue where they wonder who was the biggest failure. Partisan advertising is another example of that, really. It is nothing new and the Conservative government insists on following the sorry example of the previous Liberal governments when it comes to misspending on advertising and all the fees that come with it. Canadians are concerned about this, which is all the more reason for us to support this bill.

It is also important to mention the Australian example. A law was passed in 1995, but it was recently amended, in 2010, because there was a problem with the auditor general's mandate with respect to the approval of government advertising and ensuring that the advertising is not partisan. Thus, the work in committee will be extremely important so that we do not make the same mistakes and to ensure that, by giving these powers to the Auditor General, he or she will be able to properly do this work and make sure that the advertising is not partisan. This is very worrisome issue. As I mentioned several times, Canadians are concerned about it.

In closing, it is important to point out that this just makes Canadians more cynical. When we go door-to-door and talk with the people in our ridings, we often see that they are cynical. That has been one of my greatest disappointments since going into politics. Using public money for partisan advertising of a party's record, instead of using it to inform Canadians of what the government is doing, only fuels cynicism.

Government Orders

That is a very good reason to pass this bill and put an end to this practice. Of course, we must do our job in committee to ensure that the Auditor General can do what we are asking him to do with this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1205)

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—FINANCIAL CODE OF CONDUCT

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP) moved:

Motion

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should ban all pay-to-pay practices by banks operating in Canada, through the enactment of a mandatory financial code of conduct to protect consumers.

Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the member for Beauport—Limoilou.

[*English*]

It is an honour to stand here in this place today on behalf of the good people of Davenport in the great city of Toronto, and in fact on behalf of all Canadians who are upset to the point of anger over unfair pay-to-pay fees. A pay-to-pay fee is a fee a customer is charged just for the right to pay their bill. This is patently unfair, and it plays out in a variety of different ways. Today, we are discussing, specifically, the banks.

Colleagues in the House will recall that the NDP led a very strong campaign to ban pay-to-pay fees, and due to that pressure the government introduced, in its last budget, the one before this one, measures to ban pay-to-pay fees on telephone companies, ISPs, telecommunications companies and cable companies. However, it did not include banks in that ban. Of course, when that did not happen, banks were free to do what they wanted with pay-to-pay fees, and we have seen them increase and expand.

Right now, pay-to-pay fees, just on transactions, just on statements that are mailed to people's houses, are worth about \$180 million a year. That is \$180 million that Canadian consumers have to pay the banks, the big five, just to get their statements in the mail. This is outrageous. It is ridiculous. It is unfair.

Government Orders

Today we have an opportunity to finally close the door on this unfair practice that Canadians from coast to coast to coast agree is unfair. I am sure my colleagues across the way on the government side have heard from their constituents about these fees. It is time for all of us to do the right thing, do what we were sent here to do, and that is fight for, protect and speak up for Canadians who sent us here, who we represent.

Banks are some of the most powerful corporations in the country. There are very few institutions that can stand up to a bank. An individual small business, an individual person, a hard-working Canadian, has a tough time doing that. However, that is what we are here to do. That is what we can do today.

I invite my colleagues from all the parties to support this motion to ban pay-to-pay fees. I want to read a bit of a letter that I received on this issue from a woman named Cynthia in my riding, a small business person, who said:

I have multiple accounts with TD Canada Trust and have been a customer with them for 30 years(!).

Now, this is what we call customer appreciation.

They charge \$2 for EACH account statement.

I've opted for online billing, but I need to print out copies for my records, so I end up paying for ink and paper to print my own bills. Either way, I lose.

Many in my riding have their own businesses. I represent a riding with many small, micro-entrepreneurs who are trying to make a living, oftentimes out of their own homes. She goes on to say:

I have my own business. I can only laugh at the idea that my customers would be agreeable to me charging them for printed invoices.

When was the last time any of us went to a restaurant, for example, and when we got the bill had to pay for the bill, too? That is what is happening. It is a big business; \$180 million.

The Public Interest Advocacy Centre found in a survey that it did that almost 40% of Canadians said they were not comfortable or could not use online billing, and 74% said they disapprove of companies charging extra for bills or statements.

●(1210)

Let us talk about who this would affect the most. It would affect those who do not have Internet access, seniors, persons with disabilities, many people for whom English or French is not their first language, and people who do not want to bank online for a variety of good reasons. In a sense, it affects communities that are already at some level of disadvantage in our society, and it is our job to ensure that they are treated equally and fairly.

These are unfair charges, and they are allowed to happen because the current government has opened the door for them. Whenever we talk about pay-to-pay fees here, the government rebuts the idea by touting the code of conduct under which the banks are governed. I am sure the government will do that today. However, what the Conservatives will not say, but what we will remind them of today, is that the code of conduct that they trumpet is a voluntary code of conduct. Let us imagine if the commute of Canadians watching this today was governed by a voluntary code of conduct. I can only imagine what Highway 401 would look like if it was governed by a voluntary code of conduct, but that is basically what we have going on here with the banks.

Why would the government not ensure that banks were following a code of conduct that is mandatory, not one that the banks can pursue by choice? When it is by choice, we see consumers having their pockets picked time and again while the Conservative government stands by and watches it happen and essentially allows it.

We have an opportunity today to do something very important for consumers right across the country.

A couple of weeks ago, one of the five big banks—which, by the way, just posted over \$2 billion in profits in its recent quarter alone—announced that it would charge extra pay-to-pay fees just for the right to make a mortgage payment, a student loan payment, or a credit card payment. It wanted to charge an extra bit of money just to pay a bill, until a huge outcry both on the street and in the House of Commons forced RBC to back down.

However, that did not stop it and all of the other five big banks from increasing fees on everyday transactions. Someone told me recently that when they took out \$40 at a bank machine, they were charged \$4.50 to take out their own money. That is outrageous. We need to have a serious conversation about what is and is not fair.

It would be one thing if these businesses were in distress, but how is it that the government allows Canadian banks, who are all posting over \$2 billion in profit every quarter, to nickel-and-dime hard-working Canadians? Shame on the government.

Today we have the opportunity to do the right thing by hard-working Canadians who have to play by the rules, make ends meet, and work hard. They do not deserve to have their pockets picked in this way. Today we have an opportunity to right this unfair practice.

I look forward to this debate today and to this House agreeing tonight that we will end pay-to-pay fees forever.

●(1215)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his intervention today and for his work on this file.

My question to him is quite simple. I would like him to expand upon how this motion would help small businesses in our communities. I know that a number have had several challenges with respect to negotiating fees and costs related to payments made through MasterCard, Visa, and a series of other operators. I would like him to expand upon the small business advantages that would happen with respect to this motion.

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Speaker, this is indeed an issue that affects consumers and small businesses.

Right now, many small businesses are just snowed under by a preponderance of transaction fees when customers use credit cards or debit cards. We have long been calling for a cap on these fees. This would make a big difference for small businesses.

Government Orders

When we talk about small businesses, I think it is important that we qualify what some of these small businesses are. Many of these businesses, including the one that I referred to earlier in my speech, are operating on micro-thin profits. These fees sometimes make the difference between whether they go into the red or stay in the black from month to month.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, both for small business and the average individual, transaction fees have a very important impact on our middle class in terms of disposable income. Other opportunities might be there if there were a few more constraints on the fees charged by financial institutions.

Could the member provide some further comment as to what else we could do to make these measures much more all-encompassing in terms of the different types of fee structures that are in place, in particular for small businesses? As he has pointed out, the consumer ends up having to pay for these fees far too often.

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Speaker, one of the first speeches that I attended with Jack Layton was around the issue of capping ATM transaction fees. We have long called for a cap on those fees, and the cap should be 50¢. We have done a lot of work on this aspect and we know that 50¢ is a fair fee, both for the institutions and for the consumer. I think that should have wide support here in this House.

However, today we are focused on pay-to-pay fees. We are focused on these because they are particularly egregious and really do target vulnerable communities, and it is just plain wrong and unfair.

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Davenport for bringing this important issue forward. I know that he and other members, such as the member for York South—Weston, have been great advocates on this issue.

In fact, the reason RBC was forced to rescind or reverse its decision on these fees was that members like these actually went and stood in front of RBC branches with petitions and frankly shamed the bank into moving backwards on that decision.

I remember a show that was on *CBC Marketplace* in 2013 called “Canada’s Dumbest Charge”. Of course, pay-to-pay fees was one of the top contenders for the dumbest charge in Canada. Of course, the kind of advocacy work that CBC does might be one of the reasons the government keeps trying to undercut it and remove its funding.

I would like to ask the member if he saw that show and what he thought about it being one of Canada’s dumbest charges.

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Speaker, I completely agree. It is not only dumb; it is unfair and it is wrong.

We have to set this situation in context, and the context is the government’s refusal to act and its refusal to tighten up the rules.

The Conservatives expect Canadians to play by the rules. Why do they not expect the same thing from the big banks?

• (1220)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Davenport for sharing his precious speaking time with me, because our time is very limited.

This is an opposition day and we are dedicating our entire day to this topic. I am sure that he could have shared a number of thoughts from his constituents regarding the problems with these pay-to-pay fees. I want to start by reading the motion, because it is very short and clear:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should ban all pay-to-pay practices by banks operating in Canada, through the enactment of a mandatory financial code of conduct to protect consumers.

I want to reflect on my 10 years of public life. It has already been 10 years, and I can hardly believe it myself. This fall will mark my fourth election campaign. I have met all kinds of people in these 10 years. Every single day in the past four years specifically, I have taken time to hear from the people of Beauport—Limoilou.

What I find really striking, and I am sure my colleagues have seen this too, is that people are proud of their accomplishments, whether they have raised a family, found a job, bought their first house or owned a house for 20 or 30 years. However, one constant is becoming increasingly obvious: people are complaining more and more about the rising cost of living in general and especially the countless fees they have to pay.

They also talk to us about taxes, but their main issue is the fees they have to pay left, right and centre, fees on all kinds of simple transactions, fees that businesses charge to compensate for declining revenues in highly competitive markets. However, the most offensive fees are no doubt those that make up the enormous profits of huge Canadian companies, particularly our big banks.

I am a long-time observer of the Canadian economy. I have been interested in it for 30 years, and I have seen how admirably stable our chartered banks are. However, I have also witnessed them taking advantage of people over and over, and I believe that governments are complicit because they have not done anything about it for years. That is so disappointing.

My colleague from Davenport chose to target pay-to-pay fees for paper bills. That is certainly the most offensive example of abuse on the part of the big Canadian banks. It is an outright insult to the millions of Canadians who, unfortunately, depend on paper bills. I think it is unfortunate because changes made by big businesses such as chartered banks hold people hostage and force them to change their habits or try to adapt somehow.

I currently have the great pleasure of being a member of the Standing Committee on Finance. However, for all of 2014, I was a member of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology. I am very proud of having had a front-row seat to and an active role in passing legislation to prohibit these pay-to-pay fees for getting paper copies of telephone, cellphone, or cable television bills, among others.

Government Orders

It was a great victory and we are very proud. We led the charge for a very long time. My colleague from Davenport spoke of our late leader, Jack Layton. I very much remember our campaign all those years ago. Our beloved Jack got in front of an automated teller machine and denounced the ever-increasing fees and the fact that people had to pay to withdraw their own money.

• (1225)

Before I go on, I will provide some very interesting and very important statistics to inform this debate. According to a poll by the PIAC, 33% of respondents said they were not comfortable with the idea of receiving a bill electronically. That is one in three Canadians, which is a rather significant part of the population. According to Statistics Canada, one in five Canadian households do not have Internet, but more importantly, 46% of homes with a household income of less than \$30,000 a year do not have Internet. That is almost half of all the lowest-income households. Some 40% of senior Canadians do not use the Internet.

When I went door-to-door, especially as part of our campaign against eliminating door-to-door mail delivery, many people told me they supported the NDP campaign not because they felt uncomfortable or deprived at the loss of home mail delivery, but because they were thinking about their neighbours, namely seniors, households with very young children, people with reduced mobility, or people who do not use the Internet and who will end up paying a heavy price when mail is no longer delivered to their door.

It is the same in this case. Someone like me, a young 48-year old who is comfortable using the Internet, can easily make the transition. That being said, my mother does not even have a cell phone and has never used the Internet in her life. Why should she be charged for a paper invoice? That is outright robbery. My mother is far from being alone; on the contrary, many of her friends of the same or similar age are also entirely dependent on paper. With that in mind, how can a responsible government that respects all Canadians allow people to be cheated in this way, forced to pay \$2 for every invoice? It might not seem like a lot, but it is huge. My mother worked for part of her life, but her retirement income is pretty modest. For her, every cent counts. How can we tolerate a government that allows this kind of outright theft? It is stealing.

I am not even talking about other charges that also seem to go up every year, or even twice a year, in the case of transaction fees. Even people who have very little income have to make a few withdrawals or a few transactions from their account. For someone like my mother, having to pay \$1 or \$1.50 for each transaction and \$2 for a paper copy of her statement to see what is happening with her account is, quite frankly, scandalous. Any responsible government should really look at the situation and protect people from this kind of abuse.

That being said, I am very pleased to be able to speak to this issue on behalf of all Canadians, and especially my constituents in Beauport—Limoilou. This is yet another subject that we will be debating in the weeks to come and over the summer.

• (1230)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to bring up an example that recently happened in my

constituency. This is where government has an issue with respect to photo radar. When a constituent receives a ticket, the back of the ticket notes that the person can phone in and make payment or mail it in. The interesting thing is that if the individual chooses to mail in the payment, it costs more money. I think this is becoming even more prevalent. We need to watch this in the private sector, but other agencies look at roundabout ways to collect additional fees. One would have thought, for instance, that if we were to pay over the telephone, it would be cheaper than having to pay by mail.

Could the member comment on that?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Winnipeg North for that example. It is quite a good one and rather interesting.

It is a privilege for me to sit on the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance. In 2013, we studied income inequality in Canada. It is a reality. In fact, we are steadily sliding down the slope of income inequality. Although the income of a small fraction of the population is rising very quickly, the income of the vast majority is stagnating or even decreasing when the cost of living is taken into account.

These small fees are being charged left, right and centre, and people are being squeezed and losing a lot of their purchasing power. How can they fight back? The fact that we are leaving them at the mercy of this type of arbitrary fee being charged all over the place is scandalous. That is why we want to go one step further. This is very simple and very easy to understand and to support, and it will give all Canadians a little breathing room.

[*English*]

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I notice that in the 2013 Speech from the Throne the Conservatives promised to take action to “End “pay to pay” policies, so customers won’t pay extra to receive paper bills”.

They re-pledged to do the same thing in the 2014 budget to “eliminate the practice of pay-to-pay billing”. However, the legislation excluded banks from that prohibition. Instead, the Conservatives have been talking about financial codes of conduct, which fail to cover banking fees and are entirely voluntary.

Therefore, could my colleague comment on whether the Conservatives' voluntary code of conduct will be sufficient?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Victoria for his question. My answer is very simple: it is not sufficient.

Government Orders

The Conservatives now have a well-established reputation for being all talk and no action. Take, for example, the economic action plan and the famous building Canada plan. Every year they promise money. However, we get all kinds of complaints from all over the country, from municipalities and provincial governments, questioning whether the money is actually being spent. These governments are complaining that the federal government is blocking this money but does not provide a reason.

We are in the process of studying the budget implementation bill and one other aspect is outrageous: although the Conservatives committed to stop using the surplus from the EI fund, they used it to balance the budget this year. The Conservatives say one thing and do the opposite. Then they then claim to be good managers. Let us not kid ourselves. That is intellectual fraud. That is the underlying problem.

[*English*]

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to use my time today to endorse the spirit of this motion and to review certain measures by our government that have already taken place to put Canadian consumers first. In my remarks I will also illustrate how this government has often been able to ensure positive commitments from financial institutions without resorting to mandatory measures.

It is quite remarkable to see the NDP members actually put forward any sort of public support for Canadian consumers, especially since they have voted against every pro-consumer measure that our government has introduced. Nonetheless, we will be supporting the motion today because our Conservative government has a strong record on consumer issues, and I am glad the members of the NDP are happy with that announcement. We will continue to put Canadian consumers first. We certainly hope they will too.

In doing so, however, I would like to remind the hon. member that consumer protection measures like the updated code of conduct this government released in April benefits two different groups: the businesses that rely on financial institutions to operate, and the consumers that make those businesses and ultimately our entire economy a success.

It was the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, after all, that noted that the code of conduct for the credit and debit card industry in Canada “has served merchants extremely well....[It] has done an excellent job in ensuring some fair ground rules and maintaining Canada’s low-cost debit system”.

Accordingly, a valid and constructive examination of the motion before us simply must ensure both small business and consumers are priorities. With the NDP refusing to support our measures helping small businesses, on top of all the measures to protect consumers, I question the sincerity of the NDP’s motion today.

In the motion, the hon. member has trained his sights on the business-to-consumer space, the B2C space. B2C, on the other hand, describes the relationship between a company and the end user of a service. Without question, these relationships are important. Canadian families work hard to make ends meet and every dollar counts. When Canadians make decisions about how to spend their money, they must be assured of a voice, a choice and fair treatment.

These words once again recall the 2013 Speech from the Throne and the very first strokes of what was to become our consumer first agenda. It is here that hon. members may have first heard the term pay-to-pay, for it was on this occasion that we committed to end pay-to-pay policies in specific industries in Canada, starting with the telecommunications sector. Contrary to the wording of the motion, the pay-to-pay concept goes beyond banks.

For those who are not aware, pay-to-pay billing refers to a new charge on monthly phone bills that previously did not exist. This fee may cost up to \$6 each month and is charged to Canadians who choose to receive their monthly phone bill by mail, that is the paper version. Here again, promises made, promises kept.

Last December, legislation prohibiting telecommunications companies from charging Canadians for receiving paper bills received royal assent. This was a very good first step, but it was by no means our last.

One of the most important relationships Canadians have is with their financial institution, and Canada’s banks are world-class. The World Economic Forum has recognized Canada’s banking sector as the soundest in the world for the seventh straight year. That is something of which we can all be very proud.

Our nation’s financial institutions continue to meet global regulator reform thresholds on time and often ahead of schedule. Three of our six major banks count among Bloomberg’s list of the world’s strongest. More important, Canadians have high regard for their financial institutions: 87% have a favourable impression of banks in Canada, significantly higher than any other service providers; 75% give banks a good rating for being stable and secure; and 79% of Canadians get good value for their service fees.

This is positive news because it shows Canadians recognize that a profitable banking sector benefits communities across the country and the Canadian economy as a whole. Those countries that do not have a sound banking sector, including the ones most impacted by the global financial crisis a few years ago, have come to envy those that do.

Government Orders

● (1235)

In the banking sector, as in the telecommunications sector, our government has been proactive about ensuring that Canadians do not face unfair or undisclosed charges for services rendered. Our efforts in this regard are long standing and cut across many different areas of the banking and financial industry. They are even in collaboration with other levels of government. However, while we have a strong banking sector, we also understand the concerns of Canadians who feel nickel-and-dimed by the big banks. It is why we have introduced tough measures to protect Canadians from predatory banking practices and have continued to look for ways to protect Canadian consumers when dealing with their financial institutions.

Some of our measures leverage public education. For example, in budget 2014, we committed to raising public awareness about the associated costs of payday lending and other lending products with high interest rates. We are also giving provincial governments the space they need to fully regulate payday loans, including a 2007 change to the usury provisions of the Criminal Code.

Many more of our efforts draw on the benefits of clear disclosure to help consumers make good choices. Disclosure rules ensure that service providers, credit card companies, or federal financial institutions that offer mortgages, highlight relevant consumer information about charges and consequences in a manner that is visible and accessible. For example, the prepaid payment products regulations, which came into force last May, require disclosure of fees in a prominent information box on exterior packaging; disclosure of pertinent information on the product's use, including on how to access the full terms and conditions and a toll-free number to make a balance inquiry; prohibit the expiry of funds; and prohibit dormancy fees during the first 12 months following card activation.

To put consumers first, our government has prohibited unfair practices where necessary. That includes, for example, the use of unsolicited credit card cheques, which encourage funds to be withdrawn directly from a credit card. These cheques are considered to be cash advances, which can accrue higher interest rates and fees and do not provide an interest-free grace period.

Another example of our government's consumer commitment is the access to funds regulations, which reduce the maximum cheque-hold period to four days from the previous seven days for cheques of less than \$1,500. The regulations also provide consumers with more timely access to the first \$100 of a cheque.

These are some of the actions that the government has taken, which in turn have prompted changes within the banking industry.

However, our financial industry has always been a driver of positive change. Financial companies also recognize the value of treating their clients fairly, whether they be consumers or businesses. It is the Canadian way, and our government has repeatedly helped to make that happen.

For example, budget 2014 called on banks to enhance disclosure to consumers of the costs and consequences of collateral charge mortgages relative to conventional mortgages. In response, on September 3, 2014, eight major banks, and the Canadian Bankers Association on behalf of its smaller member banks, committed to providing consumers with general comparative information on

residential mortgages. Banks also committed to providing specific information about these same topics to consumers on their individual mortgages at the time of or before entering into a mortgage loan agreement.

The NDP voted against all of these consumer protection measures.

Just over a year ago, Canada's eight largest banks voluntarily committed to enhancing low-cost bank accounts, and to offering no-cost accounts with the same features as low-cost accounts to a wider range of eligible consumers, especially students and seniors.

Industry-initiated change has not been limited to our federally regulated financial institutions either. Last fall, we welcomed voluntary commitments by Visa Canada and MasterCard Canada to cut credit card fees by close to 10%. Visa and MasterCard started to implement the reductions in April 2015. This is a very important commitment for retail business owners in particular.

● (1240)

Canadians have proven to be enthusiastic adopters of new and evolving payments technology. From the early days of automated teller machines, now known as ATMs, to newer tap and go technologies at point of sale, the days of exchanging hard cash for goods and services, for many, seem long ago and far away. I am proud to say that Canada leads in this respect.

Businesses that accept payments must now consider a much larger number of payment options, ranging from cash to debit to credit, and emerging digital technologies as well. That is why, alongside the recent release of our updated code of conduct for the credit and debit card industry in Canada, we have also undertaken a consultation, seeking the views of Canadians on how to ensure that payments innovations are safe and provide adequate consumer protection.

Payment systems are vital to the movement of money in an economy. Given their importance, the government provides oversight of these systems based on the broad policy objectives of safety and soundness, efficiency, and consideration of user interests. It is our strong hope that one of the major conversations that this consultation will spark is related to efficiency and how to ensure that our payments industry remains competitive so that consumers do not face higher costs when using new payment technology. At the same time, businesses can make the right choices about the kinds of payments they will accept.

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More important to this debate today, which I am surprised the NDP has already forgotten, is that the banks have already committed to ending pay-to-pay charges. It makes this debate somewhat unnecessary, as the NDP is completely ignoring that the banks have made a commitment to the federal government that they will not charge customers for bills when money is owing.

Our government completely agrees that we should support eliminating the practice of making customers pay fees to see their bills or invoices, which is why, in the spring or summer of 2014, the banks made their commitment to ending this practice for Canadian consumers. Our government fully intends to accept the banks' voluntary commitment.

I am sure the hon. member knows that our government does not regulate the day-to-day operations of banks, but this issue is something we take seriously, which is why we are proud that we are able to work with the industry to help all consumers.

Then, there is the financial code of conduct that the member has raised. Again, I am faced with some confusion. Economic action plan 2015, the extraordinary budget that the Minister of Finance introduced this year, proposes a new financial consumer protection framework for banks. This is the same budget that the opposition has already committed to voting against, which comes as no surprise when members opposite vote against most of our government's measures without even reading them.

Economic action plan 2015 proposes to amend the Bank Act. It will strengthen and modernize Canada's financial consumer protection framework to respond to the diverse needs of Canadians. Not only will it make the consumer protection provisions of the act more transparent and consistent with regard to the banks' dealings with consumers, it will benefit all Canadians, including the most vulnerable consumers. Since it would be enshrined in the Bank Act, the framework would be mandatory.

Again, New Democrats need to read the budget before they propose their motions. Our government's use of voluntary codes of conduct has increased transparency at banks and is considered a model framework around the world. Every Canadian bank has accepted and implemented our voluntary code of conduct. We are taking it one step further to make sure the framework will prohibit certain business practices, improve access to basic banking services, and broaden requirements for clear and simple disclosure of information for banking products and services.

I am sure that the point is clear already, but let me quote from the budget text itself:

The Government of Canada intends that the Bank Act provide the exclusive set of rules governing consumer protection for banks. One comprehensive set of rules will allow banks to officially deliver national products and services and provide consumers with the benefit of knowing they have the same uniform protection when they deal with their bank anywhere across the country.

I am not sure what more the member wants. This is a clear example of our government taking true leadership on this issue and helping all Canadians, by putting these principles in law.

• (1245)

Let me be crystal clear for the NDP. Banning pay-to-pay bank fees is the kind of thing we intend to look at, including in our mandatory

financial consumer protection framework that we promised in economic action plan 2015. Our government understands that when Canadians make decisions about how to spend their money, they must be assured that their interests come first and they are given fair treatment.

I could spend a whole day listing the measures we have introduced to help consumers and that the opposition has voted against, but I see that my time is almost up.

Let me comment on one more measure that I believe is extremely important, and that is financial literacy.

Our government has been working to support the financial literacy of Canadians since we came to power. We have created the financial literacy leader position and invested funds to ensure that Canadians have the skills and knowledge to make informed financial decisions. As we have said many times, this will not only result in economic benefits for Canadians, it will also benefit the entire economy.

Protecting consumers and supporting small businesses remain a central focus of our government. We continue to work through our many channels to effect positive change for both groups. From regulations to voluntary industry-driven codes, consumers today enjoy far greater protections than ever before, even as the products and services they enjoy also evolve in step with technology and our increasingly digital world. Canadian consumers and businesses stand to benefit first from these exhaustive efforts, which is only right and fair.

Again, while we support the motion here today, I urge the NDP to stop playing political games and finally support the countless measures that our government has introduced to protect Canadian consumers. It could perhaps start by supporting economic action plan 2015.

• (1250)

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for that speech and support for the motion.

I would like to get some clarification. The motion calls for a mandatory financial code of conduct to protect consumers with regard to pay-to-pay fees at the banks. We would note that when the government had the opportunity to ban pay-to-pay fees in budget 2014, it excluded banks. That is why we are here today.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague to clarify that the intention is to bring in a mandatory code of conduct that would ensure these fees are banned and ask when we would see that.

Government Orders

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, I suggest that the member stay tuned. Economic action plan 2015 proposes to amend the Bank Act to strengthen and modernize Canada's financial consumer protection framework to respond to the diverse needs of Canadians.

I should also point out that our government understands the concerns of Canadians who feel nickel-and-dimed by the big banks. That is why we have introduced tough measures to protect Canadians from predatory banking policies. We have taken action to improve low-cost and no-cost banking options for over seven millions Canadians, and we have introduced and strengthened the debit and credit card code of conduct as well.

I encourage the member opposite to stay tuned.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate a number of the comments that the member has put on the record this morning.

One of the frustrations that many consumers have is the ever-increasing number of small businesses that will have fees, for example, for using credit cards or an ATM. A good example would be that if people want to pay for a taxi ride with Visa, they would pay an extra \$1.50 just for access. We all know that the actual cost is nowhere near \$1.50. It would be substantially less than that, and I would argue likely less than 25¢.

Given that we are more and more moving toward a cashless society, I want to know from the minister whether he or his government are looking at proactive consumer-based legislation to deal with monetary fees that consumers are being obligated to pay if they choose to pay, for example, with a credit card or at an ATM?

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, I remind my colleague opposite that both Visa and MasterCard Canada have agreed to lower their interchange fees to businesses by 10%. They have done that voluntarily, and it is a significant advantage for consumers, because those costs would ultimately be passed on to them, as well.

I would also like to point out that our government is providing Canadians with the information to make informed decisions about their banking needs. There are many low-cost alternatives available to Canadians, but they ultimately decide what is in their best interests and in the best interests of their families.

• (1255)

Mr. Jeff Watson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his intervention today and for laying out the government's agenda with respect to protecting consumers. If I understood him correctly, the incremental approach the government is taking, first by banning pay-to-pay in the telecommunications sector, has allowed for the ability to get these types of voluntary agreements with the banks while allowing the government to proceed with what I heard the member say was a much more comprehensive approach to consumer protection in the financial industry.

I wonder if the member could confirm that this is, in fact, the approach of the government. Could he confirm that it is not just a one-off with respect to pay-to-pay for banking customers but that we are taking a comprehensive look at consumer protection broadly within that sector.

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, not only are we reducing fees and making sure that fees are more competitive in the financial industry, but we are doing it in other industries as well.

In the telecommunications industry, for example, we are increasing competition in the telecommunications market by amending the Telecommunications Act to cap wholesale domestic wireless roaming rates. We are putting an end to cross-border price discrimination by cracking down on companies that use their market power to charge higher prices for consumers. We are strengthening Canada's food safety system by investing \$390 million in the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's food safety programs. We are removing tariffs on baby clothing and certain sports and athletic equipment to help to reduce the cost of these goods for Canadian families. We are adopting a wireless policy focused on stimulating greater competition, which has helped to reduce wireless rates by 20% since 2008. In addition to that, we require all-inclusive air fare advertising to ensure that consumers can clearly see the total price of an airline ticket.

Members can see that the list of measures we have taken to help consumers goes on and on, well beyond the financial services industry. We just wish that the opposition would get on board and start supporting some of these important measures and stop voting against every single one of them.

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting, listening to my colleague opposite talk about the concern he and his government have for consumer protection. If there was that concern, why did the government not ban pay-to-pay fees for banks in the budget of 2014, when it did that very thing, under pressure from the NDP, and banned them for telecommunications and phone companies?

Additionally, I would just like to clarify that the term "pay-to-pay" was coined by a young volunteer in my office in Toronto when we were building this campaign and working to come up with a name. This young man, who was just in high school, said that it is a fee to pay a bill and that we are paying to pay our bills. That is how this whole issue got rolling.

I would like to ask the member opposite why the government did not ban pay-to-pay fees for banks when it had the opportunity? It could have saved consumers \$180 million this year. It could have done that. It could have put that money back into the pockets of hard-working Canadians, but it did not. It allowed the banks to go on their merry way. Why is that?

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, I remind my colleague opposite that, in fact, in the throne speech of 2013, it said:

End "pay to pay" policies, so customers won't pay extra to receive paper bills;...

Government Orders

It was not exclusive to the financial services industry. We intended to end pay-to-pay practices in all industries. We think this is in consumers' best interests. They should have a choice as to whether they receive their bills in paper form or digital form, and they should not have to pay for that choice.

In addition to that, I want to point out that in economic action plan 2015, we have introduced measures such as delivering a new and exclusive financial consumer framework for federally regulated banks. We are strengthening the financial literacy of Canadians through a national financial literacy strategy. We are continuing the national counterfeit enforcement strategy to ensure that Canadians can have confidence in their currency, and we are supporting the growth and competitiveness of credit unions, which are essential local institutions in many communities across Canada.

Members can see that there are a lot of very good consumer protection measures we have introduced in economic action plan 2015. We certainly hope that the members of the opposition will vote in favour of them and show that they also have a commitment to helping consumers.

• (1300)

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to the motion from the member for Davenport seeking a ban on pay-to-pay fees charged by Canadian banks.

I want to start by examining the issue of pay to pay and how it relates to existing consumer protection measures in the financial sector. Then I would like to use the rest of my time to discuss a more meaningful way to bring fairness to the middle class and those Canadians working hard to join the middle class.

I believe that the underlying issue of today's motion is one of fairness. The motion before us calls for "a mandatory financial code of conduct to protect consumers". While the text of the motion does not explicitly lay out an objective, I believe that its main objective really is fairness, which is something any reasonable person in this House can support.

It is an issue that speaks to our founding principles, peace, order and good government, and is a recognition that we need strong consumer protection measures so that Canadians are treated fairly when they make a purchase or enter into an agreement.

There is an inherent imbalance between large institutions and large businesses and individual consumers with respect to information and power. Most individuals need the protection of strong laws and consumer protection measures to help even the scales.

Canadians are justifiably proud of our banks. We have some of the largest and most successful banks in the world. Our resilient banking system did not just happen by accident. It was shaped, largely, by reforms in the 1990s, directed, in fact, by the strong governments of Paul Martin and Jean Chrétien, when globally, the banking systems were being deregulated in Europe, the U.K., and the U.S. Canada did not follow suit at that time and did not follow the global trend of deregulation. Canadians and our banking system are better off for it.

However, every system needs balance. A strong banking system must be complemented by strong consumer protection measures that ensure fairness for Canadians.

In today's economy, access to basic banking services is essential for consumers. We are moving towards a cashless society. It is becoming nearly impossible to carry on today without a bank account. Even the federal government is pushing Canadians towards an increasingly cashless society and electronic transactions. The government is in the midst of phasing out, for instance, its use of printed cheques. As of next April, Canadians will be required to accept all payments from the federal government by direct deposit. This will include tax refunds and federal child benefits as well as CPP, OAS, and EI payments.

The government has said that it will only issue cheques under exceptional circumstances. For example, it will continue to issue cheques to people who live in remote communities where they do not have access to a financial institution. For everyone else, it is clear that the government sees bank accounts as a prerequisite to receiving financial support.

Liberals believe that the government ought to show more compassion, understanding, and flexibility in allowing more Canadians to continue receiving cheques. For instance, we can look at situations with many of the elderly, who may be less disposed to using electronic banking, or low-income Canadians, who may not have ongoing and reliable access to high-speed Internet or who cannot afford those connections on an ongoing basis.

We recognize how essential it has become for Canadians to have access to basic banking services, particularly, as I mentioned, for low-income Canadians, who cannot afford to see their meagre earnings eaten up by large fees. That is why, in 2001, the Liberal government brought in legislation to guarantee access to basic banking services for all Canadians, including low-income Canadians. It is why the Liberal government banned the banks from placing a hold on government cheques valued at \$1,500 or less. It is why a Liberal government brought in rules requiring each of the largest banks to offer a standard low-fee bank account. These accounts include between eight and 12 transactions per month as well as a free debit card, free deposits, and free monthly statements.

• (1305)

At the same time, a Liberal government established the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada to monitor the financial services industry, educate consumers, and enforce new, stronger consumer protection measures. These reforms were introduced by a Liberal government. They were an important step forward, but a lot has happened over the last decade. Technology has changed everywhere. Smart phones are now everywhere. More Canadians are doing their shopping and banking online, and a growing number of companies in telecommunications, broadcasting, and the banking sector are pressuring Canadians to pay their bills online as a way to cut costs.

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In the past few years, we have seen a proliferation of pay-to-pay fees. Let us be clear about what that term actually means. “Pay to pay” is widely understood to mean the practice of charging customers an additional fee for mailing them a paper invoice or statement, in a lot of cases. It does not mean an end to all transaction fees for payments.

Last year, the Public Interest Advocacy Centre estimated that Canadian consumers were paying between \$495 million and \$735 million per year to receive paper bills for telco and banking services combined. Of that total, \$180 million was for the banking sector. PIAC also conducted a survey that found that a third of Canadians were uncomfortable receiving bills or statements online, for a variety of reasons. I mentioned seniors, particularly, who may be averse to that.

Many Canadians are worried about falling victim to online scams and identity theft. Earlier this year, thousands of employees at the Canada Revenue Agency were unable to identify a fake email phishing scam that was sent to them as part of a test. It is understandable that cautious Canadians would take extra steps to avoid the possibility of being scammed.

Another reason some Canadians insist on paper billing is because they simply do not have a choice. They do not have high-speed Internet at home. This is a significant barrier to low-income Canadians. According to Stats Canada's latest Canadian Internet use survey, only 58% of households in the lowest-income quartile have Internet at home. That compares to an access rate of 98% and 94% in the first and second income quartiles. Not surprisingly, the PIAC survey found that low-income Canadians are more likely to pay their bills in person or by mail rather than online, and they are not alone.

Canadians living in rural and remote communities are less likely to have reliable high-speed Internet at home. Seniors are less likely to use the Internet regularly, making them more likely to end up paying extra fees for paper billing.

It seems unfair to punish Canadians with extra fees because they are poor, they are low-income, or they live in an area where they cannot get high-speed Internet. It seems to me that we are disadvantaging those who are already disadvantaged.

PIAC estimated that Canadians without Internet access spend between \$77 million and \$102 million per year on paper billing. Pay-to-pay fees were virtually unheard of before 2010, but between 2010 and 2014, a system came into place that forced some of these most vulnerable Canadians to pay extra fees just to find out how much they owed for banking and telco services, which are considered essential in the modern world.

In the last few months, new consumer protection measures have come into place. Bill C-43 introduced measures to end pay-to-pay fees in the broadcasting and telco sectors. It prohibited service providers from charging customers who receive paper bills for wireless, Internet, telephone, and television services. Liberals voted in favour of these measures during clause-by-clause consideration of the bill.

There have also been new measures to limit bank fees. The government has built on the reforms Liberals introduced in 2001 and expanded low-fee and no-fee bank accounts. Students, low-income

seniors, and Canadians with disabilities are entitled to basic banking services with no fees. With low-fee and no-fee accounts, many Canadians can avoid pay-to-pay fees at their banks.

● (1310)

However, according to the banks around 15% of Canadians pay fees for mailed bank statements. Apparently, the banks are willing to waive these fees for customers who face economic hardship or who do not have Internet access, but there is more that can be done to avoid pay-to-pay fees across the federally regulated financial sector.

Of course, the devil is in the detail. Closing the door on pay-to-pay fees would not mean a thing if it leads to similar fees popping up elsewhere. The government must be clear in how it defines the term pay-to-pay. Does it refer to invoices for accounts where the customer owes money, such as credit cards and mortgages? Does the government have a broader interpretation that would include statements for all financial accounts at the bank, including investment accounts, or is the government's interpretation even broader still? It seems that a small number of people are trying to morph the term into something far more comprehensive, covering almost any financial transaction fee on any payment. Therefore, we need some level of clarity around that. No one likes bank fees, but banning transaction fees in a modern world of e-commerce has to be done discerningly.

It is really important to recognize that there are many meaningful ways we can bring fairness back to Canadian families who are struggling. Today's motion reflects one way. The Liberal plan for fairness is another way to help struggling middle-class Canadian families and those Canadians working hard to join the middle class.

The Liberals have put forward a plan to stand up for Canadian middle-class families. We recognize that too many Canadian families are struggling just to make ends meet. They are struggling under the crushing weight of record levels of personal debt, \$1.66 for every \$1.00 of disposable income. Canadians have been taking on more debt as the job quality in Canada has deteriorated. In fact, according to CIBC Economics we have the worst job quality in Canada that we have had in 25 years. We have seen full-time jobs with benefits being replaced by part-time work.

Government Orders

Too many middle-class Canadians have not had a real pay raise in a long time and too many young Canadians have yet to really start their careers. They face a labour market that still has 160,000 fewer jobs for young Canadians today than back in 2008. Young Canadians face a growing pressure to take unpaid work, just for the work experience. We have all heard of recent graduates who are stuck in a cycle going from unpaid internship to unpaid internship, while their parents are struggling to help pay the bills. That is another reason why more and more Canadians are going deeper into debt, the direct financial subsidization of young Canadians who have good educations but cannot find good work to support themselves.

Many middle-class parents are delaying their retirement in order to help adult children who simply have not been able to achieve financial self-sufficiency. It is no longer unusual to hear of young Canadians still living with their parents into their late 20s or beyond. Meanwhile, income inequality has grown, and growing income inequality does not just go against our sense of fairness, it is also bad for economic growth. We have learned that from the IMF, among others.

A Liberal government would make the tax system fairer and cut the middle-class tax rate by 7%. That is a \$3-billion tax cut for those who need it the most. We could afford to do this by asking the wealthiest Canadians to pay a little more so the middle class can pay less. We would introduce a new tax bracket for the top 1% on incomes over \$200,000.

We would also cancel the Conservatives' \$2-billion income splitting scheme that the C.D. Howe Institute has actually told us will only benefit 15% of Canada's richest families. Income splitting provides \$2,000 more to those who do not need the help. It does nothing to help single parents or low-income families. In fact, according to the C.D. Howe Institute, 85% of Canadian households, those who need the help the most, will not get a dime from income splitting.

According to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, higher income families are not only more likely to qualify for benefits under income splitting, the average benefit actually rises with family income. The Conservatives are providing the most help to precisely those who need it the least. We do not think it is fair to ask struggling Canadians to pay for a \$2,000 tax break for the Prime Minister's family or, in fact, for the family of the leader of the Liberal Party of Canada.

● (1315)

Income splitting is not just unfair, it also needlessly complicates our tax system and is bad for growth. It is complicated that we need to follow an 85-step process just to apply. Even the tax experts within the Department of Finance who wrote the rules got it wrong the first three times it came to Parliament. It is also bad for growth. The PBO has shown that income splitting will actually weaken our economy rather than strengthen it. He estimates that it would cost the equivalent of 7,000 full-time jobs.

The Liberal plan would do more to grow the economy and help families with the high cost of raising kids. A Liberal government would provide one bigger tax-free monthly cheque to Canadian families with children. Under our plan, every family earning less than \$150,000 per year would receive more monthly benefits.

With the Liberal plan's new Canada child benefit, a typical two-parent family with two children earning \$90,000 per year would get \$490 tax-free every month. Under the Conservatives, the same family today only receives \$275 after tax.

When we compare the two plans, the Liberal plan would provide an extra \$2,500 per year tax free over what Canadians are now getting under the Conservative government. Therefore, that family making \$90,000 a year with two children would be \$2,500 better off every single year.

With the Liberal plan, a typical single-parent family earning \$30,000 a year with one child would get an extra \$533 tax free every month. That is significantly more generous than the \$440 that family gets under the Conservatives currently.

A Canadian family making \$45,000 per year with two children would receive an extra \$4,000 per year after taxes under the Liberal plan for fairness than they are receiving right now under the Conservatives.

It boils down to choices, and Canadians have two fundamentally different choices now. The Conservatives are offering tax breaks for the wealthy, and the Liberals are offering a plan to help the Canadian middle class with a middle-class tax cut and a new, fairer, more generous and simpler Liberal Canada child benefit.

Liberals believe in a country that works for everyone. We will put more money in the pockets of Canada's middle-class families and those Canadians who are working hard to join the middle class.

In conclusion, today's motion focuses on small fees that are an irritant to Canadians. It is a step that we expect all parties can support. However, a Liberal government would go further by tackling the bigger issues facing Canadians.

We would provide real, meaningful help to Canadian families who are struggling and a middle-class tax cut that would put more money back in the pockets of the Canadian families who need the help the most. A Liberal Canada child benefit would help vulnerable Canadian families, low- and middle-income families with children who need the help the most.

We can afford to do that and still balance budgets, because we are prepared to make a choice by asking wealthier Canadian families to pay more. It is fair and it is also good for jobs and growth, because when we cut taxes on the middle-income and lower-income Canadians, it is more stimulative to the Canadian economy.

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We will be presenting more plans for jobs and growth in the future and fairness for Canadian middle-class families. We are looking forward as a government moving forward to really helping those families after the next election.

● (1320)

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. colleague for his comments around these fees. I wanted to clarify that a pay-to-pay fee is a fee one has to pay to pay a bill. That is what a pay-to-pay fee is. It does not matter whether it is a bill that comes in the mail or one that the banks charge. This is what RBC was charging but backed down due to pressure from consumers and the NDP.

The hon. colleague seems to be concerned about ensuring that the banks have the ability to charge fees for things. I wanted to get his opinion about this. Today, RBC announced that it was charging a new \$5 fee for its high-interest savings account. Every time customers go over one transaction they will have to pay \$5 to put money into their savings account. The member was talking about how important it was for banks to charge transaction fees. Is he in favour of this fee?

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, although I appreciate the question from the hon. member, one would think that I had said in my remarks that we did not support his motion. We do support his motion, and his gratitude is overwhelming.

In terms of the specific fee that he mentioned, I have not seen information on that. If it is on the service he has described, it seems high and exorbitant. However, I have not reviewed that fee. I am not sure how the hon. member likes to conduct himself, but I like to get the facts on something before I offer an opinion. I have been around long enough to not offer an opinion until I have seen the facts on something like that. Therefore, with no disrespect to the hon. member, I would like to have a little more detail and I would be glad to discuss it with him at any time.

Mr. John Carmichael (Don Valley West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague talked about the fairness of new plans that he and his party are introducing. It was only a week ago that his leader talked about plans not having to be fair. Fairness is what we have delivered with the universal child care benefit program. Clearly, four million families qualify and some seven million adults. That is why our government has consistently introduced consumer-friendly measures, including consumer debit and credit card code of conduct, and increasing access to low- and no-cost banking options, programs that the opposition and the third party have voted against. I wonder if my colleague opposite would maybe comment on fairness and why he did not support these measures, which were geared to consumer fairness.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, I would direct my colleague in the Conservative Party to his House leader and other members of the Conservative government who are responsible for the omnibus bills that force the House opposition parties to vote on hundreds of items that are totally unrelated to the fiscal situation of the government, which should be budgets. The government is in the habit of putting in massive pieces of legislation that affect a wide range of unrelated areas of government and forces us to sometimes vote against measures that if we were provided with an opportunity to vote on as individual items we could possibly support. Therefore, if he wants to

understand why opposition parties, New Democrats, Liberals and independents vote against measures that on the surface sound like they might make sense, then he ought to ask his own government why it put those more sensible measures in with measures that we fundamentally disagree with as part of omnibus legislation. I would direct him back to answer a question with a question. The hon. member ought to be asking his own government why it continues with this counter-democratic practice of omnibus legislation that forces opposition parties to vote against some reasonable measures that we could potentially support if the government did not continue with this ham-handed anti-democratic omnibus approach.

● (1325)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague said that the core issue of the motion was fairness. I appreciated many of the comments he made. In a comparison between the Liberal Party's approach to fairness versus to the Conservatives' attempt at fairness and the many deficiencies we have seen in the last budget they presented, I am wondering if the member could expand upon the importance of getting it right. If we get it right, we will have a healthier, stronger middle class, and if we are successful at doing that, we will have a stronger economy. Would the member not agree? Could he provide some comments?

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, it is an important question, and I thank my colleague from Winnipeg North, who intervenes in this House from time to time and does so with great passion and with an understanding of the issues. I have campaigned with him in his riding, and there is no member who has any more direct relationship with his constituents than the member for Winnipeg North. I have seen that in his riding.

The whole issue of combining a plan for fairness with one for jobs and growth is based on what some economists describe as a marginal propensity to consume or to spend. What that means is that if the same amount of money is provided to low-income or middle-income families and to high-income or wealthier families, the low-income or middle-income families are more likely to spend that money than the high-income or wealthier families. It is actually good for jobs and growth.

Economists, including our colleague from Markham—Unionville, who is a former chief economist of the Royal Bank of Canada, understand the importance of providing a real break to low- and middle-income families. Those are the families that are struggling the most, so it is fair and it is the right thing to do in terms of tackling inequality

Incidentally, inequality is really bad for jobs and growth, and we are getting a lot of reports on that. Measures to address inequality for low- and middle-income families, such as cutting their taxes and increasing their benefits, actually are good for jobs and growth as well.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since my colleague spoke about the measure, I want to ensure that he understands the Canadian tax system. If we reduce taxes on an entire bracket in the middle, the people who benefit are those who have higher incomes. They will benefit from the tax cut for this entire bracket. If we compare a single person who has an income of \$50,000 a year and a single person who has an income of \$150,000 a year, it is obvious that the latter will benefit more from the tax cut.

Does the member agree with what I just said?

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question. I have a good understanding of our tax system. I agree with my colleague that our tax system is too complicated. Under the Conservative government, it has also become less fair.

That is why the Liberal Party has presented a plan to cut taxes for the middle class. This plan includes a new tax bracket for incomes over \$200,000 a year. This will make our tax system fairer and will really help middle-class families. I think that makes sense for our economy and our society.

• (1330)

[English]

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to speak on the opposition motion. I will be sharing my time with the member for Newton—North Delta.

I think the motion before the House is very important for most ordinary Canadians. It calls on the government to ban all pay-to-pay practices by banks through the enactment of a mandatory financial code of conduct to protect consumers.

Let us take a minute to think about who we are talking about. We have seven nationally chartered banks but only five really big banks. Just so we understand their financial position, let me quickly review that for hon. members.

The Royal Bank of Canada has assets of \$655 billion; Toronto-Dominion has \$557 billion; Scotiabank has \$496 billion; the Bank of Montreal has \$236 billion; and CIBC has \$336 billion.

In the first two quarters of this year alone, the banks turned a profit of \$15 billion. That is only halfway through the year, so these companies are not struggling to make ends meet.

These are companies with enormous assets, built on the deposits of Canadians. If we run through the big banks, we see that the Royal Bank holds nearly \$400 billion of our money, the Toronto-Dominion Bank \$391 billion, Scotiabank \$350 billion, the Bank of Montreal \$236 billion, and CIBC \$336 billion, so scrambling to extract every last fee out of Canadians is not something they have to do to stay afloat.

They are remarkably stable banks, and I give them credit for the good job they have done in achieving that stability through rough economic times.

I also want to acknowledge that these banks have more than 250,000 employees who provide, by and large, excellent service to consumers and also contribute a lot to their local communities in terms of charitable activities and fundraising for those charities.

In particular I want to acknowledge the employees of the Toronto-Dominion Bank. As the LGBTQ spokesperson of the NDP, I know the Toronto-Dominion Bank has been very generous in supporting Pride activities across the country and encouraging the end of homophobia in the workplace, both as it affects their employees and as it affects their customers, so I am not saying that banks never do anything good. They quite often do. However, what I am saying is what we are saying in this motion: there is no need for the banks to extract \$180 million a year in pay-to-pay fees.

We are standing in the House now with the government saying it is in favour of the motion. That is very interesting. If the Conservatives had just put this measure in the budget, Canadians would already be saving \$180 million. Did they simply forget, or did they just discover they are in favour?

I say “forget” quite seriously, because in their throne speech in 2013, they promised to end pay-to-pay fees in federal jurisdiction, and they actually did so. However, when they did, they ended the fees only for telecommunications companies, not the banks. The banks were exempted. Either there was some lobbying going on or the Conservatives forgot their promise to end pay-to-pay fees in the public sector.

The Liberals are also saying they are in favour, but I have to remind the Liberals that they are the ones who brought in all the voluntary financial codes of conduct for banks. They were not mandatory codes of conduct, but voluntary ones, and we have seen again and again that voluntary codes of conduct for financial institutions do not work.

I want to cast back to another example, one that is very important to some of my constituents, and that is what happens when we have a dispute with a bank. In 1996, to their credit, the Liberals set up what was called the Ombudsman for Banking Services and Investment. That was way back in 1996. If an individual had a dispute with the bank, that person could go to an independent, non-profit organization and get mediation of that dispute and some help in taking on the big banks.

Over time, the banks began to not like the decisions of the non-profit, neutral, and independent mediator, so in 2008 the Royal Bank of Canada pulled out. Why? It was because the Liberal legislation was not mandatory. It was voluntary. When the Royal Bank pulled out and got away with it, the Toronto-Dominion Bank watched very closely, and in 2011 the Toronto-Dominion Bank pulled out.

There was some question then raised again in the House by the NDP about whether they could actually get out of having this independent mediation service. This issue was clarified by the Conservatives in 2012, but they clarified it this way: they said banks are required to have a third party dispute resolution mechanism, but they did not specify it had to be the independent, non-profit Ombudsman for Banking Services and Investment.

Government Orders

●(1335)

What did the Royal Bank do and what did TD do? They hired companies to provide the independent third party mediation services.

If a client of one of the banks has a dispute, how would that person feel about taking the dispute to someone the bank has hired for an answer? I think most Canadians would see it as lacking the basic independence that would create confidence in decisions of that third party.

In summary, the government had a chance to bring the banks back under the Ombudsman for Banking Services and Investment but did not do so, and the Liberals have been remarkably silent on this issue of dispute resolution with the banks.

Is it just pay-to-pay fees? I heard some people asking why the NDP was picking on such a minor thing. That question does not take into account that it is not a minor thing for most people, and when the totals add up to \$180 million taken from Canadians for paying to pay, it is actually a large thing for most consumers.

However, it is not the only area in which the NDP has been active in trying to point out that the voluntary codes of conduct on fees simply do not work. In 2012, we did a campaign to point out the enormous amount of money being collected by the banks on transaction fees. These are fees charged for putting people's money into their own accounts or taking money out of their accounts. It is their money in and their money out, but the banks charge fees to do that. The banks say there is a cost to these transactions, so they have to charge people for them.

Our consumer affairs critic worked very hard to discover the actual cost to banks. We know what they charge: they charge between \$1.50 and \$3 for every transaction for people to put their money into their own account or to take it out, unless they are under a special plan. Then the banks give a few transactions for free, because otherwise there would be a total consumer revolt.

What is the real cost? It is 36¢ per transaction.

However, when the NDP put forward a motion in the House to cap those bank transaction fees at 50¢, still allowing a nice profit to the banks, neither the Liberals nor the Conservatives supported it. They said that under these voluntary codes of conduct, it is up to the banks to decide if their fees are appropriate or not.

Once again, consumers are left with very little recourse, because when we check and compare bank fees, we find that these fees are almost all the same, so if consumers are unhappy with one the big five and go to one of the others, they find the same conditions.

I want to raise another thing that we have not addressed today in this motion. That is the question of mortgage discharge fees. What we have seen increasingly in Canada is that when people pay off their mortgage and are finally free of the bank and own their own house free and clear, the bank charges them for paying off that mortgage.

Initially what we had in Canada what was called a mortgage discharge fee. I checked today, and in the big five banks, mortgage discharge fees range between \$200 and \$400. I grant that there are some paperwork costs, but the banks have been making a profit off

the mortgage for 25 or 30 years. They are not loaning the money for free. They are charging interest, but when it comes time to pay off that mortgage, people have to pay to pay.

What we have seen in the last five years, however, is a proliferation of fees. Now there is not just the mortgage discharge fee; sometimes we are also charged an e-registration fee. In Ontario, that runs to \$70. We pay the bank to pay off the mortgage, and then we pay to register land titles stating that we paid off the mortgage, so we are paying to pay and then we are paying to tell people we paid.

Some people are also charged what is called a reinvestment fee. The banks have decided that if people pay off their mortgage and go somewhere else and the bank has to find a new borrower, we should pay the cost of that. A reinvestment fee of \$300 is charged by most of the banks to reinvest the money we just paid them back. Essentially, we have to find them a new client. As well, there is a reassignment fee of \$260 if we change banks, and of course all of the banks charge very large fees for prepaying a mortgage.

I have a lot more to say about the practices of banks, but in conclusion I want to say that I am not attacking the employees of banks. For the most part, employees are like the rest of ordinary Canadians. The problem they have is that they face the wrath of consumers at the wicket or in the office when it comes to paying these fees, and I do have some sympathy for them.

What we heard today is that all parties are in favour of ending these pay-to-pay fees. I look forward to this bill perhaps passing unanimously in the House, and when it does, I would also like to see some action. I hope we are not in the situation we saw with removing the tampon tax or with other things the Conservatives have voted in favour of, when they simply did not take the action they could have taken to save consumers money right away.

●(1340)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, I appreciate many of the comments made by the member. It is important we recognize that as time continues to move forward, particularly technology with the Internet, telephone banking, and so forth, and as we go more and more toward a cashless society, consumers are inundated with all types of fees, from credit cards fees, ATM fees and banking fees. Today we are talking about people who want to have a paper bill mailed to them having to pay an extra fee for that. It seems no one in the House agrees with that in principle.

Disposable income of Canadians is of critical importance. That it is what drives our economy. The healthier our middle class, the more we will see a strong economy. Having fees such as we are talking about now takes away from one of the driving engines of our economy. In other words, let our consumers have the money to spend.

Government Orders

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, the member for Winnipeg North raises exactly the point. Consumers, especially in the lower-income groups, have very good uses for that money, much better uses than increasing bank profits.

However, there is one thing we tend to miss when we talk about this transition to a cashless society. I just looked at a study this morning. It showed that this was increasingly true for those in the top third of the income ranks, people who tend to pay everything electronically online. However, for those in the bottom third of income ranks, close to two-thirds of people do not actually pay things electronically. This includes a lot of seniors and other low-income people.

When we talk about a cashless society, we have to be careful that we are not only talking about the privileged sectors of our society, which have the luxury of Internet connections and the ability to do all their banking online.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is truly a sad situation.

The people in our riding are telling us that it makes no sense to go to the bank and pay fees to access their own money, which they have so little of. The systems are such that it is mandatory for this money—whether it is old age security, family benefits or their own pay—to be deposited directly into their accounts. Most of these payments are made via direct deposit.

However, they are charged pay-to-pay fees in order to use what belongs to them. They do not have the right to use what they have earned. Thus, they have to spend some of what they earn on a fee that makes banks richer, because they cannot directly access their money.

I would like to hear what the member has to say about that.

[*English*]

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, what we have in front of us today is pay-to-pay fees. However, as I said a bit earlier, we also have transaction fees, mortgage discharge fees, all kinds of fees. The point of the motion is that there needs to be a mandatory financial code of conduct to protect consumers and we need to end this idea that banks will somehow grow a heart overnight and treat consumers fairly and with care. History shows they will not do that.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to speak to the motion brought to us by the member for Davenport, a hard-working MP who has been very passionate about making life more affordable and addressing all the silly charges, which are not so silly because they impact the lives of people. I should call them hidden charges that customers are facing, and many times they do not even know it unless they examine their bills.

The government should ban all pay-to-pay practices by banks operating within Canada through the enactment of a mandatory financial code of conduct to protect consumers. I think all parties agree on this. Just as it acted quickly on the tampon tax, I hope that after the debate today, the Conservative government will move very quickly to implement this motion as well.

Just to make it clear, we are not talking about the gargantuan and outrageous fees charged by credit card companies when they lend money, through the credit cards as well the credit card fees. Nor are we talking about the huge burden on businesses, especially small and medium-sized business, of transactions fees.

We are here to talk about pay-to-pay billings that Canadians have started to receive. Some people may think this means paycheque to paycheque. It does not. This term was coined by a young volunteer in Toronto. He actually asked if we had to pay to pay. It is really about having to pay a fine or a fee in order to pay a bill or to do some banking. The motion is about that.

As members know, to receive a paper billing, banks are charging some pretty hefty fees. The Internet is not available to all Canadians. According to Statistics Canada, one in five homes in Canada has no Internet, and 46% of households with income below \$30,000 have no Internet.

Forty percent of Canadian seniors do not use the Internet. I am hearing from a lot of constituents, both young at heart and others, about the impact of these fees on their day-to-day lives. We have seniors who live on a fixed income, a very limited income that is not keeping pace with the cost of living, and are finding these new fees cropping up all over the place.

We are talking about some of our largest banks. The five major banks, just in the first two quarters, made a profit of \$16 billion. RBC alone raked in \$5 billion. These are the banks that are saying that they are now going to charge a fee to pay, whether it is a fee to pay a bill, or a fee to pay off a mortgage or many other things.

Let me remind members that RBC was in the media quite a bit when it laid off hard-working, qualified Canadian workers and brought in temporary foreign workers to cut costs. It was only when it got caught and it was all over the media that it came out and became champions of jobs in Canada for Canadians. It is the bank that makes billions in profits, yet it is charging these fees to hard-working Canadians, putting pressure on our hard-working middle class and all those who aspire to be middle class. These are incredible new pressures.

It is very hard to imagine that banks are charging these fees. I always thought automation would lead a reduction or elimination of fees, but it seems that this is not the case. Through automation, not only have we seen many jobs disappear but now the banks want to rake in even more money, or to steal more money from consumers.

Government Orders

• (1345)

Canadians should not have to hand over their hard earned money just to receive a bank statement or pay a bill. Surely, a bank where people deposit their money gains from that money when they are paying almost nothing in interest on those deposits. Banks are still charging more than enough in the way of interest when people take money out, and that can vary quite a lot, as we know, with credit card interest fees going up to 18% or 21%. Even borrowing from the bank can be very expensive. However, when people put their money in the bank, they hardly get any return on that at all.

The Conservative government talks the talk, and it is very famous for that. It promises things over and over again, and each time it makes it seem as if it is making a new commitment. We see that right now with the budget that it is promoting to the public, yet the action plan has not gone through all of the rinse cycles in the House or the Senate.

The government announced in the 2013 speech from the throne that the Conservatives would finally take action to “End “pay to pay” policies, so customers won’t pay extra to receive paper bills”.

It re-pledged the same action in the 2014 budget to “eliminate the practice of pay-to-pay billing”. Guess what the Conservatives did with the resulting legislation that it brought forward to deal with telecommunications companies? They excluded banks, which make billions of dollars in profit. I am sure Canadians are thinking “what was the payola in return?”, or “what kind of lobbying took place?”

It is not that Canadians pay a small amount in these fees. They pay \$180 million a year just to receive bank statements. Nobody should be punished for receiving bank statements or paying their bills, yet that is exactly what is happening to hard-working Canadians.

I have quotes from hard-working Canadians and from our seniors.

The Canadian Association of Retired Persons said, “It hardly seems fair that customers - through no fault of their own - are being charged two dollars extra for the privilege of paying their bill”. It is higher in some banks.

The Public Interest Advocacy Centre recommends “the Government of Canada follows through on its commitment to eliminate the application of additional fees charged to Canadian consumers to receive a paper bill or statement”.

This issue is not funny. However, comedy is often used to show people who fail to understand just how ridiculous some policies are. Fees for paper bills and statements were named a top contender for Canada's dumbest charge in a special series by CBC's *Marketplace* in October, 2013, beating out Ticketmaster fees, airline seat selection fees, and even ATM fees.

People have been raising their voices. Canadians should no longer have to wait for another promise to be made and not kept. I would urge my colleagues across the way to do what they did with the tampon tax and get on with implementing this.

As we look at the struggles that Canadians face to make ends meet, this would go a long way. This fee targets, specifically and unfairly, our seniors, those without Internet access, and families that already struggle to pay their bills. The other thing that we have to

take into consideration is that a growing number of us, and I am one of them, are concerned about online fraud and identity theft. Now we are being charged more and are essentially being penalized for banking offline.

• (1350)

Finally, I would urge my colleagues to, just as we did for the tampon tax, pass this today and implement it by the end of the week.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is nice that we have what appears to be unanimous support for the motion the NDP brought forward today, in recognition that pay-to-pay services are not tolerable. We can appreciate why that is the case. My question deals with other types of fees and to what degree the member believes the government could be acting.

We often make reference to seniors on fixed incomes, who do not necessarily have the same sort of flexibility as others. Many, as has been pointed out, do not even have access to the Internet. There is a substantial cost to pay for letters nowadays, especially since the postal rate has gone up.

I wonder if the member would discuss a little more what she feels is the wrong direction with regard to seniors on fixed incomes and the burden of having to pay more than the average Canadian.

• (1355)

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his question and his concern specifically with respect to seniors.

I am sure, Mr. Speaker, that when you are in your riding, many seniors go to see you. All of us, from coast to coast, hear from seniors regularly through snail mail and email. One of the things I am struggling with is that often I have no answers for seniors when they tell me that their incomes have not kept up, while their hydro bills, food bills, and everything have gone up so much.

Many seniors in my riding say that they really struggle to find money to buy clothing, and others tell me that it is very hard for them, because they sometimes have to choose between their quality of food and their medications. We are living in a country where that should not happen.

These kinds of fees are innumerable. It is not just one fee the banks charge. They charge fees in many different ways, and all of those ways put an extra burden on those on fixed incomes and on low-income families.

Statements by Members

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for Newton—North Delta pointed out that the Public Interest Advocacy Centre estimates that these fees are costing about \$180 million a year.

If my arithmetic is right, it was first promised by the Conservatives in the 2013 Speech from the Throne that they would deal with pay-to-pay fees. Now it is two years later. It is over a third of a billion dollars this is costing seniors and people with disabilities who do not have access to the Internet.

My question to the member is this: If the Conservatives have signalled today that they are going to fix it after two long years, why does she think it has taken them this long to do so?

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, since I have been in the House, I have read throne speeches, I have heard throne speeches, and I have heard commitments. I have also seen the public dime, hard-working taxpayers' money and taxes the government collects, being used and abused to promote a partisan agenda and its own ideology.

Specifically, as my colleague pointed out, Canadians have paid close to a third of a billion dollars while the government has failed to take action. Today I appeal to the Conservatives to take action this week so that we can address this unfair practice in the marketplace.

It is very weird to me that when I take money out of my own bank, I have to pay. When I get a statement, I have to pay. When I go to an ATM machine, there is a fee, and when I get cheques, there is a fee. Yet when my money sits there, I get hardly any interest.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

WALTER WRIGHT PIONEER VILLAGE

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the dedicated volunteers of the South Peace Historical Society and the Mile Zero Park Society in Dawson Creek.

The hard work and dedication of individuals like Stewart and Margaret Flynn, Anne Haycock, Day Roberts, Dale Campbell, Walter Schoen, Paul Gevatkoff, Charlie Parslow, and many others are all great examples of residents working to preserve our region's history. A lot of their effort has gone toward the local Walter Wright Pioneer Village, a historical site that preserves, maintains, and exhibits the heritage of the South Peace.

In addition, both the South Peace Historical Society and the Mile Zero Park Society are currently working on the construction and relocation of more historical buildings to expand the Pioneer Village.

It is an honour to recognize both of these organizations for their dedication to preserving the cultural heritage of the Peace region of British Columbia.

● (1400)

WINDSOR POLICE SERVICE MEMBERS

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to bring to the attention of Canadians five Windsor police officers who bravely risked their own lives to save eight citizens from imminent harm.

On May 5, my city's newest heroes sprang into action once they became aware of potential victims still inside a building ablaze and filled with black smoke. It did not matter that the home was derelict. It did not matter that it potentially had explosive hazards in it. All that mattered was their civic duty as professionals.

Chief of Windsor Police Services, Al Frederick, said it best:

I am extremely proud of the quick actions and bravery displayed by our patrol officers. Despite imminent risk, these officers rushed into a burning building and saved several members of our community.

I, along with my fellow citizens, salute Constable Bradley Snyder, Constable Jeffrey Dalpe, Constable Surjeet Gill, Constable Anthony Smith, and Constable Adam Spinarsky. May their names be forever enshrined in the annals of Windsor's finest and bravest.

* * *

ALS AWARENESS MONTH

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, June is ALS awareness month. Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis is a rapidly progressive, fatal motor neuron disease that leaves those affected in a state of progressive paralysis.

As we approach the one-year anniversary of the ALS bucket challenge, I am proud of the more than 260,000 Canadians who donated a combined \$17 million for ALS. However, the fight is not over yet. Still today, roughly 3,000 Canadians are suffering from this disease, 80% of whom will die within five years of diagnosis.

In 2005, my father succumbed to ALS, so it has affected me personally. Each year at this time, friends, family, and supporters of those suffering from ALS dedicate their time and energy to this devastating disease to raise awareness and funds for a cure.

I encourage each member to wear a cornflower today to demonstrate our support in the fight against ALS so that together we can support families and find a cure.

* * *

ALS AWARENESS MONTH

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I too would like to add my voice to ALS Awareness Month.

ALS is a disease where the living wire that connects one's brain to one's muscles degenerates, leaving Canadians affected with this disease in a state of progressive paralysis, which will eventually impact their ability to breathe. The outcome, of course, is death. As of today, there is no treatment.

Statements by Members

All members in the House have family, friends, or acquaintances who have been impacted. In September 2009, my former chief of staff in the Liberal whip's office, Richard Wackid, lost his battle with the disease. The incredibly talented and respected young man was struck down in the prime of his life.

Many of us would have met Brian Parsons, a former political staffer, who today not only fights his own personal battle with ALS but continues to be a champion for the cause.

Last year, 260,000 Canadians participated in the ice bucket challenge, donating \$17 million for ALS. The money went toward research and equipment support services to maintain a patient's quality of life.

We must continue this momentum in the fight to find a treatment. I ask all members to join me in support by wearing a cornflower today and donating to this important cause.

* * *

BOYS AND GIRLS CLUB OF SASKATOON

Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to congratulate the Boys and Girls Club of Saskatoon and its executive director, Wanda Desjardins, on its great work in the city of Saskatoon. Through its before and after school programs, its summer day camps, its club houses, or its youth employment programs, it contributes to make Saskatoon a better place, last year impacting 3,500 young people.

Each of its club locations has trained, dedicated staff and volunteers who implement fun programs that positively influence the lives of each child who comes to their clubhouses. For 40 years, they have striven to implement the vision that all children and youth discover and achieve their dreams and grow up to be healthy, successful, and active participants in society.

This Saturday, it will be having the race for kids to support its work throughout the city. For more information, check out www.raceforkids.ca. Congratulations to the Boys and Girls Club of Saskatoon.

* * *

● (1405)

[Translation]

AMYOTROPHIC LATERAL SCLEROSIS AWARENESS MONTH

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, June is Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis Month. Sadly, this disease, known as ALS, kills two to three Canadians every day.

It is therefore very important for Canadian society to do everything it can to raise funds and find a cure for this disease that takes the lives of too many mothers and fathers. Currently, over 3,000 Canadians are living with ALS, a disease that remains incurable.

I was proud to see many Canadians, including the NDP leader, participate in the Ice Bucket Challenge, which aimed to raise Canadians' awareness and raise money for a cure. It was a huge

success, and ALS Canada announced that the challenge had helped raise \$26 million.

I hope that this year's campaign will be just as successful with the Walk for ALS. On behalf of all of my NDP colleagues, I would like to thank those who signed up for the Walk for ALS, and I sincerely hope that a cure will be found soon.

* * *

[English]

OSHAWA GENERALS

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I am proud to rise in the House wearing the jersey of my hometown junior hockey team, the Oshawa Generals. The Gens have a proud history. Hockey legend Bobby Orr played for the Generals as well as hockey great Eric Lindros.

Last night, in a thrilling two-to-one overtime victory over the Kelowna Rockets, the Generals captured the Memorial Cup, the most coveted trophy in Canadian junior hockey. It was 17-year old Anthony Cirelli who scored both the tying and winning goals for Oshawa. With this victory, Oshawa now has the most memorial cups of all of the active teams in the CHL. This was truly a game for the ages.

I would like to congratulate the Kelowna Rockets for having such an amazing tournament. This is our first Memorial Cup since 1990. I know that all of Oshawa was united in support of our team. I would like to thank the Oshawa families who billeted players this season, all the players, their families and the coaching staff for their hard work and dedication in bringing the Memorial Cup back to Oshawa. They have made all of Oshawa proud.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Monster of Miramichi is a heinous criminal. He is a convicted murderer who then escaped from prison and committed four more murders. We are committed to taking all actions within our power to ensure that he remains behind bars where he belongs. Under the leadership of our Conservative government, we have taken strong action to restore victims to their rightful place at the heart of the criminal justice system, and to ensure that the worst of the worst stay in prison for life. We will always put the rights of victims before the wishes of criminals.

*Statements by Members***PUBLIC SAFETY**

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this weekend there was another shooting in Surrey, B.C. There have been over 30 shootings in our area since March. Over a dozen times since January, I have risen in this House and asked the government to make good on its 2006 promise to put more police on Surrey streets. While the current government finally paid lip service to our desperate need for more police, it will not commit to a timeline. In addition to holding the government to its word on more police, my colleague from Surrey North and I have asked the government for more resources for the youth gang prevention fund and for the Surrey school board for more comprehensive drug-prevention programs.

As the proud member for Newton—North Delta, I will continue to voice the will of the residents of Surrey and Delta in this House, which is: they want to feel safe in their homes; they want to feel safe going out at night; they want to know when the government plans to deliver the promised RCMP; and, they want the government to stop with the talk and proceed with action.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was recently proposed to have "...a mandatory expansion of the CPP of the type that Kathleen Wynne put forward in Ontario". Who said that? It was the leader of the Liberal Party, whose high-tax and high-debt plan would mean a \$1,000 tax hike for every employee who earns just \$60,000 a year, which would come directly out of their pockets.

My home of St. Catharines is full of families who would prefer to keep money in their pockets and choose how to spend or how to save their hard-earned money. It is our government that makes that happen. On this side of the House, we do not raise taxes on the middle class. We do the exact opposite; we cut them.

* * *

• (1410)

[Translation]

KNOLL ON SAINT-BERNARD ISLAND

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we were very proud to learn last week that the city of Châteauguay was honoured by the UMQ at its annual conference in Montreal. The municipality was awarded the Ovation municipale prize in the "economy, tourism and leisure" category for its project to purchase and develop the knoll on Saint-Bernard Island, as well as the jury's choice award. The purchase of the island was selected from about 20 or so other finalists. The winner was chosen based on various criteria, including originality and citizen participation.

I would remind everyone that Châteauguay purchased the knoll on Saint-Bernard Island from the Grey Nuns community in 2011. Since that time, the site has been open to the public and managed by Héritage Saint-Bernard and Compagnom. An estimated 165,000 people visited the site last year, which generated \$2.5 million in revenues and created 80 jobs.

That said, I invite everyone to go and visit Saint-Bernard Island, which is without question an exceptional destination for recreation and tourism, and a source of pride and identity for the entire Châteauguay community. Once again, congratulations to the city of Châteauguay.

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[English]

TAXATION

Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government is focused on what matters to Canadians: helping families make ends meet by lowering taxes and providing benefits directly to families. This is also what my constituents in Pickering—Scarborough East want.

The Liberal leader's only solution is raising taxes, but do not take my word for it. Here is what he said, "We're looking at an expansion and a mandatory expansion of the CPP, of the type that Kathleen Wynne put forward in Ontario".

That means, for someone earning \$60,000, it would be \$1,000 in taxes every year that they would have to pay under the Liberal scheme. This is unacceptable and Canadians know it.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, not only is the current Conservative government out of touch with Canadians, its failure on the economy and lack of strategic planning is costing Canadian jobs.

Let us take trade as an example. While the minister brags about trade agreements signed, it is just spin. The reality is that Canada has sunk to such repeated monthly trade deficits that Statistics Canada had to revise its trade deficit numbers from \$984 million to a stunning \$2.2 billion in a single month. This government's incompetence to utilize trade agreements has led to 42 months of trade deficits out of the past 61. What an abject failure on trade.

Every province and territory suffers from the government's failure to expand trade. This is a betrayal of trust that Canadian businesses and workers have placed in the government to deliver.

The numbers tell the truth. The Conservatives have not. They are out of touch with reality. It is time for them to go.

*Oral Questions***TAXATION**

Mr. Joe Daniel (Don Valley East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my constituents of Don Valley East are astonished that the leader of the Liberal Party wants to introduce a job-killing payroll tax hike on every worker in Canada. For someone earning \$60,000 a year, the Liberal leader's plan would cost \$1,000. He wants to bring "...a mandatory expansion of the CPP, of the type that Kathleen Wynne put forward in Ontario".

We reject that. Our approach is a low-tax plan to secure retirement. We want to keep more money in the pockets of hard-working Canadians.

* * *

CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, another week and another Conservative minister abandons ship. However, the Minister of Justice just could not resist making one last patronage appointment on his way out the door. The former president of the Newfoundland and Labrador Progressive Conservatives is now a Supreme Court judge.

After coming to power promising to end patronage, it looks like the Conservatives are merrily finishing their time in government by imitating John Turner: just for the boys. No Conservative goes unrewarded.

This last member to jump ship brings us to over 30 Conservative MPs who have had enough of serving in that government, and no wonder, it seems every week there is another RCMP investigation into corruption, another Conservative being charged, or another scandal unearthed in the PMO.

Well, Canadians have had enough. Fortunately, on October 19, they can finally elect an NDP government ready to repair the damage.

Canadians can vote for the change that they want, and this time actually get it.

* * *

• (1415)

TAXATION

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since coming to office, our Conservative government has consistently cut taxes for the middle class. While we are cutting taxes, the leader of the Liberal Party has proposed "...a mandatory expansion of the [Canada Pension Plan] of the type that...Kathleen Wynne put forward in [my home province of] Ontario".

That means for people earning \$60,000, that is an extra \$1,000 in tax that they will have to pay each year. We on this side of the House think that is unacceptable.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*Translation*]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada on the Indian residential school system will be released tomorrow.

The testimony of more than 7,000 people was heard. There are thousands of stories about children being taken from their families and forced to deny their culture and language. Many of them were physically and sexually abused. This is a veritable tragedy and a blot on Canada's history.

Will the Prime Minister seize this opportunity and finally answer the call of our first nations?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the record will show that in 2008, on behalf of all Canadians, the Prime Minister apologized to all survivors, their families and the communities affected by this dark chapter in Canadian history.

We know that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada is finishing its work this week, and it is important for all Canadians to continue supporting reconciliation.

[*English*]

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Commissioner Murray Sinclair was clear: "...it takes more than words. In addition to the apology, there has to be atonement and there has to be action".

First nations have been dismayed by the government's failure to embrace reconciliation. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission had to go to court to get key documents released. Victims have been denied compensation or treated with suspicion and hostility.

Will the government change its attitude and work with first nations to achieve reconciliation?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister made an historic apology on behalf of all Canadians in 2008, the government recognized that the Indian residential schools caused great harm and had no place in Canada.

While we cannot undo the past, we can learn from it, and we are taking steps necessary to bring closure to the legacy of the Indian residential schools.

We encourage all Canadians to continue promoting reconciliation between aboriginal and non-aboriginal Canadians.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that since the 2008 apology, little has changed for indigenous people. The legacy of residential schools is still present today in high rates of poverty and unemployment, in the high number of children in foster care, and the unacceptably high number of missing and murdered indigenous women.

If the government is serious about reconciliation, it will have to do a lot more to show it.

Oral Questions

Will the government commit to honouring the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we welcome the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and we thank the commissioners for their hard work in uncovering and documenting the truth about residential schools in Canada.

We look forward to receiving a full report to be able to fully understand and respond to the recommendations.

• (1420)

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government's record following the apology does not give a lot of hope. According to National Chief Bellegarde, "The relationship has not improved to the point where we can say reconciliation has started".

Last year, the government spent hundreds of millions of dollars fighting aboriginal and treaty rights. That is not how to build a relationship.

Will the government work with aboriginal peoples to build a new relationship that is founded on respect and reconciliation?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, our government remains committed to a fair and lasting resolution to the legacy of Indian residential schools.

As acknowledged by the Prime Minister on behalf of all Canadians in 2008, there is no place in Canada for the attitudes that inspired the Indian residential school system to ever prevail again.

While this is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's closing event, the work to heal the relationship between aboriginal and non-aboriginal Canadians needs to continue. The government will continue to fulfill its obligations as set out in the agreement.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government must take this opportunity to take a serious look at its chronic failure to act.

Some 20 years after the last residential school closed, education programs for first nations children are receiving less money than those for other children. The same goes for health care and social services. There can be no reconciliation when we are constantly being treated as second-class citizens.

Will the government ever do something to ensure that every child has the same chance for success?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I believe that the report will show that we have made a significant effort to improve the situation for first nations members and aboriginal people across Canada.

In fact, not so long ago, in the budget before this one, we proposed a major investment to ensure that first nations children had the same degree of education and services as other Canadians.

Unfortunately, for reasons beyond our control, we were unable to move forward with this initiative, but we are continuing to work with first nations on improving the situation.

[*English*]

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow the Truth and Reconciliation Commission will release the long-anticipated report of its important work. Canadians will learn a great deal about the truth of this dark chapter in Canadian history. However, essential work lies ahead in order to achieve genuine reconciliation.

Would the government commit to following up on the symbolism of the apology with concrete actions to facilitate real healing for the survivors and their families, and to engaging all Canadians in the real work of reconciliation?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, we welcome the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We thank the commissioners and the survivors who came forward to tell their stories because it was time that all Canadians know the truth about that sad legacy of Canada.

The government remains committed to working with first nations, all aboriginal peoples across Canada, to address the challenges that we all inherited as a people living in Canada on account of that history. What is important is working in partnership in the future. That is what we are committed to do.

* * *

[*Translation*]

PENSIONS

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the numbers are clear: almost 75% of private sector workers do not have an employer-sponsored pension plan.

This government introduced voluntary savings plans, but Canadians still do not have enough money for their retirement.

When will this government listen to what Ted Menzies said and admit that the voluntary plans alone are inadequate for creating a viable retirement system?

[*English*]

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. Last week, the Liberal leader said "We're looking at an expansion and a mandatory expansion of the CPP of the type that...Kathleen Wynne put forward in Ontario".

For someone earning \$60,000 a year, the Liberal leader's policy is a \$1,000 tax hike, \$1,000 coming out of their pocket.

We are letting middle-class Canadians choose how they spend and save their money. The Liberal leader's only solution is a tax hike.

Oral Questions

● (1425)

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is nonsense. In 2010, the minister's predecessor, Jim Flaherty, said the following: "...we should consider a modest, phased-in and fully funded enhancement to defined benefits under the CPP..".

Now, there is a good idea.

Why is the current finance minister ignoring the advice of his predecessor, and, in the words of the *Ottawa Citizen*, offering "nothing more than a naked attempt to siphon votes from parties that are offering a thought-through alternative"? Can the government not do any better than that?

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is very clear that the Liberals would now like to distance themselves from what their leader said. Their leader was very clear when he said last week "We're looking at an expansion and a mandatory expansion of the CPP of the type that...Kathleen Wynne put forward in Ontario".

We know that the Liberal Party believes it should get rid of the universal child care benefit, cancel income splitting, and certainly income splitting for seniors, and claw back the tax-free savings account.

For someone earning \$60,000 a year, a \$1,000 tax hike is the response and the answer that the Liberal Party has.

We believe in choice for Canadians. Canadians know they are better off—

* * *

[Translation]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the lack of resources for health care is a blatant example of the Conservatives' disastrous record with the first nations.

The Auditor General has pointed out that the government does not have any tools to measure the quality of health care services provided to the first nations. The clinics are not even all inspected, and those that have serious problems are left to fend for themselves.

Will the government finally provide adequate health care to our first nations?

[English]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to the health and safety of all Canadians.

I think it is important to note that we provide over \$2.5 billion every year toward programs and services for aboriginal health. This includes access to essential nursing services, home and community care, and \$34.5 million to improve the quality of health services.

Again, I think we are making many important measures in terms of the health of our aboriginal communities.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what we have seen over and over again from the government is total incompetence to manage even the most basic components of health care for first nations, like making sure they have functioning clinics with the necessary equipment.

I will just give one example. Portable ultrasound machines have finally been ordered for the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, but instead of delivering them to communities where they are needed the most, the government has left them stranded in a Sioux Lookout depot.

When will the government actually deliver the scanners to the communities that urgently need them?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in partnership with our aboriginal communities, we continue to support many important measures in terms of the quality of the capital and the equipment that is needed.

Again, I would like to point out the very important partnership that we do have. I look to British Columbia as a great example, where the First Nations Health Authority is actually assuming some of the responsibility for the equipment and pieces for care.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government has a real problem delivering for communities. Unfortunately, this includes front-line RCMP officers.

The horrific incident in New Brunswick last year, which took the lives of three officers, underlined how dangerously unprepared the RCMP had left many officers, without the right firearms and without appropriate training.

The situation is so bad that the RCMP has been charged under the Canada Labour Code. However, officers on the ground are still saying that necessary changes have not been made.

What will it take to get this minister to act?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, keeping our streets and communities safe is a priority for our government.

While training and procurement are matters that fall under the direct purview of the RCMP, our government supports Canada's law enforcement agencies with legislative tools, resources like we find in budget 2015, that the member could support, which they need to get the job done, fighting crime and ensuring the safety and security of our communities.

The RCMP has taken action following the report regarding the tragic event that took place less than a year ago. It will continue to do so, and I trust in its capacity to protect Canadians and provide the front-line officers with the tools required.

● (1430)

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the recommendations on what needs to be done have been around since Mayerthorpe, more than a decade ago.

There is no excuse for inaction, just as with the issue of sexual harassment in the RCMP. The situation has become so bad that nearly 400 female RCMP officers and civilian staff are joining a class action lawsuit against the RCMP. We are talking about allegations ranging from threats and bullying to sexual assault, all behaviours that have no place in any public organization.

How will the government support these victims and make sure that the RCMP action plan is fully implemented?

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government takes a zero tolerance approach to sexual harassment. That is why all members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police should be able to feel safe and respected by their colleagues and superiors. Canadians expect professional and exemplary conduct. RCMP leadership continues to work on fostering a culture of respect worthy of the men and women who protect our country. I trust those leaders to ensure that this respect applies to all members of the RCMP.

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the British Columbia superior court is currently considering a class action suit by 362 women who were victims of sexual harassment within the RCMP. Even after the damning report on the culture of sexualization within the forces, the Conservative government once again took too long to react and deal with RCMP harassment cases.

Will the minister ensure that everything possible is done immediately to put an end to these unacceptable situations and help women who have been victims of discrimination within the RCMP?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can give my colleague a clear answer: our government has a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment. That is why we expect those in charge at the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to demonstrate professionalism and ensure that all of the men and women who protect our country can thrive within a culture of respect where they are at no risk of sexual harassment.

Members of the RCMP need to feel safe, and I am sure that those in charge will face these challenges with the appropriate tools that we have given them and the structures we have created.

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that would take leadership from the Conservative government on this file.

The tragic shooting in Moncton, last June 4, exposed some serious problems within the RCMP. Officers complain about the lack of firearms and training for dealing with such situations, so much so that the RCMP is now in court for Labour Code infractions and endangering its employees.

Can the minister tell us how many RCMP officers are still waiting for adequate equipment or training?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if my colleague wants to help the Royal Canadian Mounted Police get the resources and legislative tools it needs to protect Canadians then I invite her to support budget 2015, which has the additional resources.

Oral Questions

As far as deploying equipment is concerned, training and procurement are the responsibility of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. We can ensure that it has the resources and tools it needs. That is what we are doing with our anti-terrorism measures and with budget 2015, which contains the additional resources. The RCMP is taking into consideration the recommendations that were made in response to the tragedy in Moncton and I expect that it will act on those recommendations.

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ETHICS

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have the right to know what is happening in the Prime Minister's Office. While we know that PMO staff doctored a report on senators' expenses at least seven times, the Auditor General is about to release his report on the expenses of 105 senators. Nearly half of all senators are under suspicion of fraud.

Why did the Prime Minister's Office try to hide the truth about the fraud committed by senators appointed by the Prime Minister?

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. It was the senators themselves who actually invited the Auditor General in to review their expenses. We expect that all senators will participate and cooperate in this.

At the same time, we know the NDP members have their own problems with respect to 68 members of Parliament who owe \$2.7 million back to the taxpayer for illegal offices that they funded in contravention of the rules in this place. In fact, the member for Scarborough Southwest is on the hook for \$141,000, and he should do the right thing and repay the taxpayer.

● (1435)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one of the sadder elements about this corrosive Senate scandal is the failure of the Prime Minister to show leadership and explain his role in undermining public trust in the Senate. We have learned that the vetting of senators is the sole responsibility of the Prime Minister and yet he refuses to explain what that process is or whether senators even are eligible to sit in the Senate. At the same time his Conservative colleagues in the upper chamber are sitting in on a report that speaks to the issue of eligibility rules and whether they were followed.

The Prime Minister promised to clean up Ottawa. Why will he not come clean with Canadians? What is he trying to hide?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said on a number of occasions, constitutional practice with respect to the appointment of senators has been clear for almost 150 years. What is also clear is that it is inappropriate to use taxpayer resources to fund political party offices.

Oral Questions

Now in the officegate scandal hatched out of the Leader of the Opposition's own office, some 68 members of the NDP are now on the hook for \$2.7 million. In a very awkward twist, when the member for Burnaby—Douglas was asked last week how he would pay the \$170,000 he owed, he said that it was not his debt, that it was the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley's debt because he was the House leader at the time. Therefore, they are busy throwing each other under the bus as opposed to paying.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when we see the mighty Prime Minister hiding behind that man, we know why so much of the front bench are getting out of town as fast as they can.

The Prime Minister is neck deep in this scandal. The RCMP named his staffers as being key in the coverup of issues of fraud and breach of trust. His senators tried to whitewash the audit.

We are on the eve of a new Auditor General report that could put 14 senators in jail. Why will the Prime Minister not stop hiding and come clean with Canadians. How many Conservatives need to be indicted before he will tell the truth about what happened with the coverup in his office?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously, it was the Senate that invited the Auditor General in to audit its expenses, and it insists that it will co-operate in this.

At the same time, it is also very clear that 68 members of the NDP caucus, unfortunately for taxpayers, will be spending their summer in court, squished into the defendant's box of the court, trying to explain why they refuse to pay back \$2.7 million to taxpayers. The NDP has a troubling pattern of abusing taxpayer dollars. It used \$2.7 million for offices and \$1 million for mail-outs. Just pay it back.

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THE ECONOMY

Ms. Chrystia Freeland (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Friday's GDP numbers showed a 0.6% drop over the first quarter of 2015, a performance rightly described as "terrible" by a Bay Street economist.

The Governor of the Bank of Canada's previous remark about an "atrocious" start to the year has sadly been borne out. Most troubling was the 0.2% decline in March, a month which was supposed to show an economic rebound.

When will the Conservatives quit parroting their talking points, face this grim reality, and admit they have no effective plan for jobs and growth?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is a further indication of global economic uncertainty—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. Someone's phone is ringing. I do not know where it is coming from, but perhaps a smart young person in the lobby can help so we do not have to listen to it in here.

The hon. Minister of Finance is going to answer the question.

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Speaker, this is another indication of global economic uncertainty, which the G7 ministers of finance and

governors of the central banks discussed in Dresden at the G7 meeting.

Since the depths of the recession, we have created over 1.2 million net new jobs. However, the Liberals and the NDP propose to hike payroll taxes, which would kill jobs. The CFIB survey of employers in Ontario said that 69% would have to freeze or cut salaries, and 53% would have to lay off workers if their job-killing plan was introduced.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian economy has not just stalled, it is going in reverse. In fact, we are now half-way to a recession.

In response to Canada's bad job numbers, last week TD Bank said "While the headline number was bad, the underlying details were worse". It points to a deep drop in investment, which is bad for future growth. Meanwhile, the finance minister says that to boost growth, we need to make it easier to fire workers.

How many more jobs does the minister think we need to lose before the Canadian economy can grow? How can the minister and the Conservatives be so out of touch with this slow growth economy and the challenges it is creating?

• (1440)

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member opposite understands, I said no such thing.

At the G7 meeting in Dresden, finance ministers and governors of the banks discussed Europe's slow growth. It is especially acute in several countries, which have adopted the type of high-tax and high-deficit policies that the Liberals and NDP are advocating here in Canada.

Our government's low-tax plan for jobs and growth will benefit Canadians right across the country.

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GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has no plan for jobs and growth, except in the advertising sector. It is not surprising that the entire cabinet is seized with developing slogans for partisan government advertising. Now, get this, every department and agency is forced to shill for the Prime Minister's 24 Seven vanity video site. My private member's bill, the elimination of partisan government advertising act, debated this morning, could put a stop to all of this right now.

With scarce taxpayer dollars and so many real needs in Canadian society, when will the government do the right thing, pass the bill and stop wasting millions and millions of dollars on taxpayer funded propaganda?

Oral Questions

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are informing Canadians of the valuable services and benefits that are available to them. For example, with the family tax cut and benefits, families can receive almost \$2,000 for each child under 6, and \$720 for kids aged 6 through 17. The Liberals plan to take away that money from parents, and that is why they do not want parents to know about the benefit in the first place.

That will not stop us. We are going to go out and ensure that 100% of families with kids under the age of 18 know that they are entitled to new benefits that will put money directly in their pockets.

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[Translation]

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, under the Conservatives, people are working harder than ever, and yet they are still living hand to mouth, unable to save any money.

Despite record profits in the billions of dollars, Canadian banks are still not satisfied. Customers are being charged to pay their bills and even to pay their mortgage. It is appalling. Transaction fees are constantly going up. Enough is enough.

Will the Conservatives ever stand up for the middle class and impose a mandatory code of conduct on their friends, the big banks?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government understands the concerns of Canadians who feel they are not getting their money's worth from bank fees.

That is why we are supporting the opposition motion. Banning the pay-to-pay fees imposed by banks is the kind of measure we plan to include in the mandatory financial consumer protection framework, which we promised to establish in economic action plan 2015.

[English]

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the government for supporting this motion, but let us be clear. When the NDP forced the government to ban pay-to-pay fees, the Conservatives made an exception for the banks. As a result, Canadians got their pockets picked to the tune of upwards of \$180 million this year alone. We can get the job done now.

I have a simple question for the minister. Will he agree to pass legislation before the summer so no Canadian will ever be charged a pay-to-pay fee again?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have already introduced tough measures to protect Canadians from predatory bank practices, including obtaining commitments from the banks to end pay-to-pay practices for bills in the mail, implementing low-cost bank accounts and expanding no-cost banking options for more than seven million Canadians. We are very proud of our record.

•(1445)

EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Conservatives are failing consumers on bank fees and they are also failing on the economy.

When the Governor of the Bank of Canada said that the economy would be “atrocious”, he was talking about zero growth, but the truth is even worse. Under the Conservative economic mismanagement, our economy is actually shrinking, with thousands of Canadians struggling to make ends meet and worried that their jobs might be the next to disappear.

When will the Conservatives drop their tired talking points and start taking action to protect Canadians and create jobs?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals and NDP have only one plan on jobs, and that is to raise taxes on those who create them and the workers who do them. Raising taxes during this fragile global economic time would be a disaster. It would kill jobs and send shockwaves through our economy.

Our approach is the opposite. Through tax cuts, training and trade, our economy has generated 1.2 million net new jobs, 80% of them full time, two-thirds in high-wage sectors. That is the best relative job-creation record in the G7. We will keep cutting taxes and creating jobs.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are not talking about past economic performance, but about what is happening today.

When will the Conservatives realize that their economic policies are not working? Even the government's forecasts are way off the mark. It forecast a 1.2% increase in GDP in the first quarter, but it is no surprise that we had a 0.6% decrease instead. The Governor of the Bank of Canada was absolutely right when he predicted that the first quarter would be atrocious.

When will the Conservatives abandon their status quo economic policy and bring forward a real job creation plan?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is focusing on what is important to Canadians: jobs and economic growth.

More than 1.2 million net new jobs have been created since the recession. Both the IMF and the OECD are forecasting that Canada will have the strongest growth of any G7 country in the years to come.

[English]

We know there is an impact from global economic slowdowns.

*Oral Questions***PENSIONS**

Mr. John Carmichael (Don Valley West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has introduced multiple opportunities for Canadians to save more for their retirement. Could the Minister of State for Finance please update the House on our proposed idea for the Canada pension plan?

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Don Valley West for the question. He is correct.

The Liberal leader said last week, “We’re looking at an expansion and a mandatory expansion of the CPP of the type that Kathleen Wynne put forward in Ontario.” We have already said that for someone earning \$60,000, that is an extra tax hike of \$1,000. A middle-class family with two incomes would be paying thousands of dollars.

While we are letting middle-class Canadians choose how they spend and save their money, the Liberal and the New Democrat plans are simply another tax hike.

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CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last year the federal government announced its intention to attract double the number of international students, but once again it failed to follow through. A Citizenship and Immigration Canada report obtained by *The Globe and Mail* shows a 30% increase in processing times for study permits and a doubling of time for temporary resident visas because of a lack of coordination between government departments.

Does the minister understand that failing to attract international students hurts our competitiveness and leaves Canada falling further behind?

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that member’s question, as usual, is eye-wateringly misinformed.

This government has doubled the number of foreign students in this country since 2005. Last year, we saw a double-digit growth across the board once again, and 29,000 Chinese international students who came to this country in 2013 were succeeded last year by over 60,000. That is from one single country.

We have never seen growth like this. We are proud of our universities and colleges. Our strategy is working, and an unprecedented number now have the opportunity to become permanent residents of this country as well.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, apparently no one talks to one another in this government.

Not quite a year ago, the government announced that the number of foreign students would double in the country, then nothing. The departments work in isolation and the results are more than disappointing. The processing times for study permits have increased by 30%, and wait times for visas have doubled.

Can someone explain how this government’s objectives can now be met?

• (1450)

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is so great that after four years, since the last election, the NDP has managed to be so poorly informed, or even misinformed, about the situation with foreign students.

We have doubled the number of foreign students studying at Canadian colleges and universities. In 2013, we welcomed 29,000 new students from China alone, and that number was more than 60,000 in 2014.

Our strategy is working very well, and we have never had so many foreign students become immigrants—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Saint-Lambert.

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what is really so great is that family reunification has become such a nightmare in Canada thanks to the Conservative government’s incompetence, piecemeal approach and insensitivity.

It now takes four years just to be eligible to sponsor a parent or grandparent, and that is if things go smoothly. Mr. Momcilovic has been waiting seven years to sponsor his mother, who is now a widow.

When will the minister show a little compassion and do something about the backlog in processing applications?

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the real nightmare, once again, is the NDP’s determined campaign to misinform Canadians.

The parent and grandparent program has brought in up to 75,000 new immigrants in three years through a family reunification program. This year, 70,000 new immigrants arrived in Canada thanks to our family programs, and that is not including our super visa, which made it possible for 50,000 parents and grandparents to come to Canada in less than three years.

[English]

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that the people who are directly affected know that the current government has failed to deal with the immigration backlog. That is the reality.

These long delays create havoc for newcomers, who just want to come to Canada, build a better life, and make a contribution. These delays affect real people such as Kerstin Mulfinger, who waited four months longer than the standard wait time just to renew her permanent resident card. It impacted her job.

When will the Conservatives show their humanity, reduce the processing wait times, and make life easier in Canada for immigrant families?

Oral Questions

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is what we have been doing for nine years in this country. In our economic immigration programs, there are no backlogs of the sort that we knew under those Liberal decades of darkness. In fact, under express entry, some new permanent residents are being processed in two weeks. On family reunification, our action plan for faster family reunification has brought together 75,000 parents and grandparents in only three years, in addition to the 50,000 super visas issued in only three years.

We are getting the job done. The backlogs are down. Immigration has never been faster.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Foreign Affairs and concerns military sales to Saudi Arabia.

As we know, Canada is obliged to screen any military sales to a country whose government has a persistent record of serious violations of the human rights of its citizens. Canada must in fact receive assurances “that there is no reasonable risk that the goods might be used against the civilian population.”

Have those assurances been asked for, and have they been received by Canada?

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the export contract that the member refers to is the largest in Canadian history and will create and sustain more than 3,000 direct jobs in southwestern Ontario alone. Export permits are only approved if they are consistent with Canada's foreign and defence policies, including human rights. I can assure the member that such an assessment was done in this case.

Of course, it is his leader who has said that they should be abandoning manufacturing in southwestern Ontario. That is something that this government will not do.

* * *

●(1455)

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister is now committed to a 225 megatonne reduction of greenhouse gases by 2030. Delusionally, she said that her government will reduce its methane emissions for the oil and gas sector and regulate the production of fertilizer.

Can the minister tell the House precisely how many megatonnes will be reduced and eliminated by fertilizer and methane regulation, and what is the plan for the rest?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of the Environment, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I announced last month, our government has announced a fair and ambitious target for Canada that is in line with other international countries. We plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 30% below 2005 levels by 2030, a reduction of 225 megatonnes.

We have also announced regulations in the transportation sector and banned traditional coal-fired electricity in Canada. Now we are moving on three new areas to reduce methane from the oil and gas sector, reduce the production of chemicals and nitrogen fertilizers, and regulate the emissions of natural gas-fired electricity generation. We are doing all—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Surrey North.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week there was another shooting in Surrey. That is 28 shootings in just over two months. Every week brings more shootings and more fear in our community. People should not have to live in fear. Immediate action is needed, but the Conservatives are stalling and refusing to commit to a timeline for the arrival of new RCMP officers in Surrey.

Will the minister please provide a clear timeline today for the deployment of new officers in my community?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are ways that the member could help the people of Surrey, such as by supporting the additional funding we are providing for the RCMP, the measures we have put in place to deal with gang violence such as drive-by shootings, and our initiative to invest millions of dollars into prevention.

That is because we stand up for the people of Surrey. We will ensure that their community is safer and we will continue to pursue our efforts with the RCMP.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is a crisis. The community is devastated, and the minister's words offer no solace. The Conservatives have to be pushed every step of the way to take any action at all. We have asked repeatedly in this House for a clear timeline for the deployment of new RCMP officers in Surrey. People in our community deserve a response. They are scared.

Will the minister stop playing politics and playing with words and tell us when the new RCMP officers will arrive on the ground in Surrey?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me be clear. The citizens of Surrey merit much better than the lip service of the New Democrats when it comes to talk of public safety.

I am proud to stand up with members who are supportive of preventing gang violence in Surrey with programs that have proven efficient and who work with the Government of British Columbia and the school board. We are standing up. We are committed to sending 100 RCMP officers. We also have tough-on-crime sentences for those who are threatening the safety of Surrey. When will the NDP stand up with us—

Oral Questions

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. member for Miramichi.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Allan Legere, known as the monster of Miramichi, is a heinous criminal. He murdered a shopkeeper in Black River Bridge and then escaped from prison and committed four more murders. He is the worst of the worst.

My constituents recently found out that he will have a parole hearing this October and could be released into the community.

Could the Minister of Public Safety tell the House what our government will do to keep dangerous criminals like the monster of Miramichi behind bars?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Miramichi for making sure that the people of her community are safe.

Allan Legere was convicted of horrific crimes, and I can assure the hard-working member for Miramichi that we will take every step we can to ensure that individuals like Mr. Legere are kept behind bars.

Under the leadership of our Conservative government, we have taken strong action to restore victims to their rightful place at the heart of the criminal justice system and to ensure that the worst of the worst stay in prison for life.

• (1500)

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in answering my recent written Question No. 721, the Conservatives wrote bluntly that "...the Government of Canada will not revisit the decision to close the prison farms." However, the Conservative candidate in Kingston and the Islands launched his campaign by stating his "unshakable" conviction to restore prison farms, and he bought a share in the herd of prison farm dairy cows.

Could the Conservatives please clarify for Canadians their position on having inmates pay their way through work on prison farms?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, correctional services have many programs to help inmates reintegrate into society successfully.

We continue to support Correctional Service Canada programs, but we are also ensuring that people who have committed serious and dangerous crimes serve their time behind bars. We will also continue to offer balanced rehabilitation programs.

* * *

HOUSING

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the pyrrhotite problem keeps getting worse and worse.

Last Saturday, over 3,000 people took to the streets in Trois-Rivières to call on the federal government to help the families that have had to pay sometimes over \$200,000 to have their foundations redone.

The municipalities and the Quebec government have answered the call, but there has been nothing but silence from the federal government, if not complete denial.

Will the government finally acknowledge that there is no excuse for its failure to act and will it ever implement an emergency plan to help the pyrrhotite victims?

Hon. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we understand how much of an impact this has had on the people of that region.

As many members know, the pyrrhotite problem falls under provincial jurisdiction. In fact, the Government of Quebec has created a provincial program to provide financial help to property owners dealing with damage caused by pyrrhotite. I invite anyone affected by this problem to contact the Société d'habitation du Québec.

* * *

[*English*]

PENSIONS

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Burlington has more seniors per capita than any other community in the GTA. Burlingtonians and all Canadians deserve to have a strong and secure retirement so that they can enjoy their next chapter after their working lives.

Could the minister for employment please inform the House on the actions our government has taken to help Canadians with their retirement?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week the Liberal leader said, "We're looking at an expansion and a mandatory expansion of the CPP of the type that Kathleen Wynne put forward in Ontario."

The Kathleen Wynne plan is the federal Liberal plan. The numbers that the Ontario government has published suggest that a worker earning just \$60,000 a year would face a \$1,000 pay cut, but his employer, a small business, would also have to match that \$1,000 tax increase, which according to the CFIB would lead to layoffs and further wage cuts.

This would send reverberations throughout the entire economy. That is why we will never support it.

* * *

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this morning, more than 300 workers took part in a demonstration to protest the hiring of foreign workers at the new Jean Coutu Group distribution centre in Varennes. The problem is simple: these Austrian workers are doing work on the construction site that is usually done by industrial mechanics from Quebec. The labour market impact assessment in this case is problematic or non-existent, unless the foreign workers obtained entrepreneur visas in order to get around the law.

Oral Questions

Can the Minister of Employment and Social Development tell us whether these workers are here under the temporary foreign worker program or the entrepreneur visa program, and whether he intends to address this matter quickly?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first I want to thank the hon. member for letting me know that he was going to ask this question.

We believe that every job in Quebec should be offered to Quebecers first and that a temporary foreign worker should never push out a Canadian worker. That is why my department is currently reviewing this case. As soon as I have all the information, I will share it with the hon. member.

* * *

• (1505)

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mrs. Sana Hassainia (Verchères—Les Patriotes, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, the Citizenship and Immigration Canada website indicates that the average processing time for the renewal of a permanent resident card is 65 days. Why is it that 100 working days after submitting an application, it still has not been processed?

The work of a permanent resident in my riding requires him to travel outside Canada. This person could lose his job because Citizenship and Immigration Canada's processing times are too long and their procedures are interminable.

When he had still not obtained his card after five months, he had to submit an urgent application, but he heard nothing for eight days. That is unacceptable. Can this government explain what good this urgent processing service is?

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have to point out that it is practically irresponsible to raise such a question in the House rather than raising it in private. We cannot comment on individual cases. The member opposite should call the minister responsible if she wants everyone to be treated fairly.

We have been able to reduce backlogs everywhere, but there are some cases that are more complicated. They should be dealt with privately and not publicly in the House.

Mrs. Sana Hassainia (Verchères—Les Patriotes, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I understand what my hon. colleague is trying to say, but I brought up one of my constituents as an example of the general issue with wait times, not to address the specific case.

In the case of an urgent application, the website for Citizenship and Immigration Canada clearly states that it will contact applicants within two business days to inform them of whether it can speed up the application. It can be worrisome to not have heard anything after more than eight days when you have an upcoming business trip.

How can this taxpayer do his job?

This urgent processing system is clearly not working. When will this government take people's requests seriously, especially urgent ones? Will we have to create a second, third or fourth system to process urgent applications that have not yet been processed?

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the members who truly care about their constituents' situations immediately contact the ministers or departments responsible to get results. That has always been our objective on this side. We do not set out to play politics with the individual cases of people who are obviously facing urgent situations abroad. We would like to help the hon. member, but in order to do so we need detailed information, which we have yet to receive.

* * *

[*English*]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are at a loss to understand why the Government of Canada would rather risk losing a trade challenge and compensating the European Union than assist the Newfoundland and Labrador government through the promised fisheries investment fund.

Could the Minister of International Trade inform the House if his department has investigated the potential cost relating to compensating European interests, and what are those estimated costs?

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member that our government remains committed to working out the details of an MPR fund with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. The fund was always intended to compensate hard-working Newfoundlanders and Labradorians for actual losses arising out of the removal of MPRs. It makes sense. It was never intended to be a blank cheque that could be used to disadvantage the maritime provinces. Why will the member not stand up for the Atlantic provinces?

Federal officials remain open to receiving proposals from their provincial counterparts on how to implement the MPR fund. As yet, we have not received such a proposal.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: Canadian Forces Day is an opportunity for Canadians across the country to recognize the sacrifices that our men and women in uniform make on our behalf.

[*Translation*]

I am pleased to draw the attention of members to the presence in our gallery of nine members of the Canadian Forces, who are participating in Canadian Armed Forces Day today.

[*English*]

Petty Officer 1st Class Stephan Handerek; Master Seaman Andrew W.M. Brown; Corporal Jason A. Funnell; Sergeant Kyle Parker; Captain Joey A. Baker; Corporal Trevor R. Madge; Master Corporal Seth J. Van Loon; Sergeant Sophie S.M.C. Martel; and Sergeant David D.J.P. Roy-Lamontagne.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Routine Proceedings

●(1510)

The Speaker: I draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of former students and youth ambassadors participating in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*Translation*]**WAYS AND MEANS**

NOTICE OF MOTION

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 83(1), I wish to table a notice of ways and means motion to introduce an act to give effect to the Déline Final Self-Government Agreement and to make related and consequential amendments to other acts.

Pursuant to Standing Order 83(2), I ask that an order of the day be designated for the consideration of the motion.

* * *

[*English*]**ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS**

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I also have the honour to table, in both official languages, the the Déline Final Self-Government Agreement and the Déline Tax Treatment Agreement.

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[*Translation*]**TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF CANADA**

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to stand before you to reaffirm our government's commitment to advancing reconciliation with aboriginal people who suffered from the residential school system.

This week marks the closing event of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This event marks a significant milestone in the successful implementation of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, and in meeting the goal of moving towards healing, reconciliation and resolution of the sad legacy of the residential school system in Canada.

[*English*]

Today, to all former students who have come forward to speak about their experiences, to all who have shown extraordinary courage and resilience, to their families, and to everyone who has suffered from the impacts of this very dark chapter in our history, I would like to offer a statement of reconciliation.

The strength, determination, and resilience they and many former students I have met shared in discussing their experiences and in talking about the legacy of the Indian residential schools is

admirable. These qualities are necessary to ensure that Canadians have a greater understanding of the long-standing harms caused by the Indian residential school system for aboriginal people across Canada.

[*Translation*]

On June 11, 2008, the Prime Minister apologized on behalf of the Government of Canada, and all Canadians, for the forcible removal of aboriginal children from their homes and communities to attend Indian residential schools.

In this historic apology, the Prime Minister recognized that there is no place in Canada for the attitudes that inspired the Indian residential school system to ever prevail again.

The apology affirmed Canada's commitment to joining aboriginal peoples on a journey of healing towards reconciliation.

[*English*]

The commission was mandated with a unique opportunity to educate all Canadians on the Indian residential schools to forge a new relationship between aboriginal peoples and other Canadians. While this is the commission's closing event, the work to heal the relationship between aboriginal and non-aboriginal Canadians must continue.

On this day, let us commit to taking one more step together to rebuild the relationship between aboriginal and non-aboriginal Canadians. This renewed relationship requires sharing the truth.

Compiled through the work of the commission, the historical record of Indian residential schools made possible by the thousands of individuals who courageously came forward to tell their stories is an achievement of national significance. This profound and lasting record will help Canadians toward renewed relationships based on understanding and respect.

●(1515)

[*Translation*]

Reconciliation is a goal that will take the commitment of multiple generations, and the Government of Canada understands the importance of transforming how it works with aboriginal people and shifting attitudes and perceptions among all Canadians.

Reconciliation is an active process that requires ongoing engagement. The government looks forward to continuing dialogue with all Canadians, aboriginal and non-aboriginal alike, about advancing reconciliation.

[*English*]

To that end, Canada is committed to working toward reconciliation, building on the Prime Minister's historic 2008 apology to former students of Indian residential schools, their families and communities. This will be achieved by acknowledging, learning from and addressing past wrongs, being responsive to aboriginal peoples' expressed needs and priorities, actively engaging Canadians in reconciliation efforts, and commemorating the significant contributions of aboriginal peoples and cultures to Canadian society.

The stained glass window installed in the Centre Block of Parliament is a poignant reminder of the true meaning of reconciliation, not only for the members of Parliament who enter through the door above which it sits, but for all Canadians.

I am confident that we will be able to continue healing as a nation, building on the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It is in this spirit that Canada pledges that it will continue its efforts to advance reconciliation.

[Translation]

To that end, Canada is committed to working towards reconciliation.

[English]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, *meegwetch*. As I always do when I rise in this House, in this august place, I want to first acknowledge that this House sits on unceded, unsundered Algonquin territory of the Anishnabeg. In fact, in the spirit of true reconciliation, we should consider making that acknowledgement the norm whenever we rise in this House.

Allow me to thank the minister for his statement today and, with equal importance, express my gratitude to the minister for his participation in the Walk for Reconciliation yesterday afternoon, *meegwetch*.

As a survivor of the residential school system, I especially want to acknowledge and welcome to Ottawa the many fellow survivors who will be in town this week along with their families and friends. I pay homage to my fellow survivors. Very few Canadians realize that since our days in residential school, the TRC events for many of us are the only moments we get together again or the only moments we see one another again to share our stories, to say something that many members may take for granted: we are still here; we made it.

Members will have guessed that as a survivor it is with great anticipation that I await the release of the commission's report tomorrow, and I want to take this opportunity to thank Justice Sinclair, Commissioner Wilson and Commissioner Littlechild for their hard work and commitment to this cause.

After the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples almost 20 years ago, our common history will provide us with yet another moment to restore harmony among the peoples of this land that we now call Canada. Tomorrow is that moment. Let us pause for a moment tomorrow and reflect on the way forward. History will have given us yet another occasion. Canadians want change. Canadians want us to seize the moment. Change and reconciliation go together.

As a survivor, I can appreciate the fundamental importance of the moment we are about to experience tomorrow. Let us all collectively seize it, and collectively commit to genuine change in our relations with the first peoples of this country. Let us set out to do what 148 years of successive governments have not managed to achieve, and that is reconciliation.

Reconciliation is about healing relationships, building trust and working out our differences. It is about redress and respect for the rights of all. Reconciliation means a meaningful commitment to

Routine Proceedings

change, to honesty, and engaging and reconceptualizing relationships to create a future of peace, a future of justice and a future of renewed hope for all of us. I suggest that it is not possible to conceive of reconciliation in the absence of justice. Many segments of Canadian society have been honestly willing to engage in a dialogue to obtain truth, dignity and, above all, reconciliation.

● (1520)

Today, and into our shared future, we must continue the difficult work of building honourable relations, a fair society and a real dialogue to which the justice and the commissioners have invited us.

The adoption of the TRC report, important though it is, would not in itself change the everyday lives of women, men and children whose experiences it honours and gives witness to. No. For this, we need the political and constitutional commitment of not only the governments but the support and goodwill of the public, of all Canadians, to create and implement substantial and meaningful changes in co-operation, in partnership, with indigenous peoples themselves. We are all in this together.

Change is what Canadians want, and it happens that, along with my colleagues, I have come here to do exactly that: to bring that change.

Meegwetch.

● (1525)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou for his reminder that we must always acknowledge when we speak in the House that we are speaking on the unceded and unsundered territory of the Algonquin people.

It is an honour to speak here on the eve of the release of the much-anticipated report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It is important to reflect upon the broader intent of the apology which created it, to create healing and reconciliation and build a renewed relationship on a foundation of trust and partnership. These aspirations were reflected in the words of the apology, but have sadly found no expression in the ongoing paternalistic policies of the government.

After the Prime Minister stood in the House in 2008 and delivered the residential school apology on behalf of all Canadians, there was a groundswell of goodwill from aboriginal people from coast to coast to coast. On that day, the Prime Minister did the right thing and should be credited for that important step toward reconciliation. However, there was a disappointing lack of follow-up after that seminal milestone but still a great deal of optimism when he promised to reset the relationship during the 2012 Crown-First Nations Gathering.

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Unfortunately, and sadly, his actions and those of his government since that important symbolic gesture have failed to live up to the hopeful spirit of the apology. In fact, far from supporting the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its important work, it was disappointing that the government withheld crucial documents and actually fought the commission in court to obstruct its progress. Further, I am saddened that the antagonistic approach of the government toward aboriginal people, and its refusal to deal with appalling gaps in outcomes and deplorable living conditions for far too many, has further eroded the already fragile trust of aboriginal people.

Put simply, the government has damaged the honour of the Crown and squandered the tremendous opportunity of apology to foster more positive relationships with first nations, Inuit, and Métis communities. Canada needs a new nation-to-nation relationship with aboriginal communities based on the spirit of partnership, respect, and co-operation for mutual benefit. These were the principles at the core of our original relationship, reflected in documents like the Royal Proclamation of 1763.

It will be essential to educate and work with all Canadians to understand the truth about the historic and ongoing pain, achieve true reconciliation, and move toward a future based upon the realization of the original, respectful, and collaborative nation-to-nation partnership with all aboriginal communities. Honouring and reinforcing the spirit and intent of that original relationship, while recognizing and implementing the rights that flow from it, are not only the responsibility of elected politicians but of every Canadian.

The apology means nothing if Canadians do not understand why it was necessary and do not understand the devastating multi-generational impacts that colonization and specifically the residential school system have had on aboriginal peoples. Tomorrow, the TRC report will be an important step in establishing the truth of what happened, but we must all commit to carrying on the important work of reconciliation going forward.

We thank Commissioners Sinclair, Wilson, and Littlechild for their painstaking and heart-wrenching work. The release of this report will represent another seminal opportunity for the Government of Canada to honour both the words and the spirit of the apology. Meaningful reconciliation will not come until we live up to our past promises and ensure the equality of opportunity necessary to create a prosperous shared future.

It is time to rebuild our relationship with first nations, Inuit, and Métis in Canada on a foundation of inherent and treaty rights. It is important that we ensure we have the healing for the survivors and their families and begin that process of reconciliation as a responsibility of all Canadians. It is rooted in the principles of the United Nations Declarations on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

• (1530)

The minister mentioned the stained glass window installed in the Centre Block as a poignant reminder of the true meaning of reconciliation, not only for members of Parliament but for all Canadians. I believe that will not be enough. May all MPs, as they enter this building under artist Christi Belcourt's beautiful stained glass window commemorating the 2008 apology, be reminded every day of each of our responsibilities. May they be reminded of our

responsibilities to engage all Canadians in the essential work of reconciliation so that indigenous and non-indigenous people in Canada can go forward in a good way, in the words of the commission, "For the child taken, for the parent left behind".

In closing, I would like to thank the minister for walking with us yesterday in the Walk for Reconciliation, and for being there at the opening of the commission hearings this morning. However, I have to ask the minister why he has chosen to make a statement of reconciliation before the commission report is released.

Canadians expect the Prime Minister of Canada to respond in a timely manner to the recommendations in that report with concrete action.

* * *

[Translation]

PETITIONS**TAXATION**

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, considering that a vote will be held this evening on this very issue, I am pleased to present a petition signed by hundreds of Canadians regarding the tax on feminine hygiene products, which unfairly targets women. This measure is supported by the people of Chambly—Borduas. I look forward to this evening's vote, which will be a victory for women.

[English]

EBOLA OUTBREAK

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Ebola continues to affect communities in Guinea and Sierra Leone. We must work to support the push toward zero cases.

The petitioners call upon the government to provide funding for the economic and health system recovery of Ebola-affected countries as well as to help meet their food needs.

TAXATION

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present petitions on behalf of thousands of Canadians across the country with respect to the unfair and gender-specific discriminatory tax on feminine hygiene products and what has been known across the country as the "tampon tax".

The petitioners are requesting that the tax, GST specifically, on feminine hygiene products, be removed, as the burden is disproportionate on women in this country.

I would like at this moment to also give my personal thanks on behalf of women across this country to the New Democrats, as well as to the member for London—Fanshawe, for being a champion of this cause. I am very excited that we will be able to vote on this tonight.

Routine Proceedings

KOMAGATA MARU

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, earlier this year, the Punjab assembly in India unanimously passed a resolution calling upon the Canadian Parliament to apologize for the *Komagata Maru* incident. The incident was a dark moment in Canada's past, when, in 1914, 352 passengers aboard a steamship were denied entry into Canada based upon discriminatory immigration policy.

The petitioners are calling for the Government of Canada to provide a formal apology on the floor of the House of Commons for the *Komagata Maru* incident in 1914.

TAXATION

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, like my colleague earlier, I rise today proudly presenting a petition from people from different parts of Canada, British Columbia and Toronto primarily, asking that the menstrual hygiene products tax be eliminated, reduced to zero. In doing so, I want to thank the New Democratic Party, and particularly the member for London—Fanshawe, for her efforts in this regard.

AIR TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Trinity—Spadina, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition signed by citizens of the city of Toronto, in particular along the waterfront, who are urging the federal government to honour the tripartite agreement which governs the island airport. The tripartite agreement guarantees to residents of the city that no jets will be used on the island airport.

The petitioners ask the federal government to respect the agreement that has been signed by the City, the port authority, and the federal government to not allow commercial jets to land on the airport, to not reconfigure the waterfront, and to respect the wishes of the City of Toronto in this regard.

• (1535)

[Translation]

TAXATION

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present a petition today signed by hundreds of women, especially young women, who are calling on the government to remove the GST from feminine hygiene products. It is an unfair tax that categorizes feminine hygiene products as luxury items.

Since we are voting on this tonight, I hope that all of my colleagues in the House will consider the voices of these young women.

[English]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present petitions from about 500 members across Ontario who want to petition the government to cease taxation on menstrual hygiene products. The petitioners call for fairness and the elimination of taxation immediately.

AGRICULTURE

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition from a little over 400 Prince Edward Islanders who are demanding that the House of Commons and

government respect the right of small-scale family farmers to preserve, exchange, and use seeds. They call on the Government of Canada and the House of Commons to adopt international aid policies that support small family farmers, especially women, and recognize their vital role in the struggle against hunger and poverty; that we ensure that Canadian policies and programs are developed in consultation with small family farmers; and that they protect the rights of small family farmers in the global south to preserve, use, and freely exchange seeds.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Question No. 1149 will be answered today.

[Text]

Question No. 1149—**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:**

With respect to Criminal Code section 718.2(a)(ii): since January 1, 2015, (a) in how many cases has this section been used; (b) in how many cases were the people charged released pending their trial; (c) in cases that ended in a conviction, how many people have been charged with committing any other criminal offense following their release; (d) in cases that ended in a conviction, how many people, following their release, were subsequently charged with committing another offense in which Criminal Code section 718.2(a)(ii) applied; (e) in cases where people were released pending their trial, how many have been charged with committing any other criminal offense during the release period; (f) in cases where people were released pending their trial, how many have been charged with breaching any conditions attached to their release; and (g) in cases where people were released pending their trial, how many have been charged with committing another offense in which Criminal Code section 718.2(a)(ii) applied during their release period?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Integrated Criminal Court Survey does not collect information on purpose and principles of sentencing, therefore information related to the disposition under section 718.2 of the Criminal Code is not available.

* * *

[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, furthermore, if Questions Nos. 1151, 1152, 1160, and 1165 could be made orders for return, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Is it the pleasure of the House that the aforementioned questions be made orders for return and that they be tabled immediately?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 1151—**Ms. Mylène Freeman:**

With respect to all Governor in Council appointments for each year since 2006: (a) what is the total number of appointments made, broken down by administrative tribunals, agencies, boards and Crown corporations; and (b) what is the total number of female appointments made, broken down by administrative tribunals, agencies, boards and Crown corporations?

Business of Supply

(Return tabled)

Question No. 1152—**Ms. Mylène Freeman:**

With respect to Status of Women Canada's Action Plan on Gender-based Analysis: for each specific commitment, sub-commitment and identified action, what is the detailed status of the commitment, completion date or anticipated completion date?

(Return tabled)

Question n° 1160 — **Mr. Ted Hsu:**

With regard to the sale of the government's stake in General Motors (GM) common stock, announced in April 2015: (a) which counter-parties were contacted and asked to submit bids, broken down by (i) name of counter-party, (ii) date that they were contacted by the government or its designate, (iii) date of submission of firm, tradable bids to the government; (b) how was the sales price, as reported publicly, determined and calculated; (c) what observed prices, such as close prices or Volume Weighted Average Prices, in the market, were used to calculate the sales price; (d) were any other fees or commissions charged; (e) what conditions were imposed on the winning counter-party, Goldman Sachs; (f) when was Goldman Sachs made aware of the government's intention to sell GM stock; (g) when was Goldman Sachs made aware of the number of shares available for sale; (h) what conditions were imposed on Goldman Sachs' ability to hedge its purchase of GM stock; (i) was Goldman Sachs permitted to sell GM stock or other auto sector stocks as a hedge of its trade with the government on (i) Wednesday, April 1, 2015, (ii) Thursday, April 2, 2015, (iii) Monday, April 6, 2015; (j) what limits on internal communications within Goldman Sachs were promised by Goldman Sachs to the government or its designate; and (k) what other measures were taken to minimize the transaction costs and market impact of the government's sale of GM shares?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 1165—**Hon. Hedy Fry:**

With regard to Health Canada's regulations on flavoured tobacco in cigarettes, cigars and cigarillos: (a) what percentage of the total number of consumers for each product are over the age of 18; (b) what percentage of the total number of consumers for each product are under the age of 18; (c) what percentage of each of these products contains menthol; (d) why did Health Canada exempt menthol flavoured cigarettes and cigarillos from the new regulations on flavoured tobacco; and (e) what organizations and individuals were consulted on the decision to exempt menthol cigarettes and cigarillos from the new regulations?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, lastly, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before we resume debate, I must inform the House that because of ministerial statements, government orders will be extended by 19 minutes today.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—FINANCIAL CODE OF CONDUCT

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today on this motion, and I will be splitting my time with the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport.

Financial literacy is a skill more relevant today than ever. There is no better way to protect consumers than to give them the tools, knowledge and confidence to make the financial decisions that are right for them. Financially informed Canadians are better able to save, to pay their bills and to invest in their future.

Increasing the knowledge of the financial skills of Canadians across the country is why we named November Financial Literacy Month, and why our government continues to support financial literacy and financial literacy events across the country.

The subject of financial literacy has long been a priority for us on this side of the House, because the true costs of uninformed decisions can be substantial. This is true for young Canadians who face increasingly complicated decisions when it comes to applying for a credit card, buying their first car, or figuring out how to pay for school. It is true for our seniors, who must deal with a range of financial products that have expanded greatly and have become more and more complex. It is also just as true for middle-aged Canadians who are saving for retirement.

The ever-changing world we live in makes it difficult for most Canadians, in fact, to understand fully the risks or fees involved in products like savings accounts and loans. It is a critically important subject, which is why our government has been committed to increasing the financial know-how of Canadians since 2006.

We began by establishing the task force on financial literacy and committing additional funding to the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada to undertake financial literacy activities. We also amended the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada Act to provide the framework for the appointment of a financial literacy leader. In April 2014, the Finance Minister appointed Jane Rooney as Canada's first financial literacy leader.

The financial literacy leader's mandate is to collaborate and coordinate activities with stakeholders to contribute to and support initiatives that strengthen the financial literacy of Canadians. After all, financial literacy is everyone's responsibility.

Financial institutions deal directly with Canadians every day and offer a wide range of tools and resources to help Canadians choose the right financial products for them. The not-for-profit sector has existing and direct connections to Canada's most vulnerable Canadians, and plays a pivotal role in reaching out to these people to deliver financial literacy information and initiatives in their communities. Employer and labour organizations deal with millions of Canadians and have significant opportunities to teach employees about financial matters such as pension and retirement plans.

Business of Supply

For Canadians, it is crucial that they take advantage of all of the financial planning tools available to them so they can better participate in today's fast-paced economy. The Financial Consumer Agency of Canada has much to offer in this endeavour, including a host of online tools and publications such as "The City", a web-based program for high school students designed to teach skills integral to financial well-being.

The Financial Consumer Agency's website is the destination for all Canadians looking to enhance their financial decision making. As just one example, it has a valuable tool on its website that helps Canadians in selecting the right banking services for them.

In addition to the work of the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada, our government has also taken steps to update the existing financial consumer protection framework with several key measures.

We are mandating an effective minimum 21-day, interest-free grace period on all new credit card purchases when a customer pays the outstanding balance in full and are introducing a fee summary box.

We are reducing the maximum cheque-hold period to four days from seven days for cheques of less than \$1,500 and are providing consumers with timelier access to the first \$100.

We are banning unsolicited credit card cheques.

We are also requiring federally-regulated financial institutions to offer products and services on an opt-in basis only, where consumers have sufficient disclosure about the terms and conditions before accepting, and introducing new requirements for prepaid cards issued by federally-regulated financial institutions requiring them to disclose to consumers relevant information at appropriate points in time.

We are implementing regulations relating to credit agreements and unsolicited credit card cheques, and a new code of conduct dealing with mortgage prepayment penalties.

• (1540)

We are developing measures to enhance the consumer protection framework with respect to network-branded prepaid payment products to ensure that fees be disclosed to consumers in an information box displayed prominently on the product's exterior packaging, and that other consumer-oriented information be provided in a way that is clear, easy to understand and straightforward.

Our government is clearly working tirelessly to protect hard-working Canadians. Just last year, the government secured voluntary commitments from Canada's eight largest banks to enhance low-cost bank accounts and offer no-cost accounts with the same features as low-cost accounts to a wider range of eligible consumers. As a result, no-cost accounts are available to youth, students, seniors qualifying for the guaranteed income supplement, and registered disability savings plan beneficiaries. This action fulfilled a 2013 Speech from the Throne commitment to expand no-cost banking services and to end pay-to-pay policies, as well as an economic action plan 2014 commitment to enhance access to basic banking services.

We are also continuing to take action on consumer issues in economic action plan 2015, with a number of measures to build on our already strong track record in that regard. That includes looking at banning pay-to-pay banking fees as one of the things we intend to include in our mandatory financial consumer protection framework that is in economic action plan 2015.

It would also go beyond strengthening the basic things I just spoke about with respect to banking and consumer protection issues. I will highlight a few quickly. There are so many of them that I could never get to them all in 10 minutes.

We are increasing competition in the telecommunications market by amending the Telecommunications Act to cap wholesale domestic wireless roaming rates, putting an end to cross-border price discrimination by cracking down on companies that use their market power to charge higher prices for consumers, and removing tariffs on baby clothing and certain sports and athletic equipment to help reduce the costs of these goods for Canadian families, just to name a few.

Furthermore, our government is also focused equally on savings and ensuring that Canadians can save to have a dignified retirement. Our government believes that Canadians who have spent their lives helping to build a strong and resilient Canadian society should be able to enjoy their retirement and, most important, that they can save enough funds to be able to sustain their lifestyles in retirement. This is why we took several measures to ensure that seniors could have a dignified retirement.

For example, we increased benefits through the old age security program's guaranteed income supplement for Canada's most vulnerable seniors. This investment of roughly \$300 million each year improves the well-being of approximately 680,000 seniors across Canada, and represents the largest increase to the guaranteed income supplement for the lowest-income seniors in a quarter century.

We have also improved the tax rules for registered pension plans and registered retirement savings plans, and increased the age limit for maturing savings in plans to 71 from 69, allowing seniors to make further contributions and accrue greater retirement savings. More recent, economic action plan 2015 proposed to adjust the RRIF minimum withdrawal factors that would apply in respect of ages 71 to 94 to better reflect more recent long-term historical real rates of return and expected inflation.

Furthermore, we have introduced pooled registered pension plans for the more than 60% of Canadians who do not have access to a workplace pension plan. PRPPs will be of particular help to employees of small and medium-sized businesses that until now have not had access to low-cost private pension options.

Business of Supply

Our government's actions clearly demonstrate our dedication to promoting an ideal economic environment for all Canadians. This includes equipping Canadians to make informed decisions that strengthen their own personal finances and support the economy as a whole.

• (1545)

[Translation]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, can my colleague tell me why the Conservative government did absolutely nothing for so long?

Over the past few years, the middle class has suffered additional abuse. It is being gouged. Unfortunately, the Conservative government did not appear very receptive. Even if it had been receptive, in concrete terms, it did nothing to change any laws or regulations.

Why has the government done nothing for so long? I still have a hard time understanding that, because it seems to me that doing something about this issue just makes sense.

[English]

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, I have to wonder if the member has been sleeping for the last nine years. I find it difficult to imagine him making a statement such as that. I outlined just a few measures in my speech, but I could go on for the remainder of the time very easily and still only be part way through the measures.

We have already taken a number of measures to protect Canadians from banking practices, such as obtaining commitment from banks to end pay-to-pay practices for bills in the mail, implementing low cost bank accounts, expanding no cost banking options for more than seven million Canadians. It certainly does not sound like nothing to me.

I could go on with consumer measures as well. There is a whole host of them. The Consumer Products Safety Act, which helps protect Canadians from dangerous products, is a good example of that. I could talk about stronger labelling requirements on things like tobacco packaging to help prevent marketing aimed at youth.

We could go back to some of the issues with financial institutions as well, such as doubling the maximum fine on financial institutions that violate consumer protection provisions, banning negative option billing for financial products, requiring greater disclosures of mortgage prepayment charges, and that is just a few.

I have to wonder where the member has been for the last nine years.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated a number of the comments the member has made.

My question is about general awareness. He recognizes the importance of education for many different things out there today.

He specifically cited no-cost accounts or low-cost accounts, which have been around for a number of years. Yes, they have been enhanced relatively recently, but they have been around for a number of years.

The government has spent \$750 million on advertising much of that, very partisan, self-congratulatory advertising. Could the member indicate how much money he believes the government

has actually spent on advertising to Canadian seniors, for example, that there is such a thing called no-cost accounts and low-cost accounts and how they can go about tapping into that through websites or through phone calls to the banks?

• (1550)

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, it certainly sounds to me like another example of the Liberal Party trying to ride both sides of the fence on an issue.

First, the Liberals want no government advertising. Now they want more government advertising.

As a government, we recognize that it is important to promote to Canadians some of the measures that are available to them. I am glad to hear that the Liberals recognize that. I hope they will choose a side of the fence and be on it rather than try to ride both sides, but that is a pretty typical Liberal approach, so it is not a big surprise.

He referred to some of the measures in his question. I talked about some of the measures we have taken as a government, such as securing a commitment from the major banks to voluntarily provide a range of basic banking services for \$4 or less every month, including things like no extra charge for deposit, use of a debit card, minimum of eight debit transactions per month, at least two of which can be done in branch; reasonable charges for extra debit transactions; cheque writing privileges; and a free period statement or passbook record keeping.

These are all great measures our government has taken, and we are continuing to do everything we can to protect consumers and ensure they are aware of those opportunities.

Mr. Jeff Watson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity to discuss today's motion. Let me assure hon. members that under the leadership of our Prime Minister, our government is standing up for consumers and saving Canadians money.

We know that Canadian families work hard to make ends meet and every dollar counts. However, while some companies may look out for their bottom line, our government is always looking out for all Canadians. When Canadians make decisions about how to spend their money, they must be assured of a voice, a choice and fair treatment.

Business of Supply

In the October 2013 Speech from the Throne, our government committed to take additional action to protect Canadian consumers. We understand that Canadians are tired of hidden fees. That is why we have secured commitments from Canada's eight major banks to enhance low-cost bank accounts and offer no-cost accounts. Banks also committed to provide free monthly printed credit card statements. That is why we have worked with the provinces to maintain the integrity of the framework for payday lending-type products and to support provincial efforts to regulate appropriately all payday lending-type high-interest-rate products and why we are considering a ban on pay-to-pay bank fees in our mandatory financial consumer protection framework announced in economic action plan 2015. We know that when Canadians make wise financial choices, our entire economy benefits.

Let me remind the House of one of the wisest financial decisions my constituents have made, and that is electing a Conservative government. The decision did not cost them a dime, but the return on that investment has been substantial. A typical Canadian family of four will save \$6,600 this year, a direct result of our low taxes. Canadians also are not paying the higher costs associated with a carbon tax that the NDP would have imposed. Our government also balanced its books, an achievement that allows us to help families balance theirs, and will help ensure a more prosperous future for our children and grandchildren. This is in direct contrast to the Liberals and NDP, who would send Canada back into deficit and more debt.

Thanks to our balanced budget plan, many consumers are benefiting from a host of tax relief measures. Since we were elected in 2006, our government has introduced over 180 measures to provide tax relief to hard-working Canadians. We increased the amount Canadians can earn tax free, we removed over one million Canadians from the tax rolls altogether, we cut the lowest personal income tax rate to 15% and we introduced pension income splitting for seniors. We also introduced important credits, such as the children's art tax credit, the children's fitness tax credit, the first-time homebuyers tax credit, and one dear to my heart that I worked hard on, the adoption expense tax credit enhancements.

However, our initiatives go beyond law making and tax relief and include public outreach and education. In 2014, we announced the appointment of Canada's first-ever financial literacy leader. The mandate is to collaborate and coordinate activities with stakeholders to contribute to and support initiatives that strengthen the financial literacy of Canadians. This initiative will allow the government to broaden its efforts and help Canadians make more informed choices for themselves and their families.

Let me also remind the House that Canadian banks understand they must be prepared to respond to the specific and often changing needs of Canadian consumers. Accordingly, the government believes that the best consumer protection framework is one in which there is competition, fees are disclosed and consumers can exercise choice. For example, we have introduced regulations relating to credit agreements, including lines of credit and credit cards, which came into force in 2010. These regulations limit business practices that are not beneficial to consumers. They require the provision of clear and timely information to Canadians about credit products, with a particular emphasis on credit cards.

Specifically, the government has taken steps to update the existing financial consumer protection framework with several key measures. These include, for example, mandating an effective minimum 21-day interest-free grace period on all new credit card purchases when a customer pays the outstanding balance in full and introducing a fee summary box. In November 2014, the Minister of Finance welcomed proposals submitted by Visa and MasterCard to reduce their credit card fees for merchants that should ultimately result in lower prices for consumers.

● (1555)

In April, our government announced the enhanced code of conduct for the debit and credit card industry. These new changes will make the code even stronger by addressing unfair business practices and improving transparency for merchants and consumers, including new provisions that apply specifically to mobile payments.

The revised code contains several enhancements to address unfair business practices and improve transparency for merchants and consumers, including extending the application of the code to mobile payments, which includes new consumer protections for mobile payment users; measures to facilitate the pass through of credit card fee reductions to merchants; a new complaints handling process available to merchants with code related complaints; enhanced disclosure requirements that will require plain language disclosure of key contract terms and conditions and merchant fees in information summary boxes on merchant contracts; providing greater flexibility for merchants to exit their contracts without penalty and limiting the automatic renewal of contracts; new branding requirements for premium credit cards to make these cards more easily identifiable to merchants at the point of sale; and new disclosure requirements for credit card issuers to inform consumers who apply for premium credit cards that the use of these cards may result in higher merchant fees.

Let me also reassure members that the updates to the code were developed in close consultation with a broad range of stakeholders, including the members of the Finance Canada Payments Consultative Committee, which includes members representing the credit and debit card networks, small business, retailers and consumers. Bilateral consultations were also conducted with acquirers and small merchant associations. In fact, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business said at the time that the code:

Business of Supply

...has served merchants extremely well....[It] has done an excellent job in ensuring some fair ground rules and maintaining Canada's low-cost debit system.

Consumers will also benefit from a new requirement for credit card issuers to disclose to consumers who apply for premium credit cards that use of these cards results in higher merchant fees. This will help to empower consumers in selecting their payment method by disclosing the actual cost to merchants of accepting payments with a premium card.

Of course, this is not new. Throughout our time in office, our government has been focused on helping Canadian consumers identify and take advantage of the best possible financial products and services for their needs. As we announced in economic action plan 2015, we are working to develop a comprehensive financial consumer code to better protect consumers of financial products, and ensure that they have the necessary tools to make responsible financial decisions. Such measures empower and protect Canadian consumers, and increase their financial literacy by providing them with the right information at the right time so that they can make the financial decisions that best suit their needs.

These are actions that clearly demonstrate that our government is the only party in the House that has actually and consistently stood up for Canadian consumers. Sadly, New Democrats have been known to vote against measures to support consumers. It would be wise to start supporting our efforts, because Canadian consumers understand that they are better off with this Conservative government.

• (1600)

[Translation]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is beyond me how our Conservative colleagues can believe that they are the only ones with judgment and the ability to come up with good measures to help the middle class and taxpayers.

Last year, people in my riding and across Canada paid \$180 million in excessive fees for things like receiving their bank statements and using ATMs. Banks have been taking that money out of people's pockets for years now. Since 2011, banks and credit unions have been charging people who want to get paper copies of their bills and bank statements, and the government has still done nothing to put an end to that predation.

What does the Conservative member have to say about the kind of predatory banking practices I just mentioned?

[English]

Mr. Jeff Watson: Mr. Speaker, I know the member keeps repeating that false line, but even as a rookie in this House, having been here since 2011, he should be aware of a number of actions that the government has taken, many of which I have outlined, with respect to improvements for consumers, including securing commitments for banks to provide low-cost or no-cost banking services, and Visa and Mastercard commitments to reduce credit card interchange fees with an effective rate of 1.5% for the next five years, a flow-through that will be important for consumers. I could go on and on in that regard.

The member should at least acknowledge the facts of what we have done. Beyond that, we have consistently lowered taxes and put

more money into the pockets of Canadians. We have enhanced their benefits.

Every budget helps consumers, incrementally, year over year, to save more money, to lower their taxes and to improve their benefits. Those budgets are about priorities. We have the right priorities when it comes to consumers and protecting them. The NDP members have the wrong priorities, or if they have some, they do not have the courage to stand up and support the measures we have taken to benefit consumers.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member actually stood up in his place to talk about all of these measures that the government has brought in. They were done compliments of the government being successful in having a balanced budget, and then warning Canadians that the Liberals and New Democrats do not know how to balance budgets.

I wonder if the member would be straightforward and truthful on the issue of a balanced budget. There is only one member in this House who has actually achieved a balanced budget, and that is the deputy leader of the Liberal Party, the member for Wascana.

My question is related to the fact that if we are seeing this because of balanced budgets, would the member not acknowledge that the only balanced budget the government received was the one it inherited from Paul Martin, when he was the Prime Minister, and that ever since that inheritance not only did the Conservatives squander it pre-recession, but that Canada has now ended up with a balanced budget for the first time and it happens to coincide with an election year?

Is the member not a little suspicious of what would appear to be a phony balanced budget?

Mr. Jeff Watson: Mr. Speaker, brought to you by a member and his party who, when we hit the great recession and brought in a stimulus package in line with what the G20 were doing, said it was not enough, and demanded a second, even a third stimulus package.

The deficits just could not be big enough, even on a temporary basis, for those members over there. We consistently balanced budgets before the great recession. We paid off massive amounts of debt, \$40 billion, before the recession even began.

We committed, in the last election, that when the finances were balanced again after the great recession, we would begin returning the surplus back to Canadians where it belongs, not to enrich the bureaucrats or to enrich the select few that the opposition parties would like but to return broad-based measures back to all Canadians, including Canadian families.

We are delivering. That member will find out in the next election exactly what Canadians think about it. They are going to return us with another Conservative majority government.

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•(1605)

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): Mr. Speaker, to hear the last member say that their government consistently brought in balanced budgets before and after the recession, those kinds of remarks are almost as dumb as saying that budgets balance themselves.

[*Translation*]

I would like to share my time with the member from Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

[*English*]

I am thrilled to get an opportunity to speak to this very important issue affecting nearly all Canadians and the majority of my constituents in Scarborough Southwest. After 10 years of Conservative rule and 13 years of the Liberals before them, families back home are struggling to make ends meet.

These pay-to-pay fees hit vulnerable people the hardest: seniors, people living with disabilities, new Canadians and anyone who cannot do online banking. Now the notion of charging people money just to pay their bills is absurd, but, then again, so is charging someone \$4.50 to withdraw \$40 from the bank as in the case brought up by my colleague from Davenport, which is just simply insane. That worked out to a fee of 11% just for an individual to withdraw his or her own money.

Bank fees hit those with modest incomes even harder because they are forced by circumstances often to make a larger number of small dollar withdrawals. It is like a tax on being poor because the bank will not make more money from them on mortgages, investments and loans, so they gouge them with these usury fees.

Going back to online banking, Statistics Canada reports that 20% of homes in Canada have no Internet and that number rises to 46% of households with incomes below \$30,000. This should make it clear that these fees hit those who can least afford it the most.

The big five banks make around a half a billion dollar a year profit off ATM fees. They are now making almost \$180 million each year on pay-to-pay fees. How long before those numbers rise to \$1 billion just for Canadians to access their own money and to pay their own bills?

I will move on to the Conservatives' famed voluntary code of conduct and why we need to change it to a mandatory one and make it stricter, frankly.

Last year, the government introduced changes to force the banks to offer more free and low-cost accounts. These accounts come with a very limited number of debits per month. Therefore, to get around this the banks now are starting to include things like bank transfers, bill payments, student loan payments, credit card payments into the number of debits so it will jack up the number of debits that each individual will make.

Many people with those low-cost or no-fee accounts with only seven or eight debits allowed per month are going to end up getting hit with even larger fees for going over the number of allowed debits, which means they are going to have change what type of account

they have and pay more for it just to get more debits so they in fact reduce the cost per transaction.

This is why we need to move to a mandatory code of conduct with stricter rules. Every time the Conservatives bring in these voluntary codes of conduct, it is really just a suggestion to the banks. Then what the banks will do, because they always will ensure they make whatever bottom line they want, and we just have to look at the first two-quarters of this year where the banks in Canada turned \$15 billion in profit, is find ways to sneak around the different changes that are made if they are only voluntary. We need to make them mandatory and we need to make them stricter.

The Conservatives keep talking about how they keep trying to do things to save people money and to help businesses, but nowhere in the last 10 years has the government moved to address one of the most ridiculous merchant fees that exists.

•(1610)

An example is a small business like a restaurant, which accepts credit cards because many people use credit cards nowadays. When people pay the bill, they put the tip on the bill. Let us say it is \$30 and they put a generous \$4 on the bill. Depending on the card used, the merchant will pay anywhere from 2.5% to potentially up to 6% in merchant fees on that transaction for \$34.

In places like Ontario, where it is required by law for the employers to remit the tips back to their employees, and that is exactly how it should be, that business is then paying a merchant fee on that \$4 tip it has to give to the employee. It is in fact giving that \$4, but it is really costing it \$4 to \$5 because it has to pay that merchant fee on it as well.

Nowhere has the government ever suggested that we should remove this fee, despite suggestions from the opposition. This would be a tangible measure that would help a lot of small businesses make ends meet.

The banks are always a pleasure and a joy to deal with. I was talking to someone at my bank today while I was writing this speech. It worked out pretty well because I noticed all of a sudden that I was getting hit with more fees. I called the bank to see what was happening. It took me 35 minutes on the phone. Most Canadians do not have that kind of time to waste. I was sitting typing my speech, so I was doing two things. I talked to someone about what was going on. Sure enough, the bank had raised the minimum thresholds on my accounts in order to not pay those monthly fees. I asked when I had been informed about that and was told a letter had been sent. No, it had not. I was then told there should be a message in my online inbox. There was no message.

This again is a case where if the banks are not required to do something and properly inform consumers about what is going on, consumers then have to waste their time, energy and effort just to get fees back that should never have been charged to them in the first place.

Business of Supply

All of us in the chamber are blessed with very high salaries compared to average Canadians. In many cases, we should be able to keep minimum balances in our bank accounts to avoid those fees. However, most Canadians cannot do that. Most Canadians would not be able to find another \$1,000 all of a sudden to put in different bank accounts to not get dinged with these fees. Then they could end up losing another \$20 or \$30 a month. A single parent in my riding, with two children and child care, cannot afford that.

Child care is prohibitively expensive, and neither of the two parties will do anything about that. They want to put a little money back into people's pockets, while they continue to pay \$15,000 to \$20,000 a year in child care fees. They get \$5,000 but then fork out \$20,000. That is \$15,000. That is not more money in their pockets. That is more money out of their pockets, whereas the NDP is planning to create \$15 a day child care. That would make the total child care costs for those families \$5,000 to \$6,000 a year. That means families would end up with \$10,000 to \$15,000 back in their pockets. That is how we make a more prosperous Canada, a more equal Canada. It is also by getting rid of ridiculous pay-to-pay fees.

I have heard several members talk about how their government brought it up in the Speech from the Throne in 2013. That was only after the NDP had been hammering on it for a year. There was no equivocation in the Speech from the throne. The government did not say it would do it in this industry but not in this sector. Then when it actually came up with the rules, it excluded the banks. We asked the Conservatives why. They said that it was because the banks were not charging those fees right now. All of a sudden, the banks are now charging those fees. Why? Because they are allowed to. They will do whatever the market can bear and they will try to maximize their profits in every instance.

I am thrilled to hear that the government will actually support the motion. It is supporting a lot of our motions these days. It must mean we are ready to govern or something. However, will it actually implement the changes?

There was a unanimous vote in the House on feminine hygiene products. The government will put that into effect July 1. However, will it bring this change in for July 1? Will it bring this in legislation or accept an amendment to the budget implementation act to include it? That question remains. Therefore, supporting the motion is all fine and good, but it is the action required afterward that matters.

•(1615)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, some people with mental health issues might not feel comfortable doing business with banking services. Does my colleague think that is a problem in his riding? Unfortunately, the government forces them to do business with banks to get their benefits, and on top of that, they have to pay to pay fees.

Does my colleague think that this way of doing things marginalizes a group of people, particularly people with delusional disorder, who might be a little more reluctant to do business with banking institutions and a computer system that collects their data?

Mr. Dan Harris: Mr. Speaker, it is definitely one more challenge that people with mental health issues do not really need. Furthermore, they are not the only ones affected by this.

Studies show that more than 40% of Canadians were not comfortable with the idea of online banking. That is why online security is definitely still very important, and it can be worrisome for many people.

When I go door-to-door, I always meet people who do not want to sign or look at a document online because they are afraid that someone will steal their information and misuse it.

[*English*]

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the speech very carefully the last number of minutes. When it comes to facts, that is not something the Conservatives really want to discuss.

The member talked about how the Conservatives wanted to put money back into the pockets of Canadians. In this case, they are taking money out of the pockets of Canadians and giving it to their friends, the big banks. That is a lot of money, \$180 million a year, that they are taking from Canadians, giving it to their friends and helping them steal from Canadians.

What would an NDP government do after October 19?

Mr. Dan Harris: Mr. Speaker, we hear the other parties talk about putting money back into people's pockets. We would rather leave it there in the first place by bringing in good quality, affordable child care, at a \$15 a day, which would drastically lower the cost of child care for families that need it. That would leave the money in their pockets.

By ending pay-to-pay fees and by putting a cap on ATM fees, for example, we would then be leaving money in the pockets of Canadians rather than taking it out and then putting it back.

The Conservatives, with their income-splitting plan, would be taking take \$2.5 billion of peoples' money and putting it into the top 15% of income earners, the people who frankly do not need any help.

The Liberal policy changes here and there, day to day. It is kind of like a moving target, but it will not be the kind of policy like ours, which will reduce costs for Canadians.

A good quality, affordable child care is the number one thing we can do for families to help them make ends meet.

•(1620)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for LaSalle—Émard, Co-operatives and Mutual Companies; the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, the Environment.

Business of Supply

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to talk about the parliamentary secretary's very surprising comments. He said that the banks are going to implement measures whereby consumers who pay off their credit cards every month, for example, will not pay any fees.

There is an inherent difference between our philosophy and that of the Conservatives, who sit on the other side. If a student's credit card is maxed out at \$800 and the student pays the minimum amount and interest every month, it will take about 15 years to pay off the credit card. Richer people can of course pay off their debts. That is the philosophy of the people on the other side of the House.

We must protect all consumers, both small and big. I congratulate the member for Davenport, who moved this motion on June 1, because this is the day that my bank, and probably several others, announced increases in a number of fees it charges consumers. For example, my bank is increasing the fee for an NSF cheque from \$45 to \$48.50.

This motion on pay-to-pay fees calls on the government to ban all pay-to-pay practices through the enactment of a voluntary financial code of conduct. It could gradually be made mandatory. The purpose of this motion is to protect consumers. That seems pretty clear to me.

The most profitable banks in Canada have decided to make us pay extra fees to carry out all sorts of basic transactions. If we want to make a credit card payment it will cost us an extra \$2. If we want to make a regular mortgage payment or pay down a student loan it will cost \$1. If we want to use a contactless debit card it will cost \$2. The banks are going to make us pay to use our own money.

What is more, it is middle-class families who are already struggling and carrying too much debt who are going to pay. They will not be able to afford the so-called premium bank accounts, such as the infamous accounts where you do not have to pay fees if you keep \$5,000 or \$3,000 in your account. This certainly works for some Canadians, but there are many who live paycheque to paycheque. Some earn \$15,000 or \$20,000 a year and cannot afford to keep \$3,000 or \$5,000 in their bank account. This includes many seniors.

I would like to read from an article in *Le Devoir*, from May 19:

The Canadian banks, RBC, TD, the CIBC, all closed with higher earnings than for the same period last year.

The bank posted net earnings of \$2.5 billion.

The Royal Bank saw its profits increase by 23% to \$625 million.

CIBC saw its earnings practically triple to \$911 million.

Retail and Business Banking posted a net gain of \$583 million for the second quarter, an increase of \$37 million.

It is obscene, because these are not co-operatives. All Canadians will not share in these profits, but rather a small minority of individuals. Those who cannot afford to keep \$3,000 or \$5,000 in their bank account to avoid paying monthly bank fees will not benefit.

•(1625)

Not too long ago, in April, if I am not mistaken, I introduced Bill C-663, which deals with excessive bank fees. There are currently no regulations to limit bank fees in Canada. On top of fees for everyday services, banks also charge additional fees for

occasional services, such as for NSF charges. Banks make millions of dollars in profits on fees charged to individuals for banking services.

Fees need to be regulated immediately, especially NSF charges. The following measures could be taken, and it would be quite simple: prevent banks from charging fees to customers who deposit a payment from a third party when the payment ends up being NSF. Mr. Speaker, if I write you an NSF cheque, you are the one who will be charged. Just like that, you will be fleeced that day, so it is a double punishment, a double charge. We could also set a maximum amount for NSF fees and require banks to provide customers with a grace period to cover the overdraft before dishonouring a cheque or refusing a debit. That would be entirely in good faith. Banks should treat their customers as we treat our constituents and give them a warm welcome. It would be really nice if a bank could call customers to let them know about an NSF situation and give them a chance to come and cover the amount and avoid the charges and a bad credit score.

Banks need to produce reports listing all of the bank fees they charge customers for all of the services they provide in Canada, and it is important that the reports also indicate the real costs associated with these services. In the United States, the fee for processing an NSF cheque seems to be about 50¢, \$1 or \$1.50. At my bank, these fees have just increased to \$48.50. That means that there is a very big margin. It may cost more in Canada than in the United States to process these cheques, but if the banks were transparent we could see exactly how much the service costs and they could then charge a percentage based on that cost.

The NDP, along with the media and millions of Canadians, believe that the banks are raking in huge profits, and meanwhile Canadians struggle to make ends meet and are paying increasingly exorbitant bank fees. The banks earn the most profit from the fees they charge customers and the fees they charge for banking services. These fees are taken directly from the pockets of the middle class and from people who do not have much money.

In the 2015 budget—on page 248 for the members opposite who have read it—the Conservatives have some empty words about banks. They were rather modest and cautious. They talk about improving transparency and accountability, for example, through enhanced public reporting on complaints and on measures taken to address the challenges faced by vulnerable Canadians. This does not refer to Canadians who have \$3,000 or \$5,000 to avoid paying bank fees, but to those who do not have those kinds of means. They would be in less of a predicament if the banks called them and they were not billed \$45 to \$90 for non-sufficient funds.

Business of Supply

Whom do these measures affect the most? Young people, people with low incomes, seniors, members of minority ethnic groups and people without credit cards. Some 28% of people who have had to pay overdraft fees have told me that they closed their bank account as a result. Once they have no access to banking, they can no longer receive services. About 65% of individuals who have paid overdraft fees say that the transaction that resulted in the overdraft was for \$50, and 15% indicated that the transaction was for \$5 or less. Having to pay \$45 for a \$5 overdraft is absurd.

Canadians should not have to hand over their hard-earned money just to get a bank statement or pay a bill. That is called “pay to pay”. Canadians pay as much as \$180 million per year just for bank statements. Nobody should be punished for receiving bank statements or paying bills.

Maybe people have forgotten, but not so long ago, bank fees did not exist, and companies did not charge fees to send bills in the mail. Now that companies are no longer sending bills in the mail, they want to make all the unlucky ones who get them pay to pay.

• (1630)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have heard many comments today on this motion, and the one I am most sympathetic to is the fact that there are many individuals on fixed incomes, particularly seniors, who are not able to go on the Internet or who choose not to do their banking online. The core of the motion is really about paying to have monthly bank statements mailed or paying extra for choosing to pay a bill a certain way.

It would appear that there is unanimous support for this motion, and I am wondering if the member could reflect on why she feels that the government has been dragging its feet in making the statement it made today, which is that in principle, it does not believe that there should be pay-to-pay fees.

[Translation]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Mr. Speaker, the government is not doing anything tangible to deal with the banks. It is being too wishy-washy, to put it politely. The government's budget is geared to greater transparency in the complaints process. However, it is not going to tell the banks to hand over their figures and tell the government how much their clients spend on ATM fees. Since there is money moving in and out, a user log could be issued.

The budget is not short on prose, but what we are asking for is concrete measures and an action plan to truly help consumers.

[English]

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the motion before us today calls on the government to introduce consumer-friendly measures for hard-working Canadian families, something we not only stand for but are already doing. For example, in our most recent budget, our government introduced several measures to empower consumers, including delivering a new and exclusive financial consumer framework for federally regulated banks and strengthening the financial literacy of Canadians.

I am wondering why the opposition does not stand up and support the plans we have already put in place.

[Translation]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Mr. Speaker, again, the government's measures are too wishy-washy. They should be part of an action plan to help consumers. In order to support a serious plan, we need to have a serious plan together with a program to achieve an end goal, namely consumer well-being.

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in her speech, my colleague talked about her excellent bill, which is absolutely related to the issue at hand because it also addresses bank fees. The government indicated that it was going to support the motion. I would like to know whether there are other bank-fee-related measures the government could apply immediately at the same time that it is supporting our motion, in order to lower fees for consumers, especially those with a low income, who cannot keep \$3,000 in their account to avoid paying bank fees.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Mr. Speaker, we really need to bring in legislation. The government could pass legislation in many areas and give people more purchasing power. For example, we really need to look at bank fees. It is not that complicated. We ask banks to provide a report every November. The Governor in Council can then submit a report 30 days after the House resumes in January or February. Thus, limits for all consumer fees are set.

The banks are going too far. They have to understand. That is way too much. They are taking billions of dollars directly out of Canadians' pockets.

• (1635)

[English]

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted today to support my colleague's opposition day motion and to continue our government's strong support for middle-class consumers and small business owners and operators. I would like to say that I will share my time with the hon. member for Willowdale.

Business of Supply

It is no secret that small business is the lifeblood and the engine of our economy. Small businesses account for 99% of all businesses in this country and employ half of the working men and women in the Canadian private sector. Our government believes that small business owners should spend their time growing their businesses and creating jobs, not battling high taxes and red tape. We have already cut taxes significantly for small businesses and their owners. We cut the small business tax rate to 11% in 2008, and increased the amount of annual income eligible for this lower rate from \$300,000 to \$400,000 in 2007 and then to \$500,000 in 2009. This makes a huge difference to small businesses.

We cut the general corporate income tax rate to 15% in 2012 from approximately 22% in 2007. That is a 30% reduction in tax for corporations generally. This reduction benefits successful small businesses on their way to becoming big businesses when their income exceeds this \$500,000 income level.

We increased the lifetime capital gains exemption on qualified small business shares from \$500,000 to \$750,000 in 2007. The government further increased the exemption to \$800,000 in 2014, indexed the new limit to inflation, and further increased this exemption to \$1 million for farmers and fishermen in 2015. The lifetime capital gains exemption is estimated to be delivering over \$1 billion in federal tax relief annually for small business owners, including farm owners and fishermen.

We also reduced small business EI premiums by introducing the small business job credit. This credit is expected to save small businesses more than \$550 million in the next year or so.

To further encourage small business growth, last month's budget proposed to further reduce the small business tax rate by nearly 20% by 2019, taking it down to just 9%. For a small business with taxable income of \$500,000, this tax cut and other tax relief the government has provided since 2006 would result in an overall federal tax reduction of 50%. It is cut in half.

However, small business owners and operators in my riding of Vegreville—Wainwright would be alarmed to know that the Liberal leader said he would reverse our tax cuts to small business. I also note that both the NDP and the Liberal Party would dramatically hike payroll taxes for small businesses and their workers.

The Liberal leader has said, "We're looking at an expansion and a mandatory expansion of the CPP of the type that Kathleen Wynne put forward in Ontario." That is what he said. He wants a mandatory expansion to the CPP. For someone earning \$60,000 per year, the Liberal leader's policy would be a cut of \$1,000. That would be in addition to the \$1,000 payroll tax increase that would have to be paid by the small business owner. To be clear, not only would this mandatory increase in payroll tax reduce employees' take-home pay, but it would also force small businesses to cut jobs, hours, and wages for their employees. That is simply what would happen.

When it comes to promoting job creation and economic growth, which ultimately benefit all Canadians, including consumers, our government continues to make responsive and responsible decisions. Our government is implementing policies focused on raising Canada's economic potential and creating stable, well-paying jobs.

● (1640)

However, we cannot be complacent. These are tough economic times here at home and right around the world. Small businesses are stretching dollars as far as they can go, and they need support so that our economy can continue to grow. That is why our government took action to address credit card fees. Every time a merchant accepts a credit card payment, he or she pays fees, and, as is the case with any other cost, fees can affect prices for consumers and usually do.

Last fall we accepted voluntary commitments by Visa Canada and MasterCard Canada to cut credit card fees by close to 10%. This is meaningful. Specifically, the proposals from Visa and MasterCard include voluntarily reducing their respective credit card fees for consumer cards to an average effective rate of 1.5% for a period of five years and ensuring that all merchants receive a reduction in credit card fees. More importantly, Visa and MasterCard started to implement the reductions this past April, so they have already kicked in.

The purpose of these voluntary commitments is simple. It is to reduce the cost of credit card acceptance for merchants in order to keep prices lower for consumers. Let me reassure the House that, as the finance minister has said:

If Visa or MasterCard do not comply with their public commitments the Government will take all necessary measures to keep prices low for all consumers.

Let me turn members' attention to the enhanced code of conduct for the debit and credit card industry that was announced in last year's budget. It aims to promote fairness in the credit card market and addresses the issues that businesses told us about.

We worked hard to fix the problems. Merchants will now have a new, more user-friendly complaints process for code-related complaints. We are improving disclosure requirements within contracts. Businesses will have more flexibility to exit their contracts without penalty. In addition, the code will now apply to mobile payments.

This stronger code also offers new protection for consumers. Credit card issuers will have to inform consumers that using premium cards may mean higher fees, so there will be new branding requirements for premium cards to make them more easily identifiable. We are also introducing new protections with mobile devices so that consumers have choice.

Business of Supply

We want to go even further than this. Every year Canadians make roughly \$24 billion in payments. More and more of these transactions are being made electronically. However, while debit, credit, and prepaid cards are subject to federal regulations, digital and electronic wallets largely are not. That is why our government launched public consultations on the national retail payments system. We want to hear what Canadians think about the way that they pay so that our consumer protection will continue to be cutting edge.

In conclusion, taking together all that has been done since our Conservative government was elected, I can say with confidence that protecting consumers and supporting small business remains a central focus of our government.

We are working with the provinces and territories to make consumer protection regimes more robust and to defend Canadians using high interest rates and payday lending products. We have worked with the financial sector to ensure that Canadians benefit from greater transparency and pricing disclosure. At the same time, we are defending consumers from having to pay the costs associated with the high-tax agenda of the Liberals and the NDP. That is something that consumers should think about more. Canadians generally should think about that more. What would the consequences be of electing a Liberal or NDP government in the next election? It is something that I do not like to think about, because I do not like higher taxes, but that is what the result would be.

The NDP has pledged to implement a carbon tax that would raise the price for consumers on groceries, gas, and everything else. This is something I will not support, and my constituents simply will not support it either.

•(1645)

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to that speech very carefully. The member talks about the NDP and the Liberals raising taxes. The only tax I see in this is in the guise of fees on consumers.

The Conservatives are helping their banking friends to pick the pockets of Canadians. Instead of putting money back in their pockets, they are actually helping the corporations to pick the pockets of Canadians to the tune of \$180 million. They have had nine years to bring in legislation to help protect Canadians and help Canadians keep their money where it should be, yet now they are saying that they will be looking into this.

My question is simple. Will the Conservatives do that before the House rises in a couple of weeks?

Mr. Leon Benoit: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question asked and the comments made by the member opposite. I do not agree with them, but he certainly has a right to make comments like that.

In terms of what our government will continue to do from now until the time the House rises and what we can accomplish during that time, quite frankly that largely depends on the official opposition. The opposition must be willing to co-operate for a change, instead of opposing every single thing this government brings in.

That is what the opposition members do. They oppose everything. If we look at a list of legislation that they have actually supported,

we see they have done it because they have been embarrassed by the statistics, which show that they oppose virtually everything. The list is an extremely short list, and there is only a list of legislation that they support because of the embarrassment of opposing everything.

It is up to the member to determine what we as government will look at and accomplish before the end of the session. He has to look at himself and his colleagues beside him to determine how much legislation our government will pass in the rest of this session.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a number of members might have been somewhat surprised that the government indicated it would support this motion before us today, given its track record on the issue.

However, I have a very specific question for the member with respect to advertising. The government has spent literally three-quarters of a billion dollars on advertising over the last number of years. Much of it was political in nature. However, in terms of educating the public, there is value in using advertising to promote no-cost and low-cost accounts in an apolitical fashion. I wonder if the member could comment on the value of making Canadian consumers, in particular our seniors, more aware that there is an opportunity to save money if they can communicate with financial institutions where there are no-cost and low-cost accounts.

Mr. Leon Benoit: Mr. Speaker, to the last part of the member's question, perhaps I have a lot more faith in my constituents and in Canadians generally than he does. I think most Canadians recognize that banks do have special no-fee programs and other types of programs for people approaching retirement age. That is well known and well understood.

With respect to the member's comments on advertising, the government does spend money on advertising. The difference between what our government does and what his government did when his party was in office a few short years ago is that our money actually goes to a wide range of advertising companies in a fair and open way so that we can let consumers, voters, and Canadians know what programs we have to offer them. His government sent over \$40 million into the pockets of political friends.

We do not do that. That is why we brought in the Accountability Act as one of our first pieces of legislation when we took office in 2006.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

•(1650)

Hon. Wayne Easter: That's a lie. Say it outside. Do you want to promote that lie? Say it outside. Say it outside the door.

Mr. Leon Benoit: Let them holler, Mr. Speaker, but the truth is the truth. They cannot deny it. That is the truth. They were found guilty of that.

Mr. Chungsen Leung (Parliamentary Secretary for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Chungsen Leung: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the member opposite would conserve his comment until I have finished my remarks.

Business of Supply

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. If some members in this place want to have further conversation, I would suggest that they all take it outside the House and speak there.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary for Multiculturalism has the floor.

Mr. Chungsen Leung: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to discuss how our government continues to lower costs for businesses and consumers, and in the process update this House on all that this government has done on the subject in recent years.

Our government understands that Canadians are tired of hidden fees, and that is why we introduced a code of conduct for the credit and debit card industry in Canada. The code was launched in 2010 to promote fair business practices and ensure that merchants and consumers understand the costs and benefits associated with credit and debit cards.

At the same time, Canadian banks understand that they operate in a highly competitive environment and that they must be prepared to respond to the specific and often changing needs of Canadian consumers. Accordingly, the government believes that a strong consumer protection framework is one in which there is vibrant competition, fees are disclosed, and consumers can exercise choice.

On this front, we have introduced regulations relating to credit agreements, which came into force in 2010. These regulations accomplish a number of pro-consumer goals, including the following: strengthening consumer protection and limiting business practices that are not beneficial to consumers; requiring the provision of clear and timely information to Canadians about credit products, with a particular emphasis on credit cards; mandating a minimum 21-day, interest-free grace period on all new credit card purchases when a customer pays the outstanding balance in full; and requiring express consent for credit limit increases.

We continue to make progress in this regard. Last November, in fact, the government welcomed individual commitments by Visa and MasterCard to reduce their credit card fees for merchants, which should ultimately result in lower prices for consumers.

Specifically, Visa and MasterCard are voluntarily reducing their respective credit card fees for consumers to an average effective rate of 1.5% for a period of five years. These proposals include specific commitments that all merchants receive a reduction in credit card fees, while providing a greater reduction for small and medium-sized enterprises and charities, which have the least amount of bargaining power.

Canadians work hard for their money, and our government believes Canadians deserve to keep more of that money in their pockets. That is why we have taken action to improve low-cost accounts and expand access to no-cost banking services to protect consumers and save even more money for Canadians. In this spirit, in May 2014, the government secured voluntary commitments from Canada's eight largest banks to enhance low-cost bank accounts, and to offer no-cost accounts with the same features as low-cost accounts, to a wider range of eligible consumers. As a result, no-cost accounts are available to youth, students, seniors qualifying for the guaranteed income supplement, and registered disability savings plan beneficiaries.

This action fulfills a 2013 Speech from the Throne commitment to expand no-cost basic banking services, as well as an economic action plan 2014 commitment to enhance access to basic banking services. Moreover, just this past April, the government released an update to the code of conduct for the credit and debit card industry in Canada, delivering on a commitment made in 2014 to help make life more affordable for Canadians and entrepreneurs.

These new changes will make the code even stronger, by addressing unfair business practices and improving transparency for merchants and consumers, including new provisions that apply specifically to mobile payments.

Consumers will also benefit from a new requirement that credit card issuers disclose to consumers who apply for premium credit cards that the use of these cards results in higher merchant fees. This will help to empower consumers in selecting their payment method by disclosing the actual cost to merchants of accepting payments with a premium card.

When it comes to helping businesses with their payment costs, members should not just take my word for it. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business has said that the code of conduct for the credit and debit card industry in Canada, "...has served merchants extremely well... [It] has done an excellent job in ensuring some fair ground rules and maintaining Canada's low-cost debit system". They have also said that "...the Code played a big role in saving low-cost debit in Canada and it gave merchants some degree of power in dealing with the payments industry".

Therefore, despite the opposition's call for more support to empower consumers, we can see that our government has already taken considerable action in this regard.

• (1655)

We are supporting consumers and merchants by working collaboratively with financial institutions. We will not change course. I urge my opposition colleagues to support our efforts in this regard by voting in favour of our budget bill, which is a bill that contains many low-tax and pro-consumer measures.

Our initiatives go beyond law-making and regulation. They also include public outreach and education.

In April 2014, we announced the appointment of Jane Rooney as Canada's first-ever Financial Literacy Leader. Her mandate is to collaborate and coordinate activities with stakeholders to contribute to and support initiatives that strengthen the financial literacy of Canadians. This initiative will allow the government to broaden its efforts and help Canadians make more informed choices for themselves and their families.

This is nothing new. Throughout our time in office, our government has been focused on helping Canadian consumers identify and take advantage of the best possible financial products and services for their needs. We are not done yet.

Business of Supply

In economic action plan 2015, we proposed to amend the Bank Act to strengthen and modernize Canada's financial consumer protection framework to respond to the diverse needs of Canadians. For example, the financial consumer protection framework will provide improved access to basic banking services by allowing a broader range of personal identification, cooling-off periods for a greater range of products, and a new requirement that advertising be clear and accurate.

Unfortunately, the opposition, the NDP and Liberals, have committed to voting against our budget.

I should note that we have already accepted promises from the banks to end pay-to-pay practices as well. Hopefully, the next time the opposition will do their research before putting forward a motion like the one we are debating today.

As our actions have clearly demonstrated, the Government of Canada understands the importance of these costs that affect all Canadians, but we will continue to allow Canadians to keep more of their own money with lower taxes and increased benefits. The measures I have described today will benefit all Canadians, including the most vulnerable consumers. Moreover, they will help to provide all Canadians with the protections and tools necessary to make informed decisions on their financial futures.

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member told us that we should be doing our research. However, I would suggest that maybe he should do his. The fact is, despite all this bragging about the government's record up to this point, the Conservatives' code of conduct is voluntary. It is based on nothing but a good faith agreement. It is great that the Conservatives have sat down with stakeholders, but what has come out of those meetings is nothing but a good faith agreement to follow a voluntary code of conduct.

What we are asking for with this motion is that we finally put in place some concrete measures and a real code of conduct that would oblige banks to stop fleecing their customers when they try to access their own money or pay their bills with their money.

Despite the fact that the Conservatives say they are going in the right direction, does the member not agree that the code of conduct should be obligatory, not a voluntary one as it is right now? It is not leading to anything.

• (1700)

Mr. Chungsen Leung: Mr. Speaker, it appears that the member opposite does not have a lot of experience with financial institutions.

Prior to entering this House, I spent five years in public accounting, and one of my tasks was to audit some of the big banks. The member should know that banks, as profit institutions, are very concerned about how they govern themselves and how they win consumers. One of their tasks in doing that is to ensure they are competitive in this unregulated environment. It is regulated in the sense that we protect consumers, but unregulated in the sense that they do not have to comply with a day-to-day regulatory regime as to exactly how they should manage accounting, their fees, and so forth.

Government is not in a position to run the banking business. That is not our task. Let us leave that to the professionals in financial institutions.

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague who spoke earlier this morning on my private member's bill with respect to getting government advertising under control.

The member alluded to financial literacy a moment ago, which is a very important initiative for Canada, and for Canadians who have difficulty managing their credit, in the most indebted per capita population on the face of the planet today. I would like to know how much the government is spending on actual financial literacy outreach.

We know that the Conservatives spent \$12,000 to shrink wrap one train in the GO Transit system with a blue plastic wrap that said "economic action plan". We know that they spent \$30 million on 9,850 billboards around the country saying "economic action plan", and no other message. We learned today, just several hours ago, that the Prime Minister has ordered every department and agency in this country to put a link on their home page to his 24 Seven vanity video station, with no financial literacy message to my knowledge.

Can the parliamentary secretary explain how much is really being spent on helping Canadians understand?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before I go to the hon. parliamentary secretary, I would remind all hon. members that the conversation seems to have drifted a significant distance from the matter that is before the House. I will go to the parliamentary secretary, if he wishes to respond.

Mr. Chungsen Leung: Mr. Speaker, in response to the question of advertising, it is absolutely the responsibility of the government to communicate with Canadians on important programs and services that are available to them.

From time to time, government changes policy or fiscal strategies to meet the economic needs of the country, to move the country forward in terms of how we address the challenges of the 21st century and the challenges of the world economic system.

On this side of the House, we make no apologies for ensuring that middle-class Canadians are aware of the measures that would put more money back in their pockets, including an enhanced universal child care benefit, the family tax cut, and encouraging more Canadians to join the 11 million Canadians who benefit from tax-free savings accounts. Liberals would take these measures away from middle-class families if they had the choice.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak to the motion introduced by my colleague from Davenport, calling on the government to ban all pay-to-pay practices by banks operating in Canada through the enactment of a mandatory code of conduct to protect consumers.

I will be splitting my time with the member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl.

Business of Supply

I am an MP from the city of Toronto and Toronto is a place that has very high housing costs. We have a wait list of over 90,000 households trying to get affordable, subsidized housing in the city of Toronto. Barely 50% of workers in the GTA have some kind of job security. They have seen the amount of precarious work jump by 10% since 2011. Just recently, the Toronto Dominion Bank estimated that the wage gap between precarious and permanent employment was as high as \$18,000 a year.

Toronto, which is one of the most multicultural cities in the world, is finding that racialized workers have experienced a 30% increase in precarious employment since 2011. Poverty is increasing. Almost 10% of Torontonians seniors live in poverty. That is the most recent data since 2011 because of the undermining of our Statistics Canada data by the government. However, what we do know is that many seniors do not use the Internet. In 2013, in the U.S., about 59% of seniors used the Internet. Internet is significantly down for those who live in subsidized housing.

The reason I give these statistics about the city of Toronto and the people who live there is the fact that bank fees, which are unregulated by the government, are costing Canadians, costing Torontonians up to \$180 million a year. This is like a private sector tax that the government is allowing on some of the most vulnerable people in our society. Seniors, newcomers, low-income Canadians are paying up to \$180 million in really what is a private sector tax.

What am I talking about here? I am talking about the practice of banks charging customers a fee just to get a paper bill. For over 100 years, people have been receiving bills through the mail, either for utilities, or other accounts and then they go to the bank and pay their bill or they make out a cheque and send it through the mail. However, in 2011, Canadians started noticing charges appearing on their bill for the simple privilege, which I thought was a right, to receive a bill in a paper copy.

For seniors, that is the way a lot of them liked to bank. My mother was absolutely incensed when Bell Canada sent her a bill and charged her a couple of dollars for the privilege. She phoned it and was furious. She had been a customer for 60 years, had never been late with a payment, and suddenly it decided to charge her an extra couple of bucks for the privilege of paying a bill. Someone likened it to someone handing us a bill in a restaurant and then giving us an additional bill for a couple of bucks because he or she was handing us a bill.

If we buy a table in a department store and it charges a couple of dollars to give a receipt for the table, that is absolutely ludicrous. I want to thank my colleague from Davenport. He began campaigning on this and called it his "ending of pay-to-pay fees"; that is having to pay just for the privilege of paying a bill. He has noted quite rightly that it disproportionately affects seniors, low-income Canadians, newcomers to Canada, people who like to get paper copies or people who perhaps do not have access to the Internet, like more than 40% of Torontonians who live in subsidized housing. In Toronto community housing, people do not have access to computers.

• (1705)

Most Canadians agree with the right of people to get bills without additional fees. Forty per cent of Canadians have said that they are just not comfortable banking online, but three-quarters of Canadians

disapprove of charging Canadians for getting bills or statements. Most Canadians believe this is just the cost of doing business. Businesses invoice people and send the bills through the mail. That is the cost of doing business and it is accommodated appropriately in business plans.

The New Democrats have been talking to Canadians across the country. They have been signing petitions, emailing, phoning their MPs and going into constituency offices demanding action to get rid of these pay-to-pay fees. After strong pressure from the New Democrats, the government finally decided to take action on utility bills, but, inexplicably, left the banks out. It is very difficult to understand why the banks would be excluded from this. They are doing quite well. In the first quarters of their fiscal years, Canada's big banks have amassed more than \$16 billion in profits. RBC, just one of the major banks, has broken records by pulling in about \$5 billion in the first half of this year.

The point is that it is not like the banks are on the brink of bankruptcy. The banks are doing extremely well, yet not only have they been charging people to pay their bills but they thought this year it would be a good idea to start charging people to make payments on their lines of credit and mortgages. I am sure they thought that was a very good idea that would add even more profit to their bottom lines, but Canadians were absolutely outraged by it and have forced the banks to backtrack on it. However, Canadians should be comparatively outraged by the \$180 million that banks are ripping off from people by nickel and diming them \$2 at a time. Even these fees have been increasing.

The Public Interest Advocacy Centre has recommended that the government follow through on its commitment to eliminate the application of additional fees charged to Canadian consumers to receive any paper bill or statement. Certainly, the Canadian Association of Retired Persons has spoken out against this. It knows how angry seniors are by the charge just to get a bill from the bank. It says that it hardly seems fair that customers, through no fault of their own, are being charged \$2 for the privilege of paying a bill.

We do not need the wishy-washy voluntary code of conduct that the Conservative government has put forward. We need strong measures. We need a mandatory code of conduct that bans these extra fees that penalize those who can least afford to pay them. That is what the people of Toronto are telling me and what Canadians are saying right across the country.

Business of Supply

I thank my New Democrat colleagues for their strong support for banning pay-to-pay fees. I think the rest of the members in the House will probably support this measure. We need the Conservative government to take action, ban pay-to-pay fees, get tough with their friends in the banks, and benefit Canadian consumers and citizens right across the country.

• (1710)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, how many people living in poverty in Toronto simply cannot afford to pay for daily Internet access? Even if we told them to go on the Internet, they would not be able to pay for the connection. Furthermore, if they do not do what they are told to do, they have to pay fees. Is it common for people to not even be able to afford Internet access?

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, it is true that almost half the people living in subsidized housing in Toronto do not have an Internet connection at home and cannot afford Internet service. Paying \$2 a month to the bank is really like a tax for them, because it is hard for the very poor to pay their monthly bills. The government has no excuse for not moving to eliminate the fees charged by major banks, which make huge profits. It would be very easy for the government to eliminate these fees, just as it eliminated the fees of other companies.

• (1715)

[*English*]

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, as my colleague was finance critic before being industry critic, I would like to know if the Conservatives, at the same time as modifying what we have asked for, could improve other measures that could apply to banks in Canada and fees charged to consumers.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, there is a great deal the banks could do to appeal to consumers. We have long advocated for a capping of credit card rates. We have pressured for some time to reduce the fees charged to small businesses. That is an important step forward.

However, we really think the counterbalance, the growth of payday lenders across the country that can charge exorbitant interest rates and disproportionately have as customers people who are of low income, is a kind of no-frills credit card capped at a 5% interest rate. That would really be helpful for Canadians.

We have not had any take-up on that from the government, but it really would make a difference. There are times when people just need a little extra money to make ends meet and we allow them no other option than to go to payday lenders where they can be charged absolutely exorbitant rates. We are penalizing them even further. It is like a super tax on the people who can least afford it.

There is a great deal the government could do to make life more affordable for Canadians by working with the banking sector to make their consumer products much more accessible.

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I stand in support of the motion:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should ban all pay-to-pay practices by banks operating in Canada, through the enactment of a mandatory financial code of conduct to protect consumers.

I keep my finger on the pulse of my riding of St. John's South—Mount Pearl, in Newfoundland and Labrador. I am constantly out and about in the community, on the doorsteps, in the coffee shops, on the streets, on the wharves and even in the boats. I ask my constituents for constant feedback about issues ranging from child care, climate change, pensions, poverty and, of course, all federal issues having to do with the great province of Newfoundland and Labrador. If it moves here in Ottawa and it affects my province, I am all over it; I am on my feet in this House.

Most of the feedback I have received to date, as a member of Parliament, has to do with banks; more specifically, bank fees, which people see as generally too high, and credit card interest rates, which people also see as too high, through the roof, actually.

Household debt in Canada is alarming. The total debt owed by all Canadians, at the end of March, was a record \$1.8 trillion. We have gone a bit of a borrowing binge, that is how it has been described, living on credit.

However, I would say the banks have gone on a bit of a binge themselves. Household debt in Canada is at a record high, but bank profits are right up there, too. The top five banks in this country are making a killing. Profit is a good word. Profit is to be celebrated. Profit means growth. Profit means success.

However, is there a point when profit crosses the line into unfettered greed?

In the first two quarters of their fiscal years, Canada's top five banks amassed more than \$16 billion in profits. RBC, alone, had broken records by pulling in almost \$5 billion in only the first half of the year. I would say banking binge is pretty accurate.

I can tell members what drives me. My pet banking peeve is going to an ATM that is not with my bank but still one of Canada's big five and being charged \$3.00 to withdraw cash over and above my own bank fees. That is obscene. I will go without before I pay that \$3.00. It is the principle. It happens right outside this House, down on Sparks Street. I consider it gouging and I take that personally. I also take my business elsewhere.

One of our New Democratic Party proposals is to cap bank fees at federally regulated ATMs, those machines owned by chartered banks, at 50¢. The banks would still walk away with a healthy profit at 50¢ a transaction, but that is another topic.

Today's motion is about pay-to-pay, paying to pay a bill. Do members find that offensive? I do. Canadians, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, should not have to fork over their hard-earned dollars to receive a bank statement or to pay a bill.

Business of Supply

When was the last time members went into a restaurant and had to pay extra for the check, for the honour of being handed the check, or paying the check? That is what is pay-to-pay fees amount to: paying a fee to pay a bill.

Canadians will pay up to \$180 million this year alone just to receive bank statements. No one should be punished, charged, or receiving bank statements or paying their bills.

These fees that charge extra for the bill itself unfairly target seniors, about 40% of whom do not use the Internet. These fees unfairly target those without Internet access, which amounts to one in five homes in Canada, according to Statistics Canada. These fees unfairly target families already struggling to pay their bills. Forty-six per cent of households with incomes below \$30,000 a year do not have Internet.

In the 2013 Speech from the Throne, the Conservatives promised to end pay-to-pay policies so customers would not be charged extra to receive paper bills.

• (1720)

The Conservative budget 2014, last year, promised that again. However, then when it came to taking action the Conservative budget excluded banks from the stopping of pay-to-pay fees. It excluded them when it had a chance. It was \$180 million in 2013 and another \$180 million in 2014. That is a total of \$360 million that Canadians had to pay because the current Conservative government failed to act.

Last year, the Conservative government blocked telecommunications and cable companies from charging fees for paper bills. Why were the banks not included? I do not have an answer to that question. Mr. Speaker, do you have an answer to that question? I have asked around and I cannot get an answer. There is dead silence from that side of the House.

I was in this House today during question period when the Minister of Finance rose to his feet to say the government will be supporting this motion. Does he expect a pat on the back for that? He supports this motion, but when he had an opportunity to change the law of the land to stop banks from charging pay-to-pay fees, his government failed to act. It stopped short.

Sitting in this House today, watching the government in question period for example, it is obvious that the current government is on its last legs. The minister supports stopping the banks from charging pay-to-pay fees, but he did not outlaw those fees last year when telecommunications companies and cable companies were blocked from charging fees for paper bills. Again, the question is why not? The Conservatives are all over the place.

It reminds me of the finance minister's unexpected announcement last week that he is prepared to hear proposals to expand or enhance the Canada pension plan. The Conservatives had written off that idea, but now in an election year with no mention of it in the recent federal budget, they are possibly open to it. I just shake my head. They are all over the place. However, that is also a good thing, because it will not be long now and we will have a change of government.

I have a final word on banks. I am old enough to remember a day that when we called a branch we actually got someone from the branch on the phone. That is getting harder and harder to do. Banks are almost cold in terms of personal touch, and they are very calculated. It seems now to be all about the numbers. I cannot remember the last time I heard of a bank giving someone a break by writing off interest or forgiving a loan.

Yes, though, I can remember. An interesting news story broke back home in Newfoundland and Labrador over the last week. It was over how three major banks, Scotiabank, CIBC and the Royal Bank, wrote off \$371,000 in interest charges to the Liberal Party of Newfoundland and Labrador relating to a loan for the 2003 election campaign. It is a rare occurrence for an individual Newfoundlander or Labradorian or an individual Canadian to get a break from the banks.

We are being charged for paper bills; bank fees are too high; credit card interest rates are shocking; and, bank profit is measured in billions. In the meantime, the only one getting a break that I know of is the Liberal Party of Newfoundland and Labrador. That is not nearly good enough.

I will end on this: It will not be long now.

• (1725)

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague knows, the government is supportive of the motion presented by the NDP, but we do need to bring some sense of reality.

Canadians should be proud of the fact that for seven years in a row the World Economic Forum has recognized Canada as having the best banking system in the world. We can get basic major banking services for \$4 or less a month. We have a 21-day grace period for credit card payments in this country, which is something that was brought into force by this government.

About people saying “bank profits” and “banks exceeding”, we cannot see this as banks over here exceeding. I recall my father, who is a retired schoolteacher, complaining about this one time. I said to him, “Dad, let's go look at the Alberta teachers' retirement investments on the website”. It was bank after bank. I said, “Dad, your defined benefit pension plan is in part directly linked to banks doing well in this country”. We are very much linked in this Canadian society.

If we look at the Canada pension plan investments, something that the opposition members want to increase, we see that the Canada pension plan has loads of investments in our major banks. I would like the member to stand up and add a bit of balance to what he is saying in being so critical of the banking sector in this country.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Mr. Speaker, I am not so much critical of the banks, although I have been, for sure. I am more critical of the Conservative government. It had an opportunity. The government said it would act on the opportunity in 2013 to ban pay to pay, and it did not do it. It said it would ban pay to pay in 2014, and the Conservative government did not do it.

Business of Supply

Every year that costs Canadians \$180 million in pay-to-pay fees, and times two, it is \$360 million. That is how much Canadians, including Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, have had to pay because the Conservative government, which is so supportive of this motion, failed to act.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I must say I am a bit disappointed in the member's comments.

He tries to tie in the relationship of the Liberal Party and the banks. I say shame on the member. Quite frankly, the banks, as an industry, have loaned hundreds of thousands of dollars to the New Democratic Party as well.

I challenge the member to stand in his place and indicate that in no situation did the bank ever give any sort of break to the New Democratic Party.

Would the member not, at the very least, recognize that Canada has a healthy banking industry, second to no other banking industry in the world, and that in good part it is because of the actions taken by Jean Chrétien during the 1990s, which ultimately prevented Canada from going as far as other G7 countries around the world, in terms of their economics and the impact on their economies because of bank closures and foreclosures that have taken place?

I think the member's priorities might be somewhat misplaced.

• (1730)

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Mr. Speaker, to the member's first point about the Liberal Party of Newfoundland and Labrador that had \$371,000 in interest charges written off recently, by three major banks, I do not know why that was. The leader of the Liberal Party of Newfoundland and Labrador has yet to come out and explain that. It is a little too close for comfort.

In terms of the banks, yes, we do have a healthy banking system in Canada. That is beyond a shadow of a doubt. However, credit card interest rates are too high and they are hurting Canadians, they are hurting Newfoundland and Labrador families, and our bank fees are too high. When there are profits in the billions, with one bank alone making \$5 billion in the first half of this year, that says that balance has been lost, the balance between people and profit.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before I start, I would like you to know that I will be sharing my time with the member for Edmonton Centre.

Our government has a strong record of empowering Canadian consumers. We understand that when Canadians make decisions about how to spend their money, they must be assured their interests come first and that they are given fair treatment. That is why our government is pleased to support this motion. In fact, our government has already addressed the issue raised in the motion at hand. As such, it gives me great pleasure to take a moment to speak about the hard and effective work that our government has done to help middle-class consumers.

We have an actual record to stand on, in contrast to the NDP, which has voted against every consumer protection measure we have introduced.

In November 2014, the Minister of Finance accepted voluntary undertakings from Visa and MasterCard to reduce their average

effective interchange fees to 1.5%. In total, the two commitments represent a reduction in credit card fees of approximately 10%. These commitments represent a meaningful, long-term reduction in costs for merchants that should ultimately result in lower prices for consumers.

Furthermore, our government released the enhanced code of conduct for the credit and debit card industry in Canada in April, a move which ensured that merchants and consumers have the information they need to make informed decisions and that they are not gouged by credit and debit card companies. The enhanced code of conduct includes a new measure to ensure that credit card issuers disclose to cardholders that premium credit cards can result in higher fees to merchants.

In economic action plan 2015, we will continue to build on this record by introducing a new and exclusive financial consumer framework for federally regulated banks. This would ensure that banks are more accountable when it comes to consumer protection, such as in advertising and the sale of products. This framework will be good for small businesses and for consumers. Unfortunately, the opposition appears to oppose this measure, along with the rest of the low-tax, pro-job measures that our government has introduced in our most recent budget. Measures such as these would ensure that small businesses benefit from a meaningful reduction in credit card acceptance costs, which would in turn be beneficial for consumers.

As we know, small businesses are the backbone of the Canadian economy. Beyond lowering merchant fees, our government has a record of helping small businesses grow and succeed. Small businesses account for 99% of all businesses in Canada and employ half of the working men and women in the Canadian private sector. Our government believes that small businesses should spend their time growing their businesses and creating jobs. That is why we have cut taxes significantly for small businesses and their owners since 2006. Economic action plan 2015 would go even further.

In the fall of 2014, our government introduced the small business job credit, which will help small businesses save more money. Then, in economic action plan 2015, our government proposed to reduce the small business tax rate to 9% by 2019. This would be the largest tax rate cut for small businesses in more than 25 years. It is estimated that this measure will reduce taxes for small businesses and their owners by \$2.7 billion between 2015 and 2020. For example, as a result of this tax cut and other measures since 2006, for a small business with a taxable income of \$500,000, the amount of federal tax paid in 2019 will be 46% lower than in 2006. This represents an annual tax reduction of up to \$38,600, which can be reinvested in the business to fuel its growth and create jobs for Canadians.

Unfortunately, the opposition parties have chosen to vote against our measures that are designed to help small businesses and consumers. In opposing our current budget bill, the NDP and the Liberals are demonstrating their lack of understanding of the important role that small businesses play in the Canadian economy.

Business of Supply

● (1735)

The hon. member prefaces his motion with the notion that the government should take immediate steps to make the cost of living more affordable for the middle class, and we could not agree more. That is why we have cut taxes over 180 times since coming to office. In fact, the overall federal tax burden is currently at its lowest level in 50 years. We believe it is simply the right thing to do. By putting more money in the pockets of Canadians, we are helping them to make ends meet and spend more on what matters to them.

Since 2006, the government has introduced measures to make life more affordable for Canadians. We have cut the GST from 7% to 5%, established tax credits to support working low-income individuals and families, public transit users, first-time home buyers, and families caring for disabled relatives. We have provided additional support for families with children through the children's art and fitness tax credits, and the enhancement of the registered education saving plan and the adoption expense tax credit. We have introduced the new family tax cut, and enhancements to the universal child care benefit and child care expense deduction, measures which will provide support to every single Canadian family with children under the age of 18. Canadians at all income levels are benefiting from the tax relief introduced by the government, with low- and middle-income Canadians receiving proportionately greater relief.

In 2015, a typical two-earner family of four will receive tax relief and increased benefits of up to \$6,600 as a result of the measures introduced since 2006. These low-tax measures also build on our pro-consumer record, which includes removing tariffs on baby clothes and certain sporting equipment to help reduce the cost of these goods for Canadian families, banning negative option billing for financial products, requiring all-inclusive airfare advertising to ensure that consumers can clearly see the total price of an airline ticket with no hidden fee, and much, much more.

By keeping taxes low for small businesses and individuals, our Conservative government is demonstrating our commitment to creating jobs and making life more affordable. Moreover, by working with banks and credit card companies, we are ensuring that all Canadian consumers are protected and well educated in order to make informed choices about their financial futures.

Today, Canada stands tall in the world. Over 1.2 million more Canadians are working now than at the end of the recession. The majority of these net new jobs have been full-time positions in high-wage, private-sector industries. Canada has posted one of the strongest job performances in the G7. The International Monetary Fund and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development expect Canada's growth, already ahead of our peers during the recovery, to continue to be solid.

Our government continues to be absolutely committed to job creation and economic growth, objectives that have underpinned our economic action plan since its inception in 2009. By staying the course and sticking to our proven economic action plan, our government will remain committed to helping all Canadian consumers. Let us hope that the NDP will finally start supporting our pro-consumer measures for once.

● (1740)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today we are talking about the excessive fees charged by Canada's major banks and credit unions to the poor customers who have no choice and who are being squeezed. The middle class is trapped, no matter which financial institution they use, since the practices are similar from one bank to the next.

Could my Conservative colleague comment on the fact that the vast majority of small businesses do not impose fees on their customers when they send out a bill? How does he think these poor, poor big financial institutions and corporations can justify imposing these fees on their customers?

I think his response will show whether the Conservative government is serious, considering it has given the major banks a free pass to impose excessive fees without any consequences.

[*English*]

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the hon. member.

It is absolutely true. When we look at different ways in which small and medium businesses send bills, whether electronically or by mail, there is no intent on their part to add more insult to injury.

That is the frustration we have with mandatory fees. That is why in our economic action plan, we will ensure these changes are done and that consumers will be protected in that area in the same manner as we have protected them in so many other areas.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, many of the Conservative members who rise to talk about the motion today infer that they will be supporting the motion, which is great, and then they go on to talk about the economic action plan.

I am reflecting on what the late Jim Flaherty said in regard to income splitting, which is a major platform for the government and is part of that economic action plan. Mr. Flaherty said that less than 15% of the Canadian population would benefit from the hundreds of millions of dollars annually that it would cost to support that initiative.

As the member talks about the issue of fairness, how does he justify telling 85% of the population that they are not a part of that \$2 billion annual commitment from the government?

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Mr. Speaker, when there is a general discussion about income splitting, we have to look at what has actually occurred. Breaking it down, there would be a maximum amount that could be transferred to minimize the amount of tax. That is part of it.

Business of Supply

However, it is also a case of fairness. When we look at the numbers, if an individual is making \$20,000 and their spouse is making \$60,000, it works out to \$80,000. When we compare that to a scenario where two people are making \$40,000, much more tax is being paid. I believe it is around \$1,100.

Further, it is a case of looking at the potential with different types of families and making that where the fairness comes in. There are caps, which is the other aspect to it, but, again, it is to try to make it fair for all individual families because it had not been to that point in time.

• (1745)

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the things we have not talked much about today is financial literacy and how we can educate our youth with regard to needs versus wants and spending versus saving.

I would like to hear from my hon. colleague from that perspective.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Mr. Speaker, I spent my life as a high school math and physics teacher. For 34 years, I talked about economics and dealing with the ability for individuals to manage their accounts, how to deal with income tax, setting up their Canada pension plans, and managing and understanding EI, as well as concepts of savings and annuities. Those are the sorts of things I have been proud of being able to deal with.

When I saw that our government brought in the national financial literacy, I was extremely proud. I encourage all Canadians to make sure that they can deal with that in a proper manner.

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again it is an honour to highlight our government's strong record in boosting the financial literacy of all consumers.

In basic terms, financial literacy means having the knowledge, skills, and confidence to make responsible financial decisions. It is essential to the prosperity and financial well-being of Canadians, and therefore our country. While governments clearly have a role to play, and this government has played its part, protecting consumers must include giving them the tools they need to protect themselves.

I want to acknowledge the excellent work in this area by my friend and colleague, the hon. member for Edmonton—Leduc. In November 2011, he introduced private member's motion M-269 to help improve financial literacy in Canada and give Canadians valuable tools to help them make better informed financial decisions.

In March 2012, that motion was approved by the House of Commons.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. The hon. member for Davenport on a point of order.

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Speaker, while I find the train of thought most interesting and potentially edifying, it is not the question that the House is seized with today. We are talking about a motion to ban pay-to-pay fees and introduce a mandatory code of conduct in this regard for the banking sector. I would encourage the member to speak to the motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I appreciate the intervention by the hon. member for Davenport. Of course, relevance is an important standard that we keep in the House of Commons as

best we can. That said, members will know that there is a great deal of liberty given to hon. members to present their ideas and arguments. They are required eventually to bring those ideas together in terms of addressing the question that is before the House.

I recognize the member for Edmonton Centre is scarcely a minute into his remarks and I am sure he is going to elaborate on those ideas and bring them together in the course of his remarks.

The hon. member for Edmonton Centre.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, I do find it a trifle bizarre that somebody is talking about relevance 30 seconds or so into a 10-minute speech. This topic is all about investor literacy in dealing with banks that may be charging pay to pay, to give people the understanding to be able to choose banks on that basis or any other basis. This is all about financial literacy, and if my hon. colleague will allow me my time, I think he will find that we are talking about the protection of consumers and about literacy, part of which is understanding things like pay to pay.

Canada is proud to be a world leader in promoting financial literacy for all Canadians so that they can make decisions.

In the 12 years between my military career and my political career, I was a financial adviser and branch manager for investment firms in Edmonton. A large part of our job was counselling people on effective financial and retirement planning, which too many people take for granted, sometimes with disastrous results after it is too late to change. People do not plan to fail, but they do fail to plan.

We continue to take action to ensure that Canadians can learn the skills they need to make solid financial choices, such as what bank to deal with, which may or may not be charging particular fees.

In 2011 we declared November as Financial Literacy Month. Each successive literacy month has involved more organizations, bringing more resources and events that have helped more Canadians improve their personal money know-how and skills. Budget 2013 committed \$3 million specifically to initiatives to develop Canada's financial literacy.

In April 2014, Jane Rooney was appointed as Canada's first financial literacy leader. I am sure that many in the House, perhaps even my hon. colleague, may have heard Ms. Rooney talk about the National Steering Committee on Financial Literacy and the consultations it has held with a broad range of individuals and groups. That is a great example of collaboration to strengthen financial literacy in action.

Business of Supply

Our country can also be very proud to now have its own Canadian financial literacy database. This one-stop shop will guide Canadians toward the information, educational tools, and events they need to answer their financial questions and improve their financial know-how. This new tool is the perfect example of the power of collaboration among public, private, and non-profit sectors to deliver useful information and resources that people can use right now.

Hundreds of activities are already being featured in the database, and I strongly encourage all members of the House to take the time to look at the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada's website at itpaystoknow.gc.ca. This tool was created for the benefit of all Canadians.

Efforts such as these and others offered by the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada are certainly needed. Many struggle to pay their regular bills and many more lack financial understanding about the costs of owning a home and about how much money they will need to retire. Young people, seniors, newcomers to Canada, and low-income Canadians are among the most in need of targeted efforts to improve their financial literacy so they do not fall prey to nickel-and-diming by banks.

Many seniors, for example, are entering their retirement years carrying debt. We need to act to give them the tools they need to understand their retirement needs, and we are. In 2014, the FCAC carried out public consultations with seniors groups across Canada and in mid-October released "Strengthening Seniors' Financial Literacy", the seniors component of the overall national strategy for financial literacy.

The seniors strategy has four goals: first, to engage more Canadians in preparing financially for their future years as a seniors; second, to help current seniors plan and manage their financial affairs; third, to improve understanding of and access to public benefits for seniors; and fourth, to increase tools to combat financial abuse of seniors, such as nickel-and-diming by banks.

We are already seeing results. As a stated goal of FCAC's national strategy for financial literacy, combatting financial abuse of seniors has brought together many public, private, and non-profit sector organizations united by a common goal. I will highlight some of the objectives and initiatives targeting financial abuse that are part of this effort.

The first objective is to ensure seniors and their caregivers have access to the tools they need to identify and prevent financial abuse and are aware of what to do if it happens.

The second objective is to ensure governments and stakeholders collaborate to enhance understanding of financial abuse and fraud targeting seniors, the factors that contribute to financial abuse, and effective fraud prevention techniques.

The effort will provide front-line credit union staff with the tools they need to recognize and help combat elder abuse, and it helps to meet both those objectives.

I also spent three years as a member of the board of the Lakeland Credit Union in Cold Lake, Alberta. I want to applaud the credit union movement for the great work it does, especially in smaller

communities and especially in combatting higher fees for financial services.

Credit Union Central and Elder Abuse Manitoba are being joined by many other groups active in supporting in this area.

● (1750)

Some examples include the new horizons for seniors program, which supports projects led or inspired by seniors who make a difference in the lives of others in their communities. Expanding awareness of elder abuse, including financial abuse, is among its critical objectives.

We live in a complex world where we can spend money by clicking a mouse, swiping a card, or using a mobile device. With so many ways to spend money, it is easy to get buried in debt and it is not so easy to dig oneself out. In fact, according to Statistics Canada, household debt among Canadians remains close to record highs. This can make consumers vulnerable to a rise in interest rates. It can also impact the food budgets of families on fixed incomes.

This is why our government has made financial literacy a priority here too. It is a key component of Canada's economic action plan. That is the reason we set aside an additional \$3 million in budget 2013 for collaboration and coordination. At the FCAC website right now, there is valuable advice on getting out of debt, rebuilding a credit rating, and paying off a mortgage faster, among many other topics. There are also calculators for choosing the right bank account or mortgage and setting financial goals.

Our government understands that when Canadians make decisions about how to spend their money, they must be assured that their interests come first and that they are given fair treatment. That is why our government has consistently demonstrated a strong commitment to consumer protection by ensuring that Canadians are being treated fairly and getting value for their hard-earned dollars.

Business of Supply

We have demonstrated that commitment in many ways: by better protecting Canadians using prepaid cards with increased transparency and new consumer protection rules; by requiring greater disclosures of mortgage prepayment charges; by strengthening the position of credit card users by imposing a mandatory 21-day interest-free grace period on credit cards, banning unsolicited credit card cheques, and requiring consent for credit limit increases; by better protecting seniors using financial services by requiring enhanced disclosure by banks on the costs and benefits of using powers of attorney and joint accounts, as well as requiring more robust processes and staff training related to these services; by enhancing access to basic banking services by expanding and modernizing no-cost basic banking services for youths, students, and seniors, as well as ensuring consumers do not have to pay for monthly printed credit card statements; by improving transparency and fairness in the credit card market by developing options to lower the costs faced by merchants to accept credit cards while ensuring those lower costs are passed on to consumers; and by securing a commitment from the major banks to voluntarily provide a range of basic banking services for \$4 or less per month.

We must ensure that Canadians are best positioned to make wise financial decisions, allowing them to drive Canada's economy. This is just another way that our government is ensuring that Canada can create jobs, growth, and long-term prosperity.

Specific to today's motion, banning pay-to-pay bank fees is the kind of thing we intend to look at, including in the mandatory financial consumer protection framework that we promised in economic action plan 2015. Canadian consumers can count on our government.

• (1755)

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for an excellent speech. Earlier, I spoke too soon.

I want to ask my hon. colleague, given the importance of, as he described it, financial literacy, especially among young people, and given that it is difficult for many Canadians to even find the time to switch banks when the big five banks are largely moving in lockstep on many of these fees, does he think it is important for this Parliament and this government to move quickly to ensure that the intention we express today around pay-to-pay fees is fast-tracked with legislation so that when the House recesses, we have a law on the books?

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question and his patience.

Consumers do need to make choices, and it is very difficult sometimes. He is quite correct. There is a plethora of information and small print, so it is really hard for the average person to sort that out. Therefore, it is important that governments take the opportunity, when they can, to make it easier for consumers for their own protection.

We do not regulate the day-to-day operations of banks, but we have obtained commitments from the banks to end pay-to-pay practices.

In terms of legislation or bringing it into law, or whatever needs to be done by the House to do that, as a general statement we would all like government to move more quickly. However, when one is not in government, it is always moving far too slowly. Even when one is in government, it moves more slowly than I would like in many areas. That is a function of the realities of government, the realities of bureaucracy, the realities of working to put it all together.

Yes, I agree that we should move as quickly as we can. We made the commitments and we intend to follow up on them.

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to go back to a question I asked one of my colleague's caucus mates a moment ago. It speaks directly to his opening remarks.

He said this was very much, in fact entirely, a question of financial literacy. I think he referred then to a \$3-million expenditure of some kind, in terms of overall outreach in financial literacy terms for the country. I am not sure what fiscal year he was referring to.

I want to ask the member to be clear for us. How much has the Government of Canada spent on financial literacy engagement and advertising with respect to Canadians, to help them get their spending, in some circumstances, under control?

We know how much the government has spent in other sectors, including \$30 million on 9,850 billboards across the country, including in the member's riding, and counting. I am asking him specifically how much the government has spent on advertising to communicate with Canadians a meaningful message on financial literacy.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, my colleague's question clearly has a political purpose, which is fine. We are here for politics.

I do not have a specific number. I do not have a copy of the estimates with me. The number I was referring to was \$3 million in budget 2013 specifically for initiatives to develop Canadians' financial literacy. That went, at least partially, to appointing, in April 2014, Ms. Jane Rooney, Canada's financial literacy leader.

I cannot give the specifics about what she does day to day, or anything like that, but I know she has been active in that area. A lot of came back to my colleague for Edmonton—Leduc. We are all committed. We are all at various stages of life. Some of us are seniors, some are in other stages, but we all need a little support.

If the member is looking for a specific dollar amount, I clearly do not have it. I can say that the government is committed to protecting consumers. This is part of it. The support of this motion is part of it. There is no one silver bullet. However, taken together, we are making progress and we will continue to do that.

Business of Supply

•(1800)

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and for La Francophonie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated my colleague's speech on financial literacy. Obviously that is important in our society.

This motion is really about mandatory fees. We all hate mandatory fees, whether it is from banks or the government. Recently, the leader of the Liberal Party talked about big mandatory fees when it comes to CPP deductions. There is no choice. People have to pay in. Of course, he said it would be modelled after what we have in Ontario, where it would be invested in infrastructure projects and so on. It would not even be held in trust.

Could my colleague please comment on that, the idea of mandatory fees and a payroll tax, both for employees as well as for employers?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I am not sure the question is really relevant specifically to the content we have in front of us. I do see the hon. member for Edmonton Centre rising. He may want to handle the question, just the same. We will let him go ahead.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, I will cut my hon. colleague some slack, because it is all related.

It is about the knowledge of how to deal with those issues. One of the issues, as Canadians, is how to deal with retirement. CPP is there. It is in relatively good shape. It is well managed. We need to give Canadians options that they need to understand. That is where this comes in, whether it is bank fees or whatever. Canadians need to understand the options.

The only option should not be to give the government money and it will look after that money. The options should be that there are TFSA's, CPP that we all contribute to, income-splitting and a variety of things that Canadians can use to manage their retirement. That is what it is all about. It is giving Canadians the option and the education, and then letting them make their own decisions.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am glad that I can rise today and spend 10 minutes talking about a motion that I think is very important. It shows where the NDP and all of the other parliamentarians here in the House of Commons stand. I can see that the motion moved by my colleague from Davenport is resonating with the other parties.

Right now, big Canadian banks are abusing taxpayers and the middle class. We know that, in the past, the Conservative government preferred self-regulation for many industries, including the banking industry. Unfortunately, that is not working because there is not enough competition and all of the financial institutions have something to gain by squeezing people just a little more.

When we talk about excessive banking fees, we are not necessarily talking about big amounts of money individually. For example, someone who wants to get a bill in the mail rather than electronically, for whatever reason, often has to pay \$2 or \$3. We are not talking about big amounts of money, but unfortunately all of those fees charged across Canada add up to \$180 million. That is a lot. People in the riding I represent in the Saguenay and those in the

riding held by my colleague from Surrey North, with whom I will be sharing the second part of my speaking time, are paying those fees.

There are excessive fees and, unfortunately, the Conservative government is choosing to turn a blind eye. I wonder why it has avoided dealing with this for so long. We know that last year, the government responded to pressure from the NDP to tighten the screws on big companies that were charging fees to send a bill to a person's home, but oddly, the government left out the banks, which often send out paper copies of bank statements. It is the clients who pay.

What the NDP is asking Canadian parliamentarians to do is to vote in favour of the following motion:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should ban all pay-to-pay practices by banks operating in Canada through the enactment of a mandatory financial code of conduct to protect consumers.

I would like to think that all the financial institutions, including the one I use, put their clients and Canadian society ahead of profits. However, in our economic model, it is unrealistic to think that every decision the financial institutions make will serve the public interest ahead of the interests of shareholders or banking executives.

For that reason I believe, as do my NDP colleagues, that we should make this code of conduct mandatory. That is not unreasonable. We are asking the major banks not to take advantage of people. People who pay excessive fees for using an ATM or receiving a bill are not naive. We are basically caught in this system.

When we were growing up we were told to save, which is a very good thing. I hope that people no longer put their \$20 bills in a wool sock at the bottom of a drawer. I think we all agree that that can cause different problems. People are encouraged to invest, to save and to put money in the bank or credit union for school, for retirement and for medium-term projects.

We trust financial institutions. As consumers and Canadians, we trust our financial institutions to properly manage our money and to ensure that we can withdraw our money when we need it.

Unfortunately, in 2011, we really began noticing the tack being taken by large corporations and the big banks: they began charging \$2 to people who wanted to receive their bills at home. That was when we noticed that the charges were less than ideal. This type of abuse was condemned by the media and even the general public.

•(1805)

Our services, including bank services and telecommunications services, are already so expensive these days. If people have to pay another \$2 or \$3 for the huge privilege of paying a bill, which I say sarcastically of course, then they are being fleeced.

Business of Supply

I am proud to say that my colleagues and I have gathered over 12,000 signatures over the past few months to support the NDP's petition, which calls on the government to do the right thing and ban pay-to-pay fees. It is a relatively new phenomenon. There was no mandatory code of conduct in the past, but even so, for the past 50 years, banks and large corporations did not normally charge their customers for a paper invoice. The vast majority of people feel that it is just common sense that this kind of expense is part of the operating costs of any company, bank or SME.

In fact, most SMEs do not charge these fees, even though they need their customers' money more than large corporations to stay in business. Why, then, do the big banks feel the need to charge these excessive fees? It is just wrong.

When it comes time to vote today, we could take a step forward by adopting the NDP's motion, so that taxpayers and the middle class can keep more of their money in their wallets. As I mentioned earlier, Canadians pay \$180 million a year in abusive fees charged by the big banks. It is unacceptable. Unfortunately, as I also mentioned, the Conservatives have been complicit in this abuse for quite some time.

For over two years now, the NDP has been exerting pressure on the government to eliminate these kinds of fees. However, it disappointed me, because either it did not take this issue seriously or it preferred to help its friends, the big banks.

In the 2013 throne speech, the Conservative government promised to put an end to "pay-to-pay" policies so that consumers would not have to pay fees to get paper statements. The NDP highlighted that initiative in 2013. However, the government did not do much in 2013 except make nice promises.

A year later, the 2014 budget once again promised to end the practice of charging fees for bills. When it came time to walk the walk, however, the budget implementation bill exempted banks, leaving Canadians to pay \$180 million per year, as I mentioned.

We, the opposition members, and the Canadian people are now familiar with the government's approach. It makes promises but does not follow through often enough. My Conservative colleagues will tell us that they have reduced various fees and cut red tape for businesses to help them make more money. Bureaucracy sometimes prevents businesses from doing business and can make life extremely difficult for people for all the wrong reasons, which is frustrating. However, I still do not know why the government did not want to tighten the screws on the banks at that time.

I do not have much time left, but I have so much to say. I could have spoken for 20 minutes, but I really want to hear what my colleague from Surrey North has to say about this. I will conclude with some statistics.

A Public Interest Advocacy Centre survey showed that 40% of respondents were not comfortable with paying their bills online, so we cannot assume that everyone wants to pay bills online. The survey also showed that one in five households does not have Internet at home. Among the lowest-income households, those with an income of \$30,000 or less per year, 46% do not have Internet at home.

• (1810)

[English]

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I pulled a short letter that a constituent sent to me regarding this issue. She writes that she has multiple accounts with TD, has been a customer there for 30 years and that it has charged \$2 for each account statement. She has opted for online billing, but needs to print her copies for her records, so she ends up paying for ink and the paper to print her own bills. As she says in the letter, "Either way, I lose". She also goes on to say, "I have my own business. I can only laugh at the idea that my customers would be agreeable to me charging them for printed invoices".

Could my colleague share with us some of the realities in his riding and how a ban on pay-to-pay fees would help many of the people he represents?

[Translation]

Mr. Dany Morin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my NDP colleague from Davenport for bringing this very important motion forward and also for his question.

Much to my dismay, the riding that I represent, Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, in the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean region, is not one of the wealthier ridings in Canada, and our unemployment rate is very high.

Unfortunately, many people are not necessarily part of the middle class. Either they are living in poverty or they have very tight budgets and have to make tough choices. This includes people raising families and single people alike.

I go door to door a lot in my riding, and these individuals often welcome me into their home or apartment, where I can see their situation. I often go to them with a petition. One such petition was precisely about these pay-to-pay fees.

I also often ask them for an email address, so that I can stay in touch with them. Honestly, I always feel a twinge of sadness when they tell me they do not have the Internet at home, and unfortunately, it is not usually by choice. Often, these individuals do not even have a phone.

I think the federal government needs to do everything in its power to ensure that people who are living in precarious financial situations can pay their bills like any good citizen, and not be exploited by these overly greedy financial institutions.

• (1815)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when we talk about the tens of millions of dollars that have been collected through individuals or banks collecting on the pay-to-pay, the people who are most affected by that are those who are on fixed incomes or who can least afford to do extra paying.

The member just made reference to those people who might not have access to the Internet. There is no doubt that some people in society are hurt more and affected more by the whole principle of paying to pay. Would the member not agree?

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Mr. Dany Morin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my Liberal colleague for that good question.

Not only do these fees affect everyone, but the negative impact is even more outrageous and cruel for different segments of the population. We might even say that this type of fee is discriminatory towards certain segments of the population.

I mentioned those who live in a very precarious financial situation, but there are also seniors. I am quite pleased when some of them turn to the web.

However, since the Internet was not part of their everyday lives for decades, some seniors are not inclined to have a computer or Internet access. A disproportionate number of those people end up paying these extra fees, and I find that tough to take.

Essentially, both families and individuals are being penalized by this. I understand my colleague's question. Seniors and people living in poverty are affected by this more than others. This is outrageous for every segment of the population.

I would like the people at home to look at their bills and add up how much money they spend on these excessive fees every year as a family or as an individual. They would be surprised, and I think they would be even more outraged.

[English]

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as always, it is an honour to speak in the House on behalf of my constituents from Surrey North. Today, we are talking about pay-to-pay fees. The motion states in part:

—the government should ban all pay-to-pay practices by banks operating in Canada, through the enactment of a mandatory financial code of conduct to protect consumers.

To explain it in simple terms, pay-to-pay fees are not only charges from the bank to send people their bills, but charges for people to pay their bills. It is a payment on top of a payment.

It sounds ridiculous. We should not be discussing this in the House. The Conservatives should have banned this practice a long time ago. They have been in government for nine years. Before that, we had the guys in the corner. None of those members chose to address this issue over the years. The banks have been gouging Canadians, trying to take their hard-earned money just to receive a bank statement.

Under the Conservatives, Canadians are paying millions of dollars to their friends, the big banks. Estimates from research show how big an issue this is. It is \$180 million of the hard-earned money of Canadians that the friends of the Conservatives, the big banks, have pickpocketed from the very people who need the money to make ends meet.

Instead of cracking down on these excessive fees, the Conservatives have refused to take action over the last nine years, siding with their friends, the big banks. It is the New Democrats who are standing up for Canadians. We are fighting on behalf of Canadians to ensure they are not being gouged and that their pockets are not being picked by the banks, with the help of the Conservatives.

In 2011, Canadians started noticing this extra billing. The banks were starting to charge Canadians for getting their bills through the mail, and it was not only the banks that were doing it. Utility companies, telephone companies, Internet and cable companies were also doing it. All of these companies started to jump on the bandwagon, looking at it as another way to gouge Canadians, waiting to see if anybody noticed. The Conservatives did not notice it at all. In fact, they were helping the big companies that were gouging Canadians. It was the NDP that raised this issue first, back in 2012. We have been trying to get the Conservatives to come on board and help protect Canadians. They have not been paying attention to any of that, so it is good to see them supporting this motion.

My question for the Conservatives is whether they will have this amendment in the budget implementation bill, or will they want a unanimous motion in the House so we can get this done before the House rises for the summer? We are willing to work with the Conservatives and the third party to ensure that we put a stop to this gouging and picking of the pockets of Canadians. We can do this right now. We can do it today.

However, I doubt the sincerity of the Conservatives' pledge, because they have not done it for the last nine years. Is this another gimmick before the election? I hope not. I hope the Conservatives are sincere and get this done before we break for the summer.

The Conservatives did include an item in the budget implementation act and the throne speech because of the pressure we have applied over the last three years. We have talked to consumers and to families about the very fees that have been extracted from them.

● (1820)

Because of pressure from the NDP, the Conservatives backed off and eliminated pay-to-pay fees for the telephone, cable, gas and utility companies. Why not the banks? Is this because the banks have a very special relationship with the Conservatives? The five big banks made \$16 billion in the last two fiscal quarters. The Conservatives say that they will put money back into the pockets of Canadians. Here they are helping to steal money from the pockets of Canadians to give to their friends. This is their record. Are they really interested in being on the side of families? My colleagues and I in the New Democratic Party are on the side of Canadian families, of seniors, and of people who are making ends meet. The current Conservative government is not on the side of the average or middle-class families. In fact, it is helping to pick the pockets of those very families it pretends to be helping out.

I have often talked about this. I owned a small business myself. I know that small business is the economic engine of this country and generates the majority of the jobs being generated in the Canadian economy. When it comes to protecting and fostering small businesses and helping them create new jobs, the Conservatives lack any sort of motivation to help the very people who are creating these jobs.

Business of Supply

The Conservatives borrowed one of our ideas. The NDP said we would cut the small business tax by 2 percentage points and would do it sooner. The Conservatives borrowed that idea, which is fine. However, they will back end it so that it will start a few years later than what we had proposed. This was our idea to ensure that consumers are protected. Now the Conservatives are getting on board, but I feel uncomfortable as to how sincere they are in bringing about this change.

Small businesses the economic engines of this country. Having been a business owner I know first-hand about the very merchant fees being charged or how small businesses are being gouged by the credit card companies and the big banks. I am not talking about small charge here, I am talking about 3%, 4% to 6%. That is a lot of money. That sometimes is the difference between making a profit or not making a profit. I know that because I experienced it first-hand when I watched thousands of dollars being racked up by the credit card companies under the guise of merchant and other fees. That sometimes was the difference between whether we made money one month or the next month.

If we look at the other fees that the banks are charging, they are anywhere from a couple of dollars to \$3.00 or \$4.00 when we try to withdraw our own money. This is not someone else's money but our own money. We have been asking and pressuring the current government to ensure that Canadians get reasonable service. We know the banks have to make a profit and that they have to deliver. However, gouging is something that we on this side of the House will not tolerate.

I can assure members that come October 2015, Canadians will be looking for a leadership that protects their interests and are looking to the NDP. The Conservatives will not be here come October because they have failed to protect Canadians and have failed to protect the very pockets of the families they are helping to pick out of to give to their friends.

With that, I am ready for any questions from the Conservative side.

● (1825)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think it is ludicrous that the government and the Conservative members across the aisle say that they support the middle class, cutting taxes and eliminating fees. They did not ask a single question after my colleague from Surrey North finished his excellent speech. I wonder if they were listening. I listened carefully to my colleague's speech, and I would like to thank him for it.

I would like to ask him a question about the rather unhealthy relationship between these big banks and their customers. In the first half of the year, the five major banks earned \$16 billion. What kind of power do these banks have over the little guy, families, youth, the poor and seniors?

[*English*]

How can the little guy fight against those big institutions?

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, what power does the little guy have? The power rests within this group here, the NDP, because we will fight on their behalf in this House. The gouging that is taking

place has gone on for long enough. We have had that third party in the corner there, and we have had the Conservatives ganging up on Canadian consumers for far too long. It is time to stop. It is time to stop this pay-to-pay that has been going on. It is time to stop paying the big fees that they charge consumers to even take out their own money.

Come October 2015, I can assure members that we will be standing up for Canadian families, and Canadians will recognize that. The Conservatives and the Liberals will be sent packing outside of this House.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is good to see that the member is not biased in terms of what he anticipates will be taking place at the end of the year. I would challenge him on his conclusions, I must say.

One of the things that provides competition for big banks is our credit unions, other financial institutions, which are under provincial jurisdiction.

We have a New Democratic government in the province of Manitoba. I wonder if the member might provide some advice to provincial governments of all political stripes, even the NDP, that they should also be looking at ways to deal with the idea of paying to pay. In Manitoba, for example, on the other side, if we get a fine and want to pay the fine, we end up paying to pay the fine. We hope to see that the NDP in Manitoba will try to get that one right also.

Could the member perhaps provide some comments on credit unions, which have done well in terms of providing competition in Canada?

● (1830)

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, I will stick to the federal issues. I deal with a credit union, Vancity, and it provides wonderful service.

One thing I will let this House know is that the Liberals and the Conservatives have been hand in glove with the big banks over the last 148 years that we have existed. I can assure members that it is the NDP, the New Democratic Party, that stands with Canadians, that will stand with consumers, to ensure that their pockets are not being picked by the current government, or as it was previously, by the Liberal government.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin: Mr. Speaker, what does my colleague think of the fact that 74% of Canadians agree with the NDP? According to the Public Interest Advocacy Centre, 74% of Canadians are opposed to pay-to-pay fees. When the Conservatives realize that they are on the wrong side of public opinion, it will be too late. They will have proven that the NDP is the best champion for taxpayers and the middle class. What does he have to say about that?

[English]

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, I will give the member an even bigger picture. I know that 70% of the Canadian population disapproves of the current government. I can assure Canadians that come October they are going to have a government that is for Canadians, for consumers. It will work in the interest of Canadian families, not in the interest of the big banks, which the Conservatives have been doing over the last seven years. If they are sincere about helping Canadian families, let us get this done before we rise for the summer.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): There is only one minute remaining for the hon. member for Winnipeg North. We will give him the remaining one minute, and then we will have to bring this debate to a close.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will take the one minute and in essence indicate that the Liberal Party, as was indicated at the very beginning, will be supporting this motion.

We talk a lot about fairness, and it is important to indicate that under the Conservative government, middle-class Canadians have had to work longer and harder just to make ends meet. Liberals believe that is just not right and that the government needs to do more in terms of protecting Canadian consumers. There is so much more we could be doing.

Caucus colleagues today raised the issue of advertising and financial literacy, which are so very important. A good government with good priorities would understand that spending a good portion of \$750 million on political partisan ads is the wrong way to be spending money. A better priority would be investing in education and promotion of programs that can make a real difference for Canadian consumers.

The Liberal Party desires a strong, healthy middle class, and we should be taking initiatives to achieve that, because a strong, healthy middle class equates to a strong, healthy economy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): It being 6:34 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): In my opinion the yeas have it.

Government Orders

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Call in the members.

[*And the bells having rung:*]

● (1835)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The recorded division stands deferred until tomorrow, at the expiry of the time provided for government orders.

[English]

Hon. John Duncan: Mr. Speaker, if you seek it, I believe you would find consent to see the clock at 6:49 p.m.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

WAYS AND MEANS

MOTION NO. 23

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): It being 6:49 p.m., pursuant to an order made Friday, May 29, 2015, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on Motion No. 23 under ways and means.

Call in the members.

● (1900)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 410*)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adler
Aglukkaq	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allen (Welland)	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Ambler
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Andrews
Angus	Armstrong
Ashfield	Aspin
Aubin	Ayala
Barlow	Bateman
Bélangier	Bennett
Benoit	Benskin
Bergen	Bernier
Bevington	Bezan
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Blaney	Block
Boivin	Borg
Boughen	Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brisson
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Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Bruinooge
Butt	Byrne
Calandra	Calkins
Cannan	Carmichael
Caron	Carrie
Casey	Cash
Charlton	Chicoine
Chisholm	Chisu
Chong	Choquette
Christopherson	Clarke
Cleary	Clement

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NAYS

Nil

PAIRED

Nil

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I declare the motion carried.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[*Translation*]

CO-OPERATIVES AND MUTUAL COMPANIES

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on April 2, I asked the Minister of Finance a question to clarify the regulations on the conversion of mutual companies. These regulations were presented on April 28.

Mutual insurance companies have been part of our local economies for more than a century. They were the response from co-operatives when private companies showed no interest in offering insurance products adapted to individuals' needs, and more specifically to farmers' needs. After years of hard work, these companies have become important players in Canada's property and casualty mutual insurance market. Their democratic value and their capacity for innovation, as well as their deep roots in the communities they serve, have also helped them to flourish. Today, Canada has a well-established mutuals sector, which has managed to accumulate significant capital reserves over the years.

However, once again, the Conservative government is letting its ideological opposition to co-operatives shine through by proposing regulations that give incentives for demutualization. My question on April 2 had to do with the two proposed regulations for property and casualty mutual insurance companies, including mutual and non-mutual policyholders, which would establish a legal framework allowing them to convert into corporations. I realize that the government is following through on an announcement it made in budget 2011, in response to demands from the Economical Mutual Insurance Company, which indicated that it wanted to begin a voluntary demutualization process.

My question for the Minister of Finance has to do with his turning a deaf ear to the concerns that have been raised for the past two years by representatives of mutual insurance companies and the official opposition, who see in the government's intentions, in its draft regulations, incentives for demutualization. Why is the government turning a deaf ear?

The mutual insurance companies' capital reserves were established on the collective nature of equity built up over generations. Demutualization under the proposed regulations will benefit only a small group of current title holders and will make them wealthy. The federal government could take Quebec's lead and adopt regulations whereby capital cannot be divided during demutualization, creating an indivisible reserve for the common good and ensuring the sustainability of co-ops and mutual associations.

In that context, I would also like the government, or the Minister of Finance to explain to Canadians why the regulations do not treat all policy holders fairly and why he did not require the capital to be invested in the community or disbursed to other mutual associations, as is the practice in other countries.

•(1905)

[English]

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question and for the opportunity to address her concerns and highlight the measures we have introduced to help solidify the stability and efficiency of Canada's financial sector.

Maintaining Canada's financial sector advantage is especially important as the global financial system changes and adapts following the global financial crisis. Canada must continue to assess the potential impact of new international standards on our ability to compete and attract investment while maintaining confidence in Canada's capital markets.

For seven years in a row, Canada's banking system has been ranked the soundest in the world by the World Economic Forum in its annual global competitiveness report, something that all Canadians can be very proud of.

However, this government believes our resilient financial system can be even better. That is why, in economic action plan 2011, we announced the government's plan to introduce a framework to allow federal mutual property and casualty companies, or P and C companies, to demutualize, following a request by the industry for regulations to facilitate demutualization, a process by which a company governed by its mutual policyholders converts into a share-based equity company.

We sought the views of stakeholders on the appropriate policy objectives for the optimal demutualization of P and C companies. Through this process, we received more than 80 submissions expressing diverse views from a wide range of stakeholders: federal mutual P and C companies, policyholders and employees, industry associations, insurance brokers, accountants, actuaries, the co-operative sector, and many other interested individuals. Some stakeholders indicated that this framework would increase the competitiveness of demutualized companies by providing them with access to equity to grow their businesses.

In economic action plan 2014, we amended the Insurance Companies Act to allow the government to make regulations for a demutualization framework. In addition, the amendments provided a role for the court in a negotiated demutualization process.

In February of this year, our government released draft regulations for comment. These draft regulations provide those companies that

Adjournment Proceedings

may choose to demutualize with a framework that provides an orderly and transparent process and ensures policyholders are treated fairly and equitably. In considering finalization of the regulations, our government will consider stakeholder comments on this draft.

Let me remind the hon. member that demutualization is entirely optional. The decision on whether or not to demutualize will be in the hands of each respective company and its policyholders.

The P and C demutualization framework also respects existing governance rights of mutual policyholders while ensuring that all policyholders with a reasonable interest in the company can participate in, and receive benefits from, a demutualization process. In addition, the framework ensures an orderly and transparent process. It includes a court-facilitated negotiation process for companies with both mutual and non-mutual policyholders.

Policyholders are being kept well informed through various disclosure requirements and have been provided access to external experts. To give time for recently demutualized companies to adjust to their new structures, demutualized companies are required to be widely held for at least two years.

The P and C insurance industry in Canada provides coverage for Canadians when they need it most. It is an industry that our government will continue to support.

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I thank the parliamentary secretary for his comments.

What I heard is that the government is once again opening the door to demutualization instead of encouraging mutualization and co-operatives.

We must keep in mind that the capital held by most Canadian mutual insurance companies was built up over many years. How can all of the successive generations that invested in these companies be treated fairly in the demutualization process?

That is exactly why we proposed that a reserve be returned to the community when demutualization occurs. That could help co-operatives and mutual companies grow.

The parliamentary secretary also emphasized the importance of the banking system. We all know that Canada's banking system is very solid, but mutual companies have a role to play in a diversified economy. We do not want a system made up solely of share capital; we also want companies with an alternative structure—grass-roots companies that create jobs.

I would like the government to take that into account and, for the sake of fairness, that it find a way to ensure the survival of mutual companies.

What does the Minister of Finance plan to do to ensure that mutual insurance companies can thrive, remain competitive and offer Canadians—

Adjournment Proceedings

●(1910)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, allow me to explain our position in detail.

[*English*]

There are a number of steps that a company would have to undertake before making an application to demutualize, including developing a conversion proposal and having it approved by eligible policyholders. How these steps are carried out and how long the company has to do so would depend on whether the company has only mutual policyholders or both mutual and non-mutual policyholders. The time required to complete a demutualization process will therefore depend on the company.

As I mentioned earlier, throughout the process policyholders are being kept well informed through various disclosure requirements and are given access to external experts. I can reassure the hon. member that we will continue to protect Canadians and their financial interests at all times.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pursue a question that I initially asked in question period on February 23. Unfortunately, in the course of assessing my question and because the response was given by the Minister of the Environment, my question was rather mischaracterized, because I was speaking directly to the minister about public safety. It was about some disturbing language used in an RCMP report related to environmental protests and first nations' objections to fossil fuel developments.

The report was given some prominence in *The Globe and Mail* on February 17. It was originally authored and dated January 24, 2014. In other words, more than a year before the question that I put to the minister there was a report and assessment by the RCMP of what the RCMP labelled an "anti-petroleum movement". The report, as obtained by Greenpeace and published in segments in *The Globe and Mail*, said:

There is a growing, highly organized and well-financed anti-Canada petroleum movement that consists of peaceful activists, militants and violent extremists who are opposed to society's reliance on fossil fuels.

What I raised with the minister was that just recently, President Barack Obama had pointed out that the climate crisis is a much bigger threat to security than terrorism and that it is important to understand security threats for what they are. He said that ignoring the climate crisis is to put the nation, its economy, and its citizens at risk.

The question I put forward asked if the Minister of Public Safety would undertake scientific briefings so that the RCMP would actually understand the nature of the climate crisis, because the *The Globe and Mail*, with direct quotes from the RCMP, described the RCMP report as saying:

...environmentalists "claim" that climate change is the most serious global threat, and "claim" it is a direct consequence of human activity and is "reportedly" linked to the use of fossil fuels.

The language that concerns me and the overall context that concerns me is that in conducting surveillance of some kind on the climate change movement and in assessing the movement's objections to fossil fuels, the RCMP is mischaracterizing the nature of the understanding of the threat by those who are active in opposing fossil fuel developments as being merely claims and that rely on reports, whereas those who object to the expansion of the fossil fuel industry are basing their concerns on science.

If the RCMP wanted to investigate the language of those who are opposed to fossil fuel development, it might find those opponents include the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the International Energy Agency. It is the International Energy Agency that has said that of all known reserves of fossil fuels, two-thirds must remain in the ground till at least 2050 or we will put human civilization at risk.

It is the RCMP that needs a science backgrounder in climate and perhaps needs to direct its attention to those things that are real threats to Canadian security, rather than monitoring the legal activities of Canadians who oppose expansion of fossil fuel developments in the interests of protecting our children.

●(1915)

Ms. Roxanne James (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to address the concerns of the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Let me first be very clear on this and highlight a fact that I believe the member often forgets, which is the importance of the global fight against terrorism all around the world, not just here in Canada. The member seems to forget that the international jihadi movement has declared war on Canada, actually naming Canada and its citizens as one of the countries and peoples that terrorists should attack. We are being targeted by the jihadi terrorists simply because of the values that we have in this country and the fact that these terrorists hate Canada's society, which is very open and tolerant. That is why our government has put forward measures to protect Canadians from terrorists who seek to destroy the very principles that make Canada the best country in the world in which to live.

I also want to be clear that there is no liberty without security, and without strong security, there would be no prosperity for anyone here in Canada. That is why we are making sure that our policing agencies have the legislative tools that they need to keep us safe, as well as the financial resources. In fact, our government has already increased the resources available to police forces by one third. Interestingly, but unsurprisingly, the Liberals and NDP voted against both of these seven times. It has increased each time that we have tried to enhance the resources for those types of agencies.

Now, in budget 2015, we would further increase resources for the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and the Canada Border Services Agency by almost \$300 million to further bolster our front-line efforts to counter terrorism. I hope that the opposition parties will support our budget and those measures, but I probably should not hold my breath.

Adjournment Proceedings

Our government will continue to ensure that our police forces have the resources that they need to keep Canadians safe. The member opposite has brought up the issue of climate change. She was not happy with the answer that she had received from the Minister of the Environment, so let me just reiterate a part of the answer. Our Conservative government is the first government in Canadian history to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and we will continue to do so without a job-killing carbon tax. That is important for Canadians to know.

What is also important for Canadians to know is that we on this side of the House will continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with our allies around the world, fighting the global threat of terrorism. We will continue to fight, specifically, against the death cult known as the Islamic State.

I want to remind the members in the House and the member opposite that the director of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service has said that the Islamic State and terrorism are the biggest threat to our national security. Canadians know that they can count on this side of the House, the Conservative government, to keep Canadians safe.

• (1920)

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I do not think that you have ever heard an adjournment proceedings that constituted so much of a mismatch of the question that I asked and the response from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

Let me just point out that the current government is the one that has cut emergency preparedness for the environment on all of our coasts and cut preparedness for earthquakes. It has not prepared for the climate crisis, and it has cut back in natural disaster preparedness. I do not think that the government can make the claim that it keeps us safe.

I am surprised to find the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness raising the attack against me, saying that I am not aware of jihadi terrorism. In the context of the debate on Bill C-51, I made it very clear that the Green Party is concerned. That is why we opposed the bill and continue it to oppose it. Experts in security have been clear that Bill C-51 will make us less safe by creating CSIS without any oversight, giving it disruptive powers and, very likely, as many security experts said, making us more vulnerable to a terrorist attack.

Again, the Conservatives are ignoring the climate crisis.

Ms. Roxanne James: Mr. Speaker, again, there is a lot of misinformation coming from the opposition benches, including the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands. She should know this, and I am not sure why she is misleading the House, but in her home province

of British Columbia, we have increased Coast Guard funding by 27%. What we have just heard is simply not the case.

Again, when we get back to the issues of terrorism, public safety and standing up for Canadians, I want to be very clear, going back to what the director of CSIS said in his very public report. It was open for everyone to see. He said that the single most—

Ms. Elizabeth May: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): There are really no points of order in adjournment proceedings—

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I am just surprised to hear the hon. member make an accusation about misleading the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Just on that point, unless the reference is made to deliberately misleading, where there is some imputing of motive, normally those characterizations are not considered unparliamentary.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Ms. Roxanne James: Mr. Speaker, as I said, in the public report the director of CSIS actually said that jihadi terrorism was the single most serious threat to Canada's national security. However, I believe that, deep down, the member probably already knows this but either chooses to ignore it or simply chooses to accept it.

While I am on my feet, I would like to take this opportunity to ask the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands to do the right thing. Not too long ago, in fact very recently, the member made ridiculous comments about admitted terrorist Omar Ahmed Khadr. This is a person who plead guilty to heinous crimes, including the murder of American army medic, Sergeant Christopher Speer. Our Conservative government has rigorously defended against any attempt to lessen Khadr's punishment for these crimes.

While the Liberal leader refuses to rule out special compensation for the terrorist and the New Democrats actually try to force Canadian taxpayers to compensate him, on this side of the House we believe it is the victims of crimes, not the perpetrators, who deserve compensation.

I would ask the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands to apologize to his wife, Tabitha Speer, who was left without a husband and to the children of army medic—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. We are well over the one minute permitted.

The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:24 p.m.)

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