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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, June 4, 2015

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, June 4, 2015

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1005)

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the ninth report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food in relation to its study on promoting domestic trade in agriculture and agri-food products by reducing interprovincial trade barriers.

This is pursuant to Standing Order 109 of the House of Commons. The committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

[*Translation*]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the seventh report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, entitled “Promising Practices to Prevent Violence Against Women”. Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

[*English*]

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the NDP, I stand to present the dissenting opinion on this report, calling on the government for a national action plan to end violence against women and for a national public inquiry into missing and murdered aboriginal women,

Witnesses strongly urge the government to take action to address the root causes of violence against women and the systemic inequality that perpetuates it.

New Democrats recognize that the causes of violence are complex and the solution needs to be comprehensive. Unfortunately, this

report presented by the committee fails to address the urgent situation.

* * *

RESPECTING SENIORS ACT

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, GP) seconded by Mr. Rathgeber, moved for leave to introduce Bill C-685, An Act to amend the Celebrating Canada’s Seniors Act (living situation of seniors).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am introducing the seniors bill of rights to amend the Celebrating Canada Seniors Act in order to establish a yearly mandatory comprehensive review of the living situation of seniors.

It would provide an annual overview of seniors' living standards. It would report on the access to affordable, accessible, and secure housing. It would deal not only with housing but with the determinants of seniors' health. It would provide information on access to universal health care, including primary care, dental care, home care, long-term care, pharmacare, and what we will all face eventually, palliative care.

Canadians have a right to be worried about the condition of seniors. We need a comprehensive approach. The public wants immediate action for us to improve the healthy aging of seniors, and this would lead to that.

We must ensure our seniors are protected from abuse, neglect, and exploitation and enjoy freedom, dignity, and independence in their older years.

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

* * *

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, Ind.) seconded by Mr. Hyer, moved for leave to introduce Bill C-686, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (detention in custody).

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise and table a private member's bill, an act to amend the Criminal Code regarding detention in custody.

The bill would be known as Dave Wynn's law, in honour of the St. Albert RCMP constable who was fatally wounded in the line of duty on January 17 of this year.

Routine Proceedings

Amazingly, Constable Wynn's assailant had more than 50 criminal convictions, including breaches of court orders and failures to appear in court, and 38 outstanding charges. However, the assailant made bail without mention of his criminal past or his failures to appear, causing RCMP Commissioner Bob Paulson to publicly question the bail process and wonder how this person was "walking among us".

Accordingly, this proposed legislation attempts to close some of the glaring loopholes in the judicial interim release or bail process by requiring the prosecution to lead evidence that the accused has previous convictions, has outstanding criminal charges, or has previously failed to appear in court.

It is a mystery how some habitual offenders can make bail, but by tightening the rules regarding the release of habitual offenders, it is hoped that all of society will be protected from those who continually flaunt the law and also the courts.

I encourage all hon. members to support Dave Wynn's law.

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

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Speaker, following the overwhelming support that my motion received to ban unfair pay-to-pay bank fees, I would like to seek unanimous consent for the following motion. I move that it be an instruction to the Standing Committee on Finance that it have the power to expand the scope of Bill C-59, an act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on April 21, 2015, and other measures, in order to protect consumers by banning all pay-to-pay practices by banks operating in Canada.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

* * *

• (1010)

[*Translation*]

PETITIONS

CBC/RADIO-CANADA

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a petition signed by hundreds of people who say that since 1936, CBC/Radio-Canada has been a core cultural institution, broadcasting Canada's unique identities and linguistic realities.

These people recognize that CBC/Radio-Canada is suffering terribly right now. They know there have been major cuts over the past few decades. The petitioners are asking the government to guarantee stable, adequate, multi-year funding for our public broadcaster so that it can live up to its mandate from coast to coast to coast.

[*English*]

TOBACCO PRODUCTS

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition today from many residents

across Ontario asking that Parliament pass legislation that will remove all flavours from all tobacco products.

[*Translation*]

CBC/RADIO-CANADA

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, FD): Mr. Speaker, today I have the honour to present to the House a petition signed by 23,485 people as part of the Tous amis de Radio-Canada campaign. They are reiterating how important it is for their public broadcaster to have stable, multi-year funding and to be able to deliver on its mandate effectively in all parts of Quebec and Canada.

By signing this petition, these people are reiterating their desire for their government and their parliamentarians to support a massive campaign that would give CBC/Radio-Canada all of the tools it needs to deliver quality information completely democratically.

[*English*]

ANIMAL WELFARE

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour today to present more than 5,000 signatures on petitions from constituents and others across the country who are concerned about the state of our laws on animal cruelty.

Animal cruelty laws are currently under the property section of our legislation, but animals are sentient beings. They are thinking, feeling creatures.

Petitioners are asking that loopholes be closed in the existing legislation and that animal cruelty be moved to the Criminal Code so that there would be a greater likelihood of prosecution. This is for companion animals, not for animals affected by hunting, fishing, and so on.

On behalf of the more than 5,000 petitioners today, I seek to close the loopholes in the existing legislation and move animal cruelty to be a piece of the Criminal Code.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present four separate petitions today, all on the same subject. This adds to the body of literally tens of thousands of signatories who have submitted petitions on this subject.

These residents of Canada draw to the attention of the House of Commons the fact that they believe that Bill C-51 is an affront to their civil rights and freedoms. They believe and maintain that Bill C-51 has less to do with combatting terrorism and more to do, they say, with the ability of the Prime Minister to snoop on their enemies. These petitioners compare the current Prime Minister to the paranoia of Richard Nixon.

Routine Proceedings

They suggest that Bill C-51 would impede and undermine the rights and freedoms by which we define ourselves as Canadians. Therefore, these petitioners, among many thousands of other Canadians, call upon the House of Commons to join the New Democrats in our principled stand to defend our civil liberties and do everything we can to stop Bill C-51.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I would remind hon. members, when presenting petitions, to avoid editorial references of their own and/or those of their parties in these cases.

The hon. member for Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher.

[*Translation*]

CBC/RADIO-CANADA

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the CBC has been under attack for several months now, if not for the past few years. Hundreds of thousands of Canadians have signed petitions to clearly indicate how much CBC/Radio-Canada means to them.

I am once again presenting a petition signed by hundreds of people, if not more than a thousand, in support of our public broadcaster so that it can continue to deliver services throughout Quebec and Canada.

• (1015)

[*English*]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to table a petition signed by 267 residents of Edmonton—St. Albert and surrounding communities calling upon the government to adopt international aid policies that support family farmers, especially women, and recognize their vital role in the struggle against hunger and poverty, and also to ensure that Canadian policies and programs are developed in consultation with small family farmers and that they protect the rights of the small family farmers in the global south to preserve, use, and freely exchange seeds.

[*Translation*]

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition signed by approximately 100 merchants in my riding who want to send a clear message that credit card fees are far too high. Asking banks to voluntarily lower fees to 1.5% is not enough when we consider what is happening in Europe and Australia, where the rates are 0.3%, 0.5% and 0.8%, and not 1.5%.

* * *

[*English*]

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the following questions will be answered today: Nos. 1153 and 1158.

[*Text*]

Question No. 1153—**Ms. Françoise Boivin:**

With regard to *Edgar Schmidt v. The Attorney General of Canada*, as of March 31, 2015: (a) how many hours have public servants devoted to this legal challenge; (b) how much money has the government spent on the challenge; and (c) what resources has the government employed with respect to the challenge and how much money has been allocated to each of these resources?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, to the extent that the information that has been requested is protected by solicitor-client privilege or litigation privilege, the federal crown asserts that privilege and, in the following case, has waived that privilege only to the extent of revealing the total legal costs.

The total legal cost is approximately \$175,021.30.

Question No. 1158—**Ms. Elizabeth May:**

With regard to the government's actions to combat climate change: (a) what is the progress on the development and implementation of regulations on the oil and gas industry according to the sector-by-sector regulatory approach to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions that is listed on the government's www.climatechange.gc.ca website; (b) when does the government expect to introduce regulations on the oil and gas industry; (c) what factors are being considered by the government to develop regulations on the oil and gas industry; (d) what stakeholders are being consulted by the government to develop regulations on the oil and gas industry; (e) how many meetings with oil and gas industry stakeholders has the government held since it first began developing the regulations; (f) including the cost of consultation meetings, staff, and any other expenses not mentioned above, what has been the total cumulative cost to date of developing the oil and gas regulation policy; (g) will the government meet the Conference of Parties' (COP) 21 process deadlines outlined in decisions 1/CP.19 and 1/CP.20 to submit its Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) "well in advance" of the twenty-first session of the COP; and (h) why was the government not ready to submit its INDCs by the first quarter of 2015, the decisions suggested deadline?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of the Environment, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with regard to (a), through its sector-by-sector regulatory approach, the Government of Canada is working to ensure that it achieves results for Canadians and the environment. This approach will result in real emission reductions, while maintaining Canada's economic competitiveness and supporting job creation opportunities for Canadians.

With respect to the oil and gas sector, as announced on May 15, 2015, Canada intends to bring forward regulations aligned with recently proposed actions in the U.S. to reduce the potent greenhouse gas methane from the oil and gas sector. Actions in this area lead to significant reductions in emissions while ensuring Canadian companies remain competitive.

With regard to (b), as the regulations are still being developed, it would be premature to comment further.

With regard to (c), the Government of Canada is focused on an approach for GHG regulations that will reduce emissions while continuing to create jobs and that will encourage the growth of the Canadian economy. Because of the integration of the Canadian and American energy sectors, action in this area would be aligned with the proposed actions in the United States to ensure Canadian companies remain competitive within the North American marketplace.

Routine Proceedings

With regard to (d), Environment Canada has engaged other governments and met with representatives of oil and gas industry associations, and oil and gas and related industry companies. Environment Canada will continue to engage with stakeholders and work co-operatively with provinces and territories to reduce GHG emissions from the oil and gas sector.

With regard to (e), since October 2011, representatives from Environment Canada have met with or had teleconference calls with industry stakeholders approximately 80 times to discuss aspects of the development of GHG regulations for the oil and gas sector.

With regard to (f), Environment Canada has no database that records project-specific staff time costs. Based on readily available information, Environment Canada's estimated total cumulative costs to date of developing the oil and gas regulation policy is approximately \$638,000. This does not include salary costs for the full-time EC staff.

With regard to (g), the answer is yes, the Government of Canada announced its intended nationally determined contributions, INDCs, on May 15, 2015.

With regard to (h), Canada submitted its contribution well in advance of COP 21 as agreed to in the negotiations. The first quarter of 2015 was not a deadline.

* * *

[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, if Questions Nos. 1148, 1150, 1154, 1152, 1162, 1164, 1167, 1168, 1170, and 1175 could be made orders for return, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 1148—**Mr. Mark Warawa:**

With regard to government funding in the riding of Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon, for each fiscal year since 2005-2006 inclusive: (a) what are the details of all grants, contributions, and loans to any organization, body, or group, broken down by (i) name of the recipient, (ii) municipality of the recipient, (iii) date on which the funding was received, (iv) amount received, (v) department or agency providing the funding, (vi) program under which the grant, contribution, or loan was made, (vii) nature or purpose; and (b) for each grant, contribution and loan identified in (a), was a press release issued to announce it and, if so, what is the (i) date, (ii) headline, (iii) file number of the press release?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 1150—**Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg:**

With regard to the Excise Tax Act, specifically Schedule V, Part II, section 1.2, its application to the provisions at medical examinations, reports, and certificates since March 21, 2013, and its application to “qualifying” health care supplies: (a) what supplies are no longer considered to be a qualifying health care supply and are now subject to GST/HST; (b) what services performed by health care professionals and practitioners are now taxable; (c) what specific reports, evaluations, examinations, assessments, and certificates are now subject to HST/GST for each of the following practitioners, (i) psychology, (ii) social work services, (iii) psychiatry, (iv) medical practitioners, (v) optometrists, (vi) occupational therapist, (vii) chiropractors, (viii)

physiotherapists, (ix) nursing services, (x) dietetic services, (xi) dental hygienist services, (xii) laboratory services; (d) with what stakeholders and professional organizations has the Department of Finance consulted about this tax change; (e) what stakeholders and professional associations has Canada Revenue Agency consulted with about this tax change; (f) what revenue will the government collect each year from 2013 to 2020 as a result of this tax change; (g) what revenue will the government collect each year from 2013 to 2020 for each type of report, evaluations, examinations, assessments, and certificates that are now subject to GST/HST; (h) what specific court decision led to the new definition of qualifying health care supply; (i) for each supply, service, evaluation, examination, assessment, certificate and specific report identified in (a), (b), and (c), could a Canadian veteran be charged HST/GST either directly or indirectly by a health care practitioner or practitioners; (j) for each supply, service, evaluation, examination, assessment, certificate, and specific report identified in (a), (b), and (c), will Canadian veterans be charged HST/GST either directly or indirectly by psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, registered marriage and family therapists, and clinical care managers who are on Veterans Affairs Canada's approved list of service providers; (k) will the government be seeking to collect this tax retroactively; and (l) are the following reports, evaluations, examinations, assessments, and certificates subject to HST/GST: (i) custody assessments for Superior Court, (ii) disability determination packages, (iii) psychological assessments of individuals with developmental disabilities for the purpose of supporting eligibility applications for supportive, rehabilitation, community living programs and services?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 1154—**Mr. Bruce Hyer:**

With regard to government funding allocated in the constituency of Thunder Bay—Superior North, broken down by fiscal year from 2011-2012 to present: (a) what is the total amount of this funding, broken down by (i) department, (ii) agency, (iii) program, (iv) any other government body; and (b) how many jobs are estimated to have been created by this funding, broken down by (i) full-time jobs, (ii) part-time jobs?

(Return tabled)

Routine Proceedings

Question No. 1155—**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:**

With respect to the Ebola vaccine developed at the National Microbiology Laboratory (NML): (a) on what date did research for the vaccine begin; (b) what are the names of the scientists involved in the research, and what are their positions; (c) why was the vaccine research initially undertaken; (d) was the research undertaken at any time in relation to anti-bioterrorism, and, if so, during what periods and with what specific mandate; (e) who provided funding for the research and development of the vaccine; (f) was the Government of Canada the only contributor to the research and development fund; (g) how much funding did the government provide, broken down by (i) percentage, (ii) department, (iii) date, (iv) dollar amount of contribution; (h) on what date was a robust immune response demonstrated to the vaccine; (i) on what date were research findings published and in what journal, and, if none were published, why not; (j) on what date was the vaccine patented and when was the initial patent application brought; (k) in which countries is the vaccine patented; (l) during what specific time period was the vaccine produced, (i) how many vials were produced, (ii) who was informed of this production, (iii) how were they informed; (m) was there a competitive process to sell the licensing rights or other entitlements relating to the vaccine; (n) if the process in (m) was created, (i) who developed the criteria for the licensing rights or other entitlements, broken down by position and department, (ii) what were the criteria to obtain the licensing rights or other entitlements, (iii) on what date was the competitive process launched, (iv) how many companies bid for the rights, (v) which companies bid for the rights and on what dates, (vi) how did NewLink Genetics (including Bioprotection Systems Corporation) meet the criteria for the licensing rights or other entitlements; (o) on what date was NewLink Genetics awarded the rights or entitlements; (p) what specific experience did NewLink Genetics have with vaccines, specifically when it comes to manufacturing capacity; (q) what NewLink Genetics products had reached the point of commercial production at the time of its bidding and purchase of the rights; (r) on what date did NewLink Genetics purchase the rights or entitlements from the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), and for what cost; (s) as part of the licensing agreement, was NewLink Genetics expected to meet any milestones by any particular dates, (i) if so, when, (ii) if not, why not; (t) as part of the licensing agreement, what percentage royalties would NewLink Genetics pay Canada on any sales of the vaccine; (u) to date, how much income has the government obtained from licensing the vaccine, broken down by (i) up-front payments, (ii) milestone payments, (iii) any other payments; (v) did any of the NML or PHAC scientists/staff have any associations or links or monetary or proprietary interests or any other association with NewLink Genetics, and, if so, what are they; (w) did Canadian officials and the licensee meet annually in face-to-face meetings as required by Article 7.9 of the license agreement, and, if so, for all meetings, what is (i) the date, (ii) location, (iii) the names of all persons in attendance; (x) on what date did NewLink Genetics begin clinical trials of the vaccine; (y) how long was the delay between the onset of the commercial relationship with NewLink Genetics and start of clinical trials, broken down by (i) days, (ii) months, (iii) years; (z) what reason was given for the delay in (y); (aa) did the government question the progress of the clinical trials, if so, on what specific dates, and, if not, why not; (bb) in Canada's licensing agreement with NewLink Genetics, did Canada have the right to let other manufacturers make the vaccine for use in other countries "for compassionate care purposes" if NewLink had not received regulatory approval for the vaccine in the target country; (cc) did anyone in Canada urge the government to terminate its agreement with NewLink Genetics, and, if so, (i) who did so, (ii) on what dates, (iii) why; (dd) did anyone outside Canada request that Canada cancel NewLink's rights under the license, and, if so, (i) who did so, (ii) on what dates, (iii) why; (ee) did the government terminate the agreement, (i) if so, why, (ii) if not, why not; (ff) if the government terminated the agreement with NewLink Genetics, would Merck have paid the government the \$30 million up front and \$20 million once larger formal trials begun that went to NewLink Genetics, and would the government have been eligible to receive royalties on sales in certain markets; (gg) did the government approve of NewLink Genetics sub-licensing the vaccine to Merck; (hh) on what date did the government pay for IDT Biologika, to manufacture approximately 1 500 vials of the vaccine suitable for human trials, (i) how much was paid, (ii) was the Department of Defence involved, and, if so, why, (iii) did the Department of Defence contribute any funds; (ii) on what date did the Ebola outbreak begin in West Africa; (jj) on what date did the government reveal it had in storage an experimental vaccine that might be of use in combating the epidemic; (kk) on what date did the government offer vaccine to the World Health Organization (WHO); (ll) how many vials were sent to the WHO by the government, (i) on what date did the vials arrive, (ii) were there any delays; (mm) what are the results of the eight, phase 1 clinical trials in terms of (i) safety, (ii) immunogenic response, (iii) dose strength for phase 2/3 clinical trials; (nn) on what date did phase 2/3 clinical trials begin in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone; and (oo) what was the government's involvement overall, broken down by (i) expertise, (ii) funding, (iii) personnel, (iv) other?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 1162—**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims:**

With regard to the Temporary Foreign Worker Program: (a) for 2013 and 2014, what was the average length of time between the receipt of an application for a Labour Market Opinion (LMO) and the issuance of a decision, broken down by province; (b) for 2014 and 2015, what was the average length of time between the receipt of an application for a Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA) and the issuance of a decision, broken down by (i) year, (ii) month, (iii) province; (c) for 2013 and 2014, what was the average length of time between the receipt of an application for an LMO for the Live-In Caregiver Program and the issuance of a decision, broken down by province; (d) for 2014 and 2015, what was the average length of time between the receipt of an application for an LMIA for the Caregiver Program and the issuance of a decision, broken down by (i) year, (ii) month, (iii) province; (e) for 2014, how many LMO were approved for the Live-In Caregiver Program, broken down by (i) month, (ii) province; and (f) for 2014 and 2015, how many LMIA were approved for the Caregiver Program, broken down by (i) month, (ii) province?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 1164—**Ms. Irene Mathysen:**

With regard to the National Strategy for Financial Literacy "Phase 1: strengthening seniors' financial literacy campaign": (a) how much money has been spent to date on developing and implementing the campaign; (b) when will the campaign be launched; (c) what is the budget for the campaign; (d) what individuals and organizations were consulted on the development of the campaign; (e) what measure will be undertaken to promote the campaign; and (f) will there be paid public advertising for the campaign and, if so, what is the budget for that advertising?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 1167—**Hon. Gerry Byrne:**

With regard to Transport Canada and Marine Atlantic Incorporated, for fiscal years 1998 to 2007, and for fiscal years 2007-2008 to 2014-2015, respectively, while taking into consideration any transition to new accounting periods: (a) what was the (i) annual parliamentary appropriation supplied to Marine Atlantic Incorporated, (ii) total annual revenue collected from users, (iii) annual gross revenue; (b) what was the percentage of cost recovery from users broken down by (i) company-wide operations, (ii) the Port aux Basques to North Sydney route operations, (iii) the Argentina to North Sydney route operations; (c) based on the information provided in (b), what capital and what operational inputs are generally included in items (i) to (iii) respectively; (d) what rates have been charged to users for each type of service offered by Marine Atlantic Incorporated during this period and what was the effective net rate for each such service, broken down by (i) additional service fees, (ii) fuel surcharges, (iii) security fees, (iv) all other incremental fees or charges that may have been applied; (e) what was the first year that a fuel surcharge was applied to any rates; and (f) has there been a year in which the previous year's fuel surcharge was rolled into or combined with the previously established rates, and subsequently, a new fuel surcharge established over and above the new rate?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 1168—**Hon. Gerry Byrne:**

With regard to Transport Canada and Marine Atlantic Incorporated: (a) what were the costs incurred to refit each vessel to comply with Canadian safety standards or to refurbish or alter the vessels in any way before Marine Atlantic took possession of each vessel, for the (i) Motor Vessel (MV) Atlantic Vision, (ii) MV Blue Puttees, (iii) MV Highlanders; (b) what were the costs incurred to refit each vessel to comply with Canadian safety standards or to refurbish or alter the vessels in any way after Marine Atlantic took possession of each vessel in (a); (c) what were the annual lease costs paid out from 2008-09 to the present, as well as the anticipated annual lease costs for each vessel in (a); (d) what, if any, is the pre-negotiated purchase price for each vessel if they were to be purchased from their owners by Transport Canada or Marine Atlantic at the end of their current leases, for each vessel in (a); (e) what are the anticipated costs to Transport Canada or to Marine Atlantic of not renewing the vessel leases beyond the current terms and returning the vessels to their owners for each vessel in (a); and (f) based on the information in (e), what are the details of these costs?

(Return tabled)

*Business of Supply*Question No. 1170—**Hon. Gerry Byrne:**

With regard to Marine Atlantic Incorporated, during fiscal years 1998 to 2007 and 2007-2008 to 2014-2015, respectively, while taking into consideration any transition to new accounting periods, and broken down by the specific route and by the specific vessel within the fleet that was involved: (a) how many times in each month of every year was a scheduled ferry crossing delayed, and how long did each delay last, due to (i) mechanical issues, (ii) weather related issues, (iii) a combination of weather and mechanical issues; (b) how many times in each month of every year was a scheduled crossing cancelled due to (i) mechanical issues, (ii) weather issues, (iii) other issues; (c) were there ever periods of time in which Transport Canada or Marine Atlantic Incorporated believed that Term 32 of the Terms of Union between Newfoundland and Labrador and Canada was not being fulfilled and, if so, what were these periods of time and what was understood to be the cause of the failure to fulfill this constitutional obligation; (d) did Transport Canada or Marine Atlantic ever receive advice from an outside consultant concerning the optimal ferry vessel size and vessel specifications for the Port aux Basques to North Sydney ferry service and, if so, of all the options that were analyzed, was there a particular hull size that was believed by the consultants to likely be the most optimal for operations on this service and, if so, (i) what was this hull size, (ii) what were there reasons given for this conclusion; and (e) what is the definition of the constitutional term “as traffic offers” in government documentation, and what are the specific service delivery standards or operational standards required for compliance with this constitutional obligation, in terms of traffic offering and the government delivering the transportation by means of the ferry service?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 1175—**Mr. Scott Simms:**

With regard to Marine Atlantic Incorporated: (a) what are all projects, initiatives, or expenditures stemming from the five-year investment fund announced in the 2010 federal budget, broken down by: (i) cost, (ii) date, (iii) timelines, (iv) rationales for each project or initiative; (b) what are the details of all government correspondences and documentations relating to the five-year investment, including (i) relevant file or tracking numbers, (ii) correspondence or file type, (iii) subject, (iv) date, (v) purpose, (vi) origin, (vii) intended destination, (viii) other officials, agencies, departments, or contractors copied or involved; (c) what are the details of all government correspondences and documentation concerning Marine Atlantic Incorporated as it relates to the Ferry Services Stewardship and Support Program and the Transportation Infrastructure Program through Transport Canada since the creation of these programs, including (i) relevant file or tracking numbers, (ii) correspondence or file type, (iii) subject, (iv) date, (v) purpose, (vi) origin, (vii) intended destination, (viii) other officials, agencies, departments, or contractors copied or involved; (d) has Marine Atlantic undertaken any advertising or marketing of the promotional discount campaign for the North Sydney-Argentia run and, if so, what has been done, broken down by (i) date, (ii) cost, (iii) medium, (iv) targeted audiences; (e) again with respect to the promotional discount campaign, (i) what is the rationale in detail concerning the status and future planning of the promotional discount campaign for ferry services, (ii) what is the rationale in detail why the promotional discount campaign was not applied to the Port aux Basques-North Sydney run, (iii) was any public opinion research conducted prior to launching the promotional discount campaign and, if so, what are the details of any such research; and (f) what are the details of all government correspondences and documentation concerning the promotional discount campaign, including (i) relevant file or tracking numbers, (ii) correspondence or file type, (iii) subject, (iv) date, (v) purpose, (vi) origin, (vii) intended destination, (viii) other officials, agencies, departments, or contractors copied or involved?

(Return tabled)

[English]

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

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS*[English]***BUSINESS OF SUPPLY**

OPPOSITION MOTION—NUTRITION NORTH CANADA

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Northwest Territories, NDP) moved:

That the House call on the government to take immediate action to fix Nutrition North Canada and to improve the well-being of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians in Northern Canada by: (a) immediately including in the Nutrition North Canada program the 50 isolated Northern communities accessible only by air that are not currently eligible for the full subsidy; (b) initiating a comprehensive review of the Nutrition North program, with Northerners as full partners, to determine ways of directly providing the subsidy to Northern residents and to improve supports for traditional foods; (c) creating equitable program-eligibility criteria for Northern communities based on their real circumstances; (d) providing sufficient funding to meet the needs of all Northern communities; and (e) working with all Northerners to develop a sustainable solution to food insecurity.

He said: Mr. Speaker, as member of Parliament for the Northwest Territories for the past 10 years, this is a wonderful opportunity to speak about the people of the north. That includes the northern parts of provinces and the three territories, the hundreds of communities that stretch across Canada's north.

I grew up in an isolated community. We did not have a road until later on in my life, so I know the difference a transportation system delivers. I understand the intrinsic nature of the problems of people who are isolated and remote. These are the communities we are talking about right now. These are Canadian communities that do not have road access or the ability to be served in a fashion that will allow their costs to be even reasonably close to southern Canada's. These communities are suffering. They will continue to suffer until we can come up with answers that work better for them.

In a great and prosperous country like Canada, no one should go hungry. Unfortunately, for many northern Canadians, that is the case. Some people forego eating in the day so that they make sure their children have sufficient food. These are situations that Canadians respond to with emotion and with a desire to change.

Equality of Canadians is an essential in the fabric of our society. Likewise, northerners know they live in a high-cost part of Canada, but to be equal, the government has to come in and be involved. In addition to pure humanitarianism, helping northerners with their high cost of living, particularly for food costs, enhances Arctic sovereignty. More than that, northerners provide a basis for what the government considers to be the new resource sector in our country, whether it is mining, oil, gas, or any of the other natural resources the government covets in the north. Those people provide a workforce and an opportunity to see those resources developed in a good fashion.

Originally, through the past decade up until 2010, we had the food mail program. That program had accelerating costs. In 2011, nutrition north was dreamt up. The criteria for community participation was so flawed that about 50 isolated fly-in communities were left out of that program.

In his report last fall, the Auditor General said:

Business of Supply

We found that the Department has not established community eligibility criteria that are fair and accessible. The Department considered communities eligible if they lacked year-round surface transportation and if they had used the Food Mail Program extensively. Communities that had made very little use of the Food Mail Program were determined to be eligible for only a partial subsidy...

This partial subsidy was 5¢ a kilogram. It did not amount to anything. He went on to say:

...while communities that had not used the previous program were determined to be ineligible. Consequently, community eligibility is based on past usage instead of current need. As a result, there may be other isolated northern communities, not benefiting from the subsidy, where access to affordable, nutritious food may be an issue.

The Auditor General went on to say that the Department of Aboriginal Affairs was aware of this problem, and it estimated that it would cost \$7 million a year to service these 50 communities. My office conducted research and was able to identify 46 of the communities that should be getting the full subsidy. Twenty-seven of these communities are in ridings represented by Conservative members of Parliament. Nineteen communities are in the member for Kenora's riding. Where was the member during his last two-and-a-half years as parliamentary secretary to the minister of aboriginal affairs and northern development? Could he not have spoken to the minister about the need facing these communities in his riding? Then again, there were other members that failed to stand up and speak for their communities.

● (1020)

Because these communities need any help they can get, the first part of the New Democratic motion is, "immediately including in the nutrition north Canada program the 50 isolated northern communities accessible only by air that are not currently eligible for the full subsidy". However, including these communities is simply an emergency solution. Including these communities would bring them up to the level of the other communities. That is fine. That is a start toward success. It is only the start, but it is a necessary start.

We need to be fair in this country. We need to treat every community the same. We need to understand that every community has similar requirements for these subsidies, regardless of their past history.

Another problem found by the Auditor General is that there is no way for the Department of Aboriginal Affairs to determine if the subsidy is being passed on to northerners by retailers. This is a central flaw in the program. While professing to help northerners access affordable and nutritious food, what nutrition north really does is subsidize the selling of food to northerners and to anyone else who goes into their stores.

Rather than providing assistance to businesses, it might be better to look at the systems used in other countries for food subsidies. One possible solution might be to actually subsidize consumers. In the United States, the women, infants, and children program, a very successful program initiated by the federal government, goes across all states. That program is accessible by people through a swipe card.

We are not here today to decide on the long-term solution for this issue. However, we need to establish a process to work with northerners to come up with a long-term solution, and that is part of our resolution as well.

Another part of the motion calls on the government to initiate a comprehensive review of the nutrition north program, with northerners as full partners, to determine ways to provide the subsidy to northern residents and also to support the use of traditional foods. Throughout the small communities, the traditional way of providing sustenance was through hunting, trapping, fishing, and gardening, in many cases. Those were ways communities provided food in days gone by and that need to be supported now to make them more successful.

The nutrition north program was poorly thought out to begin with. For a government that says it supports the north, it fails to work with northerners, or even listen to them. I could be talking about the opposition to the changes to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act or to the bill that was passed yesterday, Bill S-6, in which the government simply rode over the valid concerns of many Yukoners.

The same thing could be said about nutrition north. There is a growing groundswell of people speaking up about the program and saying that it is not successful. For instance, the Auditor General found that aboriginal affairs had spoken to Health Canada about what food should go in the subsidy but seemed to have ignored northerners and what food they think should be covered.

When I was in Iqaluit, I met with the people who were engaged in trying to work on this program through raising public awareness about it, and they told me one interesting fact: most of the people in Nunavut, the Inuit people, are lactose intolerant. The fact that the government has made milk a large part of their particular program means that many of them will not pick up on that subsidy, because they cannot use milk the way many southern people or Caucasians use that product. Therefore, that subsidy is not actually as valid as it should be for that particular group of people. That is why we are calling for more support for traditional food. That is part of what has to happen.

● (1025)

As I noted, the current nutrition north criteria exclude a large number of communities that should be receiving the full subsidy. The current criteria seem to be shaped more toward excluding communities than toward ensuring that all northerners have access to affordable nutritious food.

Part of what was going on with the nutrition north program, as the Auditor General pointed out, was that there were to be yearly reviews of eligibility and how the program was working. We have not seen those yearly reviews in the four years the program has been put in place. How was the government to determine that the program was working properly if it did not do the reviews?

It is a very significant and important program dealing with the health of many northerners. The result of not dealing with it correctly means that other costs in the system have gone up. Perhaps they do not mind that the costs for health, education, and the social costs that go with poverty and the failure to have a proper lifestyle are costs that are borne by other governments. Perhaps the current federal government has not been that concerned about them.

Business of Supply

We know that many other communities in the country that have year-round road access have very high food costs. If they are hauling food from the southern United States or Mexico to Inuvik, the costs are very high. These costs have to be borne by northerners living in these communities, not all of whom have high-paying jobs.

Because of the poorly thought-out community eligibility criteria, we are calling on the government to create equitable program eligibility criteria for northern communities based upon their real circumstances.

Many of the communities are very small communities. The cost of running retail stores is very high. They cannot avoid that problem. They cannot avoid the problem of the cost of fuel, which has been inflated by almost 400% over the last decade throughout northern Canada. They have to deal with that problem, as well, in a small community.

They cannot expect that using single criteria, the freight rate, and whether they were in the program before is good enough to determine how a community should receive the subsidy.

A comparison of expenditures under the last years of the food mail program with those allocated under nutrition north shows that the Conservatives have been deliberately underfunding the program. In the last two years of the food mail program, the cost was about \$59 million. That was up from four years earlier, when the cost was \$39 million.

We saw a rapidly accelerating cost for the food mail program. Why was that? It was because all the other costs throughout northern Canada were going up. The Auditor General indicated that the inflationary cost of food in the north was double the rate it was in southern Canada. In the food mail program, where the Conservatives did not really have a hold on the costs, there was an accelerating cost.

However, in the four years of the nutrition north program, the original allocation each year was \$53 million. It was topped up, but it never showed much increase over those years in comparison with what was being put into the food mail program.

I think we can safely say that this program has been underfunded since its inception. The indications from the Conservative government were that it would now increase the funding by 5% a year. However, it has not put the money in to catch up to where the program should be. If the program was in place for four years without inflationary figures attached to it, then funding should start at a much higher level before it starts adding the 5% per year.

• (1030)

This shows either poor planning or a deliberate attempt to lowball the program's costs. For that reason, part of this motion is that we call on the government to provide "...sufficient funding to meet the needs of all Northern communities."

This is what is required. I think back to when I first came to Parliament. I was working on the northern residents' tax deduction, which was a program in 1989. The argument from all northerners was that the program had been in place for many years and they had seen no increase in the amount of the northern residents' tax deduction. Everyone said that inflation should put about 50% into

that program. The late minister Jim Flaherty, in his 2007 budget, put in 10%, and there has been nothing since.

What we have seen is that program, which was very important to northerners, which worked very well to encourage people to live and work in the north, and to develop all the things the Conservative government thinks are very important, like mines, oil and gas, and all the rest, has not been allowed to increase, simply to keep up to the rate of inflation.

The rate of inflation in the north is very high. In southern Canada for people heating with natural gas, the cost is pretty well the same as it was a decade ago. In the north, the same people using energy are looking at a 400% increase in their costs. It is a cold place and houses need to be heated. We need an increase in funding to this program, like other programs that are not tied to inflation. People cannot escape those costs. Those costs are part of a system that we live in.

The final point I have is we need to stop supporting a southern Canada-style of food delivery system in the north, and develop a system which is northern-based and sustainable.

We need to do more for ourselves. We need to be encouraged. Northern communities across the country need to be encouraged to look for solutions to this as well. Historically there are many large farms throughout the Northwest Territories. They were run by the missions. They produced the vegetables for all the north in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. That is gone now, but it could come back. There are some northern communities, like Inuvik and Norman Wells, that have created greenhouses. They are very successful with their production of food.

We see many opportunities in the renewable area to improve the situation, whether it is energy, food or housing. All those things come together to reduce costs.

When the efforts are put in from somewhere else, it does not allow for that local involvement. When those from outside the north decide what is good for us, that usually results in failure. Keeping this in mind, we call on the government to work with all northerners to develop a sustainable solution to food insecurity.

Nutrition north has many flaws and needs to be reworked with the involvement of northerners. However, until then, it must be expanded to cover all the communities that are now not being covered by that program. That is only fair. We are fair, as Canadians. We believe in equality. We do not stop somebody from applying for a GST rebate because they did not apply for it the year before. Why is that a criteria for northern communities, whether they made use of the food mail system? If they had not made use of the food mail system, they are ineligible for the nutrition north program. That is simply an excuse.

We do not need excuses in the north. We need ways to feed our children, to make our system work, and to have healthy and prosperous communities.

Business of Supply

•(1035)

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank that member for his speech. I just want to clarify some things for the record, however. The New Democrats stated on April 2, 2015, that they would like to see 55 communities made fully eligible for the nutrition north program. A month later, May 26, they said 46 communities should be added. Today, they say 50 communities are being added. It seems like the New Democrats do not even have an idea which communities should be added, or how many or what the criteria are.

That particular member of course has voted against investments in his own riding that would have brought down the cost of food. He voted against the Inuvik Tuktoyaktuk Highway twice. He voted against an \$11-million increase to the nutrition north program to deliver more subsidy to northerners. Specifically, the member mentioned that this was for remote fly-in communities and that was what we should be concentrating on. In his speech, he said it is actually just a long drive even if they do have year-round access.

However, I want to ask about the member's riding. Nahanni Butte is a community he says should be added. It has year-round access by road, by ferry and by winter road. I am asking this. Why should that community of Nahanni Butte be added in his riding when it has year-round access already?

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, in the case of Nahanni Butte, the member is a bit wrong on that. I would invite him to come up to my riding and I will show him the condition of the winter road that services Nahanni Butte. However, I am glad he has taken a look at that. The people in Nahanni Butte suffer incredibly high food costs. That is one of the points I made in my speech. Sometimes, the criteria being used are not a fact.

What we said was that there were about 50 communities. That is what the Auditor General reported in his study. We identified 46 communities very clearly. There is a list of them here and I would be pleased to provide it to members so that they can look at it. This was research done by my office in an effort to understand better what communities should be provided with access. If there are others, I would encourage members to come forward with the communities in their ridings that should be in this program. I should be hearing from some Conservative members who also have these kinds of communities in their ridings and say that their community needs to be subsidized as well.

•(1040)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his work on this and for the motion today. It is shocking, actually, to hear the parliamentary secretary deny and quibble about the fact that this is about a program that has failed to address the issue of hungry children or mothers not eating because they are sacrificing for their families.

It is predictable in that during the 2011 election when, at the debate in Iqaluit with the member for Nunavut, she was told this was not going to work the way it was. She was told the list was ridiculous. She was told this was a disaster waiting to happen. Now the UN rapporteur has told us that and so has the Auditor General. I thank the member for this.

I would like the member to expand a bit more on the accountability provisions that he sees and how they actually measure food security in order to ensure this program is working, but also on the importance of hunters to have access to snow machines and ammunition so hunters can feed their families in a traditional way.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. Members will come to order. It is the member's time here. I am happy to stand here all day until the House quiets down. We cannot hear all hon. members, and the member for St. Paul's is putting a question for the member for Northwest Territories. He has to have an opportunity to hear that question.

The hon. member for Northwest Territories.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, I had hoped that we could have a relatively civilized debate about this today. We are talking about real people here, who sometimes go hungry, whose kids go to school hungry, who suffer from malnutrition. The rate of dental problems in Nunavut is extremely high because they do not have proper nutrition. These are all things that are real problems for Canadians. I really do not appreciate that we get off track on this today. I really hope that everybody pulls it back together and understands that we are talking about real people.

There needs to be accountability for what we do. Everyone should understand a system has to be fair to everyone. We cannot put in tax laws that exclude people. Why should we put in systems for a food subsidy that excludes people? Those things do not match up. They do not match up to the Canadian model, so let us get with it.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for his work on this because it has such a huge impact in our regions in the north in Nishnawbe Aski Nation territory, Treaty No. 9 and Treaty No. 5, where there are instances of mothers standing outside grocery stores trying to hawk possessions to feed their children. That is in existence in Canada where it is easier to feed children on Coke and chips, because it is cheaper than giving them milk.

I would like to ask the member about the northwestern Treaty No. 9 and Treaty No. 5 area, Mishkeegogamang, Webequie in the area under the Minister of Natural Resources right now in Kenora. The housing and food crisis there has brought in international relief agencies. Feed the Children from Oklahoma had to send in 100,000 pounds of food into that region because the government has failed to look after the most basic needs of its citizens under its watch.

Business of Supply

Why does my hon. colleague think it is okay for the government to believe that it can be so arbitrary on who gets to be fed and who does not have access to proper food?

• (1045)

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, every community should have access. The fact that these communities in northern Ontario are not getting access to this program is terrible when we think that in northern Ontario right now at the Victor Mine they are pulling out diamonds. The resources are being taken away. The communities are in terrible shape. The thought that we would somehow hold back on providing a subsidy for food to communities that have so many other problems as well is ludicrous. We need to understand that the system has to be fair and has to support everyone.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, I want to clarify that the member has said 50 communities in his motion, but he has just said clearly every community should receive the nutrition north subsidy. He said it would cost \$7.5 million, those were his numbers, to add 50 communities. How much would it cost to add every community, which is what he has just proposed?

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, we identified that there were 46 communities that we could come up with. This is a difficult process. There are many small communities throughout northern Canada. It is not an easy task to determine which ones are on a road and off.

Our research showed there were at least 46 communities. The cost of \$7.5 million is based on taking the average subsidy in that particular region that is applied to the other communities that have the full subsidy and saying, if we gave the communities that do not have the subsidy the same as their neighbours are getting, then it would work out to about \$7.5 million a year. That is the math that we used. I am ready to talk about any math. I am ready to talk about any community. I do not want to restrict the list, but this is what we work with.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am grateful for the opportunity to speak today. As the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, I am especially pleased to speak to this motion and to update the House on one of the many ways our government is standing up for those living in our northern territories.

This government has been working for northerners like no other government before it. We have devolved the authority over lands and resources in the Northwest Territories out of Ottawa and back to the territorial government where it belongs. Late last year, we announced that we are working on doing the same in Nunavut as well. We pursued the most ambitious regulatory improvement agenda in Canadian history. We know that this will encourage investment in our natural resource industry and drive economic development across the north.

This Monday, legislation came into force creating Polar Knowledge Canada, a brand new, cutting-edge polar science program. This initiative will protect our Arctic sovereignty and ensure that Canada remains a world leader in polar research for years to come.

Put simply, under this government, Canada's north remains and will remain strong, proud, and free.

Continued support for the nutrition north program is just another way that we are helping our northern territories live up to their promise and their potential. Through nutrition north, we are successfully addressing not only the cost of food but the difficulty northerners may face in finding fresh, nutritious food at any price. As we all know, the north is a long way from many sources of perishable foods. Many communities are isolated. Distance and limited transportation options add to the cost. Moreover, often during the time it takes to deliver the food, perishable foods do perish. These are not new problems and ours is not the first government to develop measures aimed at helping northerners lower the cost of nutritious food, although it is undeniably the most successful.

Where results, accountability, and efficiency are concerned, nutrition north Canada represents a substantial and meaningful improvement over its predecessor, the food mail program, which operated in one form or another since the 1960s. The food mail program operated on a fairly simple premise. It provided a subsidy to Canada Post to offset the costs of transporting food to northern communities.

However, the food mail program had a number of weaknesses. First of all, the program was designed to ship mail, not food. There was no real incentive to deliver more nutritious foods to the north. Funding went to less nutritious items and non-food items. There was little accountability for the disposition of program funds. There were no requirements for retailers or transporters to provide their sales information to the department. There was no monitoring in place to ensure that the subsidy was actually being passed on to consumers in the form of lower prices. Adding to its weaknesses and perhaps most concerning of all, there was no governance structure to enable the people in the communities served by the program to provide any meaningful input on its operation or management.

In order to address these and other shortcomings of the food mail program, in April of 2011 our government launched the program that we are discussing today. Since that initial launch, based on input from sources as varied as the Auditor General of Canada to northerners themselves, we have continued to refine the program to maximize the benefits to northerners.

The aim of nutrition north Canada is straightforward: to work with stores across the north and food suppliers in southern Canada to ensure that northerners have better access to perishable, nutritious food at prices that are lower than would otherwise be the case.

Unlike its predecessor, nutrition north Canada follows a market-driven model. This provides an efficient, cost-effective and transparent means of helping northerners access perishable nutritious food. Rather than subsidizing transportation costs, the program provides funding directly to retailers, wholesalers, and distributors. If they meet the program's requirements, they proceed to enter into agreements with Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada.

Business of Supply

In addition to its emphasis on perishable nutritious foods and again unlike its predecessor, the current program also offers a subsidy for country food produced in government-regulated northern commercial food processing plants. This subsidy can be applied when northern retailers source country food from these processors for sale in local stores. In this way, the program is helping to make more country foods available.

● (1050)

Country foods—Arctic char, caribou, muskox, and others—are a vital food source, and the Government of Canada is committed to helping these foods remain a key part of northerners' diets. In addition, as I am certain hon. members are aware, these foods generally contain less fat and sugar than many store-bought foods. They contribute important nutrients for good health. Indeed, a diet including country foods has been associated with lower levels of heart disease and diabetes.

Is the program working? Is nutrition north providing the kinds of benefits to northerners it was designed to provide? Are food prices lower? Is there improved access to perishable, more nutritious foods?

The answer in every case is unequivocally yes.

Between March 2011 and March 2014, the cost of the revised northern food basket for a family of four in communities eligible for a full subsidy under the program fell by an average of 7.2%. For that average family of four, that is a savings of more than \$30 a week, nearly \$140 a month, or \$1,600 a year. This is \$1,600 a year that our government is saving northern Canadians. Of course, this comes in addition to the thousands more that northerners will save thanks to our government's suite of family tax cuts and benefits.

On the basis of these numbers alone, I would say there is ample evidence that the program is making a real difference for northerners, and it has been making a difference from the beginning.

In November 2011, just seven months after the program was launched, Michael McMullen, the executive vice-president of the North West Company, said:

Local shoppers are starting to see major price decreases on key, nutritious food items. As an example, in Hall Beach four-litre milk has dropped in price by over six dollars, from \$11.49 to \$5.09. Compared to low-nutrition beverages like soft drinks, milk is now 80% cheaper on a same portion basis.

Mr. McMullen is not the only one to say that food prices in the north have fallen thanks to nutrition north. In fact, earlier this week the member for Churchill, the NDP's aboriginal affairs critic, said that there is no question that it does reduce the price by a couple dollars, and that for healthy foods that can make somewhat of a difference.

I would say to the member and to the House that a price reduction of a couple of dollars on a couple of nutritious food items, over a couple of shopping trips does not make "somewhat" of a difference; it makes a real difference, a significant difference.

Let me offer a few more examples.

In Rankin Inlet in March 2011, before nutrition north Canada, a dozen eggs cost \$4.39. As of last November, a dozen eggs cost \$2.59, which is 40% lower. Two litres of 2% milk cost \$7.29 in

March 2011. Last fall, that was down to \$4.45, which is also 40% lower. A loaf of bread in Rankin Inlet is now going for about \$2.50, which is \$1.70 less than the \$4.19 it cost before this program

In Tuktoyaktuk last November, a three-pound bag of apples went for \$9.29, which is \$2.40 less than what it would have cost before nutrition north Canada was launched.

The program is having a positive impact on more than prices. The average annual weight of eligible items shipped to northern remote communities increased by approximately 25% over the first three years of the program

Based on the most recent analysis done in March of last year, 95% of the nutrition north Canada subsidy is going toward lower prices for key, specific product categories: fruits and vegetables, meat and alternatives, milk, and perishable dairy and grain products. That increase in shipments of perishables is a direct result of the market-based model our government put in place for this program

Under the old food mail program, food was delivered to retailers by Canada Post, period. The Canada Post system is designed for delivering mail, not food. If a letter or a parcel arrives a few days later than expected, it is not usually a big deal. However, if a shipment of bananas or lettuce or bread arrives a few days late, it is compost.

With nutrition north Canada, retailers and food suppliers have options when it comes to transportation. They do not have to purchase their products at specific access points designated by Canada Post. They can shop around for the best prices on product and for the best prices on transportation.

● (1055)

In fact, nutrition north Canada allows them to use the most effective and cost-efficient supply chain arrangements and routes to reduce the price of food and provide the best quality. As a result, more perishable nutritious foods are getting to northern communities and more northerners are taking advantage of new accessibility.

A few months ago Derek Reimer, the director of administration at the North West Company, said that sales of fresh produce, meat, and other nutritious foods in its stores have increased by nearly 25% since nutrition north Canada was launched. I am sure all members will be pleased to hear this sort of story, and I can assure them that this government is taking action to see that number go even higher.

Business of Supply

Under nutrition north Canada, we have allocated \$2.9 million to Health Canada to support culturally appropriate nutrition education initiatives in first nation and Inuit communities. These activities focus on areas such as developing knowledge and skills for selecting and preparing healthy store-bought and traditional country foods. These initiatives act as a complement to the program's retail subsidy by encouraging healthy eating patterns among people in isolated northern communities.

It is clear that nutrition north Canada is achieving its objectives, and we will continue to make it better. Our government has implemented a number of recent improvements to the program. Last fall, we increased the nutrition north Canada annual budget to more than \$65 million, an increase of \$11.3 million in one year, and we have added a 5% annual escalator to the budget. This means that number will increase by 5% every year from now on to ensure stable, predictable funding long into the future.

It is important to note that these funds are being used responsibly. We are achieving results for northerners and results for all Canadians.

In 2014 the Auditor General reported on nutrition north Canada. I would like to quote some of the findings presented in that report:

Throughout the audit fieldwork, the audit team observed examples of how controls are properly designed and are being applied effectively by NNC. ...

Eligibility assessment criteria and a consistent approach was used to assess recipient eligibility; feedback from users and stakeholders is used as input in making program decisions; and, the program is transparent in reporting performance measurement data and reports measurable results on eligible food item prices and items shipped.

I do not believe these statements describe a program that is in need of a major overhaul. That is not to say we do not believe the program can be even better. The Auditor General did identify areas where improvements could be made.

We recognize the need to continually improve the program in order to ensure that northerners have access to nutritious perishable foods. That is why our government accepted all of the recommendations of the Auditor General, including the need to review the community eligibility criteria for the program. As a result, we are collecting information on isolated northern communities that are not currently eligible to receive subsidies under the program.

The department is currently conducting a detailed review of all northern communities across this country, and this will inform the government's next steps. This is one of the many commitments outlined in our action plan in response to the Auditor General's report. Our goal is to keep improving the program for northerners and to respond to what may be a community's evolving need for a food subsidy.

Also as recommended by the Auditor General—indeed, even before the recommendation was made—the department reviewed and updated the program's performance measurement strategy.

Perhaps the most important investigations of the success of nutrition north Canada are the ones we conduct with the people who are involved personally: the retailers who are providing the service and the northerners who want their families to enjoy a diet of fresh, nutritious foods at a fair price.

The Nutrition North Canada Advisory Board provides advice to the minister on the management, direction, and activities of the program. As the Auditor General has noted, the advisory board is composed of external members who collectively represent a wide range of perspectives and interests of northern residents and communities. They are volunteers. Their loyalty is to northerners, not the minister. The board holds public meetings in communities across the north on a regular basis to gather input and suggestions directly from consumers.

● (1100)

The emphasis that we place on the feedback from the advisory board reflects our understanding that food security in the north is a complex issue and that we must work together with suppliers, retailers and especially northerners themselves if we are to address it successfully. That is what we are doing and the results being achieved by nutrition north Canada make it clear that our approach is working. Prices are down and access to fresh, nutritious foods is up. Just like the rest of our northern strategy, nutrition north Canada is working.

I encourage all members of the House to stand behind the government, support the work that we are doing to strengthen Canada's north, and reject this motion.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Northwest Territories, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the speech of the parliamentary secretary had so many inaccuracies that I cannot start to describe them.

I want to go after dollars. He said that the government added \$11 million this year to the program, to bring it up to \$65 million. In 2010-11, under Public Accounts, \$59 million were spent on food mail. In 2013-14, \$63,879,237 were spent on the nutrition north program. Now the parliamentary secretary is telling us that the government has added \$11 million to the program and it is up to \$65 million. How does he make those figures work? It is absurd. The program needs proper funding. The government knows that most of the \$11 million was part of the previous year's funding.

● (1105)

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, I was in Iqaluit to make the announcement of an additional \$11 million and the 5% funding escalator. I know the member has been here for a while, but the supplementary estimates include those amounts. When we brought in that additional funding to bring the nutrition north Canada funding up to \$65 million, the member and the NDP voted against it.

Business of Supply

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member opposite as he read from his speech. When he started to say what the prices were in Rankin Inlet, it was tempting me to go and shop there. If eggs are a little over \$2 a dozen in Rankin, I would be absolutely shocked. I live in a riding that receives a subsidy on many items and I have never, ever seen prices that low.

I would like to ask the member why the Department of Aboriginal Affairs is currently paying an Ottawa-based consulting firm to work in Ottawa to develop more made-in-Ottawa solutions to revamp the nutrition north program. We know that will not work for northern families. Why are people not going into northern communities, consulting with the users of this program who need the subsidy on food, and developing a plan in conjunction with them? Maybe then we would see some results. Since nutrition north came into effect, in the last four years northerners have seen nothing, only critical analysis of the program and how the subsidy is being used.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what our program does. There is the nutrition north advisory council, which is made up of northerners, in the north. I have met with them. They are passionate individuals from the north, who care about the north, and want this program to be made even better. The member might be talking about designing a program, but the community consultations are taking place in the north, being led by northerners, and are going to result in a better program for northerners.

Again, I want to talk about the Liberal record on this. The food mail program was a subsidy for pop, chips, snowmobile parts, tires, things that are not nutritious foods, which is where we place the priority: perishable foods, nutritious foods, that otherwise would not be available in the north. Nutrition north Canada is a vast improvement on the food mail program that the Liberal Party left in place for so long. This program is designed by northerners, will be improved by northerners, and we are happy to support it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will not hide the fact that I was extremely disappointed by the government member's remarks.

He referred to the Auditor General's report on the nutrition north program, but he said exactly the opposite of what is written in the report. The Auditor General saw some things that are unacceptable. For instance, he stated in his report that the lower prices that were supposedly observed were false.

He also said he was shocked to note that food retailers are not required to disclose their profit margins, under the pretext that that would go against commercial confidentiality. It would appear that commercial confidentiality is more important to the department than delivering food.

If the program is working so well, if the member truly believes that the Auditor General and all the stakeholders agree with him, can he explain to us why people are being forced to go to the dump to scavenge for food?

Can he explain to us why severe food insecurity, which means that people are in danger, affects 33% of people in Canada's far north?

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, as I made clear in my speech, we welcomed the report of the Auditor General and accepted all of his recommendations. One of those recommendations that the member talked about was already well under way before the Auditor General's report, and that was to increase transparency for retailers to have them publish on the nutrition north website the level of subsidy they were receiving and showing that they were passing that subsidy on to the consumer.

That recommendation was made by the Auditor General. The department has accepted it. The department moved on it as of April 1. That information is public. Retailers have to show they are passing that subsidy along to the consumer.

• (1110)

Hon. Greg Rickford (Minister of Natural Resources and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before I put a question to the parliamentary secretary, I want to say this about the motion. I appreciate some of the details, or at least the spirit of what the motion intends to address. I believe the member was at the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs when we were working on this. The motion itself sends a clear signal that the nutrition north program is certainly better than anything we saw before. I can attest to that as someone who has spent more than eight years of his life actually living and working in isolated and remote first nations communities; not big cities in the far north, but isolated communities.

Although they fall short in a couple of key areas, the member is making best efforts to understand some of the fixes that are out there for consideration. In particular, transparency, food security and actually reducing the cost at the point of purchase in the communities are key facets that the motion's, perhaps, quick fix might not ultimately address for a broader and more admirable goal of reducing food costs and increasing food security for all northern communities, as they could become defined.

That pathway to address what I think the member is saying in spirit, begs the question of the parliamentary secretary around the Auditor General's report. We have accepted those recommendations.

Could the member describe, in the context of responding to the auditors general and perhaps considering other policy options for consideration in that process, what would ultimately reduce the cost of food and increase food security for all northern communities?

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank our hard-working Minister of Natural Resources and member of Parliament from the great Kenora riding for all his work on this file and on aboriginal files in general. He has an incredible understanding, having worked and lived in those communities himself.

Business of Supply

The fact that we today see the opposition wanting to add 50 communities, whether it has assessed that eligibility at all is up for debate, to the program shows that it is working. The New Democrats have certainly criticized it widely, but they think more communities should be added to the program, which in my view shows they do support what the program does.

The Auditor General was very clear that there needed to be a new way of assessing communities. We have accepted that recommendation. Communities that believe they should be added to the subsidy list have the opportunity to contact nutrition north Canada directly to make that case. As well, the government is conducting a review of all northern communities to ensure that all of those that deserve to be part of the program, or that can be part of it, will be added.

The work is well under way. We accept the Auditor General's report and we are committed to improving food security and nutritious foods for northern Canadians.

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to speak to the motion before the House of Commons. The motion talks to nutrition north Canada, a program that is in place to help provide nutritious food to northern communities across Canada, so many people who live in those northern regions can have a healthy diet, can have access to nutritious food in their communities and to ensure that those foods are affordable.

However, while nutrition north was supposed to make nutritional food more accessible and affordable to northerners in a very transparent way, four years after its launch, the Auditor General has slammed the program as an abject failure. People in many areas of the north, we know for sure in Rankin Inlet, are scrounging for food in waste sites, in dumps.

What has the program actually done for the amount of money that has been invested? This is where the key question begins. We know this program is currently seeing millions of dollars being invested into it. However, the question remains this. Why is this money not reaching the families who need it? Why is it not reaching northerners who need to have nutritional food that is affordable for them and their families? These are very good questions, and questions that became very evident in the Auditor General's report. However, there were other things as well.

The Auditor General has outlined, very clearly, that when we look across Canada's north, we will notice there are 50 isolated northern communities that are only accessibly by air and are not currently eligible for the full subsidy under this program. First, we know that is wrong. We know of situations where communities are completely adjacent to each other, only miles apart in some cases, yet one community is getting a subsidy that is nearly double what the other community is getting.

We need to look at the fairness in the program. Why is it not being applied fairly to communities that are of similar distance, that have similar needs, that have similar transportation mechanisms and that have the same challenges in accessing nutritional food?

The other thing we need to look at is why so many communities are being omitted from the program, communities that are completely isolated and communities that are only accessible by

air. Why are those communities not being added to the list? This is not a new issue. It has been around for quite some time. The Auditor General has pointed that out on a number of occasions. However, there has been no action by the government to include those communities. Again, that is unfair.

We are not seeing fairness being practised in how the program is being delivered to northerners. What is even more concerning to me is we are not seeing where the subsidy is going.

I represent a very northern region in our country, in Labrador, that is actually a part of the nutrition north subsidy program. Before that, it was a part of the food by mail program. I have listened to government members being critical of the food by mail program, yet they are not prepared to address the flaws that are in the nutrition north program simply because it is a creation of their government. It is irrelevant who created the program. The relevance is in ensuring that it works and that it reaches the people who actually need it.

However, there are so many other communities in the north like the ones I represent. I have travelled through Nunavut, through the Northwest Territories, through Yukon, all areas which have many communities that depend upon nutrition north programs, and so many others across Canada. I know for a fact what the high prices of food are in many of those communities and I know for a fact that many people in those communities live below the poverty line. They are Canadians who often do not have employment opportunities available to them, at least on a year-round basis, because of climate and other factors that affect their regions. They live on marginal incomes if not very low incomes. Accessing food that, in some cases, is three times more expensive than most Canadians would pay is very unfair.

• (1115)

What the motion today is asking is that the isolated northern communities that have been omitted from this program be added and be eligible for the full subsidy. It also asks for a comprehensive review of the nutrition north program, and that northerners be full partners in that.

One of the things we have learned is that, while there is a review process with nutrition north, that review process does not allow all the communities that participate to actually give feedback. It is up to the board of nutrition north to decide which five communities it wants to go into and review, or which six communities, or whether it is only going to go into two communities.

First of all, we think there should be an ongoing review of the program, and at some point all communities should have an opportunity to have feedback into the program.

We really believe that, for this work, northerners do have to be full partners, but they also have to have the opportunity to give input and to provide solutions for the program on how it could work better, how monies could be better invested or better distributed, and how people could be more accountable to the program and to government for the investment. That definitely has to happen.

Business of Supply

The motion talks about improved supports for traditional foods. Obviously I am a huge supporter of ensuring that we have traditional foods available in northern communities and aboriginal communities, in particular, where people are very dependent on traditional foods as part of their diet.

We also know that there are regions across the Arctic and across the north where a lot of traditional foods are not as readily available as they used to be. For example, in my area we have a ban on hunting cariboo right now. Cariboo was the main diet of people in that northern region. It was the main protein, next to seal meat, that these communities were consuming.

Now with a ban on cariboo, many people are left hungry, having to go to the local Northern Store to try to find foods to feed their family. They are not able to hunt from the land as they used to. Those kinds of restrictions are having a huge impact on the diet of northerners.

However, I have seen some good models that are being developed. Some of those models include community freezer programs, where people who are able to get some traditional foods by hunting from the land can make them available in the community through a community freezer program.

I would encourage the government, if it wants to look at ensuring traditional foods in those communities, to support those programs. Some of them do get some funding from government, but most of it is done through charitable donations and fundraising. It does work.

I have also seen programs called the community pantry, which is not always nutritional foods but staple foods like flour, milk, tea, and those kinds of staples that people need to be available in communities, mostly dry ingredients. There are no food banks in many of these communities. If people are hungry and they cannot afford to buy from the store because of the prices and they cannot access food any other way, community pantries allow them to have the very staples they need to be able to provide some food for their family.

I have seen those programs that are working fairly well. There are things out there that are being created by local northern people themselves in their own communities, which are a fit for them. I would like to see the government look at those things and see how they are working.

• (1120)

In fact, only a short time ago, I met with a group that is looking at food security across the north. I suggested a number of these measures to it in terms of what it could or should be doing, based on my experience and what I have seen that works. There are a lot of people out there who are keenly interested in ensuring that there is food security in the northern, Arctic, and aboriginal regions of this country, ensuring that food is affordable to people. Therefore, I think we have already established a lot of resources that we can draw upon to help us put together what would be seen as an ideal program to meet those needs across the north.

The motion is also asking that sufficient funding be made available to meet the needs of all of the northern communities. This is an issue that really bothered me when we were talking about funding the nutrition north program this year, and the fact that the

program was not adequate, and there was a lot of media attention around what was happening in Rankin Inlet. The stores were sending expired food to the dump and local people were scavenging in the dump to get that food. That is a full indication that people are hungry. This is not about want; it is really about need.

When all of that happened, the response from the government was to announce that it would put another \$11.3 million into the nutrition north program this year. That was met with great applause from all of us who work in the north. We know that revenue is needed. However, what the government failed to say was that in 2013-2014 the program had already spent nearly \$64 million. Therefore, the \$11 million that it was putting in only topped up the program to what it had actually spent. It is not new money. It is not to say that it would put another \$11 million over and above to ensure that subsidies are administered more fairly to the communities that get them or that more communities would be added. That particular investment only really brought the program up to what was being spent. In fact, the addition of the \$11 million really only brought the program to a total of \$65 million in subsidies, while last year it had already spent \$64 million, so it is an extra \$1 million we will have this year. However, if the demand for food goes up in any of these communities, that \$1 million will be used up.

The subsidy was needed anyway, just to cover off the everyday costs of the program. This subsidy is not enhancing the program in any way. It is not allowing the program to grow to add additional communities in any way. I think it is important to point that out.

I would also point out that \$65 million in a subsidy program for nutrition north is a very fair subsidy amount if we know that it is reaching the people who need it. What has been most confusing about all of this is that, although this program has what I feel is a fair investment in funding going into it, unless there is accountability for how that money is spent and assurances that it reaches the people who need it, I have to ask if the money is getting the best use.

That was the point the Auditor General was really making when he talked about the accountability measures. He also talked about the fact that there was a lot of money going into subsidies that were in place in the program, but there was no way to monitor it to ensure that the subsidies were being passed on, and there was no requirement by retailers to ensure that there was accountability. This was one of the huge concerns pointed out in the Auditor General's report. That has to be looked at. I do not think we can ignore those points. They are very important points.

• (1125)

If we are going to make sure that we deal with food insecurity in northern regions of Canada and ensure there is affordable food in these communities, we also need to ensure those subsidies are going to be passed on. There has to be a new process of accountability put in place to ensure that the retailers that participate in the program are passing on the subsidy.

Business of Supply

We also have to look at what the profit margins are. Sometimes, the subsidy is being passed on in its entirety, but what is the profit being earned in a lot of those regions in Canada? If we look at where the \$64 million subsidy goes, we will notice that a large percentage of that subsidy goes to one store or provider across the northern region. It is important. If we are going to pay out more than half of this subsidy rate to one retail company servicing the north, the very least we should be doing is ensuring that there is a level of accountability being provided.

Before I conclude, I want to say that nutrition north is a very important program for northerners. It is very important for those of us who live in northern regions and represent northern regions, because we see the struggles day to day in many of these communities. Those struggles are not just around food. They are also around housing, having a good water supply, infrastructure, poverty, and all of those things. In order to deal with them, people need to have their basic needs met. One of those basic needs is ensuring that they have a good diet and nutritious food, so that they are able to function and address the other challenges and stresses they have in their life.

I would say this to the government opposite. Do not be pushed back by the fact that there are some serious issues around the program, but push forward to address them. Be on top of the game and provide the very best program that can be provided to northerners. Do not accept as good enough the fact that what we did four years ago might have been a little bit better than what was done four years before that, because it is not good enough. We are seeing that it is not good enough. Be motivated by what the Auditor General said, which is that the program is flawed, it needs to change, and we need to ensure that these subsidies are reaching the people who need them.

I would support members in the House who are prepared to do that, because that is what needs to happen. In doing so, we will be supporting many northern families across Canada.

• (1130)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first, I want to thank my colleague for her long and substantive speech. It was very informative and interesting to someone like me who lives in urban Quebec and does not hear about this situation every day. I also want to commend my colleague from the Northwest Territories for moving this motion this week, as we talk about reconciliation with the first nations. I think the motion is quite timely.

Throughout Quebec and near where I live, the price of food varies a bit, but not so much that the price is out of reach for some people, if we compare the price of food in Chibougamau and the price in my riding, Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, for example. That said, when we look at the price of fresh produce up north, we wonder how people can find the means to feed a family with those prices, when their social assistance cheque is \$371 a month.

I have two questions for my colleague. How does she react when she sees—as I was told the other day—international humanitarian aid organizations working in Canada? To me as a Canadian, it is truly shameful. I would also like to know whether some of the

municipalities that these organizations are working in are among the municipalities that my colleague's bill seeks to include.

[*English*]

Ms. Yvonne Jones: Mr. Speaker, yes, most of the communities I speak of are included under the program currently. However, in terms of how the subsidy works and the fairness of the program, that needs to be evaluated. There are some communities that are not included that still could be included. That is not just in the Labrador region I represent. My riding borders the Quebec north shore, and there are communities in that area that have the same issues and problems. I communicate with them on a regular basis as well because our ridings are adjacent. I know that there is a huge area in the Quebec-Labrador region of northern Canada that is impacted.

However, there are lots of other regions as well. I talked about income levels. It is unfortunate that we do not have the long-form census any more, but if we did, we would see that a lot of people in those regions live below the poverty line. The amount of money they have to spend to provide for the necessities of life is far less than what other people have.

Earlier my colleague talked about eggs in Rankin Inlet costing \$2.35 or \$2.65 a dozen. Nain, which is in my riding and is not nearly as far north as Rankin Inlet, receives about the same amount in subsidies. Actually Rankin Inlet receives more. In Nain, those eggs are over \$5 a dozen. I just had someone call and check. Milk is \$6.50 for a carton of milk. It is not \$3, as it is in Rankin Inlet.

The other thing we need to look at is that water by the case, depending on whether it is 12 or 24 bottles, comes out at anywhere from \$20 to \$40. In many northern communities there are boil orders right now, and people need to buy water.

• (1135)

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's speech and I appreciate having worked with her on a number of files, as she is the northern affairs critic for the Liberal Party. I think she agrees in large part with what I said earlier, which is that the program, while it may need some tweaking, is not something we should throw out. The Auditor General has said that there need to be improvements. We have accepted all of the Auditor General's recommendations.

The member recommended that northerners design the program and provide feedback. Of course, we have the mechanism for that with the nutrition north advisory council, which is made up of northerners, meets with northerners, and addresses the concerns of northerners.

Business of Supply

I have a concern about a previous intervention by the aboriginal affairs critic of the Liberal Party, the member for St. Paul's, when she harkened back to the days of the food mail program and it being in some way superior. She said that the nutrition north Canada program no longer subsidizes snowmobile parts or tires. Would she not agree with me that the purpose of nutrition north, and what we should really be focusing on, is getting perishable food to the north and allowing snowmobile parts and tires and other non-perishable items to be shipped by cheaper methods that take a lot longer? Maybe the member could clarify what the Liberal position is on that.

Ms. Yvonne Jones: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague's question is very reasonable. Again, nutrition north speaks to nutrition. I think we all agree with that. Talking about snowmobile parts and using them as items that should not be subsidized really shows the lack of knowledge of the north and the culture of northerners and people who live in the Arctic region.

For example, I grew up in isolated communities that were fly-in, fly-out. I can tell members that snowmobile parts were essential. They were essential for every single family that was fortunate enough to actually own a snow machine, because that snow machine was what got wood to heat the house in climates that went below 50°. It was that snow machine that got traditional food from the land to feed the family. In many cases, if they did not have that, many families would go without. The cost of getting those parts into those communities was very expensive, and they are still expensive today. While that would not be directly related to nutritious food, it is an essential item for many northern communities.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Northwest Territories, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her position on this, and I want to remind members that the motion says very clearly that part b is to determine ways of directly providing the subsidy to northern residents. That is actually what the motion says today. We agree that we need to have some temporary measures to fix this existing program, but we need to move on to other ways that can make a bigger difference.

The parliamentary secretary talked in his speech about some of the food costs. We did an analysis comparing communities that get a partial subsidy, like Lutselk'e, which gets 5¢ a kilogram and where milk is \$16.99 for four litres, with others, like Kujawiak, Quebec, which gets a full subsidy and where the cost is \$7.99. We could look at other things, like potatoes. In Lutselk'e, a 10-pound bag is \$13.99. We took that directly from the store last week. In Kujawiak, it is \$5.23. There is a reduction for communities involved in the program. If they are not involved in the program, they are paying extraordinary costs.

Part of our motion is to try to get these communities into the program. These communities are not just from the Northwest Territories, Yukon, and Nunavut. They are from all over northern Canada. Does the hon. member not agree that this program has to cover every single community out there that is isolated or remote and has high food costs?

• (1140)

Ms. Yvonne Jones: Mr. Speaker, I certainly want to thank my colleague from the Northwest Territories who brought forward this motion today and with whom I have worked on a number of issues

in the north, as I have with other colleagues in the House of Commons.

I want to say yes, communities that are isolated across the northern region of Canada should be included in the program. Communities that have high costs for food and are unable to access nutritious food need to be included.

The other piece the member talked about was a way to ensure that the subsidy is provided to northern residents and that there is improved support for traditional foods. I spoke to that in my speech. I talked about examples of where this is being done in a number of communities across the north right now. It is something to be explored to see whether it is a model that can work as part of nutrition north. I would certainly be supportive of having that happen.

In terms of direct support to families, I will give an example. If we crunch the numbers and the amount of subsidy that was paid out to retailers in Nain, Labrador, for example, and divide that among the number of individuals in the community, a family of eight, and as we know, in the north most homes have eight, 10, or 12 people living in them, would have received around \$8,000 directly through the subsidy. When I asked people if they think they received this kind of discount based on the subsidy for food in the store, the answer was "absolutely not". I just put that out there for the record.

[Translation]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as I usually do when I rise in the House, I want to acknowledge that we are on unceded, traditional Algonquin territory. I want to thank my Algonquin brothers and sisters for this opportunity to rise on their territory.

I also want to mention that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay, who, in my eyes, is the quintessential Canadian parliamentarian.

I see that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs agrees with me on that.

[English]

This week, we have been hearing about the need for Canada to move towards reconciliation. It was an intense week for many of us, including me. We heard about the need for constructive action to address ongoing colonialization that impacts education, health, child welfare, economic opportunities, justice, and much more in indigenous communities across this country.

We have heard the recommendation that the government create a more equitable and inclusive society by closing the gaps in social, health, and economic outcomes among indigenous peoples of this land. I propose that the logical first step would be to fix nutrition north and to implement a sustainable northern strategy based on the recommendations and knowledge of the people living in the north.

Business of Supply

Patterns of land use in northern communities have gone through extensive changes during the last 50 years. This is mostly from southerners imposing ideas, legislation, and regulations on territories and communities that face a very different reality than those in the south. Relocation, settlement, and the introduction of a wage-based economy have permanently altered indigenous land use and cultural practices.

Northern communities live in food deserts, geographic regions with limited access to diverse and nutritious food. The availability of imported, prepackaged foods outweighs access to ancestral and healthy foods, leading to diet-based illnesses such as type II diabetes, for instance.

A shift to a wage-based economy means that many do not have the time necessary for hunting, fishing, and gathering berries and medicines.

The government needs to listen to this old knowledge found in conversations with community elders, land-based stories, cultural models, and research produced by communities themselves in order to create sustainable, responsive, and respectful solutions to the problems faced by northern communities.

When the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, for instance, goes out on the water to do a species population count, they need to listen to the communities and work with the knowledge of community elders to do the job properly. The last beluga count in Quaqtaq, where I was a couple of weeks ago, was done in 1985. The DFO came at the wrong time of year to do the count. The beluga had already migrated further along.

The hunting quotas of today are based on faulty research from 30 years ago. This community wants to be able to feed its members by hunting, and yet they are restricted. This is a very innovative community that is researching hydroponic growing systems to raise vegetables indoors at the 61st parallel.

• (1145)

Quaqtaq knows what it needs to be sustainable and provide for all community members. I propose the government should listen to that community.

Last week, the minister responsible for the nutrition north program showed his seriously flawed understanding of what climate change is and how it works when he tried to joke that a warmer climate would make food costs in the north more affordable. He also showed how poorly he understands what lies at the heart of the food crisis in the north. Global climatic destabilization has already changed how we raise, harvest and distribute our food. It takes just a little unpredictable, uncharacteristic weather pattern to demonstrate how fragile our food systems are.

At the moment, the current model is not prepared for catastrophic climate shifts that challenge food chains, migratory patterns, growing and harvesting conditions, and transportation on winter roads. Northern peoples have thousands of years of knowledge on how to live well with the cold. The government must listen to them when they tell us that climate change is changing the way that people live and provide food for their families.

When a community's survival depends on maintaining a total connection with the intricacies of the environment, no detail is ever missed, none, whether it be the numbers of beluga in the Ungava Bay, the size of caribou herds on la rivière aux Feuilles, or contamination of the waters of the north.

Unfortunately, traditional northern cultures are in peril. Environmental degradation is endangering the flora, fauna and waters in northern territories. The loss of biodiversity and water, largely due to development, is leading to the gradual decline of traditional land ethics that harmonize indigenous use of the land with conservation of the natural world. When practices of traditional land management stop, the ceremonies stop, as well as language and, as a result, the encoded ecological knowledge that comes with it. It is for this reason that the Cree negotiated the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement and la Paix des Braves: to ensure recognition of and respect for land-based knowledge and inherent indigenous rights.

Every year for two weeks in the spring, the Cree communities enjoy what is called the "goose break". At this time, schools are closed and collective agreements protect the right of workers to take the time off. Everyone in the community goes out to the bush to hunt geese, sleep in camps, tell stories and teach children land-based skills. This is a culturally appropriate and traditional food system and the government needs to learn from the communities how best to support these activities.

When I travel to Nunavik, goose break is so famous that the Inuit ask me how they can have a beluga break. I support the development of a sustainable northern plan that is based on the solutions and knowledge of the communities themselves.

• (1150)

[*Translation*]

The Conservatives abolished the food mail program without consulting those mainly concerned. They eliminated the subsidy for non-food products, such as diapers and household products. Their decision had a major financial impact on the communities. Last fall, the city of Val-d'Or pointed out the vital role that Canada Post plays in its community. Any change to the program must include making Val-d'Or the hub for the north once again.

People are hungry in the north. We must respond to the call of northerners.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before I ask my question, I want to tell the member how impressed I have been by his response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission events this week. While we do not always agree on policy, I know he is an honourable member whose heart is in the right place. As a former residential school survivor, I want to honour his contribution to that effort and thank him for his work on that file.

Business of Supply

On this question, the member for Northwest Territories mentioned that while there are 50 communities mentioned in this motion, he believes that all northern communities, regardless of whether they are remote, fly-in or not, should be included in the subsidy program. I believe the NDP budgeting was \$7.5 million for the 50 communities. Therefore, to include all northern communities, whether they are remote, fly-in communities or not, I am wondering if the member knows the amount of money that it would cost to bring all communities into the program, as the member for Northwest Territories has indicated they should be.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Mr. Speaker, I thank the parliamentary secretary for his kind words.

Yes, this was an intense week for many of our fellow survivors of the residential school system. When I stood up in the House to talk about that, I did not want it to be political, because that was not the moment to do so. I am glad that the parliamentary secretary recognized that, and I thank him for those words.

In response to that very important question, I know that a lot of the communities in my riding that are accessible by road face similar challenges as communities that are not accessible by road. These are issues that we need to take into account. These are the issues we need to consider and look at seriously.

In my view, it is not just a question of money, but a question of helping those northern communities that have to deal with these challenges. If we are serious about Arctic sovereignty, northern sovereignty and our north, and Canada is essentially a northern country, then we need to make these communities strong, which is the proposal of this motion.

Chisasibi is a good example of that. Although accessible by road, it is 2,000 kilometres from Montreal, and it faces the same challenges as Kuujuaq, for instance, which is further north to my riding.

• (1155)

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his comments and this motion.

First, for clarity, is the member suggesting, although it is not in the motion, that communities that are connected by road, depending on distance, should also be added as part of the nutrition north program? The motion actually speaks to those communities that are isolated where food is only able to get there by air, but there are certain situations in the country that are connected not just by road but by train as well.

The other thing I would like the member to respond to is that we heard members opposite talk about the nutrition north advisory council and how it holds consultations with people. Does he think that process is adequate, reaching enough people in the north and getting appropriate feedback?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Mr. Speaker, the member's first question suggests that our motion does not address the criteria issue. However, the eligibility criteria is mentioned in paragraph (c), and Chisasibi is a good example of that.

To the member's second question, everything that we do in this Parliament that concerns or addresses aboriginal issues should be

done in collaboration and partnership with the people who are directly affected by any program, policy or legislation. We need to work in collaboration, partnership and co-operation with the indigenous peoples of this country in whatever we do in this House, which is what I am proposing.

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples throughout its provisions talks about co-operation, collaboration and partnership with indigenous people. That is what we need to do with this program as well.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is always a great honour to rise to speak about the people of Timmins—James Bay, a region that is represented by the great region of Treaty 9. Treaty 9 represents Timmins—James Bay and also Kenora region.

This is a very profound week for Canadians and the issues that were raised in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I hear from Canadians all over who are deeply moved by what they saw and deeply hurt that this happened in our country, and ask how we move forward. Reconciliation, as Justice Murray Sinclair said, is not a word; it is rooted in action.

Canadians were also shocked and horrified to see the images of elders finding food in a garbage dump in the north and asked themselves, how can this be Canada? Unfortunately, if we travel to many far northern communities, the issue of hunger is a reality. The effect on communities that are not able to feed their children has devastating impacts. When we deal with the issues of the lack of clean water and the lack of proper schools, the issue of hunger underlies it all.

We are talking about a program that was brought in to replace a program. Each of these programs had its merits and each of these programs had its flaws. We are not arguing about whether a program is perfect or completely imperfect. We are talking about how we address the needs of people in northern communities.

The Auditor General raised serious red flags about the nutrition north program: that the department had not based community eligibility on need, a staggering oversight; that the department had not verified whether the northern retailers had even passed on the full subsidy to customers, completely undermining the power of this program; that the department had not collected the information needed to manage the nutrition north Canada program or measure its success; and that the department had not implemented the program's cost containment strategy.

The motion today is about the 50-some other communities that should be part of the program but are not. Many of those are in Treaty 9 and Treaty 5 territory and Nishnawbe Aski Nation. We will talk about those today.

In 2005, one of the first things I was honoured to do as a member of Parliament was to take part in the 100th anniversary celebrations of Treaty 9. Treaty 9 was first signed at what was called Osnaburgh House then. It is Mishkeegogamang now.

Business of Supply

The Treaty Commissioners, led by the infamous Duncan Campbell Scott, came in to take the rivers, along the Albany and then through the Abitibi and the Moose rivers to sign the Treaty 9 that transferred the greatest wealth in the country, the hydro, timber, mining assets, gold and silver to the white settlers. In exchange, the people were told, in Mishkeegogamang, Fort Hope and the other communities, that their way of life would not be impacted, but that was not what happened.

What happened was that the people were taken and put in internal displacement camps. That is what the reserves were. They were forced into these internal displacement camps, and if we go into Kasabonika, Pikangikum or Kashechewan today, they are still internal displacement camps where people do not have the power to effect the change in their community because they are still under the Indian Act.

I went with the recreation of this historic trip, and I was there in Mishkeegogamang, at Marten Falls, and at Moose Factory at the Fort where the signing of the treaties was recreated. I was at Marten Falls when a man stood up and spoke in Oji-Cree and apologized for not speaking English. He said, "I never learned English properly. When they came and took my sister to the residential school, she never came home, ever." Nobody bothered to come back and say what happened to her. When they came the next year, his family hid the man in the bush.

I see in Marten Falls the crushing poverty and the lack of water. The government would spend \$2 million a year shipping bottled water into a community rather fix the water plant, when there is letter after letter from the community saying, "Help us fix this water plant."

I had to stand up to speak, and they were all talking about the commemoration because they had government officials there. The question was obvious: what is there to celebrate with the signing of Treaty 9, where so much wealth was transferred away from the original signatories of the treaty, and they were left in such deplorable conditions that continue today?

• (1200)

How does this affect what we are talking about now? I have been taught by the people of James Bay and the other communities I represent that, unless we know the history, we do not really understand why we are here.

We will talk about Mishkeegogamang, where I was when they signed the treaty. It is a place that has faced crushing levels of poverty. The issues of nutrition north are absolutely central to the crisis it is facing in its community. In 2007, international relief agencies went into Webequie, another community, and Mishkeegogamang. Save the Children international workers went there to see it and they were shocked. They could not believe that they could see this kind of poverty in North America.

Nicholas Finney from Save the Children U.K. said that this was an international humanitarian disaster zone. He said:

There's been no sudden disaster here. It's a gradual disaster that has emerged, unfolded, and been propagated, whether it's intentionally or by negligence, by people that should know better, by people in power...

Feed the Children responded by sending 100,000 pounds of food to help those communities, and this carries on today.

I look at Marten Falls and Webequie, which are not part of nutrition north. They do not have clean water, and they just happen to be in the heart of the Ring of Fire. I hear the government say how the Ring of Fire is going to be a great thing. We even had a minister for a while. I think the minister disappeared. I think we had two ministers. We were all going to benefit from the Ring of Fire. In other words, everybody but the people of Webequie and Marten Falls were going to benefit. The government says it cannot wait to get this off the ground, but at the same time, people do not have access to proper food. They have to rely on bottled water that is being shipped in. That is not enough to keep them safe.

We carry on to this day with a broken promise that was made when the treaty was signed. Today, in Fort Albany, it costs \$60 for baby formula, and two pounds of frozen beef is \$15.99. In Treaty 5, in Berens River, people live on \$371 a month in welfare and pay \$6 for bread, \$13 for a jug of milk, and \$37 for a case of eggs. If they want their children to have something fresh, like grapes, that is \$12. If they ever saw cherries in those communities, it would cost them \$20. People feed their children chips and pop because it is easier.

This is not to say that people are lazy. These are people who still live on the land, but we are seeing the disappearance of the caribou herds in the north because of industrial development. Flying over James Bay in winter and seeing a mass caribou herd running on the ice below is absolutely one of the greatest things I have ever seen. However, those caribou herds are starting to disappear. We heard the minister from Nunavut talk about all the people and how they work out on the land. We talked to the families about how difficult it is to get out on the land now because of the costs. We need to find alternative measures.

This is not to say, again, that there are not really good ideas happening. In Fort Albany, we have an incredible greenhouse operation that has come up. In Attawapiskat, they have started a farmers' market where they fly in fresh produce for the families. There are good models out there, but we need to deal with this fundamental issue of hunger.

I just want to say that we have seen a failure from the government and a refusal to stand up for its communities—for example, in the Kenora region, Cat Lake, Deer Lake, Kasabonika Lake, Keewatin, Kingfisher Lake, Koocheching, McDowell Lake, Neskantaga, North Spirit Lake, Pikangikum, Poplar Hill, Sachigo Lake, Sandy Hill, Slate Falls, Wapekeka, Wawakapewin, Webequie, Marten Falls, Peawanuck, and in even Moosonee, which is attached by the rail line, the costs of food are extraordinary.

We need to do better in the House. These are Canadian citizens. This is a land of the north. Everyone in this country should be able to put their children to bed at night and know they are not going to bed hungry.

Business of Supply

• (1205)

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his speech and for his passion for the people he represents.

I have noted two communities in his list—Moosonee and Winisk. Moosonee has year-round rail access and Winisk actually does receive the subsidy, but under the name of Peawanuck.

Perhaps the member would address those two questions on the eligibility list.

Also, we are hearing in speech after speech from the NDP that the motion is one thing, but it actually wants to expand nutrition north's eligibility to all northern communities that are experiencing high food costs. While that may be a laudable goal, I do not think that the analysis on the cost of that has been done.

Perhaps the member would share what he believes that cost would be and perhaps address those communities that I mentioned, which would seem to fall outside of the NDP motion, as it is drafted.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I would like to interpret for my hon. colleague that they share our desire to ensure that no community lives in hunger, whether or not it is on the list.

The motion is talking about the 50 isolated communities that are not receiving the adequate subsidy. That is clear. The fact that there are other communities in difficult situations is something that we, as a Parliament, need to talk about. The community of Moosonee is available by rail line, but it is very difficult to live there, in terms of feeding families.

I would like to go back and forth and barter with my colleagues on the other side about how we can improve this, but the overall principle should be that we can do better in this country. When they can spend \$135 million on bogus television ads and they cannot spend \$7 million making sure people have access to baby food, we have a problem, and we need to fix it.

• (1210)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, sometimes I am absolutely astounded by how this type of fundamental and important question is handled. I do not know how many times the Parliamentary Secretary has risen since we started this debate, but he just rose again to ask how much that will cost.

Yes, we do have to ask these types of questions. One of the questions that I have wanted the government to answer since I arrived here is how much it spends every year to fight the rights of aboriginal peoples in the courts. I think it spends more than \$300 million a year to challenge the fundamental rights of this country's aboriginal peoples.

Is that the basis for discussion on this issue or should we consider the current needs of the first nations across the country? It is important that this motion include eligibility criteria so we can try to debate how we can better help them. I would like my colleague from Timmins—James Bay to comment on that.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, when we are talking, in this House, about children who are hungry, we hear the Ebenezer Scrooge line, “I want to know every penny and what it's going to cost our taxpayer”, but when it comes to paying lawyers to fight the residential school survivors at St. Anne's, to fight Cindy Blackstock, to fight children getting proper medical treatment because they are indigenous, money is no option.

The Conservatives spend double on legal fees going after first nation communities and first nation rights, double the amount they spend going after international tax frauds. They spend more on RCMP investigations and taking them to court. They have spent \$100 million to \$300 million a year fighting first nation rights. Yet, when we talk about alleviating hunger, they want it costed right down to the last penny. It shows their fundamental insincerity.

Hon. Greg Rickford (Minister of Natural Resources and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague the member for Northwest Territories for bringing this motion forward. As I said earlier, I appreciated the spirit of the motion. It is an acknowledgement that nutrition north as a program is part of the solution.

Having been involved, at the standing committee, in the process of developing the program, and as I recall, working quite cooperatively with members across the way, we came up with a program that would establish a new course for some very admirable goals around food prices, food security, and food quality in the north. What we agreed on at the time was that food prices were, and in fact continue to be, too high and that food security was an issue.

Furthermore, we agreed that the quality of food, for distribution reasons and purchasing options, were things the program should address. In addition, as has been pointed out in earlier parts of the debate, traditional foods and their distribution, and in particular their storage, were elements of a program moving forward that we frankly had not seen.

That makes perfect sense. Having been a nurse who has worked in isolated and remote communities, principally in the great Kenora riding but including northern Manitoba, northern Saskatchewan, the northern British Columbia coast, Cambridge Bay, and Arviat, I am not unfamiliar, in substance, with the importance of this opportunity.

We learned and we agreed, for example, that the previous program, the food mail program, had serious structural flaws. It was largely confined in its uptake to people who had the means to buy food from cities that typically served the north. Those would be the Edmontons, Winnipegs, Prince Alberts, and Val d'Ors of the world. Importantly, it required a credit or debit card to order food. Certainly, in the time I was working and living in the north, over the span of almost 20 years, there were many people who did not have these financial instruments to order that food. Something needed to change.

Business of Supply

I believe that the nutrition north program is not the solution in every instance. There are good reasons for that because of the vastness of the north. I even heard the member for Timmins—James Bay allude to some nuanced community and regional solutions that could fit into the superordinate goal of a strategy that would work to decrease the price of food in the north and increase the quality of food and food security.

Nutrition north brought us to a couple of important pragmatic steps or interventions. The statistics have been put to this place in the debate and in previous discussions, during question period, and as far back as when this was first debated. The first step was reducing the price of a product. Particularly, the prices of categories of nutritional products like milk were reduced in the community. There were signs to let the consumer know what that price reduction would be. Those relationships were formed with the principal suppliers, at the very least, retailers in the community who sell food, and organizations that did the same remotely. That has had a positive effect. We have seen net reductions in the cost of food per month or per annum for families.

This debate is important, as we have now seen that nutrition north has been appreciably been implemented, and as the kinks get worked out we discover, and by way of debate, we can have an important conversation about what next steps nutrition north could, would, and should take.

● (1215)

Let me speak to that in two overarching ways, first with respect to the Auditor General's report and second on an emerging theme in this debate around other options.

I should say that I will be splitting my time with the member for Brampton West, and I appreciate that accommodation.

With respect to the Auditor General's report, one of the things that I was struck by—and, in fact, was waiting for—was his review of this particular program. It highlighted what I would prefer to frame as a number of opportunities that need to be addressed. We accepted those recommendations and we are taking action to address them.

They include reviewing the community eligibility criteria to ensure that they are based on need and reviewing the contribution agreements under the program so that retailers provide all information in a clear and transparent manner. In fairness, I have heard on both sides of the House and from all three parties the importance of that. Of course, the other item is to build on the implementation measures to monitor the program and ensure it is meeting its objectives.

Our approach, then, is twofold. First, we must ensure that each and every remote and isolated community has access to healthy food, including perishables such as fruits and vegetables. This means taking a very hard look at the program to ensure that communities that need access to the subsidy have access to it. Second, we must ensure that communities that are currently part of the program have clear access to information about the subsidies and that retailers pass savings on to the consumer.

Over the coming months, I will continue to work with communities in northern Ontario, a number of which have been listed by this member. Rather curiously, the NDP made what I

believe was an unfortunate political choice by issuing a scathing article that I believe attacked me personally. That was not wise, given the reputation and commitment that I have for building schools, nursing stations, police stations, and significant infrastructure in my riding and the credibility that I have garnered over a 20-year career as a nurse, lawyer, and now member of Parliament for those regions.

In fact, I was in Webeque First Nation just a couple of weeks ago and visited a couple of other communities as well. I made some significant infrastructure announcements, notably to improve water and waste water treatment and importantly, in the case of Webeque, to build on the economic prospect it has as a major hub for Ring of Fire with some investments into its airport, which would also create a platform for more commercial activity that would benefit people directly, particularly with respect to commercial products available to them. I believe much of this is happening now.

In some regards this debate today, at least in spirit, as I have said before, is an important and meaningful one. I wish it were not as heavily politicized as it is. I am certainly aware of the first nations communities in my regions and the opportunities that we have. On that note, I will advance the discussion to some of the other distinctly local and regional policy options that are there for good reasons, in addition to nutrition north, and they are important.

What they include has been mentioned earlier. There are community gardens burgeoning in first nations communities. The new horizons program has helped a couple of first nations communities in my riding build community gardens led by elders.

However, I want to close on a policy option that is distinctly for northern Ontario and that I was pleased to support as the minister of FedNor. Chief Donny Morris in Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug and Chief Bull from Lac Seul First Nation joined me earlier this year to support a study to examine and enable regional food distribution.

● (1220)

It was a study that would determine the viability of a regional distribution centre out of Sioux Lookout to increase the purchasing power of a community or of groups of communities for perishable and non-perishable goods. This was done in association with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and supported by the town of Sioux Lookout. By way of example, it represents some solutions.

I want to thank the member for Northwest Territories for bringing this discussion to this place and for the opportunity, as someone who has a rich and deep past living and working in isolated remote communities, particularly in my region, to speak to this important topic.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know the Minister of Natural Resources is always, first and foremost and no matter what position he holds in the cabinet or with the government, the member of Parliament for the great Kenora riding. He puts that first in everything he does here. I know he puts the people first, which is what his speech outlined.

Business of Supply

He talked about looking at food security from a number of angles, such as some innovative FedNor projects that he has championed. As well, I know that on this side of the House the Minister of the Environment has been clear that we support the rights of aboriginal Canadians to hunt and fish as part of their food supply. Obviously we have supported policies that allow that to happen and flourish; in fact, we encourage it.

I want to give the minister an opportunity to address the partisan nature of the motion, which, as he said, takes away from the seriousness of the debate. I know he ran out of time there a bit. Perhaps he can expand on how we have to look at all options in order to provide food security for people in the north in ridings like his.

● (1225)

Hon. Greg Rickford: Mr. Speaker, the member was probably a bit tongue-in-cheek with respect to that question, since he knows that when these issues arise, I can be a bit of a pit bull in the department in ensuring that the interests of communities in my riding, as well as the interests of first nations communities in isolated and remote parts of Canada, are well represented.

I see that the member for Timmins—James Bay has disappeared. However, I can say to him and the person who tabled the motion that the spirit of this motion is ripe for discussion right now. It is an acknowledgement that nutrition north is an important part of the solution.

As was identified by members who have ridings similar to mine, particularly in northern Ontario, there are other policy options that should be looked at. Of course, that comes to a more pointed answer to my friend and colleague, which is that this motion has some figures that we unfortunately cannot reconcile. It is not a substantive option for addressing some of the key facets for a better program within nutrition north, such as the ones that the Auditor General pointed out, in the timelines that he has given for us to embrace those recommendations, which we have embraced.

I think it is incumbent upon us all, particularly as I speak for northern and northwestern Ontario, to focus on ways to improve shipping timelines, increase shelf life, and preserve the quality of fresh foods. That is important, but so is the educational opportunity with respect to eating quantifiably more nutritional food. That starts with other solutions, such as community gardening and the like. We have a timeline now, and the recommendations from the Auditor General to act on that are appropriate.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one of the problems that has not been talked about enough—and I see the parliamentary secretary sneaking out—is that the growth rate of the nutrition north budget is half the natural population growth rate. It does not take a rocket scientist to figure out that the money will have run out in 10 years. If the same budget is always allocated to help a growing population, members of that population will be getting smaller and smaller shares. That is how major food problems occur.

I would like to remind the hon. member that part of the population in question is dealing with an ongoing food shortage. That means that people's health is affected by the lack of food. I would therefore

like him to find a non-budgetary solution to this problem because it is not true that more and more people can be fed with less and less money.

[*English*]

Hon. Greg Rickford: Mr. Speaker, I am glad to have heard from the member that this is not about the budgetary aspects, because the numbers that have been provided in some detail and attached to this motion do not reconcile. The member is asking what the policy options are, outside of budget. If the member had been listening to the debate so far this morning, he would have heard and understood what some of those policy options could be and should be.

However, the issue here, as I understand the motion, is moving beyond the existing communities that qualify for this program and assessing what options within nutrition north should be available to other communities, both as a monetary matter and as a policy matter.

In that sense, there is no question that the path forward will be to look at that, since many aspects of those communities' profiles, such as isolation, are very similar to those of communities that qualify for the program.

Those are the issues that we are here to debate, and I am glad to hear that the member has a desire to move beyond the numbers or a conversation about the budget. It is far more meaningful and comprehensive than that, and I think the member for Northwest Territories intended it to be that way.

● (1230)

Mr. Kyle Seebach (Brampton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today to this motion. I have had the pleasure of sitting on the aboriginal affairs committee for a little over four years now and through my experience, our government's record is one of progress on many different fronts. Whether we look at something like nutrition north, water and waste water, housing, or the FNLMA, we are making real progress on issues that affect first nations.

Speaking specifically about nutrition north, we know for sure that our government has made a very clear commitment to providing northerners with healthy food choices. Given the critical role of a wholesome diet to people's well-being, we are determined, like other Canadians, that northerners have access to quality nutritious food. This is the *raison d'être* for the nutrition north Canada program.

We introduced the program in 2011 precisely to address the concerns that are raised in the opposition member's motion. We know the cost of living is high for residents of isolated communities all across Canada's north, whether we talk about food, heating oil, housing or transportation, and that is why we have taken action.

Nutrition north increases northerners' access to high-quality, healthy foods. It provides a subsidy to reduce the price of perishable, nutritious food. For the purpose of this program, perishable food can be fresh, frozen, refrigerated, have a shelf life of less than one year, and the items must be shipped by air. A higher level of subsidy is provided for the most nutritious foods, such as milk, eggs, meat, cheeses, vegetables and fruit.

Business of Supply

The subsidy also applies to country or traditional foods that have been the staples of northern diets for centuries. The subsidy is available when country foods are purchased through local stores or from processing plants registered with the program. Customers in eligible communities can also purchase such food from registered northern retailers or order it directly from registered southern suppliers.

Northern retailers can claim the subsidy directly or order the food from registered southern suppliers, or country food processors and distributors can sell it in their stores. Eligible social institutions such as daycares can also order the food from southern suppliers. In all cases, the subsidies are passed on from retailers and suppliers directly to consumers.

Subsidies provided under nutrition north are customized to account for the differences in transportation and operation costs. This means that the more remote the community is, the greater the subsidy. For example, the subsidy in Grise Fiord is higher than the rate for Iqaluit. This program follows a market-driven model, which has proven to be a sustainable, efficient and cost-effective means of helping northerners access nutritious and perishable foods.

Not only are communities benefiting from nutrition north, enjoying nutritious food at the subsidized price, they are also enjoying greater accountability and transparency under this program than the predecessor program, food mail. To ensure the subsidy is being passed on to consumers, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada has entered into formal agreements with a number of registered food retailers and suppliers. These retailers and food suppliers must confirm, on a monthly basis, that subsidy claims made under the program are valid and accurate and that the subsidy is being passed on to consumers.

A third-party claims processor verifies the invoices and waybills submitted to ensure that the claims being made are in fact valid. The department ensures that it receives clear and well-supported compliance reviews to assess the compliance of retailers and food suppliers with their obligations.

It is also important to note that nutrition north Canada monitors price trends, using the revised northern food basket. This measures the weekly cost of food for a family of four using current nutrition recommendations as detailed in the dietary reference intakes and the newest version of Canada's Food Guide.

• (1235)

The food basket, which is composed of 67 items, is calculated using an average community price for each item. This takes into account the nutritional requirements and food serving recommendations for a man and a woman aged between 31 and 50, and a boy and a girl aged between 9 and 13.

I could use more of my time to discuss further details of the program, but what is far more important is to discuss the results on the ground.

Since its inception in April 2011, nutrition north Canada program has been successful in lowering the cost of food in remote northern communities. The cost of the revised northern food basket for a family of four has been cut, on average, by 7.2% between April 2011

and March 2014. This actually works out to approximately \$137 per month.

This drop in food cost is greater than anywhere else in the country. Thanks to retailers' efforts to maximize the impact of the subsidy on food prices, the northern revised food basket was 1.4% lower at the end of March 2014 than a year earlier.

In addition, the average annual weight of eligible items being shipped to northern communities has increased by approximately 25% since the nutrition north Canada program was introduced. This means that northern consumers now have access to a much wider range of nutritious foods at less cost.

The northern nutrition Canada program is achieving results in reducing food prices.

We are making progress and there is no question that affordable food in remote northern communities remains a concern that requires our continued concerted efforts. That is why, on top of nutrition north's existing annual subsidy budget of \$53.9 million, our Conservative government committed in the 2014 economic action plan to enhance funding for the program.

On November 21, 2014, in fulfillment of this commitment, the government announced an additional \$11.3 million in 2014-15 to increase the program's food subsidy budget. As well, we are implementing a new ongoing 5% compound annual escalator beginning this year.

These additional funds resulted in a subsidy budget for 2014-15 of \$65,200,000 and \$68,498,000 in 2015-16. This comes to a total of \$133.7 million in direct retail subsidies over a two year period to ensure continued access to perishable, nutritious foods for northerners.

Of course, we do not pretend that all the problems have been solved or that we have all the answers. The Government of Canada is just one of many players with an important role in this file.

Since the 1970s, the federal government has gradually transferred responsibility for health, education, social services, housing, airports and language to the territorial, local and aboriginal governments. Members of all levels of government agree that finding ways to work together with other governments, aboriginal organizations and companies to address local food security issues and to further improve access to nutritious food is absolutely essential.

We are ready to do our part and we are more than willing to work with willing partners in the opposition to achieve greater success in the nutrition north program.

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last year the Auditor General released a report that studied, among other things, nutrition north Canada. I know our government has accepted all of the recommendations and is working with community leaders, retailers and northerners to improve the program, and to lower the cost of housing and nutritious food in the north.

Business of Supply

Could the member explain for the House and all Canadians exactly what actions our government is taking to respond to the recommendations in the Auditor General's report?

• (1240)

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Speaker, we accept the recommendations in the report of the Auditor General. The goal of the program, as I said earlier, is to ensure we have subsidized good, nutritious food for people in the north. As I stated, the subsidy has resulted in a reduction of an average of \$137 a month for a family of four. The volume of perishable, nutritious food shipped to northern communities has increased by approximately 20%.

We will continue to work hard to find solutions to the existing problems. We always want to find ways to ensure the program is more efficient and benefits more people.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General found that there were a number of issues that needed to be dealt with in nutrition north. One of those was that the department had not based community eligibility on need. The motion before us today is on the 50 isolated fly-in communities that do not receive the support of the program right now.

Would my hon. colleague agree that we need to look at these communities and decide why certain communities have not been added to the list when sometimes neighbouring communities are on that list? This is a fundamental inequity. If we could at least solve that, then we could start to deal with the other issues that were flagged by the Auditor General.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Speaker, obviously we are going to look at bringing additional communities into the program. That is one of the recommendations at which we are looking. We are trying to find a way to implement that.

However, the answer that is being put forward by the opposition is to just simply throw 50 names forward and add them to the list. As we have heard today in debate, there are issues with a number of the communities being mentioned. We cannot just put all these communities in the program without analyzing whether they qualify for the program or there is a need for them to be in the program.

Those are the steps we are going to undertake. We are going to review how we can expand the program to more communities. That is going to take time. We do not just want to do it automatically without doing the research.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for his work on the aboriginal affairs committee. He is a leading government member on that committee, and he certainly brings a valuable perspective as a former lawyer.

I want to talk about the nutrition north program vis-à-vis the old food mail program. We have heard from the Liberals today that they believe in the old program, where machine parts, snowmobile parts, tires, cases of coke and cases of chips were also being subsidized in equal measure to perishable produce, milk and eggs, the things that we have determined should be in a nutritious food basket.

Could the member comment on which approach he thinks better serves northerners?

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Speaker, the miracle about the proposals that come from the Liberal Party is that it has the answers to all the problems, when it is not in government.

When the Liberals were in government, they had no answers. That is generally their track record. The food mail program is a perfect example of that. How could a program designed to subsidize healthy and nutritious food for northerners be allowed to include snowmobile parts or a case of coke?

We need to have a program that actually delivers results. We think we have that program in nutrition north. I have talked about how it has reduced the average cost for a family of four by \$137 a month. The volume of perishable food items has gone up by 25%. This program is actually delivering real results. The Liberal program did not.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to say that I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, who will surely address the economic changes that the NDP would make to the nutrition north Canada program.

Although I am quite familiar with those economic considerations, I am not necessarily going to speak about them. Instead, I am going to discuss the elements associated with food insecurity and its potential social implications.

The opportunity I have been given to support the motion by my colleague from Northwest Territories will allow me to talk in more detail about one of those elements in particular, and that is the need to work with all northerners to come up with a sustainable solution to food insecurity.

Those who are paying attention have seen that this study consists of three parts. The same is true of the speech I am going to give today. I am going to talk about collaborative work, northerners and food insecurity.

Strangely enough, over the past four years, we have sometimes talked about these three things together and sometimes individually. I have talked about them in my speeches and so have my colleagues. They are some of the current issues that best show what the Conservative government is all about.

The UN special rapporteur on the right to food has visited Canada in recent years, and I had the opportunity to meet with him. I also showed him some photos, including one of a two-litre bottle of pop on sale for \$1 in July, on a remote reserve, Uashat.

Earlier, I heard my colleagues talk about subsidies for chips and Pepsi. These products are already available at very low prices in remote communities. Strangely enough, fast food lobby groups have this government's attention, and they find a way to reach these communities and bring in their products.

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In the far north it is easy to find two-litre bottles of pop for \$1 in July, but do not even think about finding two litres of milk at that price. The prices are ridiculous. There is a double standard here. Corporatism has really taken over.

Major corporations have control and can obviously afford to send their cheap products to remote regions. I do not know whether they are losing money in the process. However, fast food and processed foods end up making their way to the far north.

I want to come back to food insecurity. That is one of the things that was submitted to the UN rapporteur. When we talk about food security, that means a balanced, nutritious diet. In this case, I am also thinking about the children who are morbidly obese at a very young age. I do not know if that term can even apply to a child, but in any case, it is obvious that many children, often seen eating bags of chips, are overweight.

On my home reserve, you will find plenty of bags of chips. I worked for the territorial resources and parks services when I was younger. My job was to empty the outdoor garbage bins, and I can confirm that my garbage bags were often full of empty pop and chip containers. As soon as kids have a few bucks in their pockets, they go and buy chips. That is another aspect of food security. We need to ensure that balanced, nutritious food is available at affordable prices in remote communities.

The key question here regarding the legislative tool before us is whether the nutrition north Canada program is working. The program was implemented in April 2011 with the aim of making healthy food—and I want to emphasize the healthy food aspect—more accessible and more affordable for people living in remote, northern communities.

Even though we are talking about healthy food, we also need to understand that beer brewers are going to these communities too. Alcoholic beverages are available at very low cost. I mentioned that to the UN rapporteur because in my community, there are 1.2 litre products with 10% alcohol. Consuming such products really muddles people up for the rest of the day. Those products are very cheap. The beer brewers' lobby also has ways to reach remote communities.

Some segments of the industry have clearly found ways to make ends meet and get into those communities. Healthy food is also part of the calculation according to my analysis, and I mentioned that during a presentation by representatives of Beer Canada, who came to talk to me about a program to fight fetal alcohol syndrome. I told them that market studies had probably been done before making those products available for sale in remote communities.

●(1245)

Depending on the demographics of their neighbourhoods, I challenge my colleagues to find these products where they live. In my community, people call them bombs: 1.2 litres of 10% alcohol. My colleagues are highly unlikely to find this stuff at their corner store or supermarket, but where I come from, it is everywhere. People who are addicted to alcohol buy these products, and it wreaks havoc. It is pretty much everywhere in my community. I am quite sure that market studies were done on this.

In keeping with the corporatist ideals that have spawned too many of this government's initiatives, nutrition north Canada is a transfer payments program based on a market model. Let us draw a parallel with corporatism. I did not take much of an interest in policy before I came here. However, in recent years, what has emerged is that the government is trying to control and manage the country like a corporate entity. Too often the Conservatives—and possibly the Liberals—apply the same yardsticks, the same standards and the same ideals as a CEO who is managing a major corporation.

The government has a marked tendency to view public policy making like managing a corporate entity. The nutrition north Canada program is no exception. We see that the subsidies and programs that are supposed to help deliver and provide healthy food will first and foremost benefit the corporate entities rather than the people. That is the basis for the NDP position. We must ensure that the people and their nutrition are top of mind. The people must benefit, not the corporations. What we are seeing right now is that the corporations benefit the most and the people not as much.

The nutrition north Canada program has a fixed annual budget of \$60 million, \$53.9 million of which is allocated annually as a subsidy. That subsidy is paid directly to the food retailers, suppliers, distributors and processors in the north under contribution agreements. Was the word “citizen” included in that list? No, we are talking here about retailers, suppliers, distributors and processors, people who are already on a sound financial footing. One's financial footing also dictates one's ability to buy healthy food and eat properly. If a litre of milk costs \$6, then families are going to buy a two-litre bottle of Pepsi to put on the table, as we are seeing in family homes in my riding. Pop will win out, because a litre of water or milk is too expensive. The choice is easy. Then comes the glucose and fructose and people develop diabetes. There is a correlation here. When we talk about healthy eating, all this socio-economic information has to be taken into account.

In closing, I want to mention the need for a comprehensive review of the nutrition north Canada program in co-operation with northerners in order to determine ways of directly providing the subsidy to northern residents and improve supports for traditional foods. The important part of what I just said was “in co-operation with northerners”. Therein lies the problem with the public policy in 2015. The government has often failed to consult the public. The Conservatives think that public consultation is a barrier to economic expansion. In this case, it would take time to consult the public regarding the review of the nutrition north Canada program, and some people feel like it would be too much work.

The industrial, food processing and fast food lobbies are likely not in favour of it either. Unlike community groups, we know that these major lobbies, these big pressure groups, have the government's ear.

Business of Supply

The next government, an NDP government, will make sure that northerners are involved in the process so that the program is culturally relevant.

I submit this respectfully.

• (1250)

[*English*]

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague is very familiar with the nutrition north program and its failures.

I point out that other Canadians from coast to coast to coast are paying attention to this. In fact, in my riding of Nanaimo—Cowichan, the B.C. founder of Helping Our Northern Neighbours, Jennifer Gwilliam from Shawnigan Lake, has started a program there. The group is gathering food and shipping it at its own expense to northern communities that are desperate for good, safe, nutritious food at an affordable price.

For any of us who have been fortunate enough to either live in the north or travel in the north, we recognize clearly that our northern neighbours simply do not have the same access to food.

Good nutritious food is very important for an individual's overall health, well-being and longevity. Could the member comment on how he sees the lack of safe, affordable food impacting the health outcomes of people living in his riding?

• (1255)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her excellent question. I would like to give a clear example about access to healthy food that some members will find mind-boggling.

Not too long ago I visited Chevery, and there was just one pineapple for the 200 residents. I do not know whether they held a raffle or drew straws to decide who would get a taste of pineapple that month, but that was all they had and they had to wait.

Relais Nordik, the shipping company that was supposed to bring in food, had been unable to do so because of winter and ice conditions. We had to wait for a plane to be able to land. The community does not have a guaranteed regular supply of food, and the store owner even considered closing down because the conditions were not economically viable and it was difficult to bring in supplies.

This is what many northern residents live with every day. I wanted to share that.

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague is a descendant of Innu caribou hunters from the north shore. The government would do well to learn from aboriginal values.

Caribou hunters in the north shore were not starving beggars. They sought out their own food. They had a long tradition of sharing their game. When they were in the forest they had a system for communicating with other hunters travelling in the area to let them know that there was meat available for other families. They had a network and no one died of hunger.

Individualism is a European invention. The worst insult in Innu means “individualistic”, or someone who does not care about others—my colleague knows how to pronounce the word. I would like to learn that word so I could use it for the other side of the House.

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. Early in our mandate, he travelled with me to Nutshimit, the traditional territories.

We use the word *menashtau* to describe someone who is egotistical and does not want to share. It is quite a pejorative term—not something people wanted to be called 400 years ago.

Today, the traditional way of life is quite difficult. Natural resource development has affected the caribou's traditional migratory routes. We call the traditional way of feeding ourselves *Innu Mitsham*. In 2015, that way has become hazardous and is no longer as reliable. We need to re-evaluate everything because caribou are becoming scarcer.

Even though there are not many *menashtau* individuals in our communities and we share everything as much as possible, caribou are becoming scarcer because of the impact of hydroelectric projects and natural resource extraction on natural systems.

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is not a very nice subject of conversation. This is a humiliating and insulting Canadian failure. Canada is one of the richest countries in the world, but a significant portion of its population has been condemned to suffer from hunger because of its ethnicity. This is not true to Canadian values.

When I became active within the NDP, Tommy Douglas was still an MP. He was no longer the party leader, but he was still there. If he had seen situations like this, he would not have been very happy. This conflicts with all of my values.

This is a dismal failure on all counts. One by one, I have looked at all of the aboriginal affairs programs audited by the Auditor General of Canada, and not one of them is working. In no case did the Auditor General say that the government did a good job. Results are systematically poor. Given so many failures with respect to an ethnic community in Canada, we have to wonder if the government is serious about wanting to work with that community.

The nutrition north program is incomplete. The Conservatives say it is excellent, but that is definitely not the case, since it does not reach everyone who needs it. How can a service be useful when someone decides that 50 communities will not have access to it? That cannot work.

The Auditor General was not satisfied with the department's analysis of its own performance. Yes, that is right, the department assesses its own performance. The Auditor General said that the department was reporting lower prices, when he actually found higher prices. In theory, this program should help bring prices down. The Auditor General said he does not understand how the department could have come up with lower prices, but no one will talk about it.

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We were told that things would be fixed, but when the Auditor General asked the department whether it had asked food retailers if they were keeping the subsidies for themselves or using them to lower prices, the department replied that it could not ask them that question, under the pretext that it would breach the businesses' commercial confidentiality. Wow. It is therefore abundantly clear that the people's right to have healthy, affordable food has been tossed out the window.

However, that is not all. The department said it would fix the situation, but the Auditor General is getting fed up. He reviewed all of the promises the department had made about fixing things and found that the government was not meeting its commitments. The Auditor General told us that this government made some commitments to follow up on his recommendations, but then it did not honour them. This government's commitments are worth about as much as the commitments that the Auditor General has verified in the past.

Food insecurity in remote communities is a serious problem. I would like to cite a Statistics Canada study. We could refer to studies by the United Nations representative or other studies, but this one is quite critical.

● (1300)

It is a Statistics Canada study from 2008-09 showing that the situation has deteriorated ever since. It has not improved. It has gotten worse. In Nunavut, 32.6% of the population experienced food insecurity, 11.5% of which experienced serious insecurity. That does not mean going without a meal a few times a week. It means rarely eating all week. We are talking quite literally about starvation.

What is this fine government's response? When children are too skinny and seniors are trembling with hunger, the government puts them on a plane to get treatment in southern Canada, where the hospital will feed them. What a wonderful solution. That is what we call sweeping the problem under the rug. Unfortunately, this government does that far too often.

Population growth in the Northwest Territories is quite extraordinary, which is fortunate because life there is not easy. Nevertheless, the population growth there is five times greater than it is here. In 10 years, the population grew by 45%. That is quite the boom. The problem is that when a population grows by 45% in 10 years and the services do not keep pace, then a larger number of people have to share fewer things. Unless the Conservatives take themselves for Christ and can multiply loaves and fishes, it is clear that people are going hungry and will continue to suffer. The population growth being what it is, more and more people will have to share the same amount of groceries that there ever was. It does not take a genius to figure that out. Unfortunately, there are not a lot of those across the way.

We spoke about housing, drinking water and access to quality education. Nothing is working, absolutely nothing. We have reached a point where, in a report on Indian residential schools, a judge declared that this constitutes cultural genocide. The government lets people go hungry knowingly and willfully. Everyone has told the government that people are hungry. They do not go to the dump for the fun of it. They want to eat and they do not have access to good quality food. They do not have access to quality housing, they do not

have access to clean drinking water and they do not have access to health care. All of this has significant consequences for their situation, resulting in a high mortality rate for very young children, a much shorter life expectancy, major health problems and addiction problems. Name a problem and they have it. The only thing that they do not have are solutions.

This motion provides a solution. It is a balanced solution, one that does not reinvent the wheel. We were already on the brink of committing genocide when we refused to help communities at risk. Obviously, doing nothing when we know that these communities are at risk is definitely an act of genocide. We would be refusing to help communities at risk without being concerned about the people who would suffer. For that reason it is important to act now. There are some people who are too focused on budget measures. The situation must be addressed by doing what the motion proposes. We will not be rediscovering the world, but just simply ensuring that everyone can benefit from a program.

● (1305)

We are faced with budget cuts. I would like to know how many of us would accept budget cuts that would make our children go hungry?

● (1310)

[*English*]

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Northwest Territories, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague got into this issue, which is much more complex, but it needs to be said when it comes to first nations.

I think of the Conservatives talking about how they provided funding for students and schools equivalent to the provinces. In the Northwest Territories, we have isolated and remote communities. The average funding for communities in the Northwest Territories is some \$22,000 a student. The government funds isolated and remote first nations communities at about \$11,000 or \$12,000. The money is simply not adequate.

It is the same with the nutrition north program. We heard the parliamentary secretary say that the Conservatives added \$11 million to the program this year. No, they did not. The program was \$64 million last year and it is now about \$65 million this year.

Is it not time that the Conservatives get off this idea that somehow they are doing the right thing with the funds they are providing to first nations and to isolated and remote communities, and actually deal with the dollars that are required?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère: Mr. Speaker, finding an honourable solution that would help Canada maintain its international reputation as a country that respects human rights would not cost a fortune. We are talking about negligible amounts. A fraction of what the government is spending in Iraq would solve all of our problems. The government would rather go to war in Iraq than transport food within our own country. If there were a famine in Africa, the government would send our air force to transport food by air, but it will not do the same thing for our own people. That is shameful and humiliating.

Some of the members here have aboriginal communities in their ridings. I cannot believe that they are not aware of this problem. There are people suffering from starvation. That is obvious. Those members must be deliberately turning a blind eye.

I am calling it a genocide because these communities are being refused aid when they are clearly in danger.

[*English*]

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was not intending to ask a question, but my colleague, the member for Northwest Territories, prompted me because he is measuring dollars to measure the success of a program. We all know that we need to measure the results of the program, not how much we are spending on the program. If in fact we can spend less and do more with it, that is the objective we should have.

I would just point out that since 2011, we have seen the cost of a food basket for a family of four drop by \$137 a month. That is impressive, and that is the kind of measurement we should be looking at, not how much money we are spending as a measure of success.

My question for my colleague who just spoke is really about the facts from the NDP. On April 2, the New Democrats said that they would like to see 55 communities made eligible for the subsidy. On May 26, they released a list of 46 communities that they would like to see fully eligible. Today, the opposition states in its motion that it wants to see 50 communities made eligible for the subsidy.

Which number is it?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère: Mr. Speaker, the member is asking questions about the number of communities, but I am going to tell him very clearly what I want: I want all Canadians to have enough to eat. I do not give a damn about how many communities will have to be added to the list.

The Deputy Speaker: There is a problem with the interpretation.

The member can continue. He has about 40 seconds left.

● (1315)

Mr. Alain Giguère: Mr. Speaker, he is talking about the number of communities. I do not want to see any Canadian go hungry. We need to invest however much it takes to achieve that goal. We do not need billions of dollars. We simply need to say that no matter where people live, they will no longer go hungry. That is my objective.

If the government's objective is to calculate how much is going to be given to one community over another, then it will never successfully combat hunger.

[*English*]

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River.

I am honoured to have the opportunity to clarify why I cannot support the opposition motion. I can assure hon. colleagues that the government is committed to the welfare of northerners. We understand that the north is a fundamental part of our heritage, our

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future, and our identity as a country. In fact, no other government in history has done as much for the north as our government.

While the motion is motivated by good intentions, the opposition has failed to provide a new solution to what all parliamentarians agree is a real and pressing issue.

I find it somewhat odd that the opposition would even want to provide additional funds to a program that both the member for Northwest Territories and the member for Timmins—James Bay have previously claimed has failed. Northerners are well aware that this is not the case. Nutrition north has provided residents with access to healthy perishable food choices at affordable prices. Unlike past Liberal governments, which endorsed the ineffective food mail program, nutrition north is helping to meet the needs of those living in isolated northern communities.

As other speakers have outlined, the government recognizes that a host of factors drive up the cost of food in northern communities. These include the higher cost of energy, labour, and transportation. Our government is determined to discover how we can overcome these obstacles to increase northerners' food security. Our Conservative government has been unequivocal in its commitment to ensuring that northerners, like all Canadians, have access to perishable nutritious food at a price they can afford.

Thanks to the implementation of nutrition north by our government in 2011, there has been a strong reduction in the cost of nutritious food in remote communities. Between March 2011 and March 2014, the cost of the revised northern food basket for a family of four fell by an average of 7.2% in communities eligible for a full subsidy under nutrition north. That translates into savings of approximately \$137 a month for a family of four.

Something else that differentiates members on this side of the House and the opposition is that we do not automatically presume that the government knows best. Instead, we engage directly with the people with the most at stake when it comes to paying for nutritious food, and that is northerners themselves.

Critical to the success of nutrition north is the program's advisory board. The board was created concurrently with the implementation of the subsidy in 2011. Its mandate is to improve program governance and to give northerners a direct voice in the program.

The Nutrition North Canada Advisory Board meets up to three times a year, holding meetings all across the north. When meeting in the north, the board, in public meetings, hears directly from northern residents and communities. Between May 2011 and June 2014, the advisory board held public meetings in Nunavut, Nunavik, Newfoundland and Labrador, and the Northwest Territories. Each meeting provided the board with input from residents and communities on how the program was working.

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Members of the board represent a wide range of northern perspectives. Transparency and accountability are ensured by choosing members who are volunteers and who serve as individuals, not as representatives of any particular organization, area, or special interest. Their experience and expertise inform the management and effectiveness of nutrition north. For example, the most recent addition to the board is Tracy Rispin. She is a heritage interpreter from Old Crow, Yukon, who works with the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation. She has held a variety of positions over the past 30 years pertaining to heritage, natural resources, and finance. She has also served as elected deputy chief of the first nation and has extensive experience as a filmmaker who has worked on projects such as the Vuntut Gwitchin oral history project.

• (1320)

Ms. Rispin has a thorough knowledge of Yukon first nations issues, history, cultures, and protocols. With a strong background and hands-on experience in first nations education, she will provide invaluable input from the community to direct the nutrition north Canada program. One of the many benefits of this approach is that board members often share their region's experiences. This makes nutrition north more effective and representative of the needs of northerners.

Northerners also provide input into the program in many other ways. For example, la Fédération des coopératives du Nouveau-Québec, which operates 14 co-operatives in Nunavik, has voluntarily implemented a point-of-sale in-store system. This system ensures that customers know how and when the nutrition north Canada subsidy is applied to their grocery bills. Consumers can clearly see the amount of the subsidy passed on to them, ensuring greater retailer transparency and accountability.

The advisory board is expected to return soon with an opinion as to whether this point-of-sale receipt system should be applied to all subsidized retailers. Our government believes that this receipt system could be an important step in creating greater transparency across the north. It also demonstrates an innovative way in which communities and retailers can work together to address the concerns of consumers.

The advisory board and local retailer innovation are just two examples of the avenues we have used to collect input from northerners. Our government is making every effort to ensure that northerners have their say about nutrition north and can contribute ideas about how to make the program work even better. Our government has carried out important reviews to assess areas for improvement. The advisory board continues to listen and learn from northern residents.

We are investing additional funds to make sure we increase access to perishable nutritious foods in isolated northern communities. I remind the House that our Conservative government, through budget 2014, added \$11.3 million in 2014-15 to increase nutrition north's food subsidy budget. This was over and above the program's existing annual subsidy of \$53.9 million. We also committed to a new, ongoing 5% compound annual escalator, beginning this year. Our government believes that this increased financing is a responsible approach to take.

We understand that taxpayers put their trust in parliamentarians to handle their money with great care.

I urge parliamentarians to reject this opposition motion. There is no doubt that subsidies offered by nutrition north have led to impressive results. Let me assure all northerners that this government will continue to act responsibly and in the best interests of northerners, assuring that they will have access to nutritious perishable food.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Northwest Territories, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his statement, but once again, when he talked about the total amount of money in the program, he neglected the actual expenditures according to the public accounts in 2013-14, which were worth \$64 million. When we add up the 2014-15 totals, we get to \$65 million. The \$11 million added to the program last October really amounted to a \$1-million increase over the last year. That is hardly even 5%, which the Conservatives have indicated in their own documents is the rate of inflation that they should be applying to the amount of money in the program.

I was in Nunavut, and people talked about how the Northern store gives the subsidy rate according to what nutrition north applies, which is the rate for everyone. However, it achieves a much cheaper freight rate than what is applied through the program. People there are concerned that the nutrition north program, in some cases, is not being fully given back to consumers. What does my colleague think about this?

• (1325)

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Mr. Speaker, I have spent some time working with public accounts. I understand the process involved, and I realize the difference between some of the statements that are coming in and the proposed expenditures that will take place at other times. I heard one of the other members speak to this as well.

It also looks at results. As I mentioned in my address, it is \$137 per month a family is saving because of the program we have in place. It is that type of thing that is important.

I believe that the member opposite spoke about how this program should go to northern communities that are only accessible by air, yet within his own community, and within the list, we have a number of communities that are accessible by ferry or by road. When we look at how the opposition members would try to put input into the program, grabbing things from all different directions, it shows a little inconsistency.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to use a specific example of a commodity we all acknowledge is essential. We all love milk, and we encourage our children to drink milk. A number of years ago, when I was in the Manitoba Legislature, I used milk as an example of the cost differential. This was in 2008, when four litres of milk cost \$3.59. In Red Sucker Lake, it actually cost \$11.89, and in Tadoule Lake, it cost \$17.40.

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Milk is one of those consumer products that is a critical need in the development of young people. I want to focus on children and the benefits of drinking milk. It costs far less to purchase two litres of Coca Cola than to buy two litres of milk.

Would the member provide some of his personal thoughts on the long-term costs, whether it is tooth decay or whatever it might be, and the issues of affordability and health?

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Mr. Speaker, I certainly agree. Even when we go into our own stores, we can look at the price of two litres of pop and compare that to the price of milk or something that is nutritious. It is frustrating when we see that sort of thing happen.

It is one of the reasons we moved away from the food mail program, which also subsidized carburetors and snowmobile parts and so on. It was a case of moving that out of the program so that we could concentrate specifically on what the real needs were, which was as much perishable and nutritious food as possible.

• (1330)

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for this opportunity to explain why I cannot support the motion introduced by the member for Northwest Territories.

Since its implementation in 2011, nutrition north has proven to be an effective, responsive and functional program that has lowered the cost of food in the north and increased the amount of nutritious perishable foods to northern communities. The program subsidizes the cost of perishable, nutritious food for Canadians in northern and remote communities.

Lowering prices for nutritious food, combined with increased knowledge of healthy eating, contributes to the Conservative government's larger vision for the north. We take tremendous pride in the support for self-reliant individuals living in healthy, prosperous communities.

While other members of this House have focused their arguments on the cost of the food in the north, how the program works and eligibility criteria, I will emphasize the important role that retailers play.

As my hon. colleagues recognize, making nutritious food accessible to residents in remote communities is a challenge far too great to be met by any single entity working on its own. Success requires willing partners. This is precisely why nutrition north Canada directly engages retailers.

These retailers are made up of men and women who not only have a deep understanding of the nature of supply and demand in the north, but also have a vested interest in satisfying their customers. In many cases, they and their families live in the communities served by nutrition north Canada. In other cases, they travel regularly to some of these communities and have first-hand knowledge of the situation on the ground. In every case, they want the program to succeed.

For all of these reasons, nutrition north Canada was designed as a market-based program to encourage retailers and suppliers to choose the most economical option for shipping foods. The program also assigns retailers an essential role in transparency in ensuring that

subsidies and savings are passed on to the consumers by assigning responsibility for some aspects of the program to those directly involved in it.

For retailers and consumers, nutrition north Canada fosters competition and innovation, and I will elaborate further on each of these points, beginning with decisions about shipping methods.

Determining the most economical and effective way to transport a particular food depends on many factors. The most important factor is shelf life. For non-perishable items, such as dry pasta, rice and most grains, the best option usually involves transporting large quantities infrequently. Retailers tend to use the annual sealift or occasional truck transport on winter roads for these items.

For perishable items, such as eggs, dairy products and fresh fruits and vegetables, retailers have little choice but to rely on regularly shipping small quantities by airplane. To minimize their potential losses, retailers strive to order only enough perishable items that their customers will buy within a certain timeframe. Ultimately, retailers and suppliers must manage their supply chains to ensure fresh food is available to customers at competitive rates and prices.

Along with shipping, retailers also play an essential role in the transparency of nutrition north. Under the program, registered retailers and suppliers are fully responsible for passing on the full subsidy to consumers. The Government of Canada closely monitors retailers' performance on this responsibility and posts regular compliance reports online.

To further ensure that consumers benefit fully from the subsidies, nutrition north recently added a new clause in the funding agreements that will ensure recipients provide all the information on eligible items, including profit margins. These agreements came into effect on April 1, 2015. Recipients, retailers and suppliers must now not only submit to audits, but also provide the government with all financial information and supporting documents for a seven-year period to justify subsidy claims. The new clause specifies that retailers must provide complete information on eligible items, including current profit margins and profit margins over time.

External independent auditors will undertake annual compliance reviews of retailers in order to ensure that the subsidy is being passed on to the consumer. These compliance reviews will then be made publicly available on the department's website. I want to be very clear that there is no requirement to publish the profit margins of individual businesses, as this is commercially sensitive information. This new measure helps to reassure Canadians that nutrition north is delivering effective results for northerners.

Business of Supply

•(1335)

Assigning these responsibilities to retailers also helps inspire innovation. A recent example is an initiative of la Fédération des coopératives du Nouveau-Québec. The federation operates 14 co-operatives in Nunavik and has voluntarily implemented a point of sale system. In each of the 14 stores it operates in Nunavik, the receipt shows the amount of nutrition north Canada subsidy for each item. There is a total at the bottom of the receipt and a notation that says how much the nutrition north program has saved consumers on their purchases that day.

The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development was so impressed with this innovation that he directed the nutrition north advisory board to take a closer look at the approach by la Fédération des coopératives du Nouveau-Québec and provide him with recommendations by June 1, 2015 on how to apply a point of sale system. Just this morning, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development released a statement after receiving the recommendations for the wider application of a point of sale receipt system from the nutrition north Canada advisory board. This new point of sale system will ensure that customers see how and when the NNC subsidy is applied to their grocery bill. This means that consumers will be able to clearly see the amount of the subsidy passed on to them, ensuring greater retailer transparency and accountability.

Our government strongly believes that northerners deserve to see the NNC savings on their grocery bill and that a point of sale system is a step retailers should take to clearly demonstrate that the full subsidy is being passed on to consumers.

Thanks to the program's close relationship with qualified retailers and suppliers, nutrition north Canada has experienced tremendous results. Northerners living in isolated communities now have far greater access to perishable nutritious foods compared to the program's predecessor, food mail. Since the implementation of nutrition north, the volume of healthy food shipped to northern communities has increased by 25%. Nutrition north Canada incorporates a market-driven, cost-effective and transparent model to deliver considerable value to consumers and overcome the fundamental challenge posed by the uniqueness of the Canadian north.

The truth of the matter is that shipping perishable food over long distances to small isolated communities is an expensive undertaking. However, by engaging the private sector and monitoring compliance closely, nutrition north continues to deliver solid results. Even the NDP's aboriginal affairs critic, the member for Churchill, admitted last week that the program is working. She said, "Well, I mean there's no question it does reduce the price by a couple of dollars, maybe two or three dollars". Between March 2011 and March 2014, for example, the cost of the revised northern food basket for a family of four, in communities eligible for a full subsidy under nutrition north Canada, fell by an average of 7.2%. This same family is saving \$32 per week. That translates into a saving of approximately \$137 per month for a family of four.

Given this performance, I have no choice but to urge my hon. colleagues to join me in opposing the motion now before us.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Northwest Territories, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I found the speech by my colleague from northern Saskatchewan to be very rational. I am still concerned that he has communities in his riding that do not achieve the subsidy that should be there. However, I am sure he will be working on that.

My question to him is about the nature of subsidizing large retailers that can deal with different kinds of freight rates. When I travelled to Nunavut, my understanding was that the subsidy being applied in many communities was based on a freight rate that was a universal freight rate for the airline companies. The large companies were getting a discounted rate on the freight, but if they passed on the full rate to the consumer they did not have to pay that in terms of the subsidy for the freight. Therefore, there is a real need for an analysis of all of the freight rates in the north to ensure there is fairness in the system so that the communities that pay higher costs are getting as much as they can and communities such as Iqaluit, where freight rates can be negotiated to a much lower extent, may see some changes made to make the system fair.

•(1340)

Mr. Rob Clarke: Mr. Speaker, we can look at the freight rates and what the government is doing. It is trying to make nutritious food more available for northerners, like those in northern Saskatchewan.

The review board for nutrition north is going to be looking at the system as a whole and making recommendations for first nations communities, northern communities, aboriginal and non-aboriginal communities to get produce to their stores and get nutritious food to consumers.

One of the things we are also looking at as a government is the profit margins and the addition of a new clause in the funding agreement that will ensure the recipients have all the information on all eligible items and profit margins from the independent auditors. That will make the independent suppliers more competitive and ensure competitive pricing for stores. That is what we are trying to do, give proper food and healthy food choices to the people in the north that would lower the costs of buying supplies.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member made reference at the beginning of his comments to the importance of working together. I want to pick up on that issue.

We need to recognize that we are talking about many different stakeholders, different territorial and provincial jurisdictions, which all have the same sorts of issues. There is only one real national entity, the federal government, that ultimately should be playing more of a role, not only with direct subsidies but also making sure that there is coordination with the different stakeholders.

That coordinated approach that stems from leadership coming from Ottawa is something we have found lacking with the government. It needs to work with the different groups to see if there is a better way to ensure that our young people are getting the nutritional food they require to do well in their communities.

Could the member tell the House precisely how he believes his government has been working with other stakeholders? Specific examples would be nice.

Business of Supply

Mr. Rob Clarke: Mr. Speaker, the advisory committee that has been set up by nutrition north takes individuals from Nunavut, Northwest Territories, Manitoba and Saskatchewan to meet the individual stakeholders and consumers. They are meeting with individuals and getting the information to look at innovative ways to address the special needs of getting consumers the proper products. That is what the government is doing.

It is doing the consultations. It has individuals out there who are doing the consultations to make the nutrition north program better.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, at the outset I would like to let you know that I will be sharing my time with the member for Churchill.

I rise today to speak in support of this motion put forth by the NDP member for Northwest Territories. I must also add my gratitude in recognizing the tremendous work that my colleague has done for many years in serving as the tireless voice of the people from the territories.

Many communities across Canada's three territories as well as in the northern parts of several provinces are accessible only by air for part of or all of the year. The cost of living and doing business in these isolated communities is higher than in many of the other southern regions of the country. Necessities such as perishable foods must be flown in to the communities, and it is not easy. In my community of Scarborough and Toronto we can walk down the street to a grocery store, but people in many northern communities do not have this luxury. Even though food insecurity is prevalent in Scarborough—Rouge River and north Scarborough, it is far worse in the northern parts of our country, and we need to recognize that. I thank the member for Northwest Territories for his work and for his recognition of this situation.

The NDP has taken a leadership role in trying to alleviate some of the problems by coming up with new solutions that might actually work.

Perishable foods should not cost such exorbitant amounts. For example, in April 2014, the price of two litres of milk was \$7.99 in Old Crow, Yukon, compared with \$3.35 in Edmonton, Alberta. In Fort Albany in northern Ontario, baby formula costs \$60 and two pounds of frozen beef cost \$16. These types of prices are through the roof. In Treaty 5 territory, bread costs \$6, a jug of milk is \$13, and a case of eggs is \$37. If we are going to go all out and have the luxury of fresh produce, something as simple as a bunch of grapes will cost \$12.

These exorbitant prices occur in communities that are living in crushing poverty, communities where people's main income is about \$371 of social assistance a month. I do not know how much \$371 can actually buy a person who is feeding a family, trying to feed children, trying to feed three or four mouths.

These types of high prices have been prevalent in our northern communities for far too long. To help with these high costs of food in the north, the federal government created the food mail program in the late 1960s. After 1991, the program was managed by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. I would like to go through a little bit about this program, especially for the benefit of

members of my community who may not know about the nutrition north program because they are in Toronto.

Under the program, Canada Post received a transportation subsidy from the department to deliver items to isolated northern communities. Over the years, because of population growth and increasing fuel prices, expenditures continued to increase and the program often exceeded its budget.

In April of 2011, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada introduced the nutrition north program. The objective of the program was to make healthy foods more accessible and affordable to residents of isolated northern communities.

Nutrition north Canada is a transfer payment program based on a market-driven model. It has an annual fixed budget of \$60 million, of which \$53.9 million is allocated annually to the subsidy component. The subsidy is provided directly to northern retailers, food suppliers, distributors, and food processors through contribution agreements. Retailers make their own supply chain arrangements.

About 40 retailers, suppliers, and food processors participate in the program, and three northern retailers have accounted for about 80% of the subsidy each year. Why are we giving these subsidies to retailers, suppliers, and food processors, rather than directly to the people who are the end consumers? We are counting on the government giving the subsidies to these retailers and hoping that the retailers will actually transfer these subsidies and cost savings over to the consumers, but in reality we are not seeing that.

● (1345)

I would like to quote Ron Elliott, former Nunavut MLA for Quttiktuq. He said:

That's been one of the problems from the onset of the program. You are providing a subsidy to the people who are responsible to board members or shareholders who are supposed to make profits. So there are conflicting interests.

He is right when he says that when they give subsidies in the hope the retailers will transfer these cost savings on to the end consumer, the retailers are not necessarily going to always make that their priority when their priority is, of course, lining their pockets and making profits for themselves and their shareholders. That is one of the many problems with the system.

However, let me go back. Soon after the program was initiated, complaints began. People were seeing increased food costs compared with those experienced under the old food mail program, which allowed a bit more control for the direct end user.

Norman Yakeleya, Northwest Territories MLA for Sahtu, said:

The transition to the NNCP was painful and frustrating for my people. We are basically at the mercy of our one or two stores, especially when these stores are now saying "believe us — this is how much you are saving and this is what you'll get...no more personal orders." We feel our choices in the old Food Mail Program were stomped out by the New Improved NNCP.

Business of Supply

Nutrition north is a failure because the criteria used to determine which communities receive assistance are flawed, with the result that close to 50 communities that should qualify actually do not receive the full subsidy or the full assistance. We know that at least 46 northern communities that receive either no subsidy or a 5-cent-per-kilogram partial subsidy on the food should actually qualify for the full subsidy.

We are speaking about families and children being able to leave the vicious cycle of poverty. The additional cost for the government to alleviate this situation and lift these families out of poverty would be about \$7.6 million. That is what it would cost to add these 46 communities to the full subsidy list, but the government refuses to be there to support these communities that are living in conditions of extreme poverty.

We have also seen the Conservatives spending dollars on advertisements for the government's action plan, or inaction plan. Recently it spent \$13.5 million just to promote its budget, but apparently \$7.6 million is just too much money to spend on our northern communities to try to alleviate conditions for the many northerners who are living in poverty.

Of the 46 communities that I mentioned, 27 are in Conservative-held ridings. If the Conservatives wanted to at least support their own communities, these 27 communities, they should be able to do something to alleviate the situation, the condition, the reality of our elders in our communities, who are rooting through garbage to scavenge for food.

This really should not be the case. In such a rich country as ours, no one should be living in poverty, let alone so many entire communities.

When I put forward Motion No. 534 to end child poverty in this House, it was because far too many children in this country, 967,000 of them, are living in poverty or extreme poverty. UNICEF's report tells us that one Canadian child in five lives in poverty today. Among our aboriginal children, it is far more extreme: half—one in two—of our aboriginal children are growing up in extreme poverty. Just two days ago, I was in Toronto with Keep the Promise, where children were speaking out and asking our government to work to end poverty among children in this country.

Food insecurity is a real problem in many of our communities, even in Scarborough, but it does not even come close to the level of food insecurity in northern Ontario and in many other parts of northern Canada.

In conclusion, I would like to end my remarks for now with a reminder and a quote from a mother.

● (1350)

Her name is Leesee Papatsie. She is the creator of Feeding My Family, a Facebook page that she created. Of the aboriginal first peoples of this country and how their culture is one of working together and supporting one another and not creating friction, she said:

It's against our culture. The Inuit never protested. Traditionally, for the Inuit to survive, everybody had to get along and we didn't create friction. But if we don't start saying something about high costs, then people will think it's okay.

Our children are going hungry. Our country's children should not be going hungry, and it is our responsibility as legislators and as a government to ensure that all of Canada's children have food and security.

Mr. Dan Albas (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's contribution to this debate about nutrition north, and I agree that if there is one child in Canada who is hungry or going hungry, our communities and all levels of government need to work together to address those concerns.

That aside, we did study this at the public accounts committee, and one of the points that was raised by officials is that nutrition north was never intended to be a food security program. Its aim was to provide more nutritious foods at a subsidized rate for northerners.

There have been many questions from the opposition members today about lack of funding. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development made an announcement last year of an escalator of 5%. Looking at that escalator using the rule of 72, we see that in 14 years the government will have actually doubled the overall budget of the program. That is a big commitment, moving forward. The program is desired and will hopefully be supported.

Will the member agree that the 5% escalator, given the fact that compounding interest will lead to doubling the program funding in 14 years, is a good, solid contribution from this government?

● (1355)

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: Mr. Speaker, it is sad to hear that government members are not actually interested in food security for our northerners. The member said that this program was not created as a measure to alleviate food insecurity in the north, and it is sad to hear that. It is just not right. He said that it was created to send nutritious, healthy food to northerners.

I want to quote once again from Leesee Papatsie, an Inuit woman. She said:

What they consider healthy food is not traditionally the Inuit diet. It's imposing the idea of, 'Here, this is what we think is healthy for you guys.' What we've been saying all along is that we're not used to cooking fruits and vegetables....

Northerners are saying that they want to have access to nutritious food and food that is part of their traditional diet, instead of just having imposed on them what this member or the current government feels is nutritious or healthy food for Inuit. We should be respecting their cultures and their traditional way of life.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, here is something from 2008 that I said in the Manitoba legislature. The price in Winnipeg of four litres of milk was \$3.59. In Red Sucker Lake, the same product was \$11.89. In Tadoule Lake, it was \$17.40.

We can talk about all the numbers we want, but from a consumer's point of view on nutritious food, milk is pretty tough to beat.

Statements by Members

Would the member not agree that we need to start maybe thinking outside the box or even working with different levels of government to find ways to deliver a product so that kids are drinking milk instead of Diet Coke or cola products, which are causing their teeth to deteriorate and causing all sorts of other issues in many of our northern communities?

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: Mr. Speaker, yes, any produce and products that need refrigeration or need to be preserved are going to be more difficult for the communities to get. That is why we are seeing more and more of our parents having to feed their children pop and chips.

The member suggested milk or anything that is more nutritious than pop or chips. The problem is that even water is even a scarce resource. The parents do not have access to good, clean water. They do not have access to running water all the time in all the communities. We should not have a situation like this in our country. In Canada, which is such a have country, we should not have communities that do not have access to clean drinking water.

Of course I agree with the member in saying that we do not want to be feeding our children pop and chips. Those kinds of food habits are the reason we are seeing exponentially growing rates of diabetes and many other health concerns in our northern communities, and we should not have this situation. We, as legislators at the federal level, should be working with all levels of government to ensure that all our communities can be safe and that all our children can grow to their full potential and have healthy food.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

TRANS-PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP

Ms. Manon Perreault (Montcalm, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, the riding of Montcalm has a significant amount of farmland, and people are worried that the trans-Pacific partnership will make farmers a lot poorer.

Supply management is how milk, egg, chicken and turkey producers establish the best possible balance between supply and demand for their products in Quebec and Canada, and it guarantees a fair and equitable income. Supply management guarantees that consumers will have access to high-quality products at reasonable prices, without having to support farmers through taxes.

The impact of this agreement would compromise supply management, and farms across Quebec and Canada would have to shut down. This would result in thousands of direct or indirect jobs lost on our farms. As the member of Parliament for Montcalm, I have a duty to support farmers and to ensure that our supply management system is fully and fairly maintained.

● (1400)

[*English*]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Joan Crockatt (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, two years ago torrential flood waters overran the banks of Alberta's Bow and Elbow rivers, creating the most costly natural disaster in Canadian history. It has taken a huge toll as well. My constituents want to know how we are preventing another disaster.

Federally, we allocated \$3.2 billion for Alberta flood damages. We funded satellite weather forecasting for early warning and flood mapping to enable overland home flood insurance. Largest of all, we opened the doors to the province and to the city of Calgary to use record federal infrastructure dollars for disaster mitigation.

It is up to the province and city to access those funds. For Alberta, that is \$3.2 billion over 10 years. For the city of Calgary, it is \$63 million alone, just this year, from the gas tax.

Other provinces are getting shovels in the ground this summer and I urge our new premier, Rachel Notley and Mayor Nenchy to do the same. We are here to work with them.

* * *

[*Translation*]

WOMEN HELPING PEOPLE IN NEED

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Mr. Speaker, austerity measures are hurting people who use public services and the professionals who provide them. Across the board, it is mainly women who are paying the price. It is no wonder that the women's global charter for humanity is promoting the principles of justice, solidarity and equality.

Through their work with the more vulnerable members of our society, hundreds of not-for-profit organizations stand up for these fundamental principles every day. Of course, most of the human resources and administrators within those organizations are women. In my riding alone, there are dozens of organizations working for our community's welfare. Here are just a few examples: ABC des Hauts Plateaux Montmagny-L'Islet, Maison de secours La Frontière, La Traversée and the Centre-Femmes du Grand-Portage.

These women are changing the lives of countless vulnerable families and individuals, and they are managing to do so in spite of the limited, unstable budgets they have to work with. In the fall of 2015, I hope to see a majority of elected members in this House who understand that the government has a duty to act as a reliable, respectful partner to these women. Without them, there would be so much less compassion in the world. On behalf of all my colleagues, I want to thank them for their profound conviction that the world can and should be a better place and for the perseverance they show as they stand up for their values.

*Statements by Members**[English]***SPECIAL EVENTS**

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to congratulate and thank all the volunteers, participants and organizers who supported the CF walks in Watson Lake and in Whitehorse this past weekend and to highlight the great work done by Jen Roberts to support multiple sclerosis and to the participants, organizers and volunteers of that walk.

Also, I congratulate Cole Byers, a fundraising superstar. This young man has raised over \$100,000 for juvenile diabetes research. I congratulate the participants and organizers of the Walk for a Cure. That was wonderful. I thank them and Cole as well.

Finally, I would like to wish my sister Beck Ashley and my brother-in-law Andy a happy 10th anniversary. I hope Jared and Logan have made them breakfast in bed.

* * *

LOBSTER SEASON

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the lobster season in Cape Breton is off to a good start. Each year this is kicked off in the fishing community of Alder Point with the blessing of the fleet.

It gives me great pleasure to rise in the House today and recognize Mrs. Eunice MacFarlane who started the tradition 60 years ago, and continues to do so today at the young age of 91.

This past weekend I attended the blessing of the fleet. It is an event that allows the community to come together and wish fishermen well for a safe and prosperous season. They also honoured those who are no longer with us.

The fleet was blessed by Father Peter MacLeod and Reverend Julio Martin. The community also offered entertainment and fun with games for everyone.

I thank Eunice and all the volunteers for their tireless dedication over the past 60 years to keep this event going strong.

May all those who go on the water to bring our tasty catch to shore have a safe and bountiful season.

* * *

● (1405)

LEAMINGTON MENNONITE HOME AND APARTMENTS

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this coming Sunday, I will have the pleasure to help celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Leamington Mennonite Home and Apartments. A special service will be held at the Oak Street Mennonite Church in Leamington.

The home was originally opened in 1965 by a group of Mennonite churches in the Essex County region, and has grown from serving 40 individuals to now over 300 seniors, per year. It is the only not-for-profit, faith-based charitable home in the area and raises over \$100,000 per year with the help of the community.

The home provides exceptional services, as well as financial aid to those who are in need, and embraces all denominations and faiths.

Over 200 volunteers work at the facility throughout the year, visiting with the elderly, taking seniors to appointments, on walks and to special events.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate all those who have laboured so hard over the past 50 years to make the Leamington Mennonite Home a wonderful place for seniors and for so many to enjoy.

* * *

*[Translation]***WOMEN'S WORLD CUP OF SOCCER**

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in the House to announce the opening of the Women's World Cup of soccer, which will take place in several Canadian cities from June 6 to July 5. Canada will welcome the world this summer for the biggest soccer competition on the planet. Five hundred and fifty-two players representing 23 nations will participate in this ultimate test of courage and determination pitting the best soccer players in the world against one another. This world cup is a wonderful opportunity for all of us to watch these accomplished athletes up close as they give their all for their sport and their country.

[English]

We all remember the captivating bronze medal performance of Team Canada in the 2012 Olympics, led by Christine Sinclair. It was exciting and inspiring. I have no doubt these remarkable athletes will once again make us proud.

Today, I join my colleagues in welcoming the world to Canada and wishing Team Canada the best of luck.

* * *

NOBLE AND WOLF V. ALLEY

Mrs. Susan Truppe (London North Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in April, at the London Public Library, I was honoured to commemorate the importance of the Noble and Wolf v. Alley case as an event of national historic significance. A Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada plaque was unveiled at a special ceremony with members, the legal community of London and members of the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs.

The Noble and Wolf v. Alley case is an example of how the Canadian courts made decisions that have contributed to building a country that values tolerance and respect. This decision was an important step in the broader struggle for human rights and against discrimination on racial and religious grounds in Canada.

Our government is proud to commemorate the Noble and Wolf v. Alley case as an event of national historic significance.

This important ruling by Canada's Supreme Court was a milestone in the battle for human rights and against discrimination on racial and religious grounds in Canada. It should be remembered as a shining example of the contribution Canadian court decisions have made to ensure our country is the strong and diverse nation that it is today.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

ASTORVILLE EN FÊTE

Mr. Jay Aspin (Nipissing—Timiskaming, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today.

[English]

As many of my colleagues in the House are aware, Canada is celebrating 400 years of francophone presence in the province of Ontario. In fact, the famous explorer, Samuel de Champlain, travelled the Mattawa River, which runs through my beautiful riding of Nipissing—Timiskaming, as he crossed Ontario.

The community of Astorville in my riding has been working hard in preparation for the celebrations. This September, Astorville en Fête will celebrate 400 years of francophone culture as well as its 130th anniversary. There will be a fair, a grand concert, a French Canadian gourmet dinner, a parade, dances and much more.

I congratulate the hard-working organizers of the event and invite Canadians across this land to come to this extraordinary francophone celebration.

* * *

HOUSING

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Vancouverites have witnessed something remarkable in recent weeks. A community-led campaign, known as #donthave1million, has vividly raised the profile of Vancouver's affordable housing crisis.

Founded by Eveline Xia, a young professional Vancouverite, this movement is an inspiring example of young folks standing up for the future livability of their community and their city.

Recent data paints a grim picture. The average family sized townhouses cost \$1 million, rental units are not being built fast enough, half of renters in B.C. pay more than they can afford to house themselves and young Vancouverites are leaving the city for good.

As Ms. Xia says:

At a pace that defies reason and defies the local economy, the dream of affordable home ownership and affordable rental housing is slipping away from too many of us...For young workers like me, or even families with two good incomes, we work hard but our dreams of a modest home will never materialize in this city.

It is time for all governments to listen to the call raised by Ms. Xia and countless others. It is time for a national housing strategy that provides appropriate, affordable and secure homes for everyone.

* * *

● (1410)

TAXATION

Mr. David Yurdiga (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Liberal Party has made it abundantly clear. While this side of the House will be about keeping taxes low and money back in the pockets of hard-working Canadians, the other side of the House wants to dramatically raise taxes on all Canadians by bringing in a mandatory expansion of the Canada pension plan.

He is basically saying he supports a payroll tax hike that would cost \$1,000 in take-home pay for someone earning \$60,000.

Under the Liberal Party plan, a family in Fort McMurray—Athabasca with a combined income of \$120,000 would pay \$2,000. This is unacceptable and we will never let this happen.

* * *

MAUREEN VINE

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Maureen Vine was a remarkable woman. The epitome of a great citizen, she blazed a trail as an active and caring spouse, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, and a strong feminist. A member of Canadian Voice of Women for Peace and the Raging Grannies, she was incredibly passionate about her community and worked tirelessly for peace, social justice, women's rights, and the environment.

Maureen received the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal, but the best reflection of her impact is in the words of those who knew her. "Maureen is a legend", said one person. "Maureen was a role model who made a huge difference in our community", said another. Someone else described Maureen as "a champion of real people; helping create and maintain a kind of Canada that I believe in". As her daughter Jocelyn put it, "She really is a force of nature".

I extend my deepest condolences to her family and her legion of friends. We love Maureen and we will miss her.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians want more money in their pockets, not less money in their pockets. Businesses are warning that the Liberal leader's new proposed tax hike could have a devastating effect on jobs, by killing those jobs and squandering economic growth here in Canada. His plan would require that individuals making just \$60,000 a year would have to pay an additional \$1,000 in taxes.

Canadians didn't ask for that, they don't accept it, and they will never accept it. The Liberal leader should stop his assault on the middle class.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this weekend the Prime Minister will be attending the G7 summit in Germany. He will be pressed by President Obama, Chancellor Merkel, Prime Minister Cameron, and others to be serious about climate change.

He knows, as does the rest of the world, that this pledge to cut 30% by 2030 is nothing more than a press release masquerading as a plan. Having done nothing in the last 10 years, he expects to waltz into the most important meeting in the world and bully and bluster his way through the agenda. He will fool no one.

Oral Questions

Once again Canada's reputation will be trashed, once again the Prime Minister will resist any serious commitment to reducing GHGs, and once again he will assiduously work to water down any communique by the leaders. The G7 leaders know that this plan is both delusional and deceptive. The G7 is not a group for delusions and deceptions.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we all know that the genocidal death cult ISIS has declared war on Canada and specifically called for attacks on Canadians. Instead of addressing ISIS as the cause of their suffering, the leader of the Liberal Party wants to send blankets to its victims. This problem will not go away if we simply sit on the sidelines.

On behalf of my constituents of Calgary Northeast, I want to say thanks to the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces. Just yesterday, two CF-18 Hornets successfully struck an ISIS fighting position south of Haditha in Iraq. On Tuesday, two other CF-18 Hornets struck two ISIS fight positions near Mosul. These strikes are part of our continued mission to degrade ISIS until it no longer represents a threat to Canada.

* * *

● (1415)

[Translation]

TRANS-PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, farmers in Quebec and across the country are very concerned, and rightly so. Behind closed doors, without any transparency, the Conservatives are trading away the economic future and livelihood of thousands of families.

While the minister of state claims to be defending supply management, the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec is telling farmers that the government will have to make concessions in order for the trans-Pacific partnership to work. One Conservative member is simply saying that supply management should disappear, and the Prime Minister is saying that Canada has to make difficult choices.

As for the Liberals, influential members, such as former ministers, are pushing very hard to get rid of supply management.

There is no doubt that only one party is clear and is defending supply management. Only one party is standing up for farmers. That party is the NDP.

* * *

[English]

LEADER OF THE LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and for La Francophonie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this last month has taught us a lot about what the leader of the Liberal Party is planning for the middle class. On top of all his other high-tax and high-debt measures, he wants to bring in a mandatory expansion of the CPP of the type that Kathleen Wynne put forward in Ontario.

Someone earning \$60,000 a year would lose \$1,000 a year in take-home pay because of the Liberal leader's plan. Employers would also face mandatory increases in their costs, leading to reduced investment and jobs for Canadians.

The role of prime minister is not an entry-level job, and the leader of the Liberal Party has proven time and time again with his proposed schemes that he is not up to the task.

Under our Prime Minister, Canadians keep more money in their pockets to spend on their priorities.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

ETHICS

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Senate is dysfunctional and needs to be reformed. Who said that? It was not an official opposition member, but a good friend of the Conservatives: the former prime minister of Canada, Brian Mulroney. The current Prime Minister promised to do it, but he has not kept his promise.

Why has the Prime Minister not cleaned house in the Senate?

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as members know, this government brought forward a number of potential reforms for the Senate. Of course, those were looked at by the Supreme Court of Canada, and in its wisdom, it decided that the only way the Senate could be reformed would be with a unanimous decision of all provinces and territories.

At the same time, we know that the Senate has adopted some proactive changes to ensure better accountability. We look forward to that continuing in the Senate.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once upon a time, the Conservatives promised they would reform the Senate.

The Prime Minister vowed he would never appoint a single senator. Well, he has appointed 59 senators. He did not enact any reform, and the entire PMO is embroiled in the biggest Senate scandal in Canadian history.

Last night, former prime minister Brian Mulroney said, “[The Senate] has become a dysfunctional chamber and has fallen into disrepute”.

When will the Conservatives take responsibility for the Senate mess they created?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course, there is something called the Constitution.

We are the party that brought in a number of recommendations to reform the Senate. As members will recall, we actually wanted to see the senators elected and wanted to bring in term limits. On both of those, the NDP said they would not support those changes.

Oral Questions

We brought that forward to the Supreme Court, and in its wisdom, the court has decided that the only way the Senate can be changed is through unanimous consent of all provinces and territories.

We are focused on the economy. We are not going to be getting into long, protracted constitutional negotiations. We will continue to focus on jobs and economic growth.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Mike Duffy is a Conservative senator and he is on trial in court for fraud, breach of trust, and bribery. Now the Prime Minister will not answer questions about how his office faked residency eligibility and altered official audits. What a cover-up.

Now old-school parties with their old-school party operatives are doing partisan work on the public payroll in the upper chamber. The Prime Minister's Office has been involved at every step.

How can the Prime Minister continue to defend this unelected, unaccountable, and under-investigation Senate?

• (1420)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was the Senate that invited the Auditor General in, and we expect all senators to co-operate with that.

At the same time, when Canadians go to work, they work very hard, they send their tax dollars here, and they expect all members of Parliament and senators to use their money appropriately. We have 68 members of the NDP caucus who have taken \$2.7 million from the Canadian taxpayer illegally. They refuse to pay it back. The member for Scarborough Southwest owes \$140,000. I hope they do the right thing and pay the taxpayer back.

* * *

[Translation]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have heard a clear call from thousands of Indian residential school survivors for reconciliation and action in order to put an end to the intergenerational impacts of the schools.

They would like to have a public inquiry into missing and murdered aboriginal women. However, the minister decided instead to show his lack of sensitivity toward and respect for women.

Why is the minister refusing to take action?

[English]

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch (Minister of Labour and Minister of Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last I checked, I am female myself.

These are terrible crimes against innocent people. As I have said many times in this House, the RCMP has conducted its own study, and the vast majority of these cases have been addressed and solved. What we do not need is yet another study. We have 40 of those. What we do need is action.

What this government has been focused on is making sure that we take action, whether it be on matrimonial property rights, safety

plans, or other initiatives to protect women. We encourage the opposition to follow suit.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Justice Murray Sinclair asked for a public national inquiry, and that is the road to reconciliation. When will the government realize it?

At the closing events of the TRC, Justice Murray Sinclair reminded Canadians that reconciliation requires a political response, and it must be done in partnership.

Yesterday, survivors of the federally run day schools had their class action lawsuit approved. These survivors survived abuse and lost their languages and culture.

The question is this. Will the Conservative government work with them to negotiate an agreement rather than continue to fight them in court?

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we thank the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and Justice Sinclair for his recommendations and for his work.

Our government remains committed to addressing the legacy of Indian residential schools and moving towards reconciliation. It was this Prime Minister who moved forward with an historic apology in the House of Commons on behalf of all Canadians.

Individuals who attended the identified schools as day students were eligible for compensation under the independent assessment process of the Indian residential schools settlement agreement if they suffered sexual or serious physical abuse.

We will review this court decision before determining the next steps.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after a painful six year journey, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has released its findings. We now know the truth. Justice Sinclair said that meaningful reconciliation will require deliberate, thoughtful and sustained action.

Will the Prime Minister begin that action by confirming that this dark chapter in Canadian history was indeed a cultural genocide, and will he immediately begin work with the survivors, aboriginal leaders and the premiers to implement all recommendations of the TRC?

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said previously, we thank the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for its work. We thank the former residential school students for sharing their stories with the commission and with all Canadians.

Oral Questions

When the Prime Minister made his historic apology in this House of Commons in 2008, we acknowledged the policy of forced assimilation was devastating to individuals, devastating to communities and devastating to families. It is a part of our past. While we cannot change it, we must move forward in the spirit of reconciliation.

That is what we are committed to do, by taking concrete action to improve the lives of aboriginal Canadians.

[Translation]

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada is the result of six years of painstaking work. Justices Sinclair and McLachlin are calling the situation cultural genocide. According to the UN, genocide means “deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part”. That is clear.

What is the Conservative government waiting for? When will it acknowledge this cultural genocide and implement all the report's recommendations?

• (1425)

[English]

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, we thank the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for its work, and the former students for sharing their stories with Canadians and with the commission.

Unlike the Liberal Party that endorsed all the recommendations without even reading them, we have said that we would wait for the full report to come out before considering those recommendations and that we would consider them responsibly as a government.

The Prime Minister started this journey in 2008. We will work together in the spirit of reconciliation to take concrete measures to improve the lives of aboriginal Canadians.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we really need concrete action to go along with those recommendations.

We also know that the Canadian economy is losing ground. Faced with the oil crisis and the fluctuating price of raw materials, Canada is among the countries that are not faring very well, ranking below the OECD average. Australia, which is just as dependent on raw materials, is ranked ahead of us.

The Conservative government is demonstrating a lack of leadership by blaming the global economy. This is a Canada-wide crisis.

Will the government adjust its economic forecasts and finally create a plan to promote job creation and growth here in Canada?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals have just one plan for the economy, and that is to raise taxes. Recently, the Liberal leader announced that he was

looking at a tax increase like the one proposed by Kathleen Wynne, the Premier of Ontario. That would cost every worker who is earning \$60,000 a year \$1,000, and the small and medium-sized businesses that hire those workers would have to pay the same tax.

That will kill jobs and cost families a lot of money. We are doing the opposite by lowering taxes.

* * *

[English]

NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Northwest Territories, NDP): Mr. Speaker, National Chief Perry Bellegarde was clear that we cannot have reconciliation while indigenous people are mired in poverty.

Yet here we are with elders being forced to root through garbage dumps for food and children going hungry because their parents have no food to give them. Instead of helping them, the Conservatives are refusing to fix nutrition north.

In the spirit of reconciliation, will the Conservatives give the full subsidy to all northern fly-in communities that are currently not receiving it?

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to ensuring that northerners, like all Canadians, have access to affordable healthy food. Since the implementation of nutrition north, the volume of healthy food shipped to northern communities has increased by 25%, and the cost of a food basket for a family of four has dropped by \$137 a month.

If the member wants to do something for the people of the Northwest Territories, he should stop opposing our investments in the Inuvik to Tuktoyaktuk highway, which would lower the cost of goods and services for his constituents. Why is he standing in the way of that?

[Translation]

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, no one should have to rifle through garbage cans for food. Nevertheless, the Conservatives are refusing to own up to their mistakes. The Auditor General was very clear: nutrition north Canada did not have any effect on the price of food and the program is not being managed transparently. Fifty communities that should have received subsidies were excluded from the program.

Will the government vote in favour of our motion, work with all northerners and develop a sustainable solution to food insecurity?

[English]

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the NDP brought this issue up in April, it said that it was 55 communities. A month later, it said that it was 46. Today, it says that it is 50. It clearly has no idea what it is talking about on this issue.

We are committed to ensuring that northerners, like all Canadians, have access to nutritious food. We have accepted the recommendations of the Auditor General. We are moving forward on things like community eligibility. We will do that in a responsible way, considering a number of factors. We will not just put them down on paper and table them in the House without having any idea of what we are talking about.

* * *

[Translation]

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, although the Conservatives voted in favour of the NDP motion to put an end to the unfair pay-to-pay fees that the banks are charging, they are still refusing to legislate in this regard. Yesterday, they blocked our proposal to amend the budget, and this morning they once again refused to give their consent to insert the measure into the budget. That does not make any sense.

Is the government saying one thing and doing another? How can the minister vote in favour of our motion and then turn around and stop it from being implemented? How?

• (1430)

[English]

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government understands the concerns of Canadians who feel that they are being nickel-and-dimed by bank fees, which is why we have already obtained a commitment from the banks to ban pay-to-pay fees.

We have already introduced tough measures to protect Canadians, implementing low-cost bank accounts and expanding no-cost banking options for more than seven million Canadians. Shamefully, the Liberals and the NDP vote against all of those measures. They vote against measures to protect Canadians and consumers. They want to raise taxes on Canadians. Contrast that with our lowering of taxes.

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if they have an agreement from the banks, where is it? Is it in some secret code or invisible ink? What is going on there?

The House overwhelmingly voted in favour of banning pay-to-pay fees but, despite this, today, the government blocked us from banning these unfair fees in the budget bill. The Conservatives are standing in the way of immediately helping Canadians save upward of \$180 million.

I do not get it, and Canadians do not either. They are fed up with getting their pockets picked. Why are these guys dragging their heels?

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously, he does not get it. He votes against consumers every time.

Again, we are the only government that is consistently standing up for consumers by lowering taxes and putting money back into their pockets. Unlike the Liberals and the NDP, who would raise taxes on middle-class consumers, our government has reduced taxes for middle-class Canadians.

Oral Questions

Our government has taken action to improve low-cost bank accounts and expand no-cost bank options for more than seven million Canadians. We introduced the debit and credit card code of conduct. Shamefully, the NDP voted against it.

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TAXATION

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while Conservatives say “yes” for votes, they then go on to block action that could save Canadians millions of dollars in fees.

Yesterday, a Conservative MP warned that over 200,000 Canadian families were at risk of missing the deadline for the universal child care benefit extension. Families who missed the deadline will have to wait another four months to receive their benefits. Talk about a bait and switch.

Can the minister now tell us exactly how many families missed the government's deadline?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have recently brought forward the family tax cut and benefits. This is our Prime Minister's initiative to put more money into the pockets of moms and dads. We have increased the universal child care benefit to \$2,000 a year for kids under 6, and almost \$720 per year for kids 6 through 17. A lot of families were unaware of this because it is the first time that every single family with kids under the age of 18 was eligible to receive support from the federal government. Therefore, I have been reaching out. I have been travelling across the country. I even produced some popular YouTube videos in order to inform Canadians of these benefits. We will keep doing all of those things.

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yes I saw the ads. They were not exactly popular.

The Conservatives brag about their new universal child care benefit, except there are 200,000 families who will not be entitled to it. Families are already struggling to make ends meet at the end of the month. They do not want to have to fill out more forms.

Until the NDP implements its affordable child care plan, can the government at least ensure that all families will have access to the assistance promised?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yes, for the first time in Canadian history, a federal program is giving money directly to all parents, regardless of income or child care choices.

We increased the universal child care benefit to give all parents nearly \$2,000 for each child under 6 and \$720 for each child 6 through 17. We are working to inform all parents. The New Democrats should start helping us inform their own constituents about these benefits, so that everyone is able to take advantage of them.

*Oral Questions***EMPLOYMENT**

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is time that the Conservatives found the courage to have an honest look at their record. The economy is in trouble, economic growth declined in the first half of the year, the OECD just downgraded its forecasts for Canada and two out of five unemployed workers have simply stopped looking for work, because they no longer think they can find any.

Will the Conservatives bring in measures to create jobs, instead of giving gifts to their friends, the rich?

• (1435)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the New Democrats just pointed out that we have announced a plan that gives money directly to 100% of families with children under the age of 18. That is one way to help people in need.

In fact, the universal child care benefit has already helped lift 41,000 children out of poverty, and we will continue to increase it. The only plan the NDP has for the economy is to raise taxes for families and businesses. That will kill jobs and hurt families.

[English]

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Conservative mismanagement has driven the Canadian economy to the brink of a recession. The GDP actually shrank so far this year, and private sector economists are saying that this year will be even worse than expected. Canadians are feeling the effects, with 1.3 million unemployed, and job losses mounting in many sectors. Things have gotten so bad that two in five unemployed Canadians may have actually given up looking for work.

Why are the Conservatives ignoring unemployed Canadians while giving billions away to the wealthy few?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP and the Liberals have one plan for the economy, that is to raise taxes. They both now support Kathleen Wynne's Liberal plan to impose a \$1,000 payroll tax on every worker who earns \$60,000 a year, and the small business that employs that worker would also have to pay \$1,000. That will kill jobs and destabilize our economy.

Our low-tax plan is working. We have created 1.2 million net new jobs, 80% of which are full time, and two-thirds in high-wage sectors. Just this week, StatsCan indicated that Canadians in every income bracket have seen their net worth dramatically rise, including a 38% increase in the net worth of Canadians in the lowest 20%.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, actually the Conservatives ran a deficit to pay for tax breaks for the rich. That is their record.

After a decade of Conservative government, the Canadian economy is sputtering, and families are working harder and falling further behind. We are now trailing behind the United States in job creation, with higher levels of unemployment. BMO's chief economist has said that we are on track for the slowest growth outside of a recession in more than three decades.

Will the Conservatives wait until a recession overtakes us before taking any action to boost growth and create jobs?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in this fragile global economy, the last thing we need is a tax increase, but that is exactly what the Liberals and the NDP propose. They want a new \$1,000 payroll tax on every worker earning \$60,000 a year. Small businesses would be forced to pay that same \$1,000. That would kill jobs, according to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business.

Our low-tax plan has created 1.2 million net new jobs. This week, Stats Canada confirmed that Canadians are enjoying higher net worth than ever before.

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THE ECONOMY

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, economists hardly ever predict recessions, but when, as is the case today, they downgrade their GDP forecast to a miserable 1.5%, that is economist shorthand that recession and deficits may well be looming.

When the facts change, responsible governments change their policies. Will the government confront this new reality, bring in a new fiscal update before this session ends, and most important, come up with a real plan for jobs and growth?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals want the government to bring in Kathleen Wynne's new payroll tax. That would be the only new plan they put forward. They want the average worker who earns \$60,000 a year to pay a brand new \$1,000 tax, and the employer would be forced to match it. That would force a lot of employers to cut wages and lay people off.

We are going to do the opposite. We have cut taxes for every Canadian. We just brought in a family tax cut and benefits, which help 100% of households with kids. We are putting money directly in the pockets of Canadians.

* * *

• (1440)

PUBLIC SERVICE OF CANADA

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians want a government that respects their tax dollars but also respects the public service. The government is doing neither by making a joke of the collective bargaining process and refusing to provide any evidence that this will make employees healthier or save the taxpayer money.

Oral Questions

Will the minister start respecting the collective bargaining process so that the public service can feel confident that any deal reached on sick leave will be fair and honest?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to assure the hon. member that indeed we are continuing to bargain with the bargaining agent representing the public sector, but I would remind the hon. member, perhaps he is not aware of this, that the current system, which has 14.7 million banked sick days, in fact does not even help employees who have catastrophic illness early on in their careers. Sixty per cent of federal public servant employees do not have enough sick days under the current system to help them when they need it most.

We need a fair system for public servants and a fair system for taxpayers.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the President of the Treasury Board knows that the \$900 million is phony.

The minister likes to talk about fair and reasonable. Is it fair and reasonable to trample on bargaining rights? Is it fair and reasonable just to prop up his \$900-million phony budget application? Is it fair and reasonable to steal away from workers something that was negotiated at the bargaining table? Is it fair and reasonable to try to mislead this House and Canadians about the integrity and character of our public service?

We see nothing fair nor reasonable about the actions of this minister.

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think there were ten questions in there, but I will try to focus the hon. member a little bit and indicate, of course, that we are still at the bargaining table, as I mentioned.

Perhaps I already mentioned that there are 14.7 million banked sick days in place right now, but it is not working for the public servants who need it most. We need a system that is fair and reasonable for them and fair and reasonable for the taxpayers.

The hon. member is clearly on the side of being the shill for the bargaining agents we are bargaining with. That is his right if he wants to do so. We want to have a fair and reasonable plan for the taxpayers.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the crisis of sexual harassment in the RCMP has shocked Canadians. It is abhorrent that hundreds of women, maybe more, were subjected to discrimination, harassment, bullying, and even assault, all while trying to protect other Canadians.

These women deserve justice, yet the government has sent its lawyers to fight to get their case thrown out of court.

Does the minister honestly believe that the government has no responsibility for what happened to these women?

Ms. Roxanne James (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government, of course, takes the issue of discrimination

and sexual harassment very seriously. All RCMP members and employees should feel safe and respected among their colleagues and superiors. Canadians have the right to expect professional and exemplary conduct from their national police service.

As this matter is currently before the courts, it would be inappropriate for me to comment further on this case.

[Translation]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are not taking this matter seriously at all. Today we learned that the government asked the B.C. Supreme Court to reject the class action lawsuit filed by 375 women against the RCMP.

Instead of taking action against violence, bullying and sexual harassment, the Conservatives would rather sabotage women who blow the whistle on unacceptable behaviour.

Can the minister explain why the government would rather block the class action lawsuit than work to find solutions?

[English]

Ms. Roxanne James (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is imperative that all members of the RCMP be free to face the daily unexpected challenges of a day's work without harassment and without fear of mistreatment by co-workers and their superiors. As I just said, this matter is before the courts, and it would be inappropriate for me to comment further on this case.

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[Translation]

PRIVACY PROTECTION

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today, with Bill C-59, the Conservatives want to collect biometric data on visitors with visas from over 151 countries.

The Privacy Commissioner was very clear about this. When the government collects that much information, special precautions are required to protect privacy and prevent the theft of personal information, especially considering the Conservatives' record on this, which is downright disastrous.

Will the Conservatives come up with additional measures to protect privacy?

• (1445)

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we consulted the Privacy Commissioner and accepted all of his recommendations. These new measures will not even apply to Canadians. These measures are necessary to protect Canada from threats, including terrorism.

We are well aware that the NDP does not want to do anything about that, that it does not want to do anything with our armed forces in Iraq and Syria, that it does not want to do anything to revoke the citizenship of convicted terrorists, and that it does not want to do anything to cancel the passports of terrorists and people seeking to travel to Iraq and Syria. Everyone knows that the NDP's record on this is very poor.

Oral Questions

[English]

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister can crank up the fear machine, but what we are talking about here is gathering biometric data on 2.9 million people within just a few years and making it harder for tourists, family members, and business people to visit Canada.

Can the minister tell us if he has consulted the immigrant, tourism, or business communities on this proposal? Can he tell us how this data will be protected from the Conservatives' atrocious record on data breaches? Can he tell us who the data will be shared with? On this point, at least, he has to be clear. Will the data be passed on to other security agencies in the United States?

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, we consulted the Privacy Commissioner, and we accepted all of the recommendations that came. These measures will not be applied to Canadians, and we are, in fact, by doing these things, catching up with many of our allies, like the United States, like the United Kingdom, like Australia, and like other European countries that have had these measures in place for a long time.

The New Democrats are clear that they want to do nothing to protect this country from terrorism. They want to do nothing to revoke the citizenship of convicted terrorists, nothing to enhance the authority of CSIS to protect us, nothing to do what needs to be done in a world where terrorism is a serious threat. The New Democrats are irresponsible on these and other issues.

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TAXATION

Mr. John Barlow (Macleod, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Statistics Canada recently released some new data showing that many Canadian families are seeing their net worth increase under our government. I would like to ask the Minister of Employment and Social Development to update this House on what the low-tax policies of our government are doing to improve the lives of Canadian families.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while both the NDP and Liberal Party have announced they support Kathleen Wynne's plan to bring in a \$1,000 payroll tax on the average worker in Canada, we have done exactly the opposite. Our low-tax plan is not only creating jobs, it is raising the net worth of the average Canadian family. In fact, the bottom 20% of income earners have seen their net worth increase by 38% since 1999.

The overwhelming majority of our tax-relief measures have gone directly into the pockets of modest- and middle-income families. We are lifting people up by rewarding their hard work with low taxes.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I smell another video coming.

[Translation]

The Information Commissioner of Canada, Suzanne Legault, has already warned the government that the retroactive amendments to

the Access to Information Act set out in Bill C-59 set “a perilous precedent against Canadians' quasi-constitutional right to know”. However, the government chose to ignore her.

Desperate times call for desperate measures. Ms. Legault recently filed an order in Federal Court to prevent the Conservatives from destroying the data.

Why is the government stubbornly refusing to listen to the commissioner?

[English]

Ms. Roxanne James (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, we reject any claim that the RCMP did anything wrong by following the express will of this House, of Parliament, to destroy the data from the long gun registry.

Our Conservative government fulfilled its commitment to the Canadian public to end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry once and for all, and we will make no apologies to any member of the NDP for ensuring that the will of Parliament is followed.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Information Commissioner is taking the government to court over its attempt to legalize the illegal destruction of documents, and she is calling it a “perilous precedent”. She says that it sets the stage for future cover-ups and government wrongdoing, including electoral fraud and scandal.

Undermining independent officers of Parliament is nothing new for the government, but it is actually trying to retroactively fabricate the will of Parliament to aid in its latest cover-up.

Why is it so hell-bent on creating a legislative black hole to send public information to disappear and die?

● (1450)

Ms. Roxanne James (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, we reject any claim that the RCMP did anything wrong by following the express will of Parliament, but it is interesting that the NDP continues to bring up this question, because the NDP, if ever given a chance, would bring that long gun registry back with everything else.

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ETHICS

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what was that? That was the sputtering of a once mighty political machine that has just run out of gas.

Speaking of which, we are learning now from media that key Liberal and Conservative senators who are handling the political fallout of the Auditor General's report are actually implicated in the scandal. This is unacceptable. The Prime Minister promised Canadians that he would bring reform. He failed. His own office is implicated in the scandal.

What steps will the government take to reassure Canadians that justice will be done with the upper chamber and to ensure that full transparency will be brought to this issue?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as you know, it was the Senate that invited in the Auditor General to review senators' expenses. As we have said right from the beginning, we expect that all senators would co-operate and assist the Auditor General.

At the same time, we know that the NDP owes \$2.7 million to the Canadian taxpayers. There are some 68 members of that caucus who will be spending their summer in the defendant's box at court trying to explain to Canadians why they refuse to pay back the \$2.7 million they owe them.

The member for Scarborough Southwest owes \$141,000. He is part of the—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please.

The hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, fortunately this Parliament is coming to an end, because we can only endure so many platitudes from the other side of the House.

Today, we learned—and this is very serious—that prominent politicians, key members of the Senate, both Liberal and Conservative, will be targeted in the Auditor General's upcoming report. The Conservatives promised us a transparent, open and accountable government. That is not what we got. Conservative senators are going to be singled out in this report, and that is in addition to senators Duffy, Brazeau, Wallin and all others that the Prime Minister appointed.

What are the Conservatives going to do to bring accountability and transparency back to this Parliament? What are they going to do for Canadians? What are they going to do for taxpayers?

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I just said, it was the Senate that invited in the Auditor General to review senators' expenses.

However, when it comes to accountability, there are 68 members of the NDP caucus who owe \$2.7 million. The member himself owes over \$122,000 to the people of his riding. He should pay it back. Instead of making those 29 cheques out to the Quebec separatist party, if he could redirect a few of those cheques to the people of Canada to pay back the \$122,000 he owes—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please.

The hon. member for Malpeque.

Oral Questions

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, one year after the Moncton tragedy, it is time to remember. It is also time for the minister to accept his responsibility.

Front-line officers are now speaking out. They fear for their safety. Members still, a year later, do not have proper rifles or training. The government made cuts in budget 2012 and requested kickbacks from budget 2013, in both cases shorting RCMP funding.

Why does the minister continue to leave rank and file RCMP members without the proper equipment and training to do their jobs, putting their lives at risk?

Ms. Roxanne James (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today is the day that we remember and honour the three fallen RCMP officers who lost their lives in the line of duty. We also take the time to send our thoughts and our prayers. We continue to send them and continue to think of the families and the community affected by that horrific event.

The member opposite is asking about questions pertaining to the OPP report with regard to the report on the October 22 terror attack on the Hill. Opposition members claim that any type of budget cut to the RCMP was a factor in that incident, which is completely false. In fact, I would like to point out for the member that the parliamentary expenditures operation budget has increased by more than five times what it was in 2007.

* * *

● (1455)

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister will be at the G7 meeting in Germany this week. Chancellor Merkel, Prime Minister Cameron and President Obama see this as the most important meeting prior to Paris to talk about GHG emissions. The Prime Minister has set a GHG target, which everyone knows is a press release masquerading as a target. The G7 leaders know that this is just simply a deceptive and delusional plan.

Why embarrass us, once again, on the international stage to deceive the world's most important leaders? Why not just admit that the last 10 years have been a colossal Conservative failure?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of the Environment, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, CPC): Mr. Speaker, may I remind that member and that party that their Kyoto agreement was written on the back of a napkin.

The plan that Canada has put forward to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 30% below 2005 levels by 2030, a reduction of 225 megatonnes, is a fair and ambitious target for Canada and in line with international industrialized countries. We will continue to take action. We have announced three new sectors that we are going to regulate methane: the oil and gas sector, the fertilizer sector and the energy sector. We will do that without introducing a job-killing carbon tax.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, farmers in my riding, Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, are not the only ones who rely on supply management. All farmers across Quebec and Canada have built their business model around this system. However, members in the Conservative caucus do not seem to have a problem with abolishing it.

Can the minister opposite guarantee that the Conservative government will not touch supply management in the trans-Pacific partnership negotiations?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism, and Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, since 2006, our government has signed free trade agreements with more than 37 countries. We never tampered with the supply management system when we signed all of these agreements. Future agreements will be no different. We will continue to maintain supply management and all other industrial sectors, since this agreement is important. Canadian producers and exporters will have access to more than 800 million consumers without any tariffs or quotas.

It is important to sign this agreement, which will benefit all industrial sectors.

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, no matter how much the minister tries to reassure us, members of his caucus have no problem talking about abolishing supply management. We do not know what the minister's colleagues are telling him in caucus, just like we do not know what is going on at the trans-Pacific partnership negotiating table.

Farmers in Mirabel know that they can count on the NDP to protect supply management. Can they count on this government?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism, and Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, farmers in Mirabel, Beauce and all across Canada, milk producers, cheese producers, and egg and poultry producers can count on this government to protect supply management, as it has done in the past when it signed other free trade agreements.

* * *

[English]

TAXATION

Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government has balanced its budget while helping families balance theirs. All families with children in Elmwood—Transcona are benefiting from the family tax cut and universal child care benefit, and do not want to give the Liberals the chance to take it away.

Could the Minister of State for Finance please update the House on the government's efforts to keep taxes at historic lows?

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, under the strong leadership of our Prime Minister, a typical family of four will save a whopping \$6,600 this year, but the Liberals and the NDP want to take that money out of their pockets. They want to raise taxes.

The Liberal leader wants to impose a mandatory \$1,000-a-year job-killing payroll tax hike on middle-class workers. We will not let the Liberals get away with their reckless high-tax, high-spend agenda. Canadians know they are better off with this Conservative government.

* * *

NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government has failed northerners when it comes to nutrition north. It has failed to provide affordable, nutritious food to northern remote families. The Auditor General clearly reported that the minister and his department failed to ensure that food subsidies were being passed along to northern residents who needed it.

Why have the Conservatives taken no steps to fix this crisis and why is food security in the north not a priority for Conservatives?

● (1500)

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have taken action. We have invested additional funds into nutrition north Canada. We have accepted the Auditor General's recommendations.

However, we have changed the program from the old food mail program under the Liberal Party. We believe that nutritious, perishable foods that improve the health of northerners should be what we subsidize. Liberal members believe in subsidizing snowmobile parts, tires, cans of Coke and chips. We are focusing on healthy foods for the north and we are getting the job done.

* * *

[Translation]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government suspended visa applications for people from Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, countries affected by the Ebola virus, in a move that was harshly criticized from the outset. The World Health Organization said that this measure is ineffective in stopping the spread of the virus.

The government lifted this visa suspension for Liberia last month. When will it do the same for Guinea and Sierra Leone?

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we lifted the suspension on visa processing for one of the countries affected by the Ebola virus when the World Health Organization indicated that the crisis was over in that country. We are awaiting a similar result in the other countries before taking action because we are committed to protecting Canadians.

Business of the House

Why are the hon. member and her party still opposed to biometrics, cancelling passports, revoking citizenship from terrorists and all the other measures we are taking to keep Canadians safe?

* * *

[English]

TOURISM INDUSTRY

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 2014 was a record year for the tourism industry in Canada, with many destinations showing growth. Overall, tourism revenues grew by 4.7%, reaching nearly \$89 billion last year.

It being Tourism Week in Canada, could the Minister of State for Small Business and Tourism please update the House on all the recent initiatives our government has undertaken to further grow tourism in Canada?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism, and Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, I want to thank the member for Wild Rose for his leadership as the chair of the parliamentary tourism caucus.

The Prime Minister announced an additional \$30 million over three years to Destination Canada for it to reach out to more visitors from the United States. This funding will be matched by the provincial tourism organizations, by the territorial organizations and also by the private sector. We will be able to reach more visitors from the U.S. to come to our country.

* * *

[Translation]

HEALTH

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, FD): Mr. Speaker, with support from the Government of Quebec and the mayor of Montreal, the public health authority just submitted an exemption application to Health Canada in order to set up supervised injection sites in the city. This will help addicts, reduce the number of people who inject drugs on the street and reduce the number of syringes that are left in parks where children play. The only thing the project needs now is approval from Health Canada.

Can the Minister of Health guarantee that her government will not derail the project, as it tried to do in the case of InSite in Vancouver?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we are talking about is an exemption for illegal street heroin to be injected in a site. Therefore, we have put forward legislation that will be moving through the Senate very shortly to ensure that neighbourhoods, where the mayor of Montreal might like to put a heroin injection site, actually have a say on whether they want a heroin injection site. It is an illegal drug. In addition, I want to know from the mayor of Montreal what kind of drug prevention and drug treatment services he has available for those who are addicted.

[Translation]

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, in 2004 the Canada Revenue Agency launched an investigation of COOP Plus and COOP Harmonie Plus. In 2008, more than 300 members of these co-operatives received notices of assessment. Approximately 270 of them were assessed after years of harassment, while another 30 or so went to the Tax Court of Canada. On December 12, 2014, they all won their cases.

In the interest of fairness, will the Minister of National Revenue ask the Canada Revenue Agency to review the files of those assessed?

● (1505)

[English]

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, to the Minister of National Revenue and for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have a very fair tax system in Canada. When the auditors choose to audit any individuals or any company in Canada, that audit is carried out in a professional manner.

In this case, the individuals were found to be in compliance, and they should be satisfied with that result.

* * *

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there was good news for Canadians this week.

As members will remember, on Monday the NDP moved a motion to eliminate pay-to-pay fees, which really add up for consumers. We are asking the government to implement what Parliament just adopted. Today, we are debating the nutrition north Canada program. That is extremely important, and we hope to secure the government's support.

[English]

There are some other bits of good news from the last week. The Alberta strong, stable, NDP majority government had its first full week. In its first week, it has put in place \$100 million in education funding. It has put in place a breakfast program for poor Albertan kids. It has been looking to raise the minimum wage and taking action on climate change. That is in the first week of action. Compared with this old, tired government, it is quite a contrast.

I am also pleased to announce, as members know, that the election starts 100 days from today. In 100 days, Canadians will be casting their judgment on the government, and we will be working hard to make sure Canadians know that they can elect a new NDP government on October 19.

Business of Supply

Since the government only has two weeks left in its agenda, two weeks before the end, I would like to ask my colleague the government House leader this. What are they going to do with the first of those last weeks before the end of the current government?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government, of course, continues on its commitment to help out families, not just by lowering the costs they pay for products and services but, most important, by lowering taxes that they are required to pay to the government and providing more money in their pockets to help them make ends meet. We think that is one of the most meaningful things we can do as a government: help Canadians succeed and meet their aspirations and dreams for a brighter future.

[*Translation*]

This afternoon will be dedicated to today's NDP's opposition day motion.

[*English*]

Tomorrow, we will wrap up the third reading debate on Bill S-6, the Yukon and Nunavut regulatory improvement act. This will be the sixth day of debate for that particular piece of legislation, which would support economic development north of 60 while ensuring the preservation of the environment.

Monday shall be the eighth allotted day when we will debate another NDP opposition day motion. Regrettably, I have noticed that the NDP leader has never taken me up on my suggestion that he allow the House an extended debate on one of their proposals, under Standing Order 81(16)(a). As a result, next week, we will have the 88th time-allocated opposition day of this Parliament.

[*Translation*]

That evening, as required by the Standing Orders, we will debate the main estimates. Then, we will consider an appropriations bill, the supplementary estimates, followed by a second appropriations bill.

Tuesday morning, we will consider Bill S-2, the incorporation by reference in regulations act, at report stage. This legislation will help streamline regulations and ensure that important safety rules keep up with evolving developments and standards.

[*English*]

In the afternoon, we will take up Bill C-59, economic action plan 2015, No. 1, at report stage, in anticipation that it will be reported back to the House tomorrow.

This package of essential measures—such as the family tax cut, enhancements to the universal child care benefit, and a reduction to the small business income tax—is an important priority for our Conservative government and I think, more important, a priority for Canadian families.

Since the budget was delivered this spring, however, the Liberal leader has let us and all Canadians in on his economic plans.

First, we learned he thinks that “benefiting every single family is not...fair”.

Then, he topped it off when he told Canadians that the Liberals are looking at a mandatory expansion of the Canada pension plan. That

would mean a \$1,000 tax hike for a typical earner and for that earner's employer, and that \$1,000 tax increase on two sides would be a significant potential impairment and drag on our economy. Certainly, it would be a huge drag on the personal finances of Canadian families.

On Wednesday, we will return to Bill C-59, if additional time is needed.

Thursday morning, we will consider Bill C-35, which is the justice for animals in service act, Quanto's law, at report stage and, ideally, third reading.

This is an important bill, which would ensure appropriate criminal penalties for killing or harming police animals and other service animals—dogs, horses, and so on—and speedy consideration of it would be favourable because that would allow it to pass and make it to the Senate for its consideration this spring.

I would remind the House the bill has already received four days of second reading debate and was in the justice committee for over five months.

That afternoon, we will again consider Bill S-2, and I hope it will be at third reading.

Next Friday, we will return to Bill S-7, the zero tolerance for barbaric cultural practices act, at report stage. The House will recall that we are debating the opposition's amendments to gut the bill of its entire contents—contents that demonstrate our Conservative government's commitment to end violence against women and girls.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1510)

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—NUTRITION NORTH CANADA

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from the Northwest Territories for bringing forward this motion on behalf of all of us who represent the north.

We are here to raise awareness of and demand action on the shameful fact that the people who I and many of us represent are going hungry. They cannot afford to keep healthy food on their family's table. Elders and kids have no food in this country, Canada. I fundamentally believe that Canadians are simply not okay with that fact.

I want to begin by giving a quick snapshot of what the people in my own riding of Churchill are dealing with on any given day. John Robert Throassie from Tadoule Lake said, “You go to the Northern Store with \$200 and you'll be lucky if you get one week of supplies”.

Business of Supply

A constituent from Tadoule Lake shared with me that a four-litre jug of milk is \$15. Darryl Beardy from York Landing, which has been excluded from nutrition north, said that a four-litre jug of milk is \$12. Julie-Anne Saunders reported to me that, at one time, strawberries in the Northern Store in York Landing were almost \$13, and ground beef was \$14.

This has been a historic week for Canada. Our Truth and Reconciliation Commission has come to a close and has given us all a clear mandate. Justice Murray Sinclair said it best when he said:

Reconciliation is not an aboriginal problem—it is a Canadian problem. It involves all of us.

He spoke directly to the leaders in Canada and the government and asked us to take up the spirit in actions of reconciliation in all we do.

The commission has given us a road map with 94 recommendations that clearly define what the government's role should be in making our broken country whole again. For our part, New Democrats are fully committed to following these recommendations.

I want to address the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations in the context of nutrition north, because when indigenous peoples are going hungry in the north and the government does not take action to address it, there can be no reconciliation. The TRC report said:

We believe that in order to redress the legacy of residential schools and to move towards more respectful and healthy relationships, the Government of Canada, in meaningful consultation with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities, must recognize and address the broader context of the child-welfare crisis. This includes matters of child poverty, housing, water, sanitation, food security, family violence, addictions, and educational inequities.

More succinctly, the formidable indigenous performer, musician Tanya Tagaq tweeted on Tuesday:

#MyReconciliationIncludes the ending of the food crisis in Nunavut. Subsidize the shipping costs.

We have heard it from indigenous leaders; we have heard it from the government's own Auditor General; and I personally hear it constantly on the ground in the communities that I have the honour of representing. Northerners cannot access affordable healthy food where they are. People are going hungry. People are getting sick. The need is urgent, and we cannot wait any longer for action.

I want to acknowledge the work of Leese Papatsie, a creator of the "Feeding My Family" Facebook page, who is known as a hero in many communities that I represent. She said:

The Inuit never protested. Traditionally, for the Inuit to survive, everybody had to get along and we didn't create friction. But if we don't start saying something about high costs, then people will think it's okay.

She said their children are going hungry.

My riding in northern Manitoba includes 14 communities that are eligible for nutrition north. They are Bloodvein, Berens River, God's Lake Narrows, God's River, Garden Hill, Lac Brochet, Little Grand Rapids, Poplar River, Oxford House, Red Sucker Lake, Shamattawa, St Theresa Point, Waasagomach, and Pauingassi

In response to numerous complaints about the effectiveness of nutrition north from my own constituents, along with six of my colleagues, I wrote a letter to the Auditor General asking for a wide

ranging financial and operational audit of the program. The Auditor General agreed, and in 2014, a damning report was released that found huge gaps and a general lack of accountability in the management of the program.

● (1515)

No wonder people in the communities I represent are calling for action. They know the program is not working.

I also acknowledge communities like Churchill and Pukatawagan that, yes, have a railway but are still remote, and people cannot afford healthy food to feed their families.

I have been advocating for the program to be fixed, and for some time, my requests have been met with an infuriating lack of action on the part of the minister and his staff, who admit freely to me that the problems and inequities that exist within the program are there, but they are in no hurry whatsoever to fix them.

I repeat, people are going hungry in our north. Elders cannot afford food. Parents cannot afford to buy healthy food for their children. Parents who cannot afford food for their kids cannot wait for the federal government to choose to prioritize the issue; they need it fixed now.

My colleagues and I are brought here today by the serious health needs of the people we represent. What could be more fundamental than addressing third-world food shortages?

One of the worst issues we are facing in the north is that some communities, which by all accounts are the most northern and face the greatest levels of food insecurity, are excluded entirely from nutrition north, and there is no credible reason. There are indigenous communities in my riding that urgently need to be included in the program, because even a program that is not working as it should is better than no program at all.

The communities are York Landing, Brochet, and Tadoule Lake, which is the farthest north first nation in northern Manitoba. They must be included immediately in the program. We also recognize that there are other communities, as I mentioned, that need to be considered and included.

Time is up for the current government. What we are saying today is that the government has to step up and immediately contribute the funds necessary to include these excluded communities. It is an easy and straightforward step in the right direction. Children are going hungry.

We have crunched preliminary numbers and approximately \$7.5 million would be needed to include the excluded communities. We can do this today and simultaneously commit the House to look critically at the nutrition north program from the ground up, and do the work necessary to make food security a reality for northerners. We need to go back to the table and fix this broken program

I want to read into the record the words of one of my constituents, Sheila Marie Beardy from Pukatawagan, who said:

Business of Supply

I live in an isolated First Nation of Pukatawagan, Manitoba, where the only means of travel in the summer is by plane or train (twice a week) and in the winter we do have a winter road for 3 months and the high cost of living is ridiculous! We only have 1 store which is called the Northern Store.... Many of our Community Members struggle due to the high cost of living in our Community....

I also think of the northerners who are making a difference every single day trying to establish food security, food sovereignty, in their communities. I think of the work that is being done currently in Garden Hill by Darcy Wood and Shaun Loney, working with local young people and people in Garden Hill to establish community gardens. I think of the work of Diana DeLaronde-Colombe in Wabowden, who for years has been working to establish greenhouses and raise chickens on a small scale in communities in our north. I think of the late Oscar Lathlin and leaders in our provincial government who fought to establish some ability to support food security in our north.

However, the role we need to see here is the one played by the federal government. We in the NDP understand that food security for northern indigenous peoples means more than just nutrition north. We need to address the food crisis in the north and work together for sustainable, indigenous, and northern-led solutions.

In conclusion, I stand in the House to ask the Conservative government to stop taking the north for granted. Stop using northerners for photo ops. I ask the Conservatives to respect the north and stand with northerners to put an end to the food insecurity they and we face.

• (1520)

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her intervention. Of course, she speaks about paying attention to northerners. I am a northerner, and I have travelled right across the Canadian north and Canadian Arctic with our Prime Minister announcing investments outside of nutrition north. These investments engage a suite of food security initiatives, like the northern greenhouse initiative, the Growing Forward 2 program, and cold climate innovation, which are enhancing different technologies in the Canadian high Arctic to bring food security solutions to the north.

I have witnessed those things working in communities like Pond Inlet, Hay River, Yellowknife, and Old Crow in the Yukon. In fact, just a couple of weeks ago I was in Old Crow, one of the nutrition program locations, announcing \$1.2 million to help stores grow there.

However, the member continues to vote against those. Why would that be?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate hearing from a Conservative member from the north today in the House of Commons. I have heard from a few Conservative members who are certainly not from the north and found that it was all too easy for them to talk about what we in the north need.

I would ask my fellow colleague from the north to work with his minister to immediately include the almost 50 communities, a number of which are in my constituency and a far greater number of which are in Conservative-represented constituencies. These people do not deserve this kind of exclusion by the government. Nutrition

north needs to be reviewed and fixed. Let us begin by including the excluded communities right away.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have raised the issue of milk on a couple of occasions because of the importance of that commodity. Hopefully, I will get a chance later to expand on that and other aspects of nutritional food for northern Canada.

The question I have for the member is this. I have heard from a number of her constituents in Churchill with respect to the issue of milk. They were lobbying us to do more to make milk more available and practical in terms of cost. I was wondering if the member would provide some comment on the importance of milk in northern Manitoba. This is an issue from my past days that was brought to my attention on numerous occasions because of the different ramifications of diet and the whole issue of eating healthy.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, the high cost of milk is unacceptable in and of itself but is also indicative of how unaffordable a range of healthy foods are in our north. As I mentioned, in Tadoule Lake is the furthest north first nation in northern Manitoba that is excluded from the nutrition north program. That is on the verge of being criminal. The government is expecting people living in abject poverty and who struggle every day to find almost \$15 for something as basic as milk, which we can find for a couple of dollars here. It is so critical that the current government take seriously its neglect of the northern people, of northern indigenous communities and immediately start including the excluded communities, reviewing the nutrition north program and working with northerners to bring a solution to this dire problem.

• (1525)

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there are many people in my city of Toronto and my riding of Parkdale—High Park who struggle with food security, such as low-income people who either cannot find work for a variety of reasons or who work in precarious jobs. For the benefit of Torontonians for whom the prices in the north would seem astronomical, could the member explain what nutrition north is and how it falls far short of what northerners need?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, there are so many north-south connections on this issue. In fact, we have seen Canadians in southern Canada rally around this issue and take it into their own hands to try and ship the food that is necessary to their northern neighbours, to people they do not even know but with whom they have connected over social media. It is incredible. In a way it is a real sense of community and co-operation among Canadians. I only wish the federal government would show that same kind of spirit, take its obligation toward first nations seriously and co-operate with northern peoples. However, time and again, all we see from the Prime Minister and his ministers are fancy photo ops and great tours in the north when in fact northern people are going hungry.

The northern first nations are excluded from this program. Change needs to happen now. Northerners need to lead the way.

Business of Supply

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today to speak to this motion. Before I commence, I will just mention that I will be splitting my time with the member for Macleod.

As we have heard in earlier interventions today, a lot of Canadians are concerned. They are supportive of the initiatives that need to take place in the north to enhance food security solutions, and not just under the nutrition north program but through an entire suite of programs that our government is delivering.

I can think of constituents in Canada, like Logan Ashley, who would be very interested in learning about the initiatives that our federal government is undertaking.

I am a northerner, and I have seen our government's investments in the north and in the Canadian arctic. I have travelled with the Prime Minister and the respective ministers, and not, as the opposition would coin it, for fancy photo ops but rather for on-the-ground, community-based, real solutions that have been generated by the community. The communities are very much interested in showing these solutions to the ministers, the Prime Minister and those members of Parliament from our side who take the time to go there and meet with mayors and councillors, chiefs and councils, and community members. We listen to what their needs are, and then observe the beginning, in progress and end of initiatives that they have undertaken with federal government resources and federal government investments.

Let me highlight a couple of those. The Growing Forward 2 program and the northern greenhouse initiatives were announced by the Prime Minister last year when I was with him in Hay River. I was joined by the Minister of the Environment, who is also the north regional minister. We were looking at the great work that communities are undertaking with the Growing Forward 2 program to provide real community-based solutions. It is not just about food security solutions. It is about skills development and employment opportunities, making sure that nutritious and affordable food is available. It is about a broad range of skill sets that are undertaken to deliver quality food and multi-year crops in a challenging northern environment.

This is a Canadian success story. This is about Canadians in the north and in the high arctic finding ways to deliver fresh and available foods right there in their own communities.

We are providing the funding for them to do that. We are supporting the technology and innovation for them to be able to do that. At the same time, we are supporting that skill set and that natural connectability to working opportunities and career opportunities. At the same time, we are helping those communities define and meet their food security needs.

In my home, in the community of Old Crow, just a couple of weeks ago, I was proud to be there to open the Co-op store. It was a first nation development corp. community-invested grocery store. It is going to provide co-operative investment for that community. When people shop there, there is going to be a direct dividend return to that community. That store is also going to provide employment and training opportunities for people living in that community. That

store is providing access to more affordable foods and more nutritious foods.

What I saw was a store full of fresh fruits and vegetables, a store that had products in it that were far cheaper than in the past. I saw a program and service delivery that our government is investing in that is working. The community was there to celebrate. They see the real results of programs that are working, not one in a vacuum, like the nutrition north program, but a whole suite of programs, like the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, which was created by our government to improve and enhance the working and economic development opportunities for people of the north. Those included food security solutions, like this one, that the development corp. has put forward in Old Crow.

They have been strong advocates of investing in their own community solutions, and we have done that with and for them. We have been strong and proud participants, and supporters of that program.

We hear somewhat of an incoherent thought from the opposition. On the one hand, they stand in this House today and criticize the nutrition north program, but then urge the government to add 50 more communities to it. I am not sure that is a coherent argument, chastising a program while asking that more Canadian communities be added to it. It is a bizarre track of thinking.

Let me talk about a couple of the communities that the opposition has put down on a napkin. One of the communities added is already a full beneficiary of the nutrition north program.

• (1530)

Governing is a responsibility that we take seriously, and it is not something that one can do by just drafting a list of communities, putting that on the back of a napkin, dropping it in Parliament and then asking Parliament to simply add those communities without thought. It is irresponsible.

When we look at some of the communities they have put in place, some already on this list, some of those communities in the design of this program have road accessibility so it is already far more affordable for them to truck supplies into those communities than some of the communities we are talking about in the Canadian high Arctic. Those are the ones that rely on shipping crates and containers to come in, those that rely on seasonal accessibility to their communities, such as the one in the Yukon that is a fly-in only community.

We have members from the opposition, from Toronto, standing up to speak about these things. We appreciate their support and their concern and their attention to the north, but they clearly do not understand the realities of these communities because they have not been there. However, they are willing to stand in this House and chastise our government for having been there. I have been there. I have been there with the Prime Minister and with several respective ministers.

Business of Supply

Every single year, the Prime Minister of this country has been across the north. Ten times he has visited since 2006. That is more than any other prime minister in the history of this country. There is more attention and more investment for the people of the north than by any other prime minister before. This is a prime minister who works in and with the communities and who dispatches his ministers on a regular basis to go to the north. He dispatches his members of Parliament to go to the north and work with the members of those communities. There are two members on this side of the House who live in northern Arctic communities and can speak about the very real challenges, and we are seized with those.

We understood the Auditor General's comments. The minister embraced those quickly and, in fact, almost by the date of the tabling of that report had already actioned many of the recommendations and had already moved to significantly improve the recommendations that were made. We have not stopped there because we understand fundamentally that nutrition north is one part of a suite of programs that our government has deployed since 2006 to improve the working and living conditions of aboriginal people. Those include things like our family tax cut so that we are able to leave more money in the pockets of hard-working Canadians. That is more money in the pockets of moms and dads so that they can spend their money on the needs that they define are important for them. The opposition wants to take that away. The opposition votes against that.

Here is another real example. Just a couple of weeks ago, I was joined in my territory by the Minister of Health. We announced \$13 million for chronic health management in our territory. As we all know, across the north certain rates of diseases like diabetes are higher than the national average, in some cases four times higher. That boils down to the need to invest in chronic disease management, nutrition, and dietary supports and programs. It boils down to the suite of programs that we are delivering to ensure we can effectively manage chronic disease, which is a challenge in the north. I personally spent time one summer running from the northern part of the Yukon to the southern part of the Yukon to raise awareness and funds for diabetes, and to ensure that people were aware that our government was prepared to continue to invest in that.

We are doing these things step in and step out: policy investments, legislative adaptations, direct or indirect contributions and services from our government, and into the territorial governments for them to outlay their local priorities under their local governance structures. Everything we have done in this massive suite of programs, the opposition stands up and votes against.

It is disingenuous for the opposition members to stand in this House and say the government should do things, and then every time we table bills, policies or investments, they vote against it. I say this. The opposition should get on board and start supporting what we are doing in real terms for the great people of the north.

• (1535)

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once again it is great to hear voices from the north on the government side on a day when I have heard from a number of southern Conservatives, one of whom, I think, spoke about how important the north is to our heritage.

We have heard about the Prime Minister's tours and we have heard about all the ministers who have gone places. I have seen pictures on ATVs and I have seen pictures in front of schools. These are great pictures, and I am sure it was a really great time.

In fact, the Prime Minister came to our constituency, which was very nice, except for the fact that nothing is actually being done on one of the most fundamental issues that northerners face, which is dealing with the hunger they face.

This is Canada in 2015, one of the wealthiest countries in the world, and the first peoples of this country are going hungry in northern communities. There were people eating out of the garbage dump in Rankin Inlet, so to hear about the Prime Minister's travels is frankly insulting to the reality that northern Canadians face.

Let us see the government put that same enthusiasm for travel into actually making a difference for northern Canadians.

Mr. Ryan Leef: What is shameful, Mr. Speaker, is the opposition failing to support all of the very real measures that I indicated.

I can tell hon. members clearly what the reaction is in the northern communities when the Prime Minister and those ministers travel and visit. How can I say that? It is because I have been there with them.

From Yukon to the Northwest Territories to Nunavut, I have been there and I have watched the programs and services that we have delivered. I have watched the community work with our ministers. I have watched the community partners engage in these activities with direct federal spending, and I have watched the pride and the sense of accomplishment and the very real support that they feel when our government is there with them and meeting directly with them.

This government, the Prime Minister, and our ministers will never apologize for actually being in those communities to hear directly from Canadians and to attempt to live the same lifestyle that they do, unlike the opposition.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Yukon for his passion and for his speech. He is one of the leading advocates for protecting our hunting, fishing, and trapping heritage in this country.

When I have talked to people in the north, I have heard that they want to be able to hunt, trap, and fish. They want to be able to provide for their families in the ways that they have traditionally done so.

We talk about the full suite of measures that we have taken to address food security in the north. Could the hon. member talk about what he thinks about an opposition party that is anti-hunting, anti-trapping, anti-seal industry? How does that affect the north, and how can we, as the Conservative government, support northerners in their desire to protect their hunting and fishing heritage?

Business of Supply

• (1540)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I am not sure that is actually pertinent to the question before the House. There is a country food element to nutrition north. I see the hon. member for Yukon on his feet and I think he will give the question a go just the same.

The hon. member for Yukon.

Mr. Ryan Leef: Mr. Speaker, I think you highlighted it perfectly. There absolutely is a country food element in this program. Northern Canadians tell us over and over again that country and traditional foods are very critical and very important to their dietary needs.

I am proud to be joined by the chair of the hunting and angling caucus, who is here with me, because we both know and understand the importance of traditional ways of life for the dietary needs of northern Canadians. We will proudly stand up and support them.

I cannot believe the opposition continues to vote against those measures and speaks out against them. It is absolutely not reflective of the needs of Yukoners, the needs of people from the Northwest Territories, and the needs of people from Nunavut, who can count on this government to continue to support them in their traditional ways of life, and we are proud to do that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is quite rich to hear the members opposite claim that we know nothing about our territory and about the reality in the north.

I have lived that reality. I lived on a reserve. I hunted to bring meat back to the village, and I know how important this is to nutrition and the traditional way of life of aboriginal people. They are pretty quick to paint us all with the same brush.

I want to make some clarifications about road access. In the winter, some places are accessible by road, but when the river thaws in the spring and the ice is not strong enough in the fall, there is no access at all.

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts about that.

[*English*]

Mr. Ryan Leef: Mr. Speaker, that is why I said we are proud to invest in a whole suite of programs and services, from cold climate innovation to the northern greenhouse initiative out of the Growing Forward 2 program. These are all things we can do to help sustainable communities develop their own food security and make community-based solutions. We are proud to do that.

I am always surprised, of course, when the opposition votes against those measures that we put in place.

With respect to the hunting and angling piece in the prelude to his question, I am only reflecting back on the comments that were made by the members themselves when they effectively chastised our government for studying and supporting the hunting and angling heritage in our country. Those are not my words. Those are the words of the opposition.

Mr. John Barlow (MacLeod, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise as a southern member of the Conservative government to speak on this issue tonight.

I want to speak a little about some of the government's ongoing efforts to work with its partners to ensure people in the north have access to a variety of fresh and nutritious foods at affordable prices and also in a manner that is cost-effective and transparent to the residents, the retailers, and the government.

As many of my colleagues have noted, nutrition north is, by any measure, achieving the goals we have set out.

As we know, the program provides subsidies to food wholesalers and retailers to help offset the high cost of bringing these food items to isolated northern communities. These products are an essential part of a healthy diet. They are products many of us in this place today would have no problem picking up at our supermarket on any day of the week. These are fruits and vegetables, meats and alternatives, milk, and perishable dairy and grain items.

However, as we talked about today, in isolated northern communities these important items were not always available, and if they were, it was only periodically. When they were available to residents in the north, the high cost of flying them in often put them far out of reach for most families, especially in some of those isolated areas in the northern part of our country.

Today, however, thanks to the nutrition north program initiated by our government as part of our broad northern strategy, northerners are seeing a greater amount and variety of nutritious perishable foods in their local markets.

Between the program's launch in April 2011 and March of last year, the average annual weight of eligible items shipped to these communities rose by more than 25%. The fact is that in the north, the availability of nutritious perishable food is up and prices are down.

Over the last three years of the program, between April 2011 and March 2014, the cost of the revised northern food basket for a family of four fell by an average of 7.2%. That may not seem much, but if we add it up, it translates into a saving of nearly \$140 per month per family. That is about \$1,600 a year. That is a substantial amount of money. In fact, the cost of a food basket in Tuktoyaktuk, located in the riding of the member for Northwest Territories, has decreased by 13.8%. The member who brought the motion forward should actually be supporting nutrition north and working to help northerners receive affordable nutritious food.

According to the most recent data available from the North West Company, the average price of a two-litre bag of milk, which we have talked a lot about today, in Rankin Inlet, Nunavut, was \$4.45. That is less than half of what it cost before the program was available.

Let me move on to eggs. The data collected also found that eggs are \$2.59 a dozen in Rankin Inlet, down more than 40% from the \$4.39 a dozen they cost before the program was instituted.

It is the same story in communities across the north. For example, in March of this year, in Salluit, Quebec, one could buy a bag of apples for \$6.19. Without the nutrition north Canada subsidy, those apples would have cost about \$18, almost three times as much as they cost with the program.

Business of Supply

These numbers the others I have cited represent real progress for northerners, something the opposition is obviously against.

Even with all the success of nutrition north, we continue to seek ways to make the program even better. For example, as has been stated in the House, all the recommendations offered by the Office of the Auditor General in its review of the program last year have been accepted by our government. In fact, we identified virtually all of the same issues and had already taken action to enhance the program before the Auditor General's report was even issued.

A key element in the ongoing refinement of the program is the regular discussion between our government and the nutrition north advisory board. This board represents the perspectives and interests of northern residents and communities to ensure they receive the full benefits of the program. The advisory board has stated its strong belief that consumers will be able to clearly see the amount of the subsidy passed on to them. This will ensure greater retailer transparency and accountability.

We believe the impact of these subsidies should be both more immediate and clearly visible to northern residents. Northerners want and deserve assurance that the benefits of the subsidies provided to wholesalers and retailers are being delivered to them in a full and fair way.

• (1545)

In addition, Canadian taxpayers expect and deserve the same accountability and transparency.

Greater transparency would also benefit wholesalers and retailers involved in this program. This would enable them to show consumers that they are indeed using the full amount of the subsidy they receive for its intended purpose. Its intended purpose is providing northerners with greater access to nutritious perishable foods at a lower price.

In March of this year, the hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development took note of a new practice implemented by la Fédération des coopératives du Nouveau-Québec. This practice is putting the amount of the subsidy of each eligible item purchased right on the cash register receipt. New Democrats should be aware—and I can show them, if they would like—that it is right there and clearly shown, as can be seen at the nutrition north website. They would also realize that several of the communities that they have put on the list are already fully subsidized in the nutrition north program.

I will move on to Nunavik. In each of the 14 stores la Fédération des coopératives du Nouveau-Québec operates in Nunavik, the receipt shows the amount of the nutrition north Canada subsidy for each item. In fact, there is a total at the bottom of the receipt, where it says, “NNC Program has saved you [this many dollars and cents] on your purchase today”. It is right on the bottom of the receipt.

That is true transparency, and it is why, after learning of this practice in March, the minister directed a nutrition north Canada advisory board to examine the approach taken by this innovative retailer and recommend how the board can implement a point-of-sale system of this kind on a much wider basis.

I would also point out that we wanted to keep in mind that any costs related to implementing a point-of-sale system should not

impact any of the subsidy dollars. Obviously, these are very important considerations. It is essential that administrative costs for this program be kept to a minimum.

Indeed, our government is already working with the advisory board to consult with stakeholders on additional measures that could be implemented to enhance cost containment and assure the sustainability of the nutrition north Canada program.

Greater transparency, like that provided by the point-of-sale system I described, contributes to greater accountability, which contributes to greater sustainability of this program. Perhaps even more importantly, the point-of-sale information will help to achieve our goal of enabling northerners to better see how nutrition north is working for them. Shoppers in isolated northern communities will be able to see exactly how and when the subsidy is applied to their grocery bill.

It will encourage greater transparency on the part of retailers as well. That is why we will be reviewing the advisory board's recommendations on the point-of-sale system. We will be doing that in the coming weeks to determine the best approach for implementing that point-of-sale system. As I said, this is an approach that will benefit northerners as well as retailers.

Nutrition north is an excellent program. It is well designed; it is well managed; and, most importantly, it is achieving the goals that we have set out to help northerners. However, as we have heard from many of my colleagues today and as our government recognizes, although nutrition north is an excellent program, nothing is perfect. Initiatives such as the point-of-sale program are ways that we can improve this system moving forward.

That is why we are absolutely committed to working with northern communities to make improvements to any program, including nutrition north Canada, and that is exactly what we are doing.

• (1550)

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Northwest Territories, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague talked about the advisory board. I wonder if he recognizes that five out of six of the members of the advisory board were contributors to the Conservative Party throughout the north. That seems like a very high percentage to occur simply by chance.

The member talked about the point of sale. There was an issue raised in Iqaluit when I was last there. The food subsidy rate is \$2.40. It is clearly identified on sales items within northern stores, but the understanding is that the bulk rate for air freight to Iqaluit is half of that. In fact, if there is a \$2.40 subsidy, the store actually only has to pay \$1.20 for the freight.

Does my hon. colleague think that there should be a very close examination of the rates of subsidies to ensure that they match up to what is perceived as the method of subsidization, which is the cost of freight?

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, I will try to get to all the questions from my hon. colleague, the member for Northwest Territories.

Business of Supply

Regarding his comments on the advisory board, they are quite disappointing when this is a group of people from the north working extremely hard to give us direction and advice on how this program and other programs such as nutrition north Canada are working. For them to come up with ideas like the point of sale program is an outstanding contribution from those volunteers in the north. It is really disappointing that the member would make such an attack on volunteers who are helping us develop programs for the north.

In terms of his numbers, not long ago the member said that there were 55 communities he wanted added to this list. Then it was 42. Now we are back to around 50. Those members should do a little more due diligence and some work when they comment about some of the programs we are trying to implement.

• (1555)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if I may pick up on the last couple of words the member said, and that is the issue of due diligence.

The Auditor General has expressed a great deal of concern with regard to retailers in the north. The department has no real genuine sense of whether the savings through the nutrition north program that consumers should be experiencing are actually being realized. In other words, are retailers taking advantage of the program at the cost of the consumer?

I wonder if he might want to comment on that. This is not something the Liberal Party is saying. The Auditor General of Canada is saying it.

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, we did take the Auditor General's report to heart. I talked about that in my speech. We identified many of the same issues the Auditor General identified in his report. We started implementing some of the changes before his report was even published. As I said in my speech, we started addressing some of those recommendations and accepted all the recommendations of his report.

The point of sale system will help address some of those transparency issues. When people have a receipt and they can see the different levels of the subsidy, whether it is a box of cereal or a bag of fruit.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member mentioned, the NDP has changed the number of communities it believes should receive this additional subsidy three times in the last six weeks.

The Auditor General said that Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada should review community eligibility and base it on need. Some of the communities that the NDP has proposed have year-round rail or road access.

Does the member agree with me that we should be following the recommendations of the Auditor General and putting this through a criteria mechanism rather than just picking communities, which is something he did not recommend in his report?

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development for his work on this file as well.

The New Democrats have gone back and forth on the numbers of communities they want added, and I have a list of some. It includes Weenusk, Nahanni Butte and Lourdes-de-Blanc-Sablon, which already receive full subsidies from the program. The program is intended for isolated communities that have limited access, whether it is by rail or flying in. Many of the communities the New Democrats wanted add to nutrition north have either year-round rail service or year-round access to highways, so they would not be eligible for the nutrition north program.

The New Democrats really should have done some due diligence when they were compiling the list, whereas we are going by the recommendations of the Auditor General, which is the prudent thing to do.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to start by saying that I will share my time with my neighbour, the member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River. I also want to point out that we are here on the traditional territory of the Algonquin people.

Last August I had the opportunity to travel to Nunavik with my colleague, the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou. I took this trip as part of my housing tour, and I was able to see how people in Nunavik live.

We visited a number of villages and homes. I saw the main housing problems, such as overcrowding and the need for major repairs. We also visited a grocery store and took photos, because the prices there were shocking.

For example, a bag of apples was \$8, compared to \$3 or \$4 here. A watermelon cost \$20.55, compared to about \$5 here. A can of frozen orange juice cost \$8, compared to \$4 here. A 10-pound bag of potatoes cost \$8.49, compared to about \$5 here. A can of Pepsi cost \$3.29, and last week you could get a case of 12 on sale for \$3.50 here. Bread cost around \$5, and here we pay from \$2 to \$3. A litre of milk cost \$3.85, compared to \$2.50 here.

We can see that the price of food in Nunavik is two to four times higher than here. There was a beef roast that nobody was buying, though that was no surprise considering it was covered in frost and cost well over \$40. It stayed in the display case, and nobody wanted to buy it.

We met with municipal councils, including six Inuit councils and one Cree band council, to talk about the local situation. I wanted to talk about housing and infrastructure. We had some very good discussions, and I will never forget the story that one Inuit municipal councillor told.

She told us that nine people live in her house. That is nothing compared to what we heard from other people who share their three- or four-bedroom houses with 12 or 13 people. Even so, she was the only person in her household with an income—she was a cashier at the grocery store—because jobs in the north are scarce.

Business of Supply

What I wanted to say is that she spent \$1,000 a week on groceries. There were nine people in that house living on one salary. How much could she earn as a cashier at a grocery store? Let us say that her annual salary was \$25,000. That means that her groceries alone cost at least twice her annual salary, and that includes the nutrition north subsidies. Living in the north is expensive.

All the food is imported by boat or plane. In the summer, food comes in by boat, but in the winter, it can only come in by plane because there are no roads. We went there by plane. Let us not forget that the cost of food goes up with the cost of fuel, among other things. According to the Auditor General, we are not even sure whether the retailers are passing on the full subsidy to the consumers. Those are some of the reasons why food is so expensive in the north.

The other thing is that the food that comes from the south is not culturally adapted. A number of people have quoted Leese Papatsie today, but it is worth quoting her again. I am not sure whether this quote was used, but here goes:

What they consider healthy food is not traditionally the Inuit diet. It's imposing the idea of, "Here, this is what we think is healthy for you guys." What we've been saying all along is that we're not used to cooking fruits and vegetables.

In other words, meals made up of meat, potatoes and vegetables are not what people originally ate in the north. To continue the quote:

There are some days when I go to the store and see a vegetable, and I have to ask one of my kids, "What is this?" It's only been 40 or 50 years that we've been eating this kind of food.

These kinds of foods are not adapted to northern people. Furthermore, a lot of food has to be shipped at the same time, because shipping can only occur at a certain time of year. Otherwise, it has to be flown in.

• (1600)

The food therefore has to be stored, and that affects the quality of the food quite a bit.

Possible solutions do exist. These are not colonialist or paternalistic solutions that come from a department, but rather local solutions. We spoke with some people there who had some really good ideas. In Inukjuak, for instance, people had all kinds of suggestions. The local population not only has good ideas, but those ideas are appropriate because they come from the people themselves. Incidentally, people there are already working on some projects. Earlier we talked about greenhouses that are further north. There are no greenhouses in Nunavik. Someone did plan to build some, and it is an excellent project. However, people need some assistance to develop these greenhouses, including local infrastructure to produce electricity, for example. These villages are not part of Hydro-Québec's network, so they need to find ways to heat the greenhouses and have electricity.

Food produced locally, for example in greenhouses, would be fresher and thus healthier than food that has been stored in warehouses for several months. It would also be more traditional and culturally appropriate. People would be able to make choices rather than have choices imposed on them. When we were there, many people were picking blueberries because they were in season. Why not take advantage of a local resource such as that one? When I was a child in Abitibi, that is what we did. My mother, my brothers,

my sister and I picked blueberries and sold them to the grocery store. That creates jobs, uses local resources and provides food that people like. There is also the seal hunt and the caribou hunt.

These activities would create jobs in the north. Some communities already ask residents to hunt and bring back caribou meat to be shared by the community. Some communities are already doing this. Why not do more of this?

There are barriers to the use of local resources. For example, houses in the north are not set up for hunting. Just imagine, Mr. Speaker, if you were to go out hunting caribou and you brought one back to your house. Where in your house would you put it? There would not be any room in my house where I could put a caribou carcass and butcher it. Houses in the north are similar to those in the south because they were built by southerners who have southern ideas. People have to put the caribou or other animal carcasses in the bathtub or shower. That creates all kinds of problems, including mould. There is also climate change. The thawing permafrost, for example, is causing the ground to sink in some villages. We must ensure that human activity will not harm animal populations in the north. Human activity could be an impediment to the grassroots efforts to encourage people to continue their traditional hunting and fishing activities.

I know that the subject of today's motion is food in the north, but I truly believe that we should be looking at much more than just the existing subsidies under the nutrition north Canada program. We need a respectful plan. We should be talking about this within a context of nation-to-nation negotiation. We need to rethink our whole relationship with northern populations. We have to give them the means to find their own solutions. We just got the report from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, which tells us how vital it is to start repairing the broken relationship with aboriginal peoples now.

If we want to achieve true reconciliation, maybe we should start right now by giving northern aboriginal populations the means to decide how they want to solve problems around one of the necessities of life: food.

• (1605)

[*English*]

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's interest in this issue. I think it is extremely important to people, in particular the children who go to school in many parts of Ontario, Quebec and elsewhere. I can only imagine the impact the high cost of food is having on children in the north. I would like to hear more of the member's comments about what she thinks should be done in particular with respect to looking at schools as a way of trying to remedy some of the problems in the north when it comes to school-aged children getting proper nutrition.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Mr. Speaker, as I said, it is not up to me to solve the north's problems. We are talking about nutrition in the north. Aboriginal peoples need to tell us what they want and what they need.

Business of Supply

There are tremendous needs in schools. We should sit down with them to ask them what they would like to see. Earlier, a Liberal MP was talking about milk. Yes, milk is an essential for those of us in the south. However, the human body is not really very well adapted to cows' milk. Many people are lactose intolerant.

When we talk about nutrition for kids in schools, we have to start by finding out the facts, such as whether milk is talked about in schools. Is it really an appropriate food for those schools? Maybe we should come up with something else. We need to talk. As I said earlier, there has to be a nation-to-nation relationship to really resolve these difficult situations.

•(1610)

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would really like to thank my colleague for her excellent speech. Not only did she share her thoughts based on her travels to northern Quebec, but she also very clearly said that as a member from southern Canada, she recognizes that the solutions must come from the people of the north and that we need to work together, in partnership.

I wonder if my colleague could share her thoughts on the fact that there are nearly 50 communities, most of which are first nations communities, that are completely excluded from the Conservative government's nutrition north Canada program. We are asking that they be included immediately. That is something tangible the government could do today, not just to make the program fairer, but to be part of the solution to a crisis that is happening right now in many communities in this country.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Mr. Speaker, as my colleague put it so well, that is part of the solution, but that is not the whole solution. That is just putting out fires.

Some people are being forced to go to the dump to scavenge for food. Others are spending \$1,000 a week on groceries, even though they are unemployed. My colleague's suggestion would be a temporary fix, only until we find a better solution. As I said, that would only be putting out fires.

We need to ensure that everyone has enough to eat in the north, as we are trying to do in southern Canada. This is even being discussed in our children's schools here in southern Canada. Why should it be any different in the north? It makes no sense.

[*English*]

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Northwest Territories, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have come at this by saying that some communities have winter roads, and this and that. Clearly, in our motion we seek to create equitable eligibility criteria for northern communities based on their real circumstances. The real circumstance for the mother who has to buy food for her child is the cost of food. Would the member not agree?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Mr. Speaker, of course I agree with my colleague.

We often hear that the average family food bill has dropped by 15%. A weekly bill of \$1,000 that drops by 15% means that food still costs \$850 a week. With respect to what I talked about earlier, that is still more than one and one-half times that person's salary. We really

need to look at the needs of each community and not the current criteria.

[*English*]

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to speak on this today. I think it would be instructive for those who are following this debate to have a quick look at what the motion actually says. It is a motion put forward by our member from the Northwest Territories, and it reads thus:

That the House call on the government to take immediate action to fix Nutrition North...and to improve the well-being of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians in Northern Canada by: (a) immediately including in the Nutrition North...program the 50 [fly-in] isolated Northern communities...that are not currently eligible for the full subsidy; (b) initiating a comprehensive review of the Nutrition North program, with Northerners as full partners, to determine ways of directly providing the subsidy to Northern residents and to [determine] supports for traditional foods; (c) creating equitable program-eligibility criteria for Northern communities based on their real circumstances; (d) providing sufficient funding to meet the needs of all Northern communities; and (e) working with all Northerners to develop a sustainable solution to food insecurity.

If members have been following this debate over this afternoon and this morning, it is interesting that the Conservatives keep talking about the numbers and that the numbers are different. The 50 communities we have identified in the motion have really been identified by the Auditor General, so we are just agreeing with the Auditor General that something needs to be done.

What does the motion actually mean? What we are hoping is that Canada will create equitable program eligibility criteria for northern communities based on their real circumstances, will provide sufficient funding to meet the needs of all northern communities, and will work with all northerners to develop a sustainable solution for food security.

Let me go back a bit and tell a little personal story about when I lived in the Northwest Territories for five years. I lived under a different program to help with the high cost of food. The federal government, in the early sixties, started the food mail program, and when I lived in the Northwest Territories, that is what I lived under. I lived in two different communities, one on the road system, which was Yellowknife, and one that was off the road system, which was Rankin Inlet, which at that time was part of the Northwest Territories, not part of Nunavut. In my job I had to travel around. I thought it was interesting back in those days that food costs were so high, even under the food mail program, but in Coppermine, which was a fly-in community further north of Yellowknife, a case of beer cost the same as it did in Edmonton. Back in those days, we could have a subsidized alcohol program so that it essentially cost the same as it did in the provincial capital.

That has changed now. I know that there is a liquor board in the Northwest Territories and it is not that way now. However, I think it is instructive to know that there always were some inequalities and some problems with the way the old food mail program worked.

Business of Supply

In 1991, when the program was managed by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, the communities received a transportation subsidy from the department to deliver items to isolated northern communities. Over the years, because of population growth and increasing fuel prices, expenditures increased, and the program often exceeded its budget.

In April 2011, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada introduced nutrition north Canada. The object of the program was to make healthy foods more accessible and affordable to residents of isolated northern communities, which is certainly a worthy goal. However, nutrition north Canada was a transfer payment program based on a market-driven model, which was quite a bit different from the old mail program.

In the spring of 2011, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development conducted hearings on nutrition north. There were many recommendations, but I would like to highlight one of those recommendations, which was that the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development conduct a comprehensive review of the nutrition north Canada program after three years.

• (1615)

The government has indicated that it is looking at it. I think that is the terminology I heard today, that it is looking at it. It is going to review it. It has used some other words too, but it does not sound like a comprehensive review to me. Perhaps the intention is to leave it for the next government, after the election on October 19.

One of the other recommendations in the Auditor General's report was that 50 communities be included in the program, either because they were receiving no subsidy at all or were under-subsidized.

We are always talking about Canada's far north. In fact, the northern parts of all provinces should and can be part of this program. For example, in the Kenora riding, if we just look at northwestern Ontario, there are 11 excluded first nations and seven first nations that receive a partial subsidy. It is certainly my belief that all of them should be receiving not just a partial subsidy but possibly a full subsidy. That needs to be determined. Those are the kinds of things we need to have action on. In fact, next door, in Thunder Bay—Superior North, there are three communities identified that should be receiving subsidies and currently do not.

It is not just an issue of Canada's far north. It is an issue that straddles sea to sea to sea, right across Canada and the northern provinces.

What would be really good for isolated and rural Canadians to hear from the government after the AG's report is that it will undertake a comprehensive review. I am not sure that is going to happen. It will be unfortunate if it does not.

The program, at least according to a number of northerners, was not rolled out very carefully. It was not clear what the parameters were of this program. In fact, in March 2012, Yukon's legislative assembly voted unanimously for changes to the program. In May 2013, the Nunavut legislative assembly and the Northwest Territories legislative assembly both voted unanimously for the audit the Auditor General eventually did. That indicates that there

are problems with the program and that there were problems, perhaps, with the rollout of the program.

To be fair, even back in the early 1960s, there were problems with the old mail program too. I do not have the background to know what kind of comprehensive reviews were done of that program in the 1960s and 1970s, but I am sure that there were calls to look at that program.

I am sure I will have a question from one of my Conservative friends, but perhaps someone could give us an idea, from their point of view, as to why nutrition north actually came in to replace that other program.

The Auditor General agreed to conduct the audit, and it was released this past fall, the fall of 2014. Here are some of the things the Auditor General found.

First and foremost was that the department has not based community eligibility on need, which is interesting. Members should keep that in mind as I go down the list.

The Auditor General also found that the department has not verified whether northern retailers passed on the full subsidy to consumers. That is another interesting one, because we have a government that talks about transparency, but apparently, this program is not that transparent, and it needs to be.

As well, the Auditor General found that the department has not collected the information needed to manage the nutrition north Canada program or measure its success. The program has been in place since April of 2011, yet there do not seem to be any tools to actually measure how successful it has been or is presently.

The Auditor General also found that the department has not implemented the program's cost-containment strategy.

• (1620)

There are a number of things that the Auditor General has found. The point I am trying to make with respect to the Auditor General is that I hope that instead of looking at that, the government would do a comprehensive review, which could start right now, even though there is an election on the horizon.

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am certainly proud that our ministers have embraced the Auditor General's report and have almost instantly engaged in dealing with some of the recommendations that were made.

Earlier in my comments I made note of the fact that there really is not a comprehensive position from the opposition members. The member for Churchill said that there is no question that nutrition north does reduce the price, but then the member for Timmins—James Bay said that the program is not lowering the costs. They have criticized the program but then said that 50 communities should be added to it. It is not a coherent position. Is the program lowering the costs, as the member for Churchill said, or is it not, as the member for Timmins—James Bay said? Is it a good program that we should add 50 communities to or is it not? They do not have a coherent position. Therefore, I am wondering if the member opposite can offer a coherent position from the NDP side once and for all.

Business of Supply

●(1625)

Mr. John Rafferty: Mr. Speaker, as I just said, I think a comprehensive review would answer the question of whether the program is running well, whether it needs to add 50 communities, or whether it is not running well. Some of the things I just mentioned that are found in the Auditor General's report should be easy to look at and to make determinations as to whether the program is or is not working well. A good way to put it is that appears to not be working as well as it should.

It is interesting that 27 of the communities that were identified as needing a full nutrition north subsidy are in Conservative ridings. I am not sure why those members have not spoken up. I mentioned three communities in the riding of Thunder Bay—Superior North. I do not know why that member has not spoken up with respect to the program.

When nutrition north was developed, eligibility was determined by lack of access and whether the community had used the old food mail program. As I indicated in my comments, the old food mail program did not always work the way it was supposed to either. Therefore, I am not sure whether the criteria for the new program should be based on a program that really was not working then.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my fellow northern colleague for speaking to this very important motion, as well as speaking on behalf of a lot of northern Ontarians, his neighbours, who are not getting the representation they deserve from their Conservative member of Parliament, such as in Kenora. We are talking about 18 communities in the constituency of Kenora that either receive a partial subsidy or 11 that are entirely excluded. I know from my own constituents what it means to live in a community that is excluded from nutrition north. As I mentioned, the cost of a jug of milk is \$15 and a bag of fruit is anywhere from \$8 to \$15. These are fundamentals. Children and elders are going hungry. This is unacceptable in a country as wealthy as Canada and at a time when we know there is plenty.

I would ask my colleague to speak to the need for leadership from the Conservative member for Kenora and from the Conservative government when it comes to standing up for northerners.

Mr. John Rafferty: Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that there is a lot of lip service rather than real concrete action.

I will go back to my earlier comments about a comprehensive review and comprehensive action. I do not believe a review would take that long. It could probably be done in a couple of months if there was a real political will to make it happen.

I think we agree on both sides of the House that if we have a government program that is spending some \$60 million annually the taxpayers deserve to know that money is being well spent. The money is being spent. Therefore, as the Auditor General suggested, I think we need to determine whether that money is being spent to the full advantage of taxpayers and of those who are receiving subsidies.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Order. It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for Thunder Bay—Superior North, The Environment.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today to speak to a very important motion.

I am hoping to pick up on a couple of points, because this is an issue on which I have had previous opportunities to speak, particularly the issue of milk. I hope to spend a bit of time on that particular issue in my comments this afternoon, because I did so while I was a member of the Manitoba legislature. People will understand and appreciate the relevance as I get to it.

Where do I start? I would suggest that maybe a good starting point might be the attitude the government has toward the north, particularly if we look at the nutrition north program. This is not a program that has been running for decades but, rather, a program that the Conservatives brought in a few years after they were elected.

I would argue that the reason they brought it in was not because the old program was not working. Programs do need modifications over time. The food mail program, from what I understand, was fairly well received. Does it mean that it was a perfect program? No one will say it was a perfect program, but it had merit, and as with any national program, we can always look for ways to improve upon it.

A number of years ago, the government made the decision that it wanted to communicate a message with that Conservative spin that routes out of the Prime Minister's Office and try to give an impression. It wanted to give the impression that it wanted to provide more food, healthier food, to northern Canada through government subsidy, so it came up with a program it calls nutrition north Canada.

On paper it looks great. Some might even suggest it is a little sexier a headline than the food mail program, but that is something the government has been known to do for photo opportunities and props, the naming and titling of bills and so forth.

Here the Conservatives have come up with a new name. They put the Conservative brand on it as opposed to trying to change and modify some of the areas in which the old program could have been improved.

It is much like having the member for Yukon stand in his place and talk about how great our Prime Minister is. After all, he has travelled more in the north than any other prime minister. I will not necessarily buy into the facts of that particular statement, but I will say that the Prime Minister, whenever he travels up north, makes sure that the rest of Canada is aware of it, through wonderful, expensive, taxpayer-expensed photo ops.

Many of my colleagues would argue that if some of the money used for those photo opportunities were reprioritized for food, we would probably have that much better a program. I am a bit suspicious about the government's true intentions on the program.

Business of Supply

Some of the members say that the program is healthier, and they use one or two examples. The Auditor General of Canada pointed out that the nutrition north program pays for bacon. I would not rank bacon at the same level as milk or other fresh produce, but that is something the government subsidizes.

When we look at what the Auditor General really had to say, a couple of things come to mind.

● (1630)

We heard the government talking about savings for consumers. There is no doubt that there are some savings, but let us not kid ourselves. There were savings under the old program too.

The government will say that it compares year over year and that a bag of groceries is less than it was the previous year. However, we have the Auditor General of Canada saying that this is not necessarily accurate. Therefore, we question the numbers being provided. Again, it is not the Liberal Party or New Democrats questioning them. It is the Auditor General of Canada, a truly independent office, calling into question whether the claims the Conservative government is making about year-over-year decreases are factual. The Auditor General is saying that this is not necessarily the case.

We talk about the subsidy and that it is really important to provide it. I do not think there is any member in the House of Commons who would say we should not provide a subsidy. We all recognize the importance of northern Canada. Whether it be the northern tip of provinces, the Northwest Territories, Yukon, or Nunavut, they are all very important to our country, and it is important that all regions of our country are provided the opportunity to have healthy food.

It is important when we talk about northern sovereignty that we substantiate that by ensuring that there are actually people living in northern Canada. For many it is a wonderful, great life, but others might find it more of a challenge. However, there are certain things that government can do to help accommodate an easier lifestyle in terms of affordability of some of the food that is so accessible here in Canada, much of it produced in Canada.

There are things we can do. I suspect that if we were to canvass Canadians as a whole, we would find that there is wide support for having a food subsidy program to help facilitate the lifestyle. It makes sense.

For those who might try to spread misinformation and ask why we in the south should support the north, I suspect that if we looked at the bottom line in terms of where the money is flowing, we would find that the south benefits immensely, economically and socially. I suspect that there is a very high net positive for the south.

In Manitoba, we have the Golden Boy on top of the Manitoba legislature that points to the north, because we believe that is where the real future is in terms of potential for Canada. We are so very much dependent on the north.

I like to think we have established that it is absolutely critical that we provide that subsidy, that assistance, for nutritious foods. However, now the issue is how we make sure we turn that into reality. It is one thing to say that we are going to provide x number of dollars. The parliamentary secretary is here and can correct me if I

am wrong, but I believe it is around \$60 million. It is a substantial amount of money.

● (1635)

At the end of the day, it is not just the amount of money that is put into the envelope targeted for a particular program; it is how effectively that money is utilized to maximize the benefits of the product that they ultimately want to deliver to the many communities in need of that subsidy.

Once again the Prime Minister and the current Conservative government have been found wanting. They have not been able to clearly establish that they are maximizing the benefits of the tax dollar in terms of actual fresh produce on the tables of northerners. Again, it is not just I or the Liberal Party talking about it; all we have to do is go to the Auditor General of Canada.

Last fall we had a detailed report from the Auditor General, and some of the comments were really interesting. I will quote just a couple of them. It was a CBC news story, and I will quote from it because I want the members opposite to realize that this is not coming from the Liberal Party or from me but from a story that quotes our Auditor General of Canada. It said:

Aboriginal Affairs does not know whether retailers in the North are passing on savings to consumers as a result of its Nutrition North program to make healthy food more affordable in remote northern parts of the country, the federal auditor general has found.

It is one thing to talk about a program and to assign a budgeted amount of tax dollars to it, but it is another thing at the end of the day to actually deliver this absolutely essential program in a way that maximizes the benefits.

In other words, we can put the money in the envelope, but we have to have the follow-through. The Auditor General has been somewhat critical of the government in this area because the government has demonstrated that it does not do the follow-through. It does not even confirm, from what I understand or have been told, that the receipts and paperwork that are being provided to it are in fact verified. These are real, serious, genuine concerns, and the government has again been found wanting. I hope to be able to get back to this point.

However, I mentioned an issue at the beginning of my comments that is really important for me, and it is something that is not new. Today I have been afforded the opportunity to ask a number of questions, and I tried to focus my questions on milk. The reason is that in 2008, as a member of the Manitoba legislature, I had the privilege of introducing Bill 213 on the floor of the Manitoba legislature, and what a privilege it was. The essence of Bill 213 was that the price of milk should be universal in the province of Manitoba, much like the price for alcohol. A bottle of beer costs the same in one community as it does in another.

I talked about why Manitoba had an important role in trying to deal with the issue of milk. I noticed the member for Churchill provided a quote in regard to Tadoule. Here is a price, and this is something I would have said in 2008: "...the four-litre price of milk today in Winnipeg you can get for \$3.59." I do not think it has gone up much since then, but I am not necessarily the best person to ask on it.

Business of Supply

This was back in 2008. It was \$3.59 for four litres of milk in the city of Winnipeg. In Red Sucker Lake, it was \$11.89 in 2008. I know the member for Churchill made reference to Tadoule Lake. I made reference to Tadoule Lake also. It is about as far north as one can go in Manitoba. One would follow the bay virtually all the way up and then kind of cross over, and then one would see Tadoule Lake.

● (1640)

At that time, four litres of milk was \$17.40. In Winnipeg it was \$3.59. It showed in a very real and tangible way the difference in the cost of living.

Members may be somewhat familiar with many of the different issues that face my province, and I am just talking about milk but in many ways the same principle applies for nutritional food of all sorts. Let us imagine people who with a limited income and have a choice between \$17.40 for four litres of milk and a two litre bottle of pop for a couple of dollars, and they have child who is quite often keen on taking the pop.

Far too families are choosing an alternative to milk, not because it is a healthier product or that it is really and truly what they want. In many cases, it is an affordability issue. They are buying a milk alternative because it is a whole lot cheaper. The alternative may not be healthier for the child.

The government has a choice. It can either try to assist the population in certain regions to eat healthier at the beginning, and there is a cost to it, but if that is not done, then there is the potential for a far greater cost at the other end.

The government could check with some of the health care professionals who travel to some of our northern regions. We hear some of the horror stories about children who have virtually all of their teeth eaten away because of sugar. Let us think of the cost of diabetes as a direct result of not having access to or not being able to afford quality nutritional food. The health care costs to society are enormous.

When we talk about a program that costs \$60 million and compare it to how much money it could cost at the other end, it is a savings that can be achieved if we are prepared to be more proactive, as much as possible.

It does not mean the Government of Canada has to pony up for everything. There is in fact an argument to be made that the Government of Canada should not only be providing financial assistance or support, but it also needs to be working with the first nations communities, the different provinces, municipalities and the many different stakeholders that live and breathe the issues the north faces on a daily basis to develop a more comprehensive strategy in how to best deliver nutritional food at an affordable cost.

At the end of the day, we will have a healthier population. Everyone will benefit, if we are prepared to do that. However, that takes a great deal of leadership.

We had this discussion in our caucus. The leader of the Liberal Party has a teaching background and has an understanding of the needs of students. When unhealthy kids are in the classroom, it takes away from their ability to focus on their education. If that leads to

people dropping out, just think of the cost to the economy, let alone the social aspect of the community.

● (1645)

There is much to lose if we do not get this thing right, and I am not convinced that the government has its priorities right. Yes, it has the nutrition north program and, yes, there is a significant amount of money in that envelope, but there is a lot more to it than just the photo op and putting money into an envelope. There has to be more dialogue and working with others and stakeholders to really have the type of impact that we need to see, not only in our territories, but in many northern regions of our country.

● (1650)

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member talked about one thing that I would agree with, which is that this file requires leadership. This side of the House has demonstrated leadership, but it is not leadership that the opposition is prepared to follow.

He talked about a suite of measures that need to be put in place to ensure food security and nutritional choices for northern families. We have done that through the Growing Forward 2 program, the northern greenhouse initiative and direct investments through the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, not only to provide economic opportunities but to provide those nutritional opportunities for communities. They are community-based solutions for community-based challenges. Some of those vary from different regions of the country, from Nunavut to Yukon.

Interestingly enough, however, every time we put forward either a legislative amendment, an operational consideration or a policy direction, the NDP and the Liberals find a convenient way to vote against those measures. That includes significant, record levels of transfer payments to the provinces and territories. The member mentioned the necessary partnerships with those provincial leaders, but every time, yet again, the opposition votes against record levels of transfer payments. The Liberals are voting against those sorts of things.

I am not sure how they expect us to deliver those kinds of investments with their support if they just stand up every time that we provide those kinds of measures and vote against them. It is disingenuous. Canadians know that.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I was not born yesterday. I know how our parliamentary system works.

The minister, the member and his party voted against the Kelowna accord, which dealt with many of these types of issues that we are talking about today. The government voted against the mail food program, which provided hundreds of millions of dollars of food over many years to northern Canada.

Business of Supply

If the government actually worked with the different stakeholders to build consensus on the legislation that it brought in, I suspect that it would have more sympathy from opposition parties saying that they will vote for it. If it does not do that, meet with people, or build consensus, then it should not expect the opposition to be voting for its legislation. If the government really wants to have an impact, it has to do the work. If it is not prepared to do the work, it should not come to the House saying here is a piece of legislation that it wants us to pass, even though it did not do the work. The opposition takes its job a little bit more seriously than the government takes its job, obviously.

At the end of the day, we did an admirable job providing in the past, through other Liberal administrations, and we look forward to the day when we will be able to add more value to the nutritional programs in the future.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I always enjoy listening to my colleague from Winnipeg North speak, but not as much as I enjoy hearing two cats fighting at midnight outside of my window. It is almost as much, though.

The point that I wish to make is that people should be judged by what they do, not by what they say. I remember, back in about 2003, I took the leader of our party, Jack Layton, to a series of northern Ontario and Manitoba fly-in communities to look at the cost of food. That was at the height of the Liberal majority government, after it had imposed a 2% cap on all spending for first nations and aboriginal people. Even though their growth was 6% per year in those communities, the Liberals decided in their wisdom that they only needed a 2% cap, which I would argue has created the social crisis that we are experiencing today.

This was in the early days of BlackBerrys, but Jack had one with him and I remember him taking photographs of the appalling, ridiculous, unaffordable prices of food in Pauingassi, Poplar River, Little Grand Rapids, Pikangikum and these places where people were starving. They were starving under the days of the Liberal regime.

When we listen to the Liberal member try to say “back when we were in charge, everything was rosy”, we know that it was rotten then. They starved. For that prime minister to say he is now in conversion on the road to Damascus is like St. Paul, talking about aboriginal issues. They had nine balanced budgets, nine surplus budgets in a row, and there was not a nickel for first nations spending until he was finished.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, more so out of an understanding and appreciation of the issue, I had chosen not to comment on the milk issue to the degree I could have. However, I will do that now.

The milk issue was a big issue in the Manitoba legislature. The NDP minister had something to say about the initiative. I believe we actually even had the Progressive Conservative Party supporting my motion to go to committee. This is what the minister said at the time: “It is a delight for me to be able to speak against this bill.”

It was the NDP administration in Manitoba that allowed for and supported Tadoule Lake paying \$17.40 for a four litre jug. That was a provincial NDP responsibility, and it chose to do nothing.

All I was asking for at the time was to allow it to go to committee and to allow the committee to go to Thompson, to The Pas, and I believe even Churchill, too, to allow northern Manitobans to come and talk to us about nutrition. The NDP provincial government refused, without any justification. In fact, one minister indicated that they could always eat Cheez Whiz as opposed to having fresh milk.

The NDP government at the time, when it was in a position to do something that would have made a difference, chose not to do it.

• (1655)

Mr. Dan Albas (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his speech. It is always wonderful to hear from a fellow sesquipedalian.

I would like to reference the point the previous member made. He referred to the previous record. There used to be a mail program. We have heard about it a lot today. It subsidized transit costs for things like snowmobile parts. Clearly, that was not getting the job done. Our government brought in a new program, with the idea of more nutritious food, specifically for northerners.

The Auditor General pointed out a number of recommendations that are helpful and are being implemented, such as reviewing the actual grocers to make sure that they are supplying the full value of the subsidy. We are also making sure that there is more money coming from the program to make sure that the people who rely on it can get the nutritious food they need. In fact, it is actually indexed to a 5% escalator. Again, using the rule of 72, in 14 years, that would in effect double the amount of money available to the program. That is a huge commitment.

Would the member not realize the point of the previous member, which is that the previous Liberal program failed northerners and that at least this program is supplying more nutritious foods? With the help of the Auditor General, we will continue to build on that success. Does he agree that the previous Liberal government did not get it done?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I do not agree with the member at all. I would challenge the member, in fact, to show me an auditor's report that supports what he just said. He cannot show me the auditor's report that substantiates what he just finished saying.

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, it was in the transcripts of the public accounts.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I do not have to go to a committee. I am going to the Auditor General of Canada. I have quotes I can provide from the Auditor General of Canada that say that the government's program has fallen short. The member cannot provide something likewise on the former program.

Business of Supply

At the end of the day, Canadians are not going to be fooled. As the Auditor General has pointed out, it is not just a question of putting \$60 million into an envelope and saying “Look how well we have done”. It is about the delivery of the program also, and the Auditor General has said that the government has failed to realize efficient delivery of the program. That is not me or the Liberal Party. That is the Auditor General of Canada. That is someone who is independent.

The government is wrong. It is more interested in photo ops than in reality in helping people in northern Canada.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Laurentides—Labelle. As I only have 10 minutes, I will definitely run out of time, just as I do nearly every time I rise in the House.

I am grateful for the chance to speak about such an important subject. I have the opportunity to comment on the motion moved by my colleague from the Northwest Territories, whom I have come to know fairly well over the past four years. I have had the opportunity to see him at work, for example, in committees. He really defends the rights of northerners with exceptional vigour and passion.

I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the work done by not just my colleague from the Northwest Territories, but all the representatives from the north, from Churchill Falls to Whitehorse. They are responsible for areas that are bigger than the average European country. They often have to defend very complex and specific files that concern such issues as the economy, the need for access to services and the environment.

Today's topic, nutrition problems in Canada's north, is a good example of a specific problem that my colleagues from the north must address.

People who, like me, live in the south need to understand that basic necessities, including perishable goods, are often shipped to the north by plane. Stores necessarily have higher hydro, maintenance and food storage costs. Naturally, this affects the cost of the food on the shelves.

For example, in April 2014, the price of two litres of milk was around \$8 in several communities in the Yukon, while people in the Edmonton area were paying about \$3.30 or \$3.35 for two litres of milk. That is over 200% more.

One story that really struck me is one Quebeckers may not be aware of. In May 2012, Leese Papatsie of Iqaluit, Nunavut, created a Facebook page called “Feeding my Family”. With the example I just gave about milk costing 200% more, we can see how difficult it is to feed a family.

Now, this page has more than 25,000 members and, unfortunately, the food situation in the north continues to be very difficult.

This citizen-driven initiative showed us images that struck Canadians and my colleagues. We saw older first nations members rooting through the garbage for food to eat. They were not there to eat properly, but to survive.

The nutrition north Canada program has a fixed annual budget of \$60 million, \$53.9 million of which is supposed to be earmarked annually for subsidies, in order to lower the price of food in the north. Unfortunately, despite all these millions of dollars, the program is not working.

My colleague's motion is well thought out and illustrates his knowledge of the subject. I will read the motion and comment on it, as it points to major aspects of the problem.

The motion reads as follows:

That the House call on the government to take immediate action to fix Nutrition North Canada and to improve the well-being of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians in Northern Canada by: (a) immediately including in the Nutrition North Canada program the 50 isolated Northern communities accessible only by air that are not currently eligible for the full subsidy;

On the Government of Canada's website, we read:

To be eligible for Nutrition North Canada (NNC), a community must:

lack year-round surface transportation (for example, no permanent road, rail or marine access).

I do not get it. When I read this official definition and I hear that communities that can be reached only by plane are getting partial subsidies, there seems to be a disconnect. I do not understand how it came to this.

In fall 2014, the Auditor General, whose findings I will keep referring to, said that the department did not base its eligibility criteria on the needs of the communities.

● (1700)

The criteria for the nutrition north program were not based on the needs of northern communities. This creates scenarios where the most remote communities that need more support to make food more affordable receive less in the way of subsidies than other communities.

Here is another excerpt from the motion:

...to improve the well-being of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians in Northern Canada by...initiating a comprehensive review of the Nutrition North program, with Northerners as full partners, to determine ways of directly providing the subsidy to Northern residents and to improve supports for traditional foods.

It is important to understand that the subsidies do not go directly to families who need better access to healthier food, but rather to retailers and distributors. At the same time, in the fall of 2014, the Auditor General noted that the department had not verified whether those northern retailers had passed the full subsidy on to consumers.

That is a very troubling conclusion. We are talking about millions of dollars in very small communities, and yet the Auditor General had to conclude that no one had verified whether the subsidy served to lower prices for the people who needed it.

I would just like to go off on a tangent about what we saw this week from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. When we see how badly the Conservative government messes up initiatives and so-called solutions targeting northern communities and sometimes primarily first nations, we have to wonder why a government would be so negligent.

Business of Supply

This week, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs stayed seated while all of the representatives of Canadian communities gave some of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's findings standing ovations.

There is something awry with this government's mentality and its approach to the problems that northerners and first nations have. It is astounding. It needs to change as soon as possible, but that will probably only happen if there is a change in government.

Here is another part of the motion:

...improve the well-being of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians in Northern Canada by...creating equitable program-eligibility criteria for Northern communities based on their real circumstances;

Once again, judging from the Auditor General's findings, the minister did not collect the information needed to manage the nutrition north Canada program or measure its success. We are talking about \$60 million shared among small communities to meet an essential need: improving access to healthy food. However, the Auditor General found that the government did not have measures in place to assess the program outcomes.

We need to go back to the communities and, in the future, make sure that we are taking their real circumstances into account throughout the process.

Here is another part:

...improve the well-being of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians in Northern Canada by...providing sufficient funding to meet the needs of all Northern communities;

Once again, this is in line with the Auditor General's conclusions about how the department had not implemented the program's cost containment strategy.

• (1705)

Since I do not live in the north, but on the south shore of the St. Lawrence, I will share one or two quotes from people who live in the north. An MLA from the Yukon, Mr. Elias, said:

The change from a transportation subsidy to a retail subsidy, combined with the decision to no longer cover surcharges and taxes, has dramatically increased the cost of getting food into Old Crow.

Someone who lives in the area, like hundreds of others who testified, told us quite clearly that the multi-million dollar measures the Conservative government put in place in the past few years have not helped reduce prices significantly, which would have helped thousands of people feed themselves better. This result is absolutely pathetic.

• (1710)

[English]

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we approach the end of the day, and I believe this is the last speech on this supply day motion, we now have yet another position from the NDP. In the last six weeks, it has gone from 55 to 46 to 50 communities that it wants added. During the first speech of the day, the member for Northwest Territories said that he thought all communities in the north should be added. Now the member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup just said at the very end of his speech that we should return to the food mail

program, to the transportation subsidy, rather than subsidizing the food for the consumer.

The Auditor General recommended none of these things. We have accepted the Auditor General's report. He said that there should be a new process for evaluating communities. We have agreed and we are going through the real work necessary to evaluate those communities that should be added. We do not do it in a haphazard way and pick communities that have year-round rail or road access or changes from day to day, like the NDP has done today.

Why will the member not accept the recommendations of the Auditor General, as the government has, and allow the government to assess the eligibility of communities according to their need?

[Translation]

Mr. François Lapointe: Mr. Speaker, I followed roughly two-thirds of the debate in the House today. I have heard the minister of state make that same twisted argument three times now.

Even if that were so, even if in recent months, the evaluations had determined that 46 communities should have had better access to the program and at some point, someone had assessed that there were perhaps 52 communities in need, the fact remains that we are talking about people who do not have enough access to a program to help them feed themselves better. Whether we are talking about 23, 27, 52 or 60 communities, there is a serious problem.

What is the point of the argument that we do not have the exact number of communities that are suffering? As long as the experts have not determined the exact number of communities that are suffering, should we continue to get this wrong and apply a program that does not provide tangible solutions for people who are hungry? To me, that argument borders on despicable.

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I feel the same way as my colleague who just spoke. When I hear people arguing about numbers and statistics like that, I wonder how many people the government members would be prepared to allow to go hungry. I wonder if they have a number in mind.

Mr. François Lapointe: Mr. Speaker, I made some comments similar to those made by my colleague from Laurentides—Labelle.

When members start making excuses based on some uncertainty around the numbers of people who are suffering, you have a serious problem.

There is an important question here. The numbers may not be exact according to the findings of some of the people who have examined this issue. However, how many suffering communities must there be before the government will deem it necessary to review the program? Twenty-two communities is apparently not enough, so should we let them starve?

Will we have to list 75 communities before this issue becomes a priority and the government admits that changes are urgently needed? I do not know. It is not up to me to give those answers. The government's approach to this issue is completely inadequate. It is not up to me to justify this kind of approach.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

*Private Members' Business***PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

•(1715)

[English]

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 Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, we ask that the vote be deferred to Monday, June 8, 2015, at the end of the time provided for government orders.

The Deputy Speaker: The vote stands deferred to Monday, June 8, at the end of the time provided for government orders.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS*[English]***HOUSE OF COMMONS CALENDAR**

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That, notwithstanding Standing Order 28 or any other usual practice of the House, the following proposed calendar for the year 2016 be tabled and that the House adopt this calendar.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the member have unanimous consent to present the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Mr. Speaker, I ask for the consent of the House to see the clock as 5:30 p.m.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business, as listed on today's order paper.

*[English]***FERRY SERVICES TO PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND**

The House resumed from May 8 consideration of the motion.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to support Motion No. 591 of my colleague, the member for Cardigan, regarding the Northumberland Ferry Service, which connects Wood Islands, P.E.I. and Caribou, Nova Scotia. This is very important to the member for Cardigan and for the people of Prince Edward Island.

The motion is quite simple. It seeks to:

—ensure a safe, efficient, and sustainable transportation system for Prince Edward Island by: (a) recognizing the integral economic importance of the ferry service between Wood Islands, Prince Edward Island, and Caribou, Nova Scotia; and (b) committing to stable, long-term, sustainable, and adequate funding, notably by ensuring that all future contracts (i) are for no less than five years, (ii) maintain or exceed current levels of service

The ferry service between Wood Islands and Caribou is run by Northumberland Ferries Limited, or NFL, with headquarters in Charlottetown. Northumberland Ferries Limited has operated the ferry since it was established in 1941 by the Government of Canada. Since it was established, this service has continued to be one of the most important issues for the people of eastern Prince Edward Island, and to a great extent, to our entire province. It provides options in transportation.

Personally I have somewhat of a special connection to the P.E.I. ferry service because my dad was, first, a deckhand then a quartermaster with Marine Atlantic for some 32 years on the run between Borden and Cape Tormentine. That ferry run was replaced by the bridge. However, I remember as a kid being on that ferry run and seeing the trucks and the economic activities that were created on that run. Tourists would go back and forth to Prince Edward Island and the workers on those ferries would gain the economy to look after their families. The run that the member for Cardigan is pushing for is no less important to Prince Edward Island.

The Government of Canada continues to provide financial assistance to Northumberland Ferries Limited under the terms of a contribution agreement, while the company leases two ferry terminals and the vessels from the federal government. Today it is the only ferry service to the mainland.

It is said that the Conservatives have continually refused to fully commit to this ferry service, and I will explain how.

Near the end of the last five year deal, which was put in place by a Liberal government, there was a lot of speculation that the Conservative government would cut the funding and reduce the service to one vessel or eliminate it entirely.

The Council of Atlantic Premiers, which represents New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, P.E.I., and Newfoundland and Labrador, called upon the government to put in place a 15-year funding agreement. Only a three-year deal was put in place by the Conservative government. That was followed by a one-year extension in 2013. Last year the government extended the service for two more years. The current contract expires in March next year, just about enough time to get through the election.

Private Members' Business

Prince Edward Islanders, given the track record of the current government, do trust the Conservatives anymore? The press releases call it the Harper government, but we cannot say that in here. I see they are agitated over there, but I looked at press release after press release and that is the name on the literature. Are the Conservatives not proud of using that name in this place? I certainly would not be either.

• (1720)

Beyond the uncertainty surrounding the fate of the Wood Islands-Pictou ferry run, I cannot help but think of the damage the Conservative government has done in my province.

In fact, the very first act of the Prime Minister in 2006 was to cancel a fully federally funded energy cable to New Brunswick that would have given us energy security.

As well, in our seasonal industries of agriculture, fishing, and tourism, the changes to EI alone take \$16.5 million out of our economy, right out of workers' pockets.

In agriculture specifically, the government has cut AgriInvest by one-third. It has cut AgriStability and undermined the safety net for farmers, not only in Prince Edward Island, but right across Canada. It has cut the researchers at the agriculture research station. The temporary foreign workers changes it has made have impacted all three seasonal industries. Fish plants are without workers. Processing, especially in the beef processing sector, is short of workers. That is affecting our economy.

In the tourism sector, tour companies are finding it difficult to get foreign interpreters and are understaffed as a result.

Cutbacks to Canada's summer job program are affecting both industry and students. Visitors' GST rebates are gone. Canadian tourism investments are gone. Canada Post is reduced. Literacy funding is cut. Environmental concerns are ignored.

All those things impact my province beyond the Pictou-Wood Islands ferry, so how could we expect Prince Edward Islanders to trust the Conservative government?

Beyond that, federal government offices are closed, immigration is transferred out of the province, the Canadian Coast Guard is cut back, DVA is reduced and its jobs cut, the DVA district office is closed, ACOA funding is cut. That is only a short list, so it is no wonder that islanders do not trust the Conservative government when it comes to the future of the Wood Islands-Pictou ferries.

We cannot trust the government. Short-term contracts are not enough. The operators of the ferries and the people and business people in Prince Edward Island and Pictou County, Nova Scotia, need stability.

This is not only an issue for P.E.I.; it is also important for Nova Scotia. In fact, only a few days ago, the island's evening news political panel commentator, Paula MacNeill, remarked that no one in eastern Prince Edward Island would be disappointed to see the member for Central Nova leaving, as he has:

...not been very helpful in supporting, enhancing or modernizing the Northumberland Ferries, which is an absolutely vital economic link for eastern P. E.I.

Not only is it vital for eastern P.E.I., it is vital for our entire province as well as Nova Scotia. It brings an estimated \$27 million of economic benefits to the island every year, as well as \$12 million to Nova Scotia. It is critical for the island's tourism, business, and transportation sectors as well as for those same sectors in Nova Scotia.

A document put together by the four Atlantic provinces called "Charting the Course: Atlantic Canada's Transportation Strategy 2008-2018" highlights the ferry services integral to the economy of our Atlantic region. It lists Wood Islands and Caribou as strategic marine ports and service centres for cargo and passenger movement.

Alongside that, we see the lack of trust in the government to provide a five-year contract. That is what the member for Cardigan is calling for. That is what my colleague from Charlottetown called for as well. I would ask members in the House to support the member for Cardigan in this motion, because if there is good economic activity in Atlantic Canada between Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, it also rolls into a benefit for all Canadians. I ask for members' support for the motion by the member for Cardigan.

• (1725)

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak on this essential ferry service. First and foremost, I have to emphasize that this private member's motion fails to recognize what this government has accomplished to support this ferry service.

The member for Cardigan is seeking a commitment from this government to ensure long-term, sustainable and adequate funding for the Wood Islands-Caribou ferry service. However, this government's track record irrefutably demonstrates a commitment to these objectives, a commitment sustained over a long period of time. Even more so, I do not hesitate to point out that our record is very clear, and that residents of Atlantic Canada have been well served by our continued support for the eastern Canada ferry services.

Our track record warrants being repeated so that no doubt is left in the minds of Canadians regarding our government's commitment to the ferry services operating in Atlantic Canada.

Since 2006, our government invested significantly in eastern Canada ferry services. From a total of approximately \$250 million, over \$100 million was allocated to the Wood Islands-Caribou service. The remainder of this total went to two other regional ferry services, namely the Saint John, New Brunswick to Digby, Nova Scotia and les Îles-de-la-Madeleine, Quebec to Souris, P.E.I. ferry services. I am sure we can agree that \$250 million is a significant sum.

Moreover, our government invested \$44.6 million to purchase a replacement vessel for the aging MV *Princess of Acadia*, the recently named MV *Fundy Rose*. We expect the MV *Fundy Rose* will be in service in 2015, after completion of some refitting and outfitting work. While the MV *Princess of Acadia* has provided the service for 44 years, it should be noted that the MV *Fundy Rose* vessel will offer improvements with respect to comfort and amenities, and has a more positive environmental impact.

As another example of our government's support, in 2013, this government invested almost \$13 million to replace the main engines on the MV *Holiday Island*, an investment that has allowed for a more efficient service while reducing the risk of unanticipated mechanical breakdowns. This funding also went toward improvements to shore-based infrastructure on both sides of the Northumberland Strait.

We have heard the opposition demand that a longer-term deal for at least five years be put in place, which maintains or exceeds the current service that is provided.

I ask members to recall that, coinciding with our July 2014 funding announcement, our government stated its commitment to examining options for a long-term approach for the delivery of eastern Canada ferry services, including the Wood Islands-Caribou service. This work is currently under way and will provide the next steps in ensuring the sustainability of these ferry services.

Ferry operators and the provincial governments are being engaged, and we believe that our collective efforts will lead to a ferry service that best serves local communities and demonstrates this government's great sense of responsibility to Canadian taxpayers. This is the government's focus, and this is an important one if we are to achieve a sustainable ferry service.

A common theme heard from the other speakers was the importance of the Wood Islands-Caribou service to the tourism sector of Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia. In 2008, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency estimated that the ferry service provided annual benefits of \$20.7 million to Prince Edward Island and \$12.4 million to Nova Scotia. A significant number of tourists use the Wood Islands-Caribou service as a point of entry to Prince Edward Island, especially during the peak season of July to August tourist season. In July and August, visiting tourists using the ferry as the point of entry to the island represent 19% of total tourist visits.

• (1730)

This is a considerable amount of traffic using this ferry service, and we want to ensure that the local economy continues to be able to leverage tourism to facilitate prosperity in the long term. These are important components to foster sustainable and prosperous communities.

While it is clear the Wood Islands-Caribou ferry service plays an important role in supporting tourism in Prince Edward Island, it also creates an important linkage to Cape Breton Island. The existence of the ferry allows tourists to easily move from Prince Edward Island to eastern Nova Scotia, including Cape Breton. The ferry service has a long history of support from local communities. Over the last half century, there have been times when it appeared that the ferry service

Private Members' Business

might no longer receive support. However, the ferry service continued uninterrupted.

Our government understands that marine transportation is a significant part of Canada's history. Our government understands how ferry services allow for greater economic development and the building of stronger and more integrated communities. Our government understands also the benefits that ferry services provide. As we have said before and continue to say, support for the Wood Islands-Caribou ferry service will continue under this government. Support for a sustainable economy that meets the diverse transportation needs of the island's businesses will continue, and support for our local communities and economic development will continue as well.

However, our government will not support Motion No. 591. Rather, we will continue to support our ferry services and examine options for a long-term approach for the delivery of eastern Canada ferry services.

• (1735)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Cardigan will now have his five minutes of reply.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleagues from all parties for being involved in this very important debate. It is a very important issue for eastern Prince Edward Island. In fact, it is a very important issue for all of Prince Edward Island.

I want to thank my hon. colleague from Malpeque. I hope he did not annoy the government too much. I think he kind of straightened out a bit of what the facts were. He takes a slightly different path than I do.

I also want to thank my colleague from Dartmouth. She certainly had words to indicate how important the ferry service was, or is. We certainly do not want to use the past tense on the ferry service that is so vitally important to the economy of eastern Prince Edward Island. I just wish she could speak to her colleagues and indicate how important it is so that they could support this motion.

It is disappointing that the government has indicated that it will not support the motion. This vital ferry service needs to have the support of the Government of Canada, and unfortunately, the ferry and the people of Prince Edward Island and eastern Nova Scotia do not seem to have the support of the government.

The government has to support this critical transportation link with action, not empty words. Supporting this motion would be such a positive step forward and a true indication of the government's support. However, it does not seem to see fit to support the motion, and that is a shame.

I am thankful that my colleagues in the Liberal Party and the opposition have indicated that they will support the motion. I certainly want to thank my hon. colleague from Malpeque for stirring up the place and waking everybody up here and indicating how important this Wood Islands-Caribou ferry service is. My hon. colleague from Charlottetown, who spoke in the first hour of this debate, also indicated its importance and gave his full support. That is so heartwarming for us.

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Both members spoke passionately, and they understand the issue. They understand how important it is for the economy, not only for the economy of eastern Prince Edward Island but for the economy of Prince Edward Island as a whole and for sure for Pictou County, Nova Scotia. It is vitally important for Pictou County, Nova Scotia.

My motion is a very simple one. I am asking for stable funding by ensuring that all future contracts are for not less than five years. I believe it only makes common sense to provide some stability to the people of Prince Edward Island, and eastern Prince Edward Island in particular, and to Pictou County, Nova Scotia. This is vital for the Pictou County area.

Second, I am asking that the current levels of service be maintained or exceeded. It is absolutely useless to run a ferry service on a part-time basis. The service has to be provided for the public. We have to make sure that we have the vessels there to run the service and to make sure they operate in a timely fashion so that we do not affect the economy of eastern Prince Edward Island.

It is not unreasonable for the people of Cardigan to expect more stable support from the Government of Canada to ensure that the Wood Islands-Caribou ferry service has a long-term contract, which would provide stability and hopefully would maintain or exceed the current levels.

As has been said here by everybody, including my hon. colleague from the Miramichi, tourism would be affected drastically if this was not funded, as would agriculture. All members would have to do is ask Tom Carver, Morley Annear, or Red Trainor of M&M trucking just what it means when they are even trucking lime. We have to make sure that we have the proper service.

Once again, I ask my hon. colleagues from across the way to please show some support for eastern Prince Edward Island and Pictou County, Nova Scotia. All we need to know is that the government is committed to this service and is committed to the economy of eastern Prince Edward Island and Pictou County, Nova Scotia. I ask them to look at the words the member for Miramichi said.

It is no good to just say the words. It also has to support it with action and funding. If we do not have the action and funding, it will hurt or have a very negative effect on the economy of eastern Prince Edward Island.

• (1740)

The Deputy Speaker: 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 Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, June 10, 2015, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, GP): Mr. Speaker, Canada has the weakest performance of any G7 country in meeting our climate projection targets. We also have weak targets to boot. Climate change is happening now and is having very real consequences on the lives of people. It is disrupting national economies and ecologies.

It is time for a real plan to prevent dangerous climate change in Canada. Canada's proposed targets only focus on methane and nitrous oxide emissions rather than CO₂, which is the main greenhouse gas. The plan still does not include regulations on oil sands at all, which is one of the fastest growing sources of emissions here. Canada is currently ranked among the world's top 10 CO₂ polluters. Alberta is accountable for 73% of Canada's greenhouse gas emissions growth since 1990.

Only an immediate and fast transition to a clean energy system will ensure that we help to avoid dangerous climate change from rapid global warming. Instead, the federal government has chosen to regulate methane from the oil and gas sector as well as emissions from chemicals and nitrogen fertilizers. That is good. However, Canada needs to go further than planned in controlling all greenhouse gases, not just some.

The new greenhouse gas reduction target is 30% over the next 15 years. However, how exactly is this going to happen? What is the plan? These proposed new targets would be achieved five years later than those proposed by the U.S.A., and would only move Canada to 14% below 1990 levels of greenhouse gases. These proposed targets are a step forward but do not put Canada on the right track to carbon reduction. Prominent economists and policy advisers from across North America and the political spectrum have recommended carbon fee and dividend as the best way to slow the progress of climate change and to price carbon. It is the official policy of the Green Party of Canada and the Citizens Climate Lobby.

Canadian CO₂ emissions have been rising for decades under both the Conservatives and Liberal. Stalling this issue into the future will only worsen the problem. We are one of the highest CO₂ polluters per person in the world. We have an obligation to our children and grandchildren to deal with this problem now.

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The carbon fee and dividend plan would make coal mines and oil and gas wells pay for their CO₂ emissions at the source, but not a penny would go to the government. The dividends generated from these payments will be paid directly back to Canadians on an equal per capita basis. It would be totally revenue neutral. It is a fee, not a tax. It is a fee based on science. It does not rise and fall with the use of fossil fuels, and not a penny goes to government.

Carbon fee and dividend would use the marketplace to reduce CO₂ emissions, guide Canada toward a transition to sustainable energy, and put money into the pockets of Canadian consumers. The carbon fee and dividend system would help Canada to meet our responsibilities in fighting climate change.

The Green Party will make carbon fee and dividend a priority item on the first agenda of the proposed council of Canadian governments.

The Conservatives have dug our economy deep into the tar sands, and we are now all suffering the consequences. The first step is to develop and approve in Parliament a national energy strategy. We are the only G20 country without one. We need a clear plan to meet Canada's energy needs, address climate change and shift to sustainable energy.

Therefore, I will renew my question tonight. When will the government start working on a real strategy to help tackle climate change in Canada, preferably carbon fee and dividend?

• (1745)

Hon. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and for International Human Rights, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the submission of Canada's intended nationally determined contribution, or INDC, reconfirmed our government's commitment to addressing climate change. It also reconfirmed our commitment to securing a total global climate change agreement later this year in Paris that, for the first time, will include all of the major emitters of greenhouse gases.

We will continue to take a responsible and balanced approach.

Our government has announced a fair and ambitious target for Canada that is in line with other major industrialized countries. It also reflects the national circumstances influencing Canadian greenhouse gas emissions. We plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 30% below 2005 levels by 2030. That is a reduction of 225 megatonnes. Importantly, Canada's INDC also outlines our government's intent to develop new measures that build on existing initiatives under our government's sector-by-sector regulatory approach. These planned measures will further drive emission reduction by regulating key greenhouse gases in important sectors of the economy.

Specifically, we will regulate methane emissions in the oil and gas sector. Methane as a greenhouse gas is 25 times more potent than carbon dioxide, and regulating it will lead to substantial greenhouse gas reductions. We will also address greenhouse gas emissions from natural gas-fired electricity generation, from chemicals and fertilizer production, and from the next generation of heavy-duty vehicles. Additionally, we will regulate hydrofluorocarbons, or HFCs, another highly potent group of greenhouse gases.

These new measures are in addition to the existing efforts implemented by our government, including the stringent regulations already in place for the transportation and electricity sectors, which are two of the highest emitting sectors in Canada. They also include the more than \$10 billion in investments since 2006 that complement regulatory efforts by providing support for green infrastructure, energy efficiency, clean energy technologies, and the production of cleaner energy and fossil fuels.

Internationally, Canada continues to work constructively with its global partners both within and outside the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. This includes fully delivering on the fast-start finance initiative by providing \$1.2 billion to support a range of projects in developing countries. Building on that success, our government also recently announced a contribution of \$300 million for the green climate fund to continue to address climate change in developing countries.

Clearly, our approach is delivering real results. Our government recognizes the importance of co-operative action in integrated markets and is aligning efforts with major economic partners like the United States. Consequently, we are generating real emission reductions in a way that maintains Canada's economic competitiveness and supports job creation opportunities.

• (1750)

Mr. Bruce Hyer: Mr. Speaker, the government's proposed weak targets for climate change would only be achieved five years later than those of the U.S.A. They rely on questionable carbon accounting practices in forestry and land-use sectors. They include international offsets to compensate for growing oil sands emissions, which is a scam if there ever was one, and only emphasize regulations for some greenhouse gases, not including CO₂.

Canada is required to release its emission targets for the G7 conference in Germany next month. Presently, Canada's opening pledge for the Paris climate summit is the weakest in the G7. It would only further cement Canada's global reputation as a climate dinosaur.

We have two parties with no plan to reduce CO₂ and one party with a very bad plan. When will the government start considering carbon fee and dividend, and start reducing both climate change and poverty here in Canada?

Adjournment Proceedings

Hon. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, our government has announced a fair and ambitious target for Canada that is in line with other major industrialized countries. We plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 30% below 2005 levels by 2030. That is a reduction of 225 megatonnes.

We will continue to take a responsible and balanced approach. Building on this, we will reduce methane emissions from the oil and gas sector, regulate the production of chemicals and nitrogen fertilizers, and regulate emissions from natural gas-fired electricity generation.

We will do this without forcing a job-killing carbon tax on Canadian families.

[*Translation*]

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

(The House adjourned at 5:52 p.m.)

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