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Monday, May 25, 2015

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, May 25, 2015

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

•(1105)

[English]

AN ACT TO AMEND THE HERITAGE LIGHTHOUSE PROTECTION ACT (SAMBRO ISLAND LIGHTHOUSE)

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP) moved that Bill C-588, An Act to amend the Heritage Lighthouse Protection Act (Sambro Island Lighthouse), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Mr. Speaker, this past year, one day before Remembrance Day, November 10, 2014, the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore and I held a press conference about a lighthouse and its link to Remembrance Day. With us was veteran Earl Corn. Mr. Corn is a retired sailor of 38 years, and he talked about how the light from the Sambro Island Lighthouse was so important to Canada's men and women serving in the military. As Mr. Corn stated, “This was the last thing we saw [leaving port], and the first thing we saw arriving home.... It's probably one of the most important pieces of real estate we have”.

Also at our press conference was George Zwaagstra, who immigrated to Canada in the 1950s. Mr. Zwaagstra told us a heartwarming story of immigrating to Canada by boat, crammed together with others who were seeking a new life in Canada, and how they spent a couple of weeks in rough seas. He told us about one passenger who suffered a horrible case of seasickness, and how after days and days of no relief this man begged his friends to help him. He said he did not think he could go on being on the ship. That is when someone saw a light on the horizon, a small pinpoint of light. It would probably not be very interesting to us, but news of that light spread across the ship in an instant. Mr. Zwaagstra and others went below and found the poor man with seasickness who felt he could not go on, and they hauled him to the deck above to see that light. That light was the first that they saw of Canada, and that light was from the Sambro Island lighthouse.

People have called the Sambro Island lighthouse Canada's Statue of Liberty. It was the first light that newcomers arriving by boat could see. They saw that light before they even saw land. As we heard from Mr. Corn, that light was not only the first light that new

immigrants saw, but it was the last light that Canadians saw when they went off to war. For those who paid the ultimate sacrifice and did not return, sometimes it was the last memory that they had of Canada.

Those stories demonstrate how important this lighthouse is. That light is a part of our history, yet it continues to shine today. The Sambro Island lighthouse is an iconic structure. In fact, at a recent funding announcement to repair the lighthouse, the Minister of Justice called this lighthouse one of the most iconic structures, not only in Nova Scotia but across the country.

This iconic lighthouse, Canada's Statue of Liberty, is at risk. A number of years ago, the government embarked on a community consultation to draft a new piece of legislation that would be called the Heritage Lighthouse Protection Act. This was a very good consultation process. I have talked to people in Nova Scotia who were part of this process, and they were proud to be a part of it. After a period of robust consultation, the Heritage Lighthouse Protection Act was written and it passed through Parliament. Those in the Nova Scotia lighthouse preservation community felt a real sense of accomplishment, that they were a part of something good that would preserve and protect our lighthouses.

Then, in 2010, in the old bait and switch, the federal government made an announcement. Conservatives announced that since lighthouses were not really used as navigational aids anymore, lighthouses across the country would be declared surplus. They were delisted. Essentially, government would not take care of them anymore.

In the lighthouse protection community, there was an incredible feeling of betrayal. There was all of this work to save our lighthouses, and then the government announced in 2010 that 976 lighthouses across Canada were surplus. In the words of Barry MacDonald, then president of the Nova Scotia Lighthouse Preservation Society:

I'm very, very disappointed. Although the aid to navigation that's on that location is not declared surplus, what they're coming at here is the fact that they can maintain a steel tower on that site with a solar light a whole lot cheaper than they can maintain a heritage structure.

The 976 lighthouses across Canada were declared surplus, and Sambro Island lighthouse was on that list. Once a lighthouse is delisted, the community does have an option to take over that lighthouse.

Private Members' Business

However, under the new Heritage Lighthouse Protection Act, the public was given two years to petition and to nominate historic lighthouses. In order to qualify for this designation, the group or an individual had to submit a business plan for its upkeep. We have seen this happen in different communities across Canada where communities have applied to take over their local lighthouse.

Shortly after the announcement in 2010, I met with members of the Nova Scotia Lighthouse Preservation Society to talk about options. We discussed this option: Could we rally the community to come together to take over this lighthouse?

A community group began the heritage designation process. However, it does not have the resources required to maintain this structure, not to mention the fact that trust has been lost. Why would they engage with a process when they had spent years in a process that only led to their community lighthouse being put at risk? Trust was lost.

Also, in the case of the Sambro Island lighthouse, which stands roughly 24 metres tall, the lighthouse is located on a granite island at the entrance to Halifax Harbour. It is not as easily accessed as if it were on land or located on the end of a pier.

Second, the financial cost associated with maintaining the structure is very high. For example, in 2008, when the Coast Guard repainted the lighthouse, it had to use a helicopter to ferry in supplies, including a large web of scaffolding. The total cost came in at about \$80,000 for a simple repainting.

It is not possible for the community to take over this lighthouse. The Sambro Island lighthouse is not on a pier or a wharf. It is not on the shores of Sambro or on Crystal Crescent Beach. It is on an island: essentially a piece of rock in the ocean.

Sue Paul, secretary for the Sambro Island Lighthouse Heritage Society put it well:

This is on an island. It's not easy to get to. It's also an 80-foot tower. It's not something that you can just put painting scaffolding on to do a quick fix-up.... It requires more work than our community can give it safely.

The community is not able to take care of this lighthouse. It is dangerous. It is not easy to get to. Every summer, there is a community celebration called Sou' Wester Days. Boat tours are organized to the island, and I cannot tell members how many of those tours have been cancelled due to rain, fog, wind, big swells. It is not like it is a hop, skip, and jump.

When I met with the Nova Scotia Lighthouse Preservation Society members in 2010, another thing was apparent. They were tired. They had put all of these resources into a consultation process and no one had any energy left. Eventually the two-year time for the community to register its intent to take over that lighthouse passed by.

In 2013, the local community in Sambro started to organize. It started as a meeting of friends, including Sue Paul, Stephanie Smith, and Brendan McGuire, who would later go on to represent this area as MLA. They came together and talked about one goal: to save the Sambro lighthouse. In October 2013, they established the not-for-profit organization called Sambro Island Lighthouse Heritage Society, and relied heavily upon Barry MacDonald for his expertise on lighthouses and working with government.

Barry mentored this group, and the group grew in size and determination. They put together a petition and asked people to sign if they supported saving the Sambro Island lighthouse. With 5,000 signatures from across Canada, they asked MPs to present those petitions in Parliament.

Working with this group of citizens, we came up with a solution. If Parks Canada took over responsibility for this park, actually took it away from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans or the Coast Guard, we could preserve this lighthouse and piece of our history.

That is what we did. Working with community and the wonderful legislative drafters at the House of Commons, I was able to put together Bill C-588, an act to amend the Heritage Lighthouse Protection Act (Sambro Island lighthouse). With the passing of the act, we could save the Sambro Island lighthouse and this piece of our history.

Why should Parks Canada take over the lighthouse? Let me tell members some of the historical facts about the lighthouse.

● (1110)

It was built during the Seven Years' War, in 1758, by the first act passed in the Nova Scotia House of Assembly. That was the first bill passed in our legislature in Nova Scotia. It was about this lighthouse. It is the oldest operational lighthouse in the Americas, and the federal government has already recognized the historic significance of this structure.

In 1937, Sambro lighthouse was designated as a national historic site and a plaque was placed in the village of Sambro. The construction of this lighthouse was also commemorated as a national historic event in 1937.

In 1996, the lighthouse received federal heritage review board classified status, which is the highest-ranking status for Canadian government heritage buildings. The heritage character of the Sambro Island lighthouse was described in the Parks Canada website of federal heritage designations as the following:

One of the most historically important lighthouses in Canada due to its age and its association with Halifax Harbour's marine traffic for over 235 years, this stone and concrete tower is considered the oldest operating lighthouse in North America.

Recently I attended a funding announcement with the Minister of Justice and the member for South Shore—St. Margaret's, who announced \$1.5 million to go toward the repair of this lighthouse. This is our chance to fix the lighthouse and restore it to its former glory, and then preserve and protect it for generations to come. Why spend \$1.5 million to prevent this lighthouse from tumbling into the sea now, only to have it tumble into the sea 40 years from now? We need to act to protect this lighthouse.

In my last few minutes, I would like to thank some people. I do recognize that if one starts a list of thanks, one is bound to forget someone, but I will take that risk because there are people who deserve recognition in this House.

Private Members' Business

I thank Sue Paul and Stephanie Smith who spearheaded the community, bringing us all together as the Sambro Island Lighthouse Heritage Society. They credit their nanny, Minnie Gilkie Smith, because without her admiration for and stories of the lighthouse, which she passed down to them and the rest of their family, they may not have felt so deeply rooted to that island and lighthouse.

I thank Barry MacDonald for his support and mentoring of this group. I know he recently retired from the Nova Scotia Lighthouse Preservation Society, and that is a well-deserved retirement, but I also know that lighthouses are in his heart and we are bound to see him at a meeting or two.

This lighthouse transcends party lines, and I would like to thank a few politicians across those party lines. Brendan Maguire, the Liberal MLA for Halifax Atlantic, has been steadfast in his commitment to this lighthouse. The member for Halifax West has also worked on this issue and brought attention to it in the House, as has my colleague, the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore. Members of the community of Sambro have named the member for South Shore—St. Margaret's as a champion for lighthouses, and I agree with them. I thank Senators Munson and Cordy for also being lighthouse supporters, as well as local councillor Steve Adams.

I thank the schoolchildren and the school of Sambro who supported this cause by selling bracelets and having awareness projects at school. The entire school drew pictures of the lighthouse and made a video of the children singing the lighthouse song. They sent the video to the Prime Minister—I am sure he has it marked in his favourites list—and they have asked him to save their lighthouse.

I thank *The Chebucto News*, which always made space in its publication for another story on the Sambro Island lighthouse. I thank the community members of Sambro for throwing themselves wholeheartedly into this project and gathering so many names for the petition, including Mishoo's store in Sambro, and Now We're Cookin' in Herring Cove. They had plenty of signatures for the petitions. I thank each and every person who took the time to gather names for this petition.

I also want to thank lighthouse advocates Chris Mills and Rip Irwin. Rip was a founding member of the Nova Scotia Lighthouse Preservation Society, which started after a trip to Sambro Island lighthouse.

As members can see, this is not just a lighthouse; this is part of our hearts, part of our community locally, but also part of the fabric of our history as Canadians. It is incredibly important to us. I agree with the Minister of Justice that this is an iconic structure for Canada. It is time to protect this lighthouse, and it is time for this lighthouse to shine on.

• (1115)

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for her speech today. Her work and the work of my colleague, the member for South Shore—St. Margaret's, on preserving lighthouses, not just in Nova Scotia but across the country, is exemplary.

I wonder if the member can comment on steps that need to be taken moving forward to ensure that this lighthouse is protected.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Mr. Speaker, I am going to give credit where credit is due. It was just a couple of weeks ago that there was an announcement in Sambro, as I mentioned, that the government is giving \$1.5 million to the restoration of the lighthouse. That was seen as such an incredible win for the community. Everybody has been walking on air since that announcement.

That announcement for the restoration is important. The stairs are falling apart, there are broken windows. Structurally, it is not safe. People are not even supposed to go up to it any more. Therefore, the restoration is vital if we are going to protect this lighthouse. But then what?

I really believe that the step that would protect this lighthouse properly would be to transfer it from the Coast Guard or the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to Parks Canada. Parks Canada has a mandate to preserve and protect these structures. It is a national historic site. It has been celebrated with a stamp, a coin and acts in legislature. It really needs protection, not just the designation of a heritage site. I see bringing it under the inventory of Parks Canada as the next step.

• (1120)

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are several lighthouses in my riding as well and some of them are struggling because they were declared surplus. They are finding innovative ways through agencies such as ACOA, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency.

One of the biggest complaints is that when these assets are transferred through Environment Canada to commemorations, they come with a commemoration. They come with the distinction of being what it is, but they never come with the money to help them jumpstart in a particular way.

Would her bill provide for any type of operating funds or capital money to be available for these groups?

Ms. Megan Leslie: Mr. Speaker, Fisheries and Oceans has custody of three lighthouses in Newfoundland: Cape Race, Cape Pine and Cape Spear. Therefore, he is pretty close to this issue.

My bill would not include funding, and that is for a procedural reason. This is a private member's bill. I am not in government yet, so if money is attached to private members' bills, they require royal recommendation from government to do that and I was not expecting to get it.

For a step in a private member's bill, I see a straight transfer to Parks Canada so that it is in the Parks Canada inventory. As the member heard earlier, there is a commitment of funds, \$1.5 million, to restore the lighthouse, bring it back to its previous glory, and that is a fantastic step.

[Translation]

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Halifax for her very thoughtful speech. I am sure that what she said resonates with many people in coastal communities.

Private Members' Business

I would like to talk about the cultural aspect of lighthouses. Communities have depended heavily on lighthouses as a link that kept them safe. Many families have lived in very remote regions to operate lighthouses and in Halifax too. Maritime communities, including fishers and sailors, have depended heavily on lighthouses.

Many cultural communities have an interest in the work we are doing today to save not only the lighthouse in my colleague's riding, but those in all of Canada.

Can my colleague comment on the cultural aspect of lighthouses?

Ms. Megan Leslie: Mr. Speaker, the cultural aspect is very important. My colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore organized a press conference with veterans and immigrants.

[*English*]

I, frankly, did not understand the connection. I did not even know those stories about the light being the last light that our military servicemen and women would see as they went off to war or the first light that newcomers would see on the horizon when they were coming to Canada to start a new life. Those stories are as important as that structure, but those stories are tied to that structure.

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us imagine people travelling across the ocean, from the old world to the new world, 200 years ago, and living through storms and the violence that can be the Atlantic Ocean, both in summer and in winter but particularly in winter.

After four or five days on a boat, not really knowing exactly where they were, at the other end of the night, they would see a light, a beacon of hope that symbolizes not only land but a future for them and their family who are travelling to immigrate to a new world. That would be the story of many of my ancestors, the MacDonalDs and the Armstrongs and the Tuckers and the Haymans, coming across from Europe to the new world.

Fast forward 100 years or so to just after the turn of the century, when literally thousands and thousands of soldiers left Canada to travel to fight against the Germans in World War I. For many of them, the last thing they would have seen, looking back at their homeland, not ever knowing if they were going to return safely, would have been that light.

Fast forward again another 50 years, when we had many settlers come from Europe post-World War II, people like my mother-in-law, who came over as a Dutch settler at the age of four, travelling with her family, a family with hope in their hearts, looking for a new, better life, escaping the ravages that were realized during World War II. Travelling across that ocean, literally millions of immigrants coming to Canada over the years, for many the first thing they would have seen of North America, the first thing they would have seen of this new life, would have been that light.

That is what we are really here to talk about today, and I congratulate the member across for her diligence in working towards this particular piece of legislation.

We have a rich lighthouse heritage. Canadians passionately want to see this heritage protected for the benefit and enjoyment of not only past generations like the ones I have spoken about but for future

generations of Canadians. Lighthouses speak to who we are and where we have been. We are one of the world's great maritime nations and lighthouses are a part of that historic nature of our country.

This is why this House adopted the Heritage Lighthouse Protection Act in 2008. My colleague, the member for South Shore—St. Margaret's has been a strong advocate for this legislation and continues to be, for lighthouses across the country. Although he is retiring this year, one of his legacies will be the Lighthouse Protection Act. I congratulate him for that.

This is why Canadians nominated nearly 350 lighthouses to be considered for designation and protection as heritage lighthouses. Our government is determined to designate and protect as many of our lighthouses as possible under the Heritage Lighthouse Protection Act. To date already, 74 heritage lighthouses have been designated under the act. A good number of these, 42 are still required as aids to navigation on our coasts and inland waterways and will remain under the custodianship of the Government of Canada.

They include some of Canada's most significant symbols of our maritime heritage. Some examples are the Cape Spear lighthouse on the Atlantic Coast near St. John's, built in 1835; as well as the Fisgard Lighthouse on the Pacific coast near Victoria, built in 1860. There is also the Triple Island lighthouse on the North Pacific in British Columbia, recognized nationally for the logistical challenges involved with its construction, and the Cape Race lighthouse on the southern Avalon Peninsula in Newfoundland and Labrador.

However, in many places in Canada, historic lighthouses are no longer needed to deliver Canada's extensive marine aid and navigation program. In these cases, our government has in place mechanisms to facilitate the acquisition of treasured historic lighthouses by community groups, other levels of government and, in rare cases, individuals. These different people, organizations and levels of government can breathe new life into these symbols of our nation by giving them a new use.

● (1125)

Identifying new owners for historic lighthouses that are no longer needed by the federal government is not just sound fiscal policy. We all know that the best protection for any heritage building is its continued use, and this is no less true for lighthouses than it is for houses, banks, schools, churches or other built markers of our shared heritage, our shared national identity.

Through the implementation of the Heritage Lighthouse Protection Act, viable, responsible new owners have been invited to submit proposals to acquire historic lighthouses that are no longer needed by the federal government, and to commit to protect their heritage character on behalf of all Canadians. The response from Canadians to this challenge has been nothing short of extraordinary. To date, community groups and other levels of government have submitted proposals to acquire more than 150 of Canada's historic lighthouses and to protect their heritage character. The majority of these proposals are considered viable, sustainable plans following review by Fisheries and Oceans Canada, which is a testament to the commitment of Canadians to conserve their heritage.

Private Members' Business

Currently, of the 150 proposals we have received, there are 32 heritage lighthouses that have been designated, which will ensure the protection and conservation of the heritage character of these historic lighthouses on behalf of Canadians and for the benefit and enjoyment of generations of Canadians yet to come. Some of these 32 heritage lighthouses that will be managed by new owners are symbols of our small but proud and indomitable maritime communities that line our coasts and inland waterways.

Yes, lighthouses such as the ones I have mentioned have economic value as well, as anchors for local and regional tourism, but the spirit that drives their conservation is more than economic. Canadians want to protect these properties because they speak to who we are. They are tangible, evocative markers of our maritime heritage.

Other designated heritage lighthouses that will be managed by new owners are symbols of larger maritime communities. The Brighton Beach Range Front lighthouse, acquired by the City of Charlottetown, is but one example.

These are some of the great examples of Canada's lighthouse heritage. The Government of Canada and Canadians are grateful to the new owners of these and other heritage lighthouses. They have embarked with the Government of Canada on a great project to secure a bright future for Canada's lighthouse heritage. Their commitment to conserve their local heritage and determination to identify and implement sustainable long-term plans for their lighthouses are inspirations for us all.

The government is committed to work with these community organizations and other levels of government to bring these visions to reality so that they too can join this great family of designated heritage lighthouses that the Government of Canada and Canadians are building together.

This is hallowed history of the oldest operating lighthouse in the Americas and part of Nova Scotia's heritage, and I am referring, of course, to the Sambro lighthouse. For generations, this sentinel of the sea has helped illuminate the safe passage of countless mariners off the treacherous waters of Chebucto Head. The Sambro Island lighthouse has been in operation for over 250 years.

Over the years, members of the Nova Scotia Lighthouse Preservation Society, the Sambro Island Lighthouse Heritage Society and the local community have worked diligently to preserve, protect and promote this storied structure and educate people about its historical significance. In recognition of its importance, the Sambro Island lighthouse was declared a classified federal heritage building. In more recent years, it has also been commemorated by Canada Post and the Royal Canadian Mint.

Our government wholeheartedly agrees that the Sambro Island lighthouse merits designation as a heritage lighthouse under the Heritage Lighthouse Protection Act, but we want to do more than just designate the lighthouse. We need to do more. The Sambro Island lighthouse deserves a bright, secure future so that Canadians can enjoy and appreciate our very own heritage for generations to come.

To do this, the Government of Canada must continue in its quest to find a viable, responsible new owner for the lighthouse who can

articulate and implement a solid plan that will set this proud symbol of our shared maritime heritage on a course for another two and a half centuries of marking one of Canada's greatest harbours. Hopefully, it will stand strong for much longer than that.

The Sambro Island lighthouse has derived strong local, regional and provincial support from across Canada. It relishes the benefits of a valuable custodian in Fisheries and Oceans Canada and of a government that recognizes and acknowledges its immeasurable historical importance. The government is committed to working with Canadians to create an enduring, sustainable future for the Sambro Island lighthouse and for many lighthouses across this country.

• (1130)

I thank the member for this legislation, and I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to it today.

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise today to speak to Bill C-588, an act to designate the Sambro Island lighthouse as a heritage lighthouse.

I thank all my colleagues in the House and in the Senate who are supporting the bill, but especially my colleagues from Nova Scotia, who are all working together to make this happen.

The Liberal Party of Canada believes in the value of protecting Canada's story through the preservation of our historic lighthouses for the education and enjoyment of present and future generations. We understand the need for federal stewardship on this issue and urge the government to work collaboratively with local leaders to develop an effective strategy to ensure the survival of the Sambro Island lighthouse.

The Liberal Halifax-area member of Parliament has represented his constituents in the House of Commons regarding the preservation of the Sambro Lighthouse since 2013, and the Liberal Party of Canada has long advocated for recognition of the historical, cultural, and economic significance of Canada's lighthouses; we voted in support of the Heritage Lighthouse Protect Act.

We support the bill but are concerned that it does not fully accomplish what the sponsoring member claims it does. Designating the Sambro Lighthouse a "designated heritage lighthouse" creates no obligation stemming from the bill for the federal government to operate the site in the future. She explained that earlier.

We recommend sending the bill to committee to so that the committee can determine whether the scope is sufficient for its stated goal as well as examine custodial responsibilities for the preservation, maintenance, and operation of this iconic structure.

Sambro Island is located, as was mentioned before, off the coast of Nova Scotia near the entrance of Halifax Harbour. In 1758, the earliest lighthouse in North America was built on the island. Today, the lighthouse is operated by Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

The lighthouse is the oldest standing and operating lighthouse in the Americas. Its construction was commemorated as a National Historic Event in 1937, and in 1996 the lighthouse was recognized as a federal heritage building.

Private Members' Business

Earlier this month, the government announced a two-year investment to rehabilitate the Sambro Island lighthouse. The project is estimated at more than \$1.5 million. The lighthouse will be transferred to local community leaders under the Heritage Lighthouse Protection Act.

These are a few facts I would like to share regarding this historic lighthouse.

Legislation to establish the lighthouse was passed on the first day of the first session of the legislative assembly of Nova Scotia in 1758. As the member mentioned, I believe, it was one of the first pieces of legislation. Construction was completed in 1759.

The light is located at the southern entrance to Halifax harbour. It was the first sight of the city for members of the Royal Canadian Navy returning to Halifax, and for new immigrants entering through Pier 21. I am proud to say that my parents came through that same pier.

Sambro served as the departure point from North America for Joshua Slocum's famous solo navigation around the world in 1895.

In 1996 the lighthouse received Federal Heritage Review Board "classified" status, the highest-ranking status for Canadian government heritage buildings.

It is still an active aid to navigation. The beacon is being maintained by the federal government. After an outpouring of support from the community, Fisheries and Oceans Canada recently committed to replacing a broken window and repairing the staircase inside to ensure the light can remain operational.

The lighthouse was repainted by the Coast Guard in 2008 at a cost of \$80,000. The light was also solarized in 2008.

The Sambro Island Lighthouse Heritage Society, represented by Rena Maguire and Susan Paul, has organized petitions, public meetings, and visits to the lighthouse.

The Province of Nova Scotia recently awarded a \$10,000 grant to the Sambro Island Lighthouse Heritage Society. I heard it was also through the hard work of MLA Brendan Maguire. The society is currently developing a business plan for the lighthouse with the hope of encouraging more tourism to the site and to help in maintaining the lighthouse as an historic site.

A petition was tabled in 2013 with more than 5,000 signatures in support of preserving the lighthouse.

• (1135)

There are also a great number of lighthouses that I would like to mention in my riding of Sydney—Victoria as well. I will talk about a couple in particular, because lighthouses are important. We have been very fortunate that some community groups recognize the cultural and historic importance of these lighthouses and have put a great deal of work into sharing their knowledge, and I would like to take this opportunity to commend the Nova Scotia Lighthouse Preservation Society. It is a great group.

I believe that the province of Nova Scotia has more lighthouses than any other province because of length of shoreline and its rugged coast.

The St. Paul Island Historical Society worked for close to a decade to have a lighthouse relocated next to the St. Paul Island Museum. For 30 years or so, the lighthouse was at the Canadian Coast Guard jetty in Dartmouth. The lighthouse was dismantled in order to transport it by flatbed truck. The total cost of restoring, transporting, and erecting the lighthouse was \$120,000. The federal government invested \$108,000 in the project through Enterprise Cape Breton Corporation.

Dingwall, which is a northern community in my riding, has a long maritime tradition and close ties to St. Paul Island. A lighthouse has operated on the island since 1839. The original southwest light was established in 1839, burned in 1916, and was replaced by a cast iron cylindrical lighthouse in 1917. The 1917 light was then replaced with an automatic system in 1962. This is what has happened to many lighthouses over the years.

There has also been a community connection with St. Paul Island. Boats transported people and supplies to the island. Many people have relatives who worked on the island, so there is a close emotional and historic bond with the island. There were as many as 50 people living on the island at one time. There were life-saving stations, radio operators, and so on, and the museum is dedicated to that history.

Canada's ocean shoreline is at least 250,000 kilometres in length. It is the longest shoreline in the world. Just minutes off the world-famous Cabot Trail, we can find Canada's first and only federally designated heritage lighthouse on any of Canada's three oceans. Built in 1915 and relocated in Dingwall, the St. Paul Southwest Lighthouse is also the first cast iron lighthouse constructed in Canada.

An old map of St. Paul Island shows 40 shipwrecks, ranging from square-rigged ships to steam-powered vessels. This is described as only a partial list of wrecks in these dangerous waters off northern Cape Breton. Other sources say that as many as 350 ships went to the bottom of the sea there.

The first lighthouse in Canada, and the second in North America, was constructed in Louisbourg in 1730. Its purpose was to protect ships by lighting their way into the harbour of the great French fortress of Louisbourg, perched on the far southeastern rocky coast of Cape Breton Island. In the years after Louisbourg was captured by the British, the fortress was levelled and the land was left desolate. There was no longer a need for a light, so it fell into ruin.

Private Members' Business

No other lighthouse existed or was necessary along the vast expanse of Nova Scotia's almost empty coastline until 1758, when the Sambro light was built at the far outer reaches of Halifax Harbour. A government lottery raised the necessary money for it. Thereafter, as pockets of settlements began to develop along the shoreline, the need for navigational aids became increasingly important. The development of hydrographic charts, printed sailing directions, and navigational markers and buoys facilitated daylight and fair-weather marine activities. Lighthouses, lightships, and fog alarms provided a measure of the security needed for nighttime and very bad weather.

Lightkeeping was a hazardous and demanding career. In the 1930s, it was critical in Nova Scotia for a large, well-developed network to be in place. As I mentioned earlier, in the decades after World War II, changing patterns in coastal and international trade, the advent of radar and sophisticated navigational technology, and the ravages of wind, water, and time all combined to put an end to the Nova Scotia lighthouse world.

Canada is built on many heritage buildings, and lighthouses are very important. We agree with this bill. It is indeed an important bill because of the historical importance, the cultural importance, and the impact that lighthouses have on the tourism industry in coastal communities.

• (1140)

It is important that we continue to protect these landmarks. I hope my colleagues will support Bill C-588, which designates Sambro Island lighthouse as a true heritage lighthouse.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour for me to support the bill introduced by my colleague from Halifax, and I am very pleased to do so.

Canada's heritage assets need our support. The Government of Canada has an obligation and a duty to do that, but unfortunately, it is not stepping up. Heritage assets are being allowed to disintegrate little by little to the point where the very foundation of this great country's heritage is in jeopardy.

I would like to emphasize that my support extends beyond this bill for the Sambro Island lighthouse. Many lighthouses in Canada have been declared surplus by the departments that own them. Most of the time, that is Fisheries and Oceans Canada. We must have the means to protect these pearls of Canada's heritage.

Ads placed around the world to encourage people to visit Canada feature lighthouses. When we sing O Canada and watch the videos that go with it, we see images of lighthouses. These buildings are part of Canada's history, and we absolutely have to protect them. The bill before us is one step among many. It is one step toward protection.

I would like to talk about the Sambro Island lighthouse, but I will also draw parallels with other lighthouses in Canada, particularly in my riding, which is a maritime riding with a lot of lighthouses. The people in my riding are very worried about the state of these lighthouses. We know that the Sambro Island lighthouse in particular is located just off the coast of Halifax. It is a major part of our heritage and history since it was likely one of the most important

lighthouses in Canada. It was built during the Seven Years' War and established by the very first act passed by the Nova Scotia House of Assembly in 1758. Construction took place from 1758 to 1760.

Let us remember that lighthouses were the gateway to many areas of Canada, not just Halifax. The Sambro Island lighthouse was the first lighthouse that people saw when they immigrated to our maritime provinces. As our Liberal Party colleague pointed out, people had to pass right by it to get to Pier 21 in Halifax.

I would like to point out that in my riding of Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, the first lighthouse that was seen when Canada was made up of only Ontario and Quebec was the Cap-des-Rosiers lighthouse, which is located just outside Gaspé. It is the tallest lighthouse in Canada, and it was the first lighthouse that immigrants saw when they came to Canada before Confederation. Of course, after Confederation, our neighbours in the Maritimes also had lighthouses, but while Canada was made up of only Ontario and Quebec, the gateway was Gaspé and the point of entry was the Cap-des-Rosiers lighthouse. These lighthouses are part of our heritage. They are part of our history and our wealth.

There are also a number of lighthouses in the Magdalen Islands. Without those lighthouses, the shipwrecks that plagued the Magdalen Islands for hundreds of years would have continued. There are hundreds of shipwrecks off the coast of the Magdalen Islands. These ships sank because years ago, people did not have the proper equipment and there were no lighthouses. Lighthouses were mainly built in the 1800s.

Lighthouses are slowly being dismantled, particularly in the Magdalen Islands. Climate change has resulted in an increasing number of major storms. Those storms cause erosion, which is jeopardizing all of the lighthouses in the Magdalen Islands. It is a major concern. We have already had to move some lighthouses in order to save them.

The government brought in legislation to preserve lighthouses. I would like to point out, however, that the legislation that the Conservatives passed in 2010, quite frankly, does nothing to preserve the lighthouses in the Magdalen Islands and the Gaspé, and it will not preserve the Sambro Island lighthouse. The act provides for a divestiture program for lighthouses. Once again, the government has plans to divest itself of lighthouses, wharves and other kinds of infrastructure, but it is unwilling to invest any money in repairs prior to their divestiture. Those who take over these lighthouses will be left with some nasty surprises.

• (1145)

We find it very hard to get behind a government that refuses to recognize that it failed in its responsibility. The government has a duty to maintain its facilities, assets and property, and this includes lighthouses.

For instance, there has been no maintenance done on the Cap-des-Rosiers lighthouse in the past 20 years. This causes serious problems, such as water leaks and damage to the structure. Because of the many winter storms, these water leaks exacerbate the situation.

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The government needs to update its facilities and infrastructure long before even considering their divestiture. Very few organizations have the resources to take over responsibility for these kinds of infrastructure, since the annual maintenance is very costly. That is why we hope that the government will be prepared to maintain its assets and property.

In the Gaspé, some poorly maintained lighthouses have had to be taken over by municipalities and private organizations. In her speech on the bill, my colleague pointed out that some community groups in Halifax would be willing to take over at least the management of the lighthouse, but they would be unable to pay for long-term maintenance. Only governments are in a position to do so.

I hope the government will grasp the multiplier effect of investing in lighthouses. When tourists are drawn to our beautiful regions by the lighthouses they see in ads, they expect those lighthouses to be not only there and in good shape, but also accessible. When lighthouses are in the sorry state that they are in now, they get shuttered and no one is allowed to enter them. People are only allowed to look at them. Truth be told, even that may no longer be possible since lighthouses are located in coastal regions where they are exposed to erosion and their potential demise in a storm.

Let us not forget that through the divestiture process, the federal government offers to transfer the asset to the province first. If the province refuses, then it is offered to the municipality. Finally, if neither party is prepared to take it, it will be offered to individuals. That is how our lighthouses could become privatized. That is what happened in the Magdalen Islands, where a lighthouse became the property of a single individual. Today, that lighthouse is no longer accessible and can no longer be part of an historic trail or route for tourists.

Even though some organizations have plans to take advantage of lighthouses as tourist attractions, the lighthouses that were handed over to individuals are not necessarily accessible to the public. The privatization of our heritage and historical infrastructure is very concerning.

Five to six lighthouses in the Magdalen Islands and a number of lighthouses in the Gaspé have been declared surplus. However, they have been recognized as being heritage lighthouses. I would like to remind members that the Cap-des-Rosiers lighthouse was designated a national historic site in 1974. In 1994, it was recognized as a heritage lighthouse.

However, the enactment of the Heritage Lighthouse Protection Act in 2010 shows that the government wants to get rid of these lighthouses. That means it does not keep its promises. The government absolutely has to take its responsibilities seriously and invest in our infrastructure. There is no denying the multiplier effect of investments, which must be made in order to keep regional economies going. Lighthouses are an integral part of that.

• (1150)

This is not just about the economy; it is also about culture. The lives of mariners and fishers have been saved because of these lighthouses. Families living in coastal communities are still there because the lighthouses protected their ancestors. We must respect

our ancestors and our coastal communities. We must invest in our lighthouses.

• (1155)

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture. I will advise the parliamentary secretary that he will have approximately seven minutes before we have to end this debate.

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, seven minutes is not nearly long enough to speak on the Sambro Island lighthouse, but I will take what time I have. I want to echo the words of my colleagues who have spoken on this issue before me in the House. Canadians have spoken clearly. Our lighthouse heritage matters and needs to be protected.

Like Bill C-588, the Heritage Lighthouse Protection Act originated as a private member's bill, and its principles resonated so clearly with parliamentarians that it was enacted unopposed. I would say, just to clarify the record, that it had a couple of opportunities to move first from the Senate and then to the House of Commons before it actually was approved, and I do not believe that anyone has recognized late Senator Mike Forrestall's support of that bill. It really was his idea and dream. Unfortunately, he did not live long enough to see it fulfilled, but he was certainly the keystone for that private member's legislation.

When the act finally came into force, Canadians responded by nominating nearly 350 lighthouses for designation through a petition process established by the act, and our government is proud of the progress that has been made over the five years since the Heritage Lighthouse Protection Act came into force. Today there are 74 designated heritage lighthouses that are protected for the future. As impressive as these results are, it is gratifying to know that many more lighthouses will be considered for designation in the months and years ahead as Fisheries and Oceans Canada concludes agreements to transfer historic lighthouses to responsible new owners who have demonstrated their ability and desire to implement a sustainable, long-term plan for the conservation of their local lighthouses.

Sambro Island lighthouse is one of those lighthouses that occupies a special place in Canada's maritime heritage. It was established in 1758 and is the oldest operating lighthouse in the Americas. It is located on Sambro Island, at the entrance to Halifax Harbour, and is surrounded by a dangerous maze of rocks and shoals. This lighthouse has guided countless people to safety while also being a silent witness to numerous shipwrecks and sea battles. For generations this lighthouse has served its purpose well by guiding mariners into and out of one of the largest, most impressive natural harbours in the world.

Its construction was designated by the Government of Canada as an event of national historical significance way back in 1937, so its special heritage value has long been recognized. More recently, the Sambro Island lighthouse was designated a classified federal heritage building in 1996, and through that designation it enjoys the highest level of heritage protection accorded to federal buildings. It should be reassuring for all to know that the heritage character of this important lighthouse already enjoys strong protection under the custodianship of Fisheries and Oceans Canada. Since 2008 we have invested nearly \$40,000 in the lighthouse, which includes repairing concrete, painting the tower base, and sealing a concrete walkway.

As reassuring as this is, it is important to note that the heritage character of the Sambro Island lighthouse is currently protected. Our government also wants to see it designated and protected under the Heritage Lighthouse Protection Act and join the growing family of heritage lighthouses being created by the Government of Canada in partnership with community groups and other levels of government all across Canada. Sambro Island lighthouse merits designation under this act.

It is also important to note that Sambro Island lighthouse is not under any imminent threat of neglect or demolition. As a classified federal heritage building, the Sambro Island lighthouse is currently afforded the same level of protection as would be offered under the Heritage Lighthouse Protection Act. Nevertheless, our government is determined to find a viable, responsible owner for the Sambro Island lighthouse, a new owner who has a vision for a sustainable new use for Sambro Island, with its iconic lighthouse and related light station buildings, and the wherewithal, of course, to make that vision a reality. Our government will help make this happen.

• (1200)

We recently announced that we are making a significant investment of more than \$1.5 million in the lighthouse over the next two years. It should be said that this funding will go toward rehabilitating the foundation, floor, walls, beams, and lantern deck; fixing issues related to erosion, cracking, and stone work; rehabilitating the original lantern; installing a heating system; and painting the lighthouse.

We are pleased to make these important investments in the Sambro Island lighthouse to serve its more than 250-year history and to continue to ensure that Canadian waters are kept safe and that Canadian heritage remains strong.

I was able to participate in that announcement along with the Minister of Justice, and the day we made the announcement, stakeholders applauded the new investment.

I would like to quote Stephanie Smith, president of the Nova Scotia Lighthouse Preservation Society, who said:

We're extremely excited about this announcement today. It's an important first step in the long-term preservation of our historic lighthouse. We look forward to continuing to work with all levels of government and our community to make sure that this national treasure is taken care of for generations to come.

I would like to add a few more comments about the Sambro Island lighthouse. I commend the member for Halifax for bringing this piece of legislation forth, and I want to recognize my colleague who quarterbacked the original lighthouse preservation bill to give

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community groups the opportunity to actually have some say and control over the future of the lighthouses in their communities.

I want to recognize the Sambro Island group that has put a business plan together and is continuing to work on a business plan for the future of the lighthouse as it takes the lighthouse over. I want to recognize the past-president of the Nova Scotia Lighthouse Preservation Society, Barry MacDonald, for not only his hard work over the years but for his ongoing interest in making sure that the oldest lighthouse in the Americas continues to be protected.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

YUKON AND NUNAVUT REGULATORY IMPROVEMENT ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill S-6, An Act to amend the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act and the Nunavut Waters and Nunavut Surface Rights Tribunal Act, as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

[*English*]

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Deputy Speaker: There are 10 motions in amendment standing on the notice paper for the report stage of Bill S-6.

[*Translation*]

The Chair has notice that the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands will not be present to move Motions Nos. 2, 3, 8 and 9.

[*English*]

Motion Nos. 1, 4 to 7, and 10 will be regrouped for debate and voted upon according to the voting pattern available at the table.

[*Translation*]

I will now put Motions Nos. 1, 4 to 7, and 10 to the House.

• (1205)

[*English*]

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

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

Motion No. 1

That Bill S-6 be amended by deleting the long title.

Motion No. 4

That Bill S-6 be amended by deleting Clause 14.

Motion No. 5

That Bill S-6 be amended by deleting Clause 16.

Motion No. 6

That Bill S-6 be amended by deleting Clause 17.

Motion No. 7

That Bill S-6 be amended by deleting Clause 21.

Motion No. 10

That Bill S-6 be amended by deleting Clause 34.

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He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to put forward these amendments to Bill S-6, a bill that has the ability to amend the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act and the Nunavut Waters and Nunavut Surface Rights Tribunal Act. It contains many clauses that cannot be amended. Why? They came out of a five-year review of the Yukon Environmental Assessment Act and were agreed to. Many changes to the Environmental Assessment Act were worked out through a process of collaboration, understanding and collaboration between the government and the people of Yukon.

After that process, four very controversial items were added to this bill and then arbitrarily put to the people of Yukon.

The first would provide the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development the authority to provide binding policy direction to the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board, to which Yukoners are opposed. They had no chance to work with anyone to mitigate that.

The second would legislate time limits for assessments in the face of the fact that the assessment process was working just fine in Yukon, and that people had learned how to deal with very complex issues in an orderly fashion.

The third would allow the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development to delegate any or all responsibilities to the Yukon government without consultation with and approval from the first nations who were party to the whole deal that was set up in the first place.

The fourth would create broad exemptions with respect to the Yukon environmental assessment process for renewals, amendments and permits authorizations, which were in the hands of the boards already.

We can see that the devolution process in the northern territories, which in Yukon started 10 years ago, has been curtailed by this legislation. It has been rolled back in a very significant and deliberate fashion by the government. That is not appropriate.

The other amendments proposed to the act dealt with things that people could see and agree to. They were designed to help move the act forward in a proper fashion so the environmental assessment process could be well-respected and understood.

We have had the same problem in the Northwest Territories. The government agreed to a devolution process and then forced changes to our environmental assessment process. That has now gone to court and there have been injunctions put in place by the court over the actions taken by the government in the Northwest Territories.

We are likely to see the same thing in Yukon, where the first nations will once again have to take the government to court to deal with issues that should have been dealt with in a proper fashion.

Therefore, we have identified four issues and are asking that they be removed from the act through these amendments. It is a request that goes back to the people of Yukon, who have asked for this.

We took the committee to Yukon and had a one-day hearing, which went from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. The room was filled with hundreds

of people who attended the committee hearing from 8:30 a.m. until it finished in the evening. They were not pleased with the bill.

• (1210)

The support for the bill was almost nil. People were speaking out on it. The Government of Yukon, which will face its own electors over this very shortly, will find out how those people feel about the bill. This will also be the case for the Conservative government very soon.

After the election, which is likely to be in October unless the government decides to try to delay it even more, the new NDP government will be ready to put forward amendments to deal with these contentious issues for the people of the north.

There is no reason at all for this to have happened in the fashion it did. The government has created uncertainty in the environmental assessment process for the companies, people and the first nations of Yukon. It has messed it up.

Let me quote Ms. Allison Rippin Armstrong, vice president Lands and Environment, Kaminak Gold Corporation, which has just invested substantial sums of money in the Yukon. She said:

Kaminak is concerned that the process through which YESAA is being amended is creating increased distrust between governments and uncertainty in the assessment and regulatory process for current and future projects in Yukon.

These are the people who are investing in the Yukon.

This is what Ruth Massie, Grand Chief, Council of Yukon First Nations, has to say:

CYFN and all 11 self-governing first nations are unanimously opposed to four provisions that are part of Bill S-6.

Here we have it. On the one hand, we have industry saying that it will not work for them, that it does not need it and do not even understand why it is being done. On the other hand, first nations are saying that things are being done against all their agreements and that are really throwing the process, which they worked so hard to set up, off the back of the cart. They want to know why the government has done it and what the purpose is of this kind of action by the government. They want to know if it is simply because the party of one over in the Langevin Block has decided that this is the way it will go, that no one can interfere with that kind of decision making, that no one from the grassroots up can make a difference.

The government is making rules for territories that actually need devolution. They need to control their own affairs. The government has actually thrown that particular process off the back of the cart. It is heading off in a different direction. People in the territories, my territory, Yukon, who have been influenced by these bills, now face the prospect of suing the government, of going forward with litigation in order to get rid of some of these contentious clauses, which nobody really wants, which do not make any sense and which are not part of any reduction of colonialism or changing the way these territories can govern themselves.

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We have put forward a number of amendments which deal with the four contentious issues. We would hope that the government, in the end, would come to its senses and would actually listen to the people of Yukon, industry and those who are involved in the actual work of Yukon, rather than sitting over on Langevin Block, and come to an understanding that these need to be removed to make this bill work. Then we could go ahead and all support it.

• (1215)

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to hear the member for Northwest Territories speak. Even if I do not agree with him, we spent that day together in Yukon and certainly survived the charter flight as well.

I want to talk about the difference of philosophy. Our government believes that northerners are best placed to make decisions affecting their legislation and their lands. That is why we propose to devolve powers to the local government, to the government closer to the people, to the territorial government. We did it in the Northwest Territories with Bill C-15. We have proposed that provision in Bill S-6 as well, to allow the federal minister to delegate powers to the territorial minister.

I would like a clear answer from the member as to why he believes power should remain concentrated in Ottawa instead of devolved to the people in the north, closer to where they live.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, the simplistic idea that has been proposed by the government is really one that goes against what people have worked very hard on throughout the north, and that is the relationship between aboriginal governments and public governments. This will be the determining factor in our ability to work together.

Northerners have come to the decision that first nations governments have complete relevance in everything that goes on in our territories. In the minds of northerners, we do not separate first nations governance as a lesser force. We accept that these forces have to work together. We accept that the decision making has to involve that kind of jurisdictional sharing.

What the government would do with this amendment is take it away from first nations and impact that kind of delegation of authority. I am sure there would be many things first nations could work very well with the public government in Yukon in this regard, but they need to be there at the table.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I find it troubling that the Conservative government, with the full support of its members and its senators, did not consult the people of the Yukon and did not strive for social acceptability with these significant changes. However, it had no problem talking to the Prospectors & Developers Association of Canada, the Mining Association of Canada and Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, among others.

Does my colleague think that we can improve the situation in the Yukon by showing contempt for aboriginal peoples and by only supporting the big mining companies? I am very concerned about the government's contempt for aboriginal peoples.

[*English*]

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, it is a problem with the government. It came up with these four amendments after a complete process of years when it could have introduced them. It could have put them forward over that time. It could have talked about them. It could have tried to find some kind of accommodation within the system. It had the time. It had people dedicated to do that work. These are highly trained individuals. They do not miss these types of items. They do not say that they forgot about these four concerns and that they will throw them into the bill at a later date. This was a fairly carefully crafted little effort to avoid talking about the things that were controversial and then shoving them into the bill later. This is really not the way to do devolution in our territories. It is not the way to come up with agreements that can work for people.

• (1220)

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since 2006, our government has been pursuing the most ambitious northern agenda in the history of this country. From promoting prosperity and development through Bill C-47, the Northern Jobs and Growth Act, to devolving powers to the Government of the Northwest Territories through Bill C-15, the Northwest Territories Devolution Act, to the vision and implementation of the Canadian High Arctic research station, no other government in Canadian history has done more than ours to increase health, prosperity and economic development in the north.

The initiative before the House today, the Yukon and Nunavut regulatory improvement act, or Bill S-6, would represent yet another key deliverable of our government's northern strategy and would be the final legislative step in our government's action plan to improve northern regulatory regimes.

In total, our government has created or amended eight different pieces of legislation in order to ensure that northern regulatory regimes across the north are nimble and responsive to the increased economic activity taking place across the north. This is no small feat. These legislative changes will allow Canada's north to compete for investment in an increasingly global marketplace which, in turn, will lead to jobs, growth and long-term prosperity for northerners. Bill S-6 would continue in this vein.

The introduction of beginning-to-end time limits for environmental assessments included in the bill would align the Yukon regime with the time limits in similar acts within the north, as well as south of 60, and would provide predictability and consistency to first nations, municipalities and industry alike.

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This is an incredibly important aspect of Bill S-6 and one that would act to drive economic development across the territory. Unfortunately, the NDP wants to remove these time limits. I take particular exception to Motions Nos. 5, 6 and 7, which would cause the portions of the bill related to time limits to be deleted. This would prevent regulatory predictability and actually hinder growth and prosperity in the Yukon.

Some have argued that the time limits would affect the thoroughness of the assessment process. However, as the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board's own statistics show, the proposed time limits are either consistent with or more favourable than the board's current practice. In addition, Bill S-6 would include provisions to allow for extensions, recognizing that there may be situations when more time is warranted to carry out a function or power.

A different provision in the act, specifically, the proposed amendment to section 49.1 of YESAA, would ensure that, going forward, reassessments would only be required in the event that the project has been significantly changed.

This is another integral piece of Bill S-6 that the opposition would eliminate. That is why I oppose Motion No. 4. The passage of the motion and the elimination of the clause would prevent the elimination of unnecessary delays and red tape in the approval process.

In the past, projects that have already been approved and permitted could be subject to a new environmental assessment simply because of a renewal or a minor change in the project. The amendment would help to streamline the process and reduce unnecessary red tape where it is not warranted.

The amendment would also make it clear that if there is more than one decision body, which could be a federal, territorial or first nations government or agency that regulates and permits the proposed activity, they must consult with one another before determining whether a new assessment is required. Further still, the legislation would specify that in the event of a disagreement, if only one decision body determines that a significant change has occurred, it must be subject to a reassessment. This would also be consistent with the UFA, the Umbrella Final Agreement, which states in section 12.4.1.1 that projects and significant changes to existing projects are subject to the development assessment process.

Another proposed change would be the ability for the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development to provide policy direction to the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board.

This is another amendment that the opposition would like to remove from the bill. Motion No. 10 would remove the ability of the minister to issue policy direction.

• (1225)

It is important to remember that the ability to provide policy direction is not a heavy-handed attempt by the government to interfere in the assessment process nor does it undermine the neutrality of the board. Quite the contrary, it is intended to ensure a common understanding between the government and the board, helping to reduce uncertainty in environmental assessment decision-

making and helping to ensure the proper implementation of the board's powers in fulfilling its role in the assessment process.

Moreover, this power exists in the Northwest Territories where it has only been used four times, and in each case it was used to clearly communicate expectations on how to address first nations' rights or agreements. For example, it was used in order to ensure that notification was provided to both the Manitoba and Saskatchewan Deline regarding licences and permits in a given region.

By supporting this motion, the opposition would actually remove a tool that the minister could use to ensure that aboriginal rights are protected. Perhaps not surprisingly, during our committee study when we were in the Yukon, the NDP member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking said it was paternalistic for the minister to try to protect aboriginal rights through policy direction. The NDP obviously does not want the minister to exercise the duty he has been given to protect aboriginal rights in Canada, calling that paternalistic. It is completely bizarre.

I want to assure members that this power in no way detracts from the board's independence. YESAB will remain an impartial and independent arm's-length entity responsible for making recommendations to decision bodies.

The legislative amendment also makes it clear that policy directions cannot be used to influence a specific project or change the environmental assessment process itself.

It is for these reasons that I oppose the passage of Motion No. 10, and encourage other members to do the same.

Another amendment of concern is the minister's ability to delegate certain powers in the act to a territorial minister. Some have suggested that this amendment is an attempt by this government to shirk its responsibilities to the Yukon first nations and is inconsistent with the tripartite nature of the land claim agreement.

I want to be very clear that these concerns are completely unfounded. First of all, any delegation must be consistent with the UFA. Second, the Umbrella Final Agreement permits delegation. Specifically, the definition of "government" includes both the federal and territorial governments, depending on which government or governments have responsibility from time to time for the matter in question. Section 2.11.8 of the agreement states that "Government may determine, from time to time, how and by whom any power or authority of Government or a Minister set out in a Settlement Agreement...shall be exercised".

Not least of all, this measure is in keeping with our government's objective of devolving responsibility to the territories and moving decision-making closer to home. That is, away from Ottawa bureaucracy and right into the hands of Yukoners themselves.

This legislation is clearly both needed and wanted north of 60. It satisfies calls to modernize northern regulatory regimes and ensure consistency with other regulatory regimes across the north and in the rest of Canada, while protecting the environment and strengthening northern governance.

For all these reasons, I urge all-party support for this worthy act as it stands, and to reject all of the amendments to Bill S-6 that are before the House today.

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Mr. Dennis Bevington (Northwest Territories, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, who I have spent time with on committee.

When the government put these four amendments in after the fact, after its major consultation process that took place over a considerable period of time, there was such an outcry from first nations. The fact is that first nations have now requested, and have requested over the previous number of months, that the minister sit down with them and see how they can work to come to some kind of agreement on these four amendments. Where has the minister been? Where has the government been in trying to work this out with the first nations?

Why have the Conservatives been so intransigent about these four amendments, which are quite obviously not supported by the first nations who are an important and vital part of any process that takes place in the Yukon?

• (1230)

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, of course the minister takes very seriously his obligation and his duty to consult with first nations. That is why, in the case of the Yukon first nations, there have been dozens of documented meetings where the four contentious amendments, as the member categorizes them, were discussed. In fact, nearly \$100,000 was provided to the first nations to help them engage in that consultation process. They submitted receipts to the Government of Canada, which were paid based on their engagement with us on those particular measures.

Obviously, we do not agree with their interpretation of those measures. The minister has met with the first nations and has repeatedly asked them to show him where these amendments contravene the Umbrella Final Agreement. To date, they have not done so.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate many of the comments the member has put on the record. I do not necessarily agree with them, especially when it comes to trying to give the impression that the current government has been very strong in developing and assisting in setting the social framework up north. To try to give the impression that it is the strongest in the history of Canada is somewhat fictitious at best, I would suggest.

When we look at Bill S-6, we see there has been a great deal of resistance. A lot of that resistance is in the community itself that has raised a number of concerns, and the government has not responded to those concerns. It was not that long ago that I was talking to Larry Bagnell and other members who came to our northwestern caucus, in essence saying that they have strong reservations that the government is not being sensitive to the needs of the north, nor is it listening.

Can the member explain to the constituents up north why the government has obviously not listened to our first nations, people of aboriginal heritage or many of our local communities who are trying to get the government to listen and make amendments that would make it better legislation?

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, I am happy that the hon. member brought up Larry Bagnell. When Larry Bagnell was speaking to constituents when he was the member for Yukon, he said he would go to Ottawa and vote against the long gun registry. What did he do? He came into this House and voted to maintain the long gun registry. Talk about not listening to constituents. That is why he is unemployed and why the member for Yukon now is a strong advocate for gun owners right across the north, a strong advocate for the aboriginal people in his community and the strongest representative that Yukon has had in 25 years.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the time I have been given today as we speak about this very important issue. I am not from the north; I am from Newfoundland and Labrador, but I proudly stand here to discuss this particular bill simply because it is very important to people in a land that is so vast and so rich in natural resources. There is a lot to talk about indeed, and it is a very important part of who we are as Canadians.

I am pleased to have an opportunity to speak to S-6, an act to amend the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act and the Nunavut Waters and Nunavut Surface Rights Tribunal Act.

This particular piece of legislation is the third in a suite of bills aimed at improving the regulatory regime in Canada's northern territories. Unfortunately, like most legislation the government introduces, the bill is being rammed through the House with only a limited debate. It was brought in without proper consultation with local communities and first nations, as has been discussed here in the past and certainly since debate started about 35 minutes ago.

There is a growing feeling in the north that the changes being imposed by the Conservatives through Bill S-6 will endanger the independence and effectiveness of environmental assessments and that it will eventually end up before the courts.

The objective of Bill S-6 is to update the regulatory regime in Yukon and Nunavut and align it with other regulatory regimes throughout Canada.

Among other things, this legislation would introduce legislated time limits for environmental assessments. It would provide the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development with the authority to give binding policy directions to the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board. It would also allow the delegation of any of the minister's powers, duties, and functions to the territorial minister by way of devolution; enable the government to develop cost-recovery regulatory measures; and reduce regulatory burdens by clarifying that a project need not undergo another assessment when a project authorization is to be renewed or amended, unless there is a significant change in the project. It would also introduce time limits for water licence reviews and allow for life-of-project water licences. It would also require the Nunavut Water Board to take into consideration agreements between Canada, regional Inuit associations, and proponents regarding posting of security to address the issue of over-bonding when more than one regulatory agency requires financial security for the same project.

Government Orders

Unlike Bill C-47 and Bill C-15, the two other bills aimed at improving the regulatory regime in Canada's northern territories, this legislation was introduced in the Senate on June 3, 2014, by Yukon Senator Dan Lang.

Some media reports indicate this particular piece of legislation may become a major issue in the next election, and some pundits question why the member of Parliament for Yukon was not the bill's sponsor. I am sure that over the next four or five months, he will have plenty of opportunity to answer that question and explain why the legislation was not amended when flaws were exposed and why there were no proper consultations with first nations, as many of my colleagues alluded to earlier in this debate.

Unfortunately, one of the strongest criticisms of Bill S-6 was on the absence of any meaningful consultation. For instance, the Council of Yukon First Nations, which represents eleven self-governing first nations, has made it clear that the Conservative government's consultations for the bill were not adequate to merit its support.

That is no surprise, as this particular government has a history of pushing through unwelcome changes in the territories.

For instance, with Bill C-15 the Conservatives passed the Northwest Territories Devolution Act. While devolution was started under a Liberal government, and we strongly supported that process, the much larger second part of the bill included the introduction of the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act, which shortened assessment timelines, reduced the role of first nations, and made it easier to approve projects that lacked local support. That was certainly a shame to many of the stakeholders involved and a shame to us here in this House.

The proposed changes in Bill S-6, which we debate today, follow this path of a top-down, Ottawa-centred approach to dealing with the territories. That is the opposite of how Liberals approach northern development.

• (1235)

The Liberal Party of Canada believes that a sustainably developed resource sector is essential to the success of our economy and, if we get it right, will serve as an important foundation for future economic growth and job creation for middle-class Canadians. Our party supports developing resources in the north in a sustainable manner.

Unlike the Conservatives, we recognize that unlocking this economic engine is contingent on environmental sustainability and on impacted aboriginal communities being treated as equal partners. That approach has not been followed in this case. Many people in Yukon and Nunavut believe that Bill S-6 would have a negative impact on their lives and their communities, and they are upset with what the government is trying to pass off as what it considers to be meaningful consultation.

Here is what Grand Chief Ruth Massie of the Council of Yukon First Nations told the committee when it held hearings on the legislation in the north. She said:

The federal government's approach on Bill S-6 is a roadblock to reconciliation. Participants in mining, tourism, and other industries are concerned about how Bill S-6 might adversely affect the future for resource development in Yukon.

Grand Chief Massie went on to say that all eleven self-governing nations on the council unanimously oppose four provisions in the legislation. She said:

We oppose giving the minister full power to issue binding policy direction to the YESAB as proposed in clause 34 of Bill S-6...

On timelines, we oppose the establishment of beginning-to-end timelines for assessments conducted under YESAA.

On exemption from assessment for project renewals and amendments, we oppose the proposed exemption from assessment for renewals and amendments of licences and permits as proposed in clause 14 of Bill S-6.

Clearly there are issues with this legislation and clearly it is not just first nations communities that are concerned. Allison Rippin Armstrong, vice-president of lands and environment at Kaminak Gold Corporation, is worried that Bill S-6 may put a chill on investment in the north. Kaminak, a Canadian exploration company that has owned and explored mineral properties in all three territories, wants an accessible and stable regulatory regime. However, Ms. Rippin Armstrong told the committee that her company is worried that the process through which YESAA would be amended is creating increased distrust and the potential for legal action.

Here is her testimony. She said:

Kaminak is very concerned about this development, because court cases create assessment and regulatory uncertainty in addition to extraordinary delay, all of which erodes investor confidence.

She went on to tell the committee once again that:

Our Coffee gold project has yet to enter the YESAA process. If Bill S-6 is passed and challenged in court, the Coffee gold project and our presence in Yukon is uncertain. Kaminak urges the federal government to resume discussions with the first nations to work collectively toward reaching consensus on the proposed amendments to YESAA and avoid a court challenge.

That is good advice, but it went unheard. Why is the Conservative government not listening to what it is being told and fixing the flaws in this bill? It is obvious that members on the opposite side believe they can unilaterally impose the government's will on the north.

As my colleague from Labrador said when she spoke on Bill S-6, history has already demonstrated that resource development can be environmentally conscious, while also finding trilateral support among aboriginal governments, territorial and federal governments, and the local communities. This, indeed, is the only way to move forward with resource development. It is not just a moral obligation; it is, truly, a legal one.

The member for Labrador was correct when she said:

Unfortunately, despite spending years of working with Yukon first nations on a comprehensive review of the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act, the federal government blindsided them earlier this year with a number of key changes that are contained in this bill and were not discussed throughout the process.

If the Conservative government persists in ramming these changes through, many observers believe that they will only create more local uncertainty and jeopardize development of the north.

Government Orders

•(1240)

Samson Hartland, the executive director of the Yukon Chamber of Mines, noted his organization enjoys a positive, constructive relationship. He told the committee that the chamber's 400 members want all levels of government to move toward a more respectful dialogue.

We must return to the original, respectful, and collaborative partnership with all aboriginal communities, including recognition of their inherent and treaty rights.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member reading his speech which, I am assuming, had some input from the member for Labrador, who was actually at the committee hearings in Yukon.

I am a little perplexed, though. He represented the Liberals' report stage lead speech, and Liberals expressed a number of concerns, but they did not move any amendments at report stage. In fact, amendments were moved by the official opposition and the leader of the Green Party, but those did go forward.

My question is this: why did the Liberals not move any amendments? In committee, they were okay with the ideas of time limits and significant change, two of the four amendments that he referenced.

•(1245)

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, the irony is that the member asks his question under the assumption that these amendments are normally approved by the current majority government. Unfortunately, that is not the case. We talked about consultation in the committee process that took place and, of course, about the lack of consultation. There is a duty to consult, which has not been sufficient, by any stretch of the imagination, over the past number of years. Since the Conservatives came into power in 2006, we have seen scant evidence that this was actually happening. Here is yet another case.

I quoted several individuals from the private sector who are quite concerned about this in terms of investor confidence. That is in addition to first nations leaders, who also talked about the environmental regulatory regime that is being undermined. It goes on and on.

Again I go back to the point that if we think about this, what ails all of the people involved in the committee process really could have been dealt with up front. It could have been dealt with in a meaningful conversation or, in this case, consultation could have taken place to justify some of the changes that could have been made.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, New Democrats share the concerns that my friend has raised about consultation or the lack of it, but what is a little surprising to me is that the people of the north were asking for the Senate committee to go there for consultations, but the Liberals in the Senate did not support it. I am wondering if the member could enlighten us as to why.

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, the member will have to ask those particular senators.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Liberal Party has been a very strong advocate for the economic and social development in northern Canada. My question to my colleague is with regard to the importance of having that development, the impact it would have not only on today's generation but on future generations, and how important it is that we not only work with people who live in the community but actually listen to what they are saying, because they have the first-hand experience and are on the ground. If we do the job right the first time, everyone in Canada would win.

I wonder if the member would like to comment on the importance of working with people.

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, there has been some talk lately about devolution, not only in Bill S-6 but also in Bill C-15. We talked about the devolution of powers to communities. In order to truly devolve powers so that it is fundamentally good for the communities, the communities have to be involved and feel that they are part of the process, whether it is government to government or trilaterally, as the member for Labrador pointed out.

Finally, I would like to point out a statement from Mr. Hartland, of whom I spoke earlier and who is with the Yukon Chamber of Mines. He said:

...as an industry organization we would be remiss if we did not articulate a concern from industry that the erosion of intergovernmental relations among parties...over Bill S-6 is creating a level of uncertainty that affects the attractiveness of Yukon as a jurisdiction to invest in.

This particular individual is on the ground. He is in the chamber in Yukon and knows whereof he speaks.

Therefore, as my colleague points out, if we are devolving powers to a group of people, we should probably do it in a manner that suits the people receiving the devolution.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to speak to this legislation. After years of review and consultation with first nations and other northerners, with the legislation proposed in Bill S-6 we can now move forward with improvements to northern regulatory regimes. These improvements will yield long-term benefits for individuals and businesses in Yukon and Nunavut.

I am a strong believer that northerners should benefit from the tremendous natural resources found in their region. Bill S-6 contains critical amendments to northern regulatory regimes that would ensure that northerners benefit from their resources. These amendments would bring both Yukon and Nunavut's regulatory systems in line with that of the Northwest Territories and the rest of Canada. This would ensure that the territories remained a competitive and attractive place to work, live, and invest for generations to come and that northern families had opportunities to grow and prosper.

I want to focus on several changes in Bill S-6 that would modernize the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act, called YESAA for short, which would enable us to make progress on both fronts.

The goal of the proposed legislation is to consider the potential effects that proposed development could have on Yukon's environment, people, communities, and economy.

Government Orders

The Honourable Darrell Pasloski, Premier of Yukon, said:

...it is becoming increasingly clear that changes to this legislation before you today are essential in order for Yukon to remain a competitive place to do business.

This work is overseen by the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board, whose mission is to protect the environmental and social integrity of Yukon while fostering responsible development in the territory, responsible development that reflects the values of Yukoners and respects the contributions of first nations.

I would like to focus my remarks today on one portion of the bill. It is the provision that would allow the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development to issue policy direction to the YESAA board.

The proposed legislation would enable the minister, following consultation with the board, to provide binding policy direction with respect to the exercise or performance of its powers, duties, or functions. This has raised concerns in some quarters that it would give the federal government authority to impose its own policies on projects on first nation settlement land. I can assure members that this is not the intention of the amendment nor the way it has been used in practice. In reality, policy directions have been used to add clarity and to ensure that all parties are on the same page with respect to existing laws.

The reason the change is being proposed is to ensure a common understanding between the Government of Canada and the board. For example, the minister could use policy direction to communicate expectations regarding the use of new technologies to mitigate environmental impacts or expectations regarding roles and responsibilities related to aboriginal consultation. This clarification would reduce uncertainty and delays in environmental assessment decision-making.

In recognition of the board's independence, there would be strict limits on the minister's ability to provide policy direction. To be precise, policy direction would have to be consistent with YESAA and with the Umbrella Final Agreement. In fact, YESAA states that first nations' final agreements will prevail in the event of an inconsistency or conflict. Furthermore, policy direction could not interfere with active or completed reviews, again because the board operates at arm's length from government.

To be clear, policy direction could not change the environmental assessment process itself. In fact, Bill S-6 explicitly states that policy directions do not apply to project proposals that have already been submitted to the board.

It is also important to note that the ability to issue policy direction is not without precedent. In fact, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development already holds the ability to issue policy direction to the Mackenzie Valley Land and Water Board in the Northwest Territories. With respect to this board, policy direction has only ever been used four times, and each time it was to ensure that the board respected and upheld interim agreements the Government of Canada held with aboriginal groups.

● (1250)

In short, policy direction has only been used to provide additional protection for aboriginals.

Clearly, this is an important amendment to Bill S-6. The ability to ensure a common understanding by the government and the YESAA board, particularly with respect to aboriginal rights, is essential. Unfortunately, the opposition would remove this power from the bill.

This government understands the importance of protecting aboriginal rights, which is why I strongly oppose Motion No. 10, and I would encourage the rest of the House to join me in rejecting it.

A second, related feature of this proposed legislation I want to comment on is the delegation of federal powers to the Government of Yukon. The Umbrella Final Agreement defines government as:

Canada or the Yukon, or both, depending upon which government or governments have responsibility, from time to time, for the matter in question.

The delegation of federal powers to the Government of Yukon is consistent with the final agreements and with the governance regime in Yukon post-devolution. In fact, section 2.11.8 of the Yukon Umbrella Final Agreement states:

Government may determine, from time to time, how and by whom any power or authority of Government or a Minister set out in a Settlement Agreement...shall be exercised.

Moreover, the principle behind this delegation, that decisions about northern governance are best made in the north, is consistent with our government's northern strategy. In fact, just last year, our government brought into force Bill C-15, which devolved all responsibility for lands and resources out of Ottawa and back to the territorial governments.

This, in short, is why I believe that the ability to delegate authority to the Government of Yukon is an integral component of Bill S-6 and why I am so disappointed to see the Green Party oppose this clause. I strongly oppose the passage of that motion, and I hope that all members of the House join me in voting against it.

The opposition actually supported that initiative when it was before the House, but now they are opposing the very same principle when implemented in the Yukon.

I remind my hon. colleagues that the amendments to YESAA proposed in Bill S-6 address agreed upon recommendations from the five-year review or have been directly requested by the Government of Yukon so that the act can better serve all residents of Yukon, aboriginal and non-aboriginal alike. As well, the proposed amendments incorporate suggestions made during the various rounds of review and consultation.

I also want to underline that all parties have improved the legislation before us during the years of consultation and I want to reinforce that the legislation in no way compromises the integrity of YESAA or conflicts with the provisions or nature of the Umbrella Final Agreement.

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For these reasons, government members are confident that Bill S-6, including the carefully constructed amendments to introduce policy direction and delegation in YESAA, fully considers the needs and interests of all northerners.

I strongly believe that the ability of the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development to issue policy direction to YESAB and to delegate authority to the Government of Yukon is an essential portion of this bill. Unfortunately, the opposition would like to see both clauses removed. I am asking all hon. colleagues to join me in defeating the motions and moving Bill S-6 forward as it stands.

• (1255)

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Red Deer for his speech, for everything he is doing on aboriginal affairs, and for how he is moving this file forward.

I wonder if the member could explain to the House how this will improve economic development in Yukon as this bill moves through the House.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity a number of years ago, when I was first on the aboriginal affairs and northern development committee, to go to the north. We were in Iqaluit, Yellowknife, and Whitehorse. I had a chance to speak to different groups and different organizations.

The study was on barriers to development in the north. While we were there, this was one of the key, important features people were talking about. They said to give them that opportunity. They said that they had great entrepreneurs there and did not want to be held back. They wanted to be able to have the same advantages as the people south of 60. It was so important for them to be able to do that to help their families.

When we were talking to folks about what these barriers were, these were some of the key components that were being brought forward.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we recognize the importance of economic development. I have made reference to that in previous questions. It is something we want to see. However, we also recognize the important role the community itself plays.

Can the member provide some thoughts on the importance of trying to build consensus and whether he genuinely believes that consensus was achieved, given the amount of resistance coming from the community, from what I understand, at the ground level and the many stakeholders being somewhat critical? The aboriginal people and other communities have been very vocal about a number of concerns in regard to the legislation. To what degree does the member believe that the government was able to achieve an actual consensus?

• (1300)

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Mr. Speaker, of course, as the member knows, the consultations were all consistent with the Umbrella Final Agreement, so all of the discussions were taking place within that framework.

I remember earlier that the parliamentary secretary was speaking of the \$100,000 that was there to help the consultations take place. Critical to this, as well, is recognizing that the Government of Canada, as far as policy directives are concerned, has been in support of our aboriginal groups in the north. That is a critical component. Sometimes we hear that we are giving this opportunity for other things and for negative things to occur, because it is easier to talk that way. However, when we look at the practicality and the actual things the government has been doing with the northerners, it has been to protect. Whether it has been environmental issues or aboriginal wishes and concerns to help their communities, there has been great support from our government.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure and a certain amount of emotion that I speak to Bill S-6. My heart has a soft spot for Yukon and its people.

In 1976, I first went to Yukon to undertake a study on the feasibility of expanding youth hostels. For those of us who remember the late 1970s, it was a time of youth migration across this great country. My task was to see if we could set up a network of centres or hostels to accommodate these young people. That was my first opportunity to visit this magnificent area of Canada. I went for a few months and stayed for five years, perhaps the happiest and most rewarding of my life.

My next job involved working with the Yukon recreation branch, which at that time came under the Department of Education. The minister at the time, a current senator for Yukon, was Senator Dan Lang. I fondly remember spending time in his office trying to get support for various initiatives that our branch was working on. Now we see each other occasionally on flights to and from Ottawa. However, unfortunately we do not agree on Bill S-6.

One of the initiatives that I had the pleasure of working on, an idea that came from the director of recreation at that time, Barry Robb, was that of implementing a network of territory-wide recreation and advisory boards that would be all inclusive. We tried and were successful in involving all communities, with first nation participation as equals, helping to break down some of the barriers that existed at that time.

What is puzzling is that this type of consultation process has apparently been lacking in regard to the bill before us. As I read my notes, I find it very troubling that the Conservative government is once again attempting to ram its ideologically driven agenda through without taking into account the needs of all citizens of Yukon.

Yukon is a majestic area with an extraordinary landscape, wide open spaces unequalled anywhere in the world, and with a dynamic proud people. While there, I spent many hours visiting various communities, from Dawson City to Watson Lake. I even had the pleasure of flying into Old Crow in the Arctic Circle. At that time, we had functioning mines in Elsa and Faro. I even spent a few months working as recreation direction in Elsa.

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Bill S-6 would unilaterally rework Yukon's environmental and socio-economic evaluation system, a system which is a product of the Umbrella Final Agreement, which settled most of the first nations land claims in the territory. The Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act, YESAA, is a made-in-Yukon solution to the unique environmental and social circumstances of the territory.

It is clear to see that the changes proposed in Bill S-6 are being driven by what I would call the corporate agenda of southern resource development companies. The bill would dismantle the environmental and socio-economic assessment process developed in Yukon, by Yukoners for Yukon.

In my opinion, it is part of the Conservative ideologically driven agenda to systematically weaken environmental protection legislation, with no public consultation, little or no parliamentary security, and often being buried in omnibus budget legislation. Some examples of weakened environmental laws include the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, Fisheries Act, navigable waters protection act, and Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act.

It is interesting to note that four former fisheries ministers, three of them Conservative, have been highly critical of the gutting of the Fisheries Act by the current Conservative government. I would like to recognize one of these individuals, the hon. Tom Siddon, who continues to serve his constituents as a director with the Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen.

As I mentioned earlier, there was incomplete consultation with Yukon first nations before these amendments were made. I find it hard to believe that there was no public process while developing these amendments. At the same time, non-Yukon stakeholders, including the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada, Mining Association of Canada, Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, and the Canadian Energy Pipeline Association were allowed input.

It appears as if the Yukon government, with support from the Conservative MP and senator, pushed this deal through in spite of considerable opposition to the changes from Yukoners and the Council of Yukon First Nations. In other words, these amendments favour the Yukon government over the Yukon first nations, the other partner in the YESAA process.

● (1305)

There should not be this kind of division. What is more, the Council of Yukon First Nations has threatened legal action should the bill become law. Ironically, instead of favouring development, Bill S-6 could wind up slowing it down.

Let us listen to what Allison Rippin Armstrong, vice-president of lands and environment at Kaminak Gold Corporation has to say:

...Kaminak is concerned that the process through which YESAA is being amended is creating distrust between governments and uncertainty in the assessment and regulatory process for current and future projects in Yukon.

Specifically, the YESAA five-year review resulted in a number of recommendations, most of which were supported by the parties involved in the review, including Yukon first nations. We understand that some of the proposed amendments do not accurately reflect comments and recommendations raised during the five-year review, and as a result, instead of celebrating a historic alignment between the governments and the Yukon first nations on most of the proposed amendments to YESAA, Yukon

first nations have expressed a common position that they intend to take the federal government to court, if Bill S-6 is passed as proposed.

Kaminak is very concerned about this development, because court cases create assessments and regulatory uncertainty in addition to extraordinary delay, all of which erodes investor confidence.

In these difficult economic times, why would any government even consider implementing measures that would encourage economic uncertainty? It would seem to me that a stable environment supported by first nations should be a necessary prerequisite to any shift in policy.

Former Yukon MP Larry Bagnell spoke in the House to the original bill creating YESAA on October 21, 2002. He said:

Much of that time has been spent in consultation with stakeholder groups and, as a result, we have a much better bill and much better process than might otherwise be the case. First nations in particular will have a more meaningful role in assessments in Yukon.

It is safe to say that virtually everyone in Yukon had an opportunity to comment on the bill and many did.

Larry talked about how the department released drafts of the legislation in 1998 and 2001 for public review and undertook two separate tours to meet with first nations and other residents to review and discuss these drafts. He went on to say:

This took time, but it was time well spent. Those in Yukon who participated believe the process was inclusive, transparent and worthwhile.

Why is it that a former Liberal majority government made an effort to adequately consult prior to introducing legislation where our current conservative regime has chosen to disregard the democratic process?

Speaking of the lack of respect for democracy, one only has to look at how the Canadian Wheat Board was gutted in spite of support for the single desk by over 60% of farmers, or the complete rejection of over 20 amendments proposed by the NDP and Liberals to strengthen the food safety act, Bill S-11, or most recently the way that Bill C-51 was rammed through, in spite of the fact that knowledgeable witnesses spoke out against these draconian measures. Clearly Canadians are asking for a change. This will happen in October, but sorry for that digression.

Ruth Massie, Grand Chief, Council of Yukon First Nations said this when appearing before the Standing Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources:

Pursuant to the UFA, the CYFN, including Yukon First Nations, Canada and Yukon undertook a comprehensive review of YESAA. Initially, CYFN, Yukon First Nations, Canada and Yukon worked collaboratively to prepare the interim YESAA review report. In the end, Canada unilaterally finalized the report and systematically rejected the input from the CYFN and Yukon First Nations.

The proposed amendments in front of the Senate today were not discussed in the five-year review process with Canada and the Yukon government.

● (1310)

Mary Jane Jim, councillor, Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, said:

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...it is our view that YESAA has been operating effectively and efficiently since its enactment in 2003. The federal government now works to unilaterally make additional amendments to the YESAA. We did not request these amendments, nor do we support them. These amendments are not necessary.

Let me close by saying that I believe this is not a good precedent in these difficult times. I urge all members of the House to reject this flawed piece of legislation.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think we can all agree in this House about the beauty of the Yukon and the potential opportunity for the people who live there, and for economic development, if it is done the right way. What we are proposing in the bill are ways to make that happen.

One of the issues that the member mentioned was policy direction, and I want to hone in on that specifically. The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs has the right to set binding policy direction in the Northwest Territories. This minister has never used it; previous ministers have used it to protect aboriginal rights.

When we were in Yukon, the member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing said protecting aboriginal rights, though the minister did it through binding policy direction, was actually “paternalistic”.

Does the member agree that protecting aboriginal rights is paternalistic? Why does he want to take away the minister's ability to protect aboriginal rights by supporting Motion No. 10, which would take away policy direction?

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, that is a logical question. However, if we look at the process and see that one group of people, namely the first nations in Yukon, do not agree with that, then in my mind that should trigger that there is something wrong. It then becomes another top-heavy federal government decision that people are not supporting. There is something wrong with it.

Obviously the protection should be there, but it should be worked out and agreed upon by all stakeholders. In reading my notes and discussing the bill, my conclusion is that has not happened, and that is one of the flaws of the amendments on this piece of legislation.

• (1315)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I suspect the member's assessment that it has not happened is quite correct. I posed a question to the former Conservative speaker in terms of whether he felt that the government was successful at achieving a consensus, and he did not indicate that the government had achieved that consensus.

Given the importance of the legislation we are debating here today, would he not agree—and in listening to his comments, I am sure he would, so it would allow him to embellish on some of his earlier comments—on how important this is when we are dealing with regional economic type of bills that would affect the lives of all northerners, and the environment, economic development, and so forth? Has the government missed an opportunity to bring forward legislation in which there could have been a much broader consensus so that everyone would be feeling part of something, as opposed to it coming down from Ottawa?

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my Liberal colleague for his excellent question. I have notes here that I have not had a chance to talk about, such as various stakeholders

who believe that this consensus, this consultation, did not take place. One of them is Mr. Felix Geithner, director, Tourism Industry Association of the Yukon. He said:

The most pertinent question isn't why Bill S-6 should be prevented from being passed but why was it ever put forward in the first place, in its current form?

He goes on to say:

The reason he provided for introducing a bill that proposes sweeping changes to a fundamental part of this regulatory regime was the need to involve and maintain a competitive and predictable regulatory system.

However, this is not what is taking place. In fact, it is just the opposite.

We have already heard what Ms. Allison Rippin Armstrong of Kaminak Gold Corporation said. I did not have a chance to talk about Chief Steve Smith of the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, or Ms. Wendy Randall, chair and executive committee member of the Yukon Environmental Socio-economic Assessment Board, or Chief Angela Demit, and we could go on and on.

There is a groundswell of opposition to these amendments and this bill, so why on earth would the current government even consider putting this legislation forward?

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today. As chair of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, it is particularly important for me to have the opportunity to speak to Bill S-6 today at report stage.

As chair of the committee, I had the privilege of travelling to Whitehorse with the committee to hear directly from Yukoners about the legislation. From this experience, it is clear to me that Bill S-6 certainly has the potential to have a profound impact on the economic development in Yukon and Nunavut. I am proud to have a chance to explain to the House why I believe this to be the case.

Our Conservative government takes great pride in our commitment to Canada's north. In fact, our northern strategy has increased funding for infrastructure, protected Canada's Arctic sovereignty and had ensured that we remain a world leader in northern science and technology. A large part of this strategy involves our work to improve northern regulatory regimes.

Improving the regulatory process in the north is something that our government has been working on and accomplishing since we came into office. Improvements began through the Northern Jobs and Growth Act, continued in the Northwest Territories through the Northwest Territories Devolution Act, and will be completed by strengthening regulatory regimes in Yukon and Nunavut.

Bill S-6 would strengthen these regimes by making effected regulatory frameworks strong, effective, efficient and predictable.

Let me quote the Hon. Darrell Pasloski, the Premier of Yukon, who said:

The amended legislation will be more consistent with other Canadian jurisdictions and will put Yukon in a stronger competitive position to achieve more economic growth, jobs and prosperity for all Yukoners.

That is a clear statement.

Government Orders

The changes proposed in this bill will encourage resource development and ensure sound environmental stewardship. In the case of Yukon, Bill S-6 would make a number of improvements to the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act, commonly referred to as YESAA.

The first of these changes I will discuss is the implementation of the principle of “one project, one assessment”. If passed, Bill S-6 will ensure that a new assessment of an existing project will only be required if there has been a significant modification to the project as it was originally assessed. This will certainly reduce duplication of work for proponents and evaluators, while retaining the integrity of the environmental assessment. This is the sort of practical approach that demonstrates our government is protecting Canada's environmental heritage.

It is for this reason that I strongly oppose Motion No. 4. I encourage other members to do the same. The member for the Northwest Territories who proposes to remove this principle from Bill S-6 only provides further proof that a New Democratic government would hinder future economic development in Yukon and all across the North. .

In addition to the introduction of the “one project, one assessment” principle, I would like to take this opportunity to discuss how the bill would further improve the regulatory system and drive economic development in Yukon.

Bill S-6 would introduce to YESAA beginning-to-end legislative timelines for environmental assessments. This would align the territory's regime with other federal environmental assessment laws across the north and in the rest of Canada.

Regulations under YESAA already set out certain time limits for decision time making, and Bill S-6 would enshrine these in legislation. These legislated time limits are an effective way to provide predictability and certainty for proponents, regulators, governments and first nations, without sacrificing the integrity of the evaluation process and safeguarding environmental protection.

I believe the motions regarding the removal of timelines in Bill S-6, specifically Motions Nos. 5, 6, 7 and 8 proposed by the member of Parliament for the Northwest Territories, would actually hinder economic development and growth in Yukon. Passing these motions and removing the associated clauses will prevent important regulatory improvements from coming into force.

Our government understands that timelines will improve proponent and investor confidence, provide certainty and consistency to the regulatory process and will ensure efficiency at all stages.

● (1320)

The time limits introduced in Bill S-6 would improve proponent and investor confidence, provide consistency and transparency to the process and gain efficiency at all stages of the process. We know from other jurisdictions that these are all vital pieces of an effective regulatory regime and that they will help to drive economic development in Yukon. Ensuring timely decision making can have a significant impact on the well-being of northern communities.

In a highly competitive global marketplace, businesses need assurance of when their projects will move from approvals to the

construction phase, and not be delayed unnecessarily by the duplication of regulatory processes. Too many delays may make a proponent look elsewhere, which means a community or first nation could see an opportunity pass by.

The Standing Senate Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources heard these same arguments last fall from industry and territorial government witnesses commenting on Bill S-6. For example, Samson Hartland, executive director of the Yukon Chamber of Mines, described the introduction of time limits as:

—probably the most important aspect of this bill to our membership. The definitive beginning-to-end timelines create certainty and allow for consistency from coast to coast to coast for proponents, regardless of where they are doing business — in the Yukon or N.W.T. It is so important for proponents to have consistency and regularity when dealing with and preparing for their project activities.

The time limits contained in Bill S-6 would provide proponents with that consistency, which would lay the ground work for economic growth and development in Yukon. This is why I strongly oppose the passage of Motions Nos. 5, 6, 7, and 8. Despite being well aware that this legislation would benefit Yukon, the opposition continues to ignore residents in Canada's westernmost territory. Fortunately, the member of Parliament for Yukon is working hard to provide Yukoners with the best representation they have had in years.

While I object to all of the motions that the opposition has brought forward today, I take particular exception to Motion No. 5, which would remove time limits for designated office assessments. Moreover, it would also prevent the inclusion of the concept of reasonably foreseeable activities in the scope of cumulative effects of projects. While this may appear to be a very technical point, it is important to remember that this concept was actually a recommendation from the YESAA five-year review that was agreed to by Canada, the Government of Yukon and Yukon first nations. Removing provisions of the bill that have been jointly agreed to by all three parties to the Yukon Umbrella Final Agreement represents a step backward in Canada's relationship with the first nations of Yukon.

These regulatory improvements would create the certainty and predictability needed for responsible resource development projects to proceed. Our government is committed to jobs, growth and long-term prosperity in the north. The legislation before the House today would play a large role in achieving these outcomes by simultaneously driving economic development and protecting Canada's environmental heritage.

I urge members from all parties to support Bill S-6 as it stands now, and to reject Motions Nos. 5, 6, 7 and 8.

● (1325)

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member talked about support from the people of Yukon, but the director of the Tourism Industry Association of the Yukon is on record objecting to this legislation, saying that the existing rules have been a model for the country and now we have something going on, which would change the arrangements that have existed for some time. He says:

Government Orders

From TIA Yukon's perspective, Bill S-6 is a shoddy piece of legislation that sows discord rather than the certainty it sets out to create. More than this, the proponents of this bill have set an adversarial tone in Yukon with Yukon first nations and a number of key organizations and businesses through their attempt to ram it through without adequate consultation. Consultation requires twoway communication. If one party doesn't believe that there was adequate consultation, then there was not adequate consultation.

I could read other quotes from industry players from mining operations, people who are quite dissatisfied with this process, that the certainty the bill claims will not arrive and will, in fact, make things worse and not better. What does the member have to say to that?

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, the best response I could provide the member would certainly be to ask him the question. What do he and his party have against the idea of greater powers and certainty in the processes and devolution of the ability to make these decisions at the local level? I cannot possibly imagine what opposition they would have to that. Certainly, in my mind, creating better predictability, better certainty and proper timelines around this would give proper confidence to industry and also to Yukoners and first nations alike, an opportunity to make the decisions about what should move forward in their territory at the local level.

Since he wants to throw quotes around, I want to remind him of a quote I have already read in the House, a very important one in my mind, by the premier of Yukon, who was very clear when he stated:

The amended legislation will be more consistent with other Canadian jurisdictions and will put Yukon in a stronger competitive position to achieve more economic growth, jobs and prosperity for all Yukoners

It is a very clear statement and I cannot imagine what the NDP could possibly have against the idea of more economic growth, more jobs and more prosperity for Yukoners.

• (1330)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, those were interesting comments from the member. He tried to turn the question around. If he wants to talk about the issue of devolution, Jean Chrétien did far more in working with the different stakeholders in trying to build consensus toward devolution.

My question for the member is the one that was just posed for the member with regard to consensus. In fact, the government has been unable to achieve a consensus within the community, which would have enabled better legislation. Why has the government been unable to achieve the consensus?

Mr. Blake Richards: I will give a two-part response to that, Mr. Speaker.

First, the member made some assertion about the previous Liberal government and what it had done for the north. I know all northerners are quite well aware of the fact that no government in Canadian history has done more for the north than this government under our Prime Minister. This legislation is further proof of that. We are talking about creating conditions that would encourage investment, that would lead to jobs, growth and long-term prosperity for Yukoners, those in Nunavut, and northerners alike.

I find it really troublesome to hear those kinds of claims from the other side, that they oppose the ability for northerners to see that kind of certainty, predictability, and the opportunities for jobs and growth. It obviously concerns me that all opposition parties would

oppose something that would do so much for the north. It is further proof that this government will do what is necessary to ensure the north has the opportunity to have jobs, growth and prosperity.

The member attempted to cast some kind of doubt on the fact that a lot of consultation took place. As the chair of the committee, a considerable amount of time was spent by the committee hearing from witnesses and people through Yukon, a large number of witnesses, and had all kinds of opportunities to consult. A lot of consultation took place prior to that. Therefore, to indicate there was no consultation is an absolute farce.

Our government will continue to work to ensure jobs, growth and economic prosperity for all Yukoners and all across the north.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill S-6, an act to amend the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act and the Nunavut Waters and Nunavut Surface Rights Tribunal Act, which is before this House at report stage.

It is a bill that arises out of fulfilment of the obligation of the Yukon Umbrella Final Agreement on the one hand and the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement on the other hand, because two acts are amended in this legislation. The Nunavut one is less controversial. In fact, there is no serious objection to it, but the Yukon one is quite different.

Let me say first, there is a bad history of the Government of Canada, both Liberal and Conservative, in dealing with agreements that had been signed with aboriginal peoples in the Northwest Territories, in the north in general. The Nunavut Land Claims Agreement was signed in 1993 by the Liberal government. In very short order, a failure to actually carry out the terms of the agreement ultimately led to a court case that went on for years and years and was only settled in the last month or two by the present government, which had resisted settling that since it has been around in 2006.

We have a history of not honouring the agreements that have been signed. In this case, the Yukon umbrella agreement was signed and part of it was put into place under the Yukon Umbrella Final Agreement. The five-year review was scheduled to be held, initiated in 2007 and completed in 2012. The agreement was never made public because of a disagreement. The final consultations took place on this, but the amendments that are put forth to establish an assessment process were never discussed with the people of the Yukon.

We now have what is being called by Yukoners an imposed agreement dismantling the environment and socio-economic assessment process, which was developed in the Yukon by Yukoners for the Yukon. The message we are getting from the people of the Yukon is that the Conservative government, with the full assistance of the Yukon MP and the senator for Yukon, is forcing a pro-southern resource company agenda unilaterally down the throats of Yukoners.

Government Orders

That is the assessment that we have, based on what we are hearing from the people of the Yukon in terms of the level of consultation, the failure to listen to what they were told, the failure to actually consult them and actually running roughshod over the arrangements that had been made between the aboriginal peoples of the Yukon and the Government of Canada in the establishment of this process.

There are significant concerns about the following amendments that are being imposed here, one which would provide the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development with the authority to provide binding policy direction to the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board. This is a supposedly independent board that came about as a result of discussions and negotiations out of the land claims agreement and the Final Umbrella Agreement, and now we would have the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development make binding policy directives.

How does that maintain the relationship between the aboriginal people, the Yukon government and the Government of Canada in this particular process?

It has been said here that it is only to ensure that the aboriginal rights are being protected, but that is not what the legislation says. It says that the minister is given this unilateral power to make this decision.

There is also a provision to introduce legislative time limits for assessments. There is no real necessity for that. In fact, as has been expressed by people who are very familiar with the process, that kind of approach of applying a beginning-to-end timeline was objected to, which is interesting, because we would think that a timeline would actually speed up the consultation and assessment process.

• (1335)

For example, Millie Olsen, Deputy Chief of First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun, said:

YESAA currently has timelines for assessors to review each iteration. This approach encourages proponents to prepare comprehensive applications that minimize iterations. Proponents who prepare adequate applications quickly are rewarded under the current process because they can proceed quickly.

On the other hand, the Bill S-6 approach of applying a beginning-to-end timeline will reward proponents who prolong the adequacy review phase by using up time with multiple iterations. The approach will penalize assessors and reviewers like first nations because it will shorten the most important public review phase, infringing on our right for comprehensive reviews of projects.

That is how the distortion and arguments occur, where the proponents of Bill S-6 say there will be timelines for certainty but the timelines actually serve to choke off public consultation and prevent the actual meat of the review process, which is consultation with the aboriginal people. That is obviously nefarious. In fact, Mr. Felix Geithner, Director of the Tourism Industry Association of Yukon, called Bill S-6 “a shoddy piece of legislation”. He said it:

...sows discord rather than the certainty it sets out to create. More than this, the proponents of this bill have set an adversarial tone in Yukon with Yukon first nations and a number of key organizations and businesses....

Therefore, when we are talking about legislation that is supposed to be designed to improve things, actually going the other way, which comes from Ottawa, not from Yukoners themselves, then we know there is a problem with Bill S-6.

Why is it called Bill S-6? It is because it originated in the other place. I do not know why the legislation is coming here from the Senate. Why is it not coming from the House of Commons? It is appalling that we have a system where the Senate of Canada is initiating legislation and we get it afterward. It has done the sober second thought first. I am not sure how that works. What are we doing? We are doing the sober second thought on the Senate.

• (1340)

Mr. Pat Martin: Who elected them?

Mr. Jack Harris: Who elected them, Mr. Speaker? That is a very good question. I think one person elected all of them, or 59 of them anyway. There were various other people who elected the others.

I will not dwell on that, but I just wanted to point out that what we are dealing with here is Senate legislation.

We have heard objections. We had this from Chief Angela Demit, chief of the White River First Nation, who said:

We participated in meetings with Canada about the changes to YESAA. Through that experience we have understood that the changes being proposed by Canada have much more to do with an agenda made in Ottawa than with the recommendations that came out of the YESAA five-year review process.

These are the kinds of comments we are getting.

Chief Doris Bill, chief of the Kwanlin Dun First Nation said:

Providing a single party with authority to direct the board is fundamentally inconsistent with any legislation that stems from our tripartite treaties. While the treaties obligate Canada to enact YESAA, it does not own YESAA and cannot choose to dictate its own policies on the independent assessment body.

Why is this being done? It is obviously being done to control the board and the process, not to ensure that the agreement has been fulfilled. It would create broad exemptions from YESAA for renewals and amendments of permits of authorizations. Once a permit exemption is granted it cannot be amended, fixed or changed. That is tying people's hands and not giving them the authority they have.

I note that my time is quickly up, but I am prepared to entertain any questions.

If those four provisions were removed from the bill I am told by the critic responsible we would pass the bill. Therefore, it can be fixed. Why do we not just fix it here and pass the bill with the amendments?

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we are interested in economic development and certainly the Yukon has vast mineral resources. We saw a report that came out this year that Yukon has slipped in terms of its competitiveness among the worldwide mining attractiveness jurisdictions. It was first when devolution occurred and is down to ninth now. The report cited that because of an unpredictable regulatory regime, it had fallen behind the rest of Canada even, in terms of competitiveness.

Government Orders

Is that something that concerns the member and if so would he not agree that this bill addresses that and we should pass it as soon as possible?

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, of course we agree with having a proper process, but one that allows for development and proper assessment. The problem we have here is that the Government of Canada is taking an approach that overrides the participation of the aboriginal people in this process over their objections, creating uncertainty. It does not solve the problem because it creates further uncertainty. We have representatives of the Yukon industry and communities in general saying that this would create more uncertainty and in fact would hurt what is happening.

The proper solution here is to have adequate consultation to ensure that the process is fixed. If the Conservatives are not willing to do that, then they should not be imposing this against the rights of the aboriginal people who participated in the process to create this board in the first place.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Northwest Territories, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for Wild Rose raised the issue about the significance of any adverse community, environmental or socio-economic effects that have occurred or might occur in conjunction with the project, and that this section was removed by our amendments. However, that is actually clause 9 in the bill and it still remains.

Could my colleague comment on why the Conservative government might be trying to create some kind of doubt about the nature of our amendments at this time and trying to mislead the House about what we have taken out in these amendments?

• (1345)

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, obviously that is a common tactic that we hear, one of creating confusion about what is going on. However, we need to know that the common thread of argument in the Yukon is best expressed by Ms. Allison Armstrong who is vice-president of lands and environment for the Kaminak Gold Corporation. She said:

We believe the bill should be held back until there is agreement. We would like to see the federal government come back to the table, talk to the first nations, and resolve these four outstanding contentious amendments.... Our position is that if the government isn't going to come back to the table to address the four contentious amendments with the first nations, they should be removed from the bill.

That answers what the concern is. That is a very clear position. That is the position that we support.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, I want to touch briefly on one of the quotes that the member has used throughout the debate this morning. I do not remember the gentleman's name from the tourism association. He said that if one party says the consultation has not been adequate, then adequate consultation has not occurred.

In the absence of considering the evidence, perhaps that sounds okay. However, when we consider that there were dozens of meetings and \$100,000 provided to first nations to participate in the consultation process, I am wondering this. Is the NDP position that there should be a veto given to anyone, any group and any legislative process that says consultation has not been adequate, and that would throw a wrench into it indefinitely? That is what that stakeholder, that witness, said. The member has positively quoted it today.

Does the member really believe that we should examine the evidence of what consultation has occurred, or simply allow one group to say that consultation has not been adequate? Canadians deserve that answer.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, I do not think these amendments were a part of that consultation. The consultation was about the five-year review. These were not part of that. Mr. Geithner is the name of the director of the Tourism Industry Association. He started off in his remarks talking about the praise that Senator Lang had given for the assessment process, saying that it was a model for certainty, implementing responsible environmental and social balance while providing certainty to investors. If that was already there, why did it need to be changed?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-6 today because we are dealing with a process, and this is extremely important, no matter what members on the other side are saying. In this case, the people who will be affected by these decisions have not been adequately consulted. The government unfortunately has a habit of not consulting people on a number of issues.

It is even more troubling in the case of the Yukon, which we are discussing today. Not too long ago, Bill C-15, if I am not mistaken, gave more powers to the territories, which was in line with what was done in the Northwest Territories a few years ago. We recently adopted the same type of approach with the Yukon.

It appears as though the pendulum is swinging the other way now. The government is bringing the power back to Ottawa and is giving itself more discretionary powers. This bill is a way to push through some natural resource development projects and to once again gut our environmental protection laws, which is another worrisome trend from this government.

Since we started the debate this afternoon, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development has been telling us that everyone in the Yukon agrees that the existing rules only delay the process, since it is unpredictable. However, as my colleague from St. John's East just pointed out, the rules proposed by the Conservatives make the situation even more unpredictable, since they simply say that if any communities in the Yukon are unhappy with the result they will have to go to court.

Speaking of trends, that is another one we are seeing more and more of all the time. Instead of being proactive and proposing legislation and an approach to governance that does not require legal proceedings, the government seems to be saying that this is not so bad because these people can turn to the courts. The focus is on the cure instead of prevention. If the government wants to have a real dialogue, then it has to prevent these conflicts where people, particularly first nations, feel that their rights are being trampled. Dragging things through the courts prolongs and encumbers the process, which makes the situation even harder for businesses that want to propose a project.

Government Orders

The interesting thing in the debates on the environment and the economy is the matter of environmental assessments. That came up again today, through this bill. If we took this responsibility seriously, we would not be obstructing those who advocate sustainable and responsible development. However, the government seems to believe that such legislation always gets in the way of development. Instead of trying to come up with better assessments, the government simply wants to get rid of them all. Words like social acceptability often come up when we talk about natural resource development projects.

It is clear that Bill S-6 has failed when it comes to social acceptability. The federal government might say that the territories are different from the provinces, but we must not play political games with the rights of the people of the Yukon and of the Yukon's first nations.

The parliamentary secretary talked about funding that was offered to the first nations, but that is not enough. The dialogue cannot be driven by money alone. There has to be a proactive attitude, a willingness to reach out and some openness.

We can have all the tools and resources in the world, but if we do not believe that they will be useful and that this dialogue will improve things, then it is hard to bring two or more partners to the table.

• (1350)

The parliamentary secretary also said there were many meetings, but that is precisely one of the things that people, including first nations, are upset about. Closed-door meetings do not count as public consultation. It is pretty easy to sit down with select stakeholders, then say that consultations were held and people should be satisfied with that. The problem, once again, is what people are feeling. I want to respond again to the parliamentary secretary's remarks. He just asked if the NDP will be challenging all of the legislation about which witnesses say they were not adequately consulted.

We all know that in politics it is impossible to please everyone, but when it comes to Bill S-6, everything we heard in committee and in the Yukon points to agreement among members of the public and first nations: the consultations were inadequate. That is why the Yukon NDP moved a motion in the legislature there to condemn this bill. Sure, they can pull out quotes here and there to support the argument that this is a step forward, but I am not talking about an exception; I am saying that most people think this.

Consequently, I believe that it is important to recognize that the government's approach is problematic. All too often, people condemn its bills and its approach and the government views them as exceptions. Very often these people are voicing the concerns of the majority, and therefore it is all the more important for the government to listen.

In matters affecting first nations especially, this is happening more and more frequently. One of my colleagues spoke about the government's paternalistic approach in its relations with first nations. That is the problem, more than the bill's outcome. When the government is considering making such a fundamental change to the way a territory is managed—a change that could call into question

some rights enjoyed by first nations—telling them to just go to court reflects a paternalistic approach. There is no doubt about that, and we see it all too often with this government.

I made a mistake at the beginning of my speech. I said Bill C-6, but I meant Bill S-6. There again, Senate bills are increasingly common, and that is a problem. This is not a Senate bill, but a government bill that is proposing to make a very important, even draconian change to how the Yukon conducts its environmental assessments. The bill would also give discretionary powers to the minister.

The fact that the Senate passed such a bill and sent us such a fundamental change is very problematic in terms of how our two chambers operate, and it is especially problematic when we consider how long it takes for the Senate to pass private members' bills originating in the House of Commons. Consider, for example, the bill introduced by the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca on the rights of transgendered people. The Senate is dragging its feet on passing it. Unfortunately, at this rate, it will not even pass before the election is called. I am using this as an example because Bill S-6 is a government bill, and we know how quickly senators pass government bills and how long it takes them to pass private members' bills. I think this clearly illustrates the problems that arise as a result of how the system works, and this only adds to public cynicism.

I touched on this earlier, but the issue of ministers' discretionary powers is becoming more and more common in government-sponsored bills. This government likes to govern in such a way that ministers are too often allowed to use discretionary powers to adopt certain policies. This is extremely troubling and worrisome when it comes to environmental assessments.

The government prides itself on having a system of checks and balances in place, but those checks and balances are the courts. Everyone knows that the courts are a good tool for protecting fundamental rights, but at the same time, a good government should not settle for getting to that point. I realize I am repeating myself, but this is really what stands out the most on this particular issue.

• (1355)

In closing, I would like to reiterate that we are prepared to work with the people of Yukon. The Yukon NDP is doing a terrific job. The member for the Northwest Territories knows what managing a territory actually involves and how to work with the federal government. We can do this job properly.

Unfortunately, all too often, the federal government is content to just centralize and impose its way of doing things on others. That is not how we believe that things should be done. There must be an open dialogue among the various nations, particularly the first nations. That is the approach that we advocate and this would be an opportunity to implement that approach. That is why we are opposed to this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: That concludes the debate for now. The member for Chambly—Borduas will have five minutes for questions and comments when we resume debate.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

ABORTION

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the most important issues I have dealt with in my 22 years as a member of Parliament are pro-life issues.

These are the issues dealing with abortion and end of life, such as physician-assisted suicide. They have been the most important but also the most difficult, and sometimes frustrating, to deal with. Often it seems that progress is too slow, but on the other hand, we do need to recognize that progress is being made.

On May 14, the annual pro-life rally was held on Parliament Hill. The turnout was very encouraging, with a huge crowd of about 25,000 people, the largest on record.

As usual, the approach was extremely positive with a focus on helping young women and men who were struggling with the decision to possibly abort their unborn child, to find the support they needed to decide to have the child. Barring serious health concerns, this is always the right decision. Information and help are offered to parents to decide what to do after that.

Progress is being made and pro-lifers here and across Canada should be proud and thankful for this.

* * *

● (1400)

THALIDOMIDE

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the historic steps taken by Parliament and the Government of Canada in addressing the suffering caused to mothers, children and families by the drug thalidomide.

[Translation]

Thalidomide survivors and their families have waited a long time for this day to come.

[English]

It bears repeating in this chamber that the survivors and their families waited more than 50 years for the Canadian government to acknowledge the hardships they endured as the result of using a drug approved by our government.

Finally, on December 1 of last year, parliamentarians united to urge the government to provide the survivors with the support they needed to live out their lives with dignity and respect.

[Translation]

I would like to thank all of the members for coming together to correct this injustice, and I want to thank the minister for the work she did to set up a program for survivors that provides them the ongoing assistance they need.

[English]

On behalf of the New Democratic Party, I want to thank the survivors and their families, and the organizations they worked with, the Thalidomide Victims Association of Canada and the task force

Statements by Members

for their tireless efforts, in particular to pay tribute to Mercedes Benegbi, who is as graceful as she is tenacious. It was a true honour to get to know Mercedes and work with her for these past few months.

In closing, it has been said many times that no amount of financial support can ever undo what happened, but it is our hope that going forward they are able to live the rest of their lives with dignity and respect.

* * *

SPORTS

Mr. John Barlow (Macleod, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I stand to recognize three people from my riding of Macleod who have been honoured for their incredible achievements in sport.

Chris Koch of Nanton and Jim “Bearcat” Murray of Okotoks will be inducted into the Alberta Sports Hall of Fame on Friday, Meanwhile, Olympian Jason Parker of Millarville was inducted into the Saskatchewan Sports Hall of Fame earlier this month.

Born without limbs, Chris has lived by the motto “Be more afraid of regret than failure”, and he has little to regret. A renowned motivational speaker, Chris golfs, snowboards and, of course, most important, works the family farm in Nanton.

Bearcat Murray, the iconic former trainer of the Calgary Flames, was inducted into the National Hockey League hall in 2009 and described being named to Okotoks Hall of Fame as the “most heart-warming honour ever” even more than the 1989 Stanley Cup.

I would like to congratulate these outstanding Albertans, these outstanding Canadians, a Foothills municipal councillor, a determined farmer from Nanton, and a bald-headed little potlicker from Okotoks for all they have achieved. They are an inspiration to us all.

* * *

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Maryam Shafipour is a 28-year old Iranian student who was sentenced to seven years in prison by the Iranian regime in 2014 for daring to promote change from within.

Maryam Shafipour's case is emblematic of thousands of who have fallen victim to the Iranian state's brutality. More people than ever have been executed since President Rohani took over. The regime is particularly harsh on female students. It monitors for proper behaviour and dress. Violations can result in expulsions and even beatings.

Since being imprisoned, the Iranian regime has refused the Shafipour family's repeated requests for her transfer to a hospital to seek treatment for heart, stomach and dental problems that she developed in prison. The Iranian authorities should know that the world is watching how it treats Maryam Shafipour. That treatment makes a cruel joke of their claim to be a defender of the oppressed.

*Statements by Members***MATERNAL, NEWBORN AND CHILD HEALTH**

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is providing strong leadership in the global effort to end the preventable deaths of mothers, newborns and young children.

I am pleased to report to the House that, thanks to our Prime Minister's principled leadership and partnering with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, maternal mortality rates in developing countries are declining and millions more children are celebrating their fifth birthday.

I also want to thank Senator Asha Seth, who worked tirelessly to establish the international maternal, newborn and child health week. This week will provide an annual opportunity for Canadians, private partners and governments to focus on promoting the health and well-being of mothers and children around the world.

I invite all members in the House to attend tomorrow's reception in Room 256-S, from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m., to celebrate our government's initiative that is saving lives.

* * *

• (1405)

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in my first statement in the House almost four years ago, I pointed out how privileged the Conservative members opposite were to sit across from such raw and rugged beauty. Of course, I was speaking about the stained glass window above me and to the left of the pitcher plant, the official flower of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I told Conservative MPs to look to the pitcher plant when they spoke of my province. They faced the pitcher plant when they closed the Veterans Affairs office in Corner Brook, when they failed Labrador's Burton Winters, when they defended the actions of a minister in using a search and rescue helicopter as a taxi, when they refused to revisit policies that threatened our rural communities, when they broke promises in trade deals, and, most recently, when they deviated from policy at the expense of Newfoundland and Labrador fishermen.

Almost four years ago, I stood in this place and warned Conservative MPs that the pitcher plant was carnivorous and would devour its prey whole. I look forward to standing in the House on the government's side after the election and showing the pitcher plant the respect that it deserves.

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ROYAL CANADIAN DENTAL CORPS

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the year 2015 marks the 100th anniversary of the Royal Canadian Dental Corps.

Since the formation of the Canadian army dental corps on May 13, 1915, Canada's military dental services have served overseas in both world wars, Korea and Afghanistan, and many other peacemaking and peacekeeping humanitarian and forensic operations. They have cared for the oral health needs of Canada's troops, both at home and abroad.

As a dentist myself, and on behalf of all members of the House, I would like to thank these brave men and women for their service, and I wish them all the best as they embark on the next 100 years of providing a very important service, helping to ensure the optimum health of our men and women in uniform.

* * *

CADETS

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last weekend I had the opportunity to attend three ceremonial review programs for the cadet program in Cumberland Colchester and the Musquodoboit Valley. I cannot tell members how impressed I was with the level of discipline and decorum displayed by these young ladies and gentlemen.

I was particularly proud that both the Truro navy league cadets and RCSCC 88 sea cadets were recognized as the most improved cadet corps in Nova Scotia. I congratulate to them all, and well done.

Cadets invite all youth from ages 12 to 18. The program focuses on citizenship, leadership and fitness. Cadets, of course, are proud citizens of Canada. They are healthy in mind and body, and they are the leaders of tomorrow. What is more important is that when they engage in cadets, they have a lot of fun.

Cadets is one of the few remaining youth activities in our country that people and young people can participate in free of charge. To all of the staff, parents and others involved in cadets, I express my thanks.

* * *

POVERTY

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I offer a glimpse into the successes and struggles in my riding of York South—Weston.

Hammer Heads is an apprenticeship training program paid for by unions and operated by the Central Ontario Building Trades in my community. Over the past five years, Hammer Heads has launched a career for 194 young adults, focusing on disadvantaged and first nations youth. It has saved over \$1 million in welfare costs alone. It is so successful that 20 of these young adults have been able to buy their own homes. It is a remarkable example of a homegrown solution, but it is only 194 people.

Meanwhile, George Harvey Collegiate Institute in York South—Weston has run a breakfast program for 12 years, feeding children who would otherwise not get to eat. Over 150,000 breakfasts have been served. Program sponsors estimate that in my riding, 38% of children go to school hungry each day. On my visit there this morning, I met the volunteers, like Vince and Imad and his family, who do this to help kids be able to learn.

While the success of the Hammer Heads program is something to celebrate, the grip of poverty in my riding shows that we have much more work to do.

Statements by Members

●(1410)

TAXATION

Mr. Bernard Trotter (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the universal child care benefit and family tax cut will benefit all families with children in my riding of Etobicoke—Lakeshore and across Canada.

Last week, I met with hundreds of constituents who were grateful for our government's track record of helping families make ends meet. They know they have a government that respects taxpayers and their hard-earned tax dollars.

Unlike the Liberal leader who wants to take all of this away, our government wants to keep taxes low and focus on economic growth. We want to ensure that all Canadians benefit and save for their priorities. It was the Liberal leader himself who said that “benefiting every single family is not what is fair”.

We will continue to work hard for all Canadians so they can keep more of their money in their pockets.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, over 50% of workers in Toronto cannot access full-time employment; that is work that comes with a pension, benefits or job security. Even those who thought they were full-time employees today can wake up tomorrow to find they have been reclassified as independent contractors.

On behalf of all the temp workers in my riding, all of those in Davenport not knowing whether their short-term contract will be renewed, to the freelancers and self-employed I meet at the Common, to all of them holding down multiple part-time jobs and squeezing into a packed Dufferin bus to pick up their kids from expensive child care, to new Canadians and new young workers from Queen Street to Eglinton working for free as unpaid interns, I want to thank United Way Toronto and researchers at McMaster University for their incredibly important report tabled last week on the outrageous growth of precarious work in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area.

We must bring Canada's labour laws and policies into the 21st century to reflect the reality of work today.

* * *

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week Canadian farmers, supported by our Conservative government, celebrated a great victory over American protectionism when the World Trade Organization ruled against the United States mandatory country of origin labelling policy.

This is the fourth time the WTO has ruled in Canada's favour and denounced this protectionist policy that has been costing our meat industry billions of dollars on an annual basis.

Let me be clear that this decision is final. There are no further appeals for the Obama administration.

Canada's allies in the U.S. Congress have begun to take steps toward repealing COOL. However, until this policy is reversed, our

government will be seeking authority from the WTO to impose retaliatory measures against U.S. exports.

Unlike the opposition parties, which have been mute on the issue of COOL for years now, our Conservative government continues to stand on the side of Canadian farmers and ranchers, and we will continue to protect all hard-working Canadians throughout the retaliatory process.

* * *

THALIDOMIDE

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over the past five decades untold numbers of Canadian women and children have endured terrible and debilitating long-term effects from the morning sickness drug thalidomide.

The irresponsible distribution of this drug during the late 1950s and early 1960s and the subsequent mistreatment of those who suffered its terrible side effects is a shameful chapter in Canadian history. This is an injustice that has spanned many decades and many governments of all political stripes.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the government for finally coming forward with an appropriate compensation package for the 92 surviving thalidomide victims in Canada.

We welcome Mercedes and a number of victims to Parliament Hill today and I know all parliamentarians pay tribute to their courage and tenacity in the pursuit of this belated justice.

This compensation, while long overdue, will allow victims to live with dignity and ensure their medical needs are met.

We would also like to pay tribute to journalist Ingrid Peritz who ensured victims' stories were heard and their plight could no longer be ignored.

* * *

ISLAMIC STATE

Mr. Ted Opatz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, CNN reported that ISIS fighters murdered nearly 100 people, including a dozen children. This same death cult has called for attacks in Canada, against Canadians. We cannot protect Canada by simply choosing to ignore this threat.

On behalf of my riding of Etobicoke Centre, I want to thank the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces who are standing up to this threat head-on. In the last week alone, Canadian CF-18 Hornets have struck multiple ISIS fighting positions in both Iraq and Syria. These strikes are part of our continued mission to degrade ISIS until it no longer represents a threat to Canada.

Oral Questions

●(1415)

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, like many of us, I watched with excitement as thousands of Albertans gathered in front of the Alberta legislature to cheer on Premier Notley as she was sworn in.

[*Translation*]

It was great to see the size of the crowd and the enthusiasm. It reminded me of how excited the other NDP members and I were when we formed the official opposition for the first time.

Since then we have worked hard on behalf of our constituents to come up with concrete measures that will make their day-to-day lives easier, such as providing affordable day care spaces, cutting taxes for SMEs and restoring door-to-door mail delivery. We stood up for our principles even when it was not popular, such as when we opposed Bill C-51, because the NDP does politics differently.

Next October, people across the country will follow Alberta's lead and finally be able to elect a government that works for them and with them, an NDP government.

* * *

[*English*]

TAXATION

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are directing money into the pockets of moms and dads across the country. We have increased the universal child care benefit to almost \$2,000 for kids under six and to \$720 for kids six to 17.

We know the Liberals want to take that money away. That is why they do not want Canadians to know about it in the first place. The Liberal leader said, "...benefiting every single family isn't what is fair." We believe it is fair to benefit every single family and we will make sure that families reap those benefits.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*Translation*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government has finally made public its greenhouse gas emission reduction targets. What a disappointment. They are the least ambitious targets of all the G7 countries. The government knows very well that it will not be able to meet its new targets or even keep its old promises.

Why is the Conservative government not doing its part to reduce greenhouse gas emissions?

[*English*]

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of the Environment, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has announced a fair and ambitious target for Canada that is in line with other major industrialized countries. Unlike the opposition, we want to take a responsible and balanced sector-by-

sector approach to reducing emissions to protect the economy and Canadian jobs. We will do this without forcing a job-killing carbon tax on Canadian families.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this climate target is late and does not deliver Canada's fair share of emissions reductions. To top it off, the Conservatives want to use questionable accounting and offsets to reach the targets, something they used to call "hot air credits".

Speaking of hot air, Environment Canada has said that the government has little hope of reaching its old target, and without regulations for the oil and gas sector Canada will not reach the new target either. Why are the Conservatives setting Canada up to fail in the global fight against climate change?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of the Environment, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are playing a leadership role on the international stage. We have helped more than 65 developing countries to reduce emissions and adapt to climate change. We are doing our part by contributing to the Green Climate Fund. We are a founding member and major financial contributor to the Climate and Clean Air Coalition. We are also addressing short-lived climate pollutants under the chairmanship of the Arctic Council. We will continue to protect our environment while keeping our economy strong.

* * *

ETHICS

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, credibility matters, as the Conservatives are learning.

According to an RCMP court document, the Prime Minister's Office played a "key role" in altering and falsifying the 2013 audit of Mike Duffy's expenses. Other documents show that the Deloitte audit report was changed a total of seven times to remove criticisms of expense claims, including references to the Ottawa home of Mike Duffy.

Does the Prime Minister deny that his office intervened to falsify the findings of the audit into the expenses of Conservative Senator Mike Duffy?

●(1420)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as was highlighted, the Prime Minister's Office participated and provided a great deal of assistance, turning over thousands of documents and ensuring that we assisted the RCMP and the crown in its case against Senator Duffy. As members know, this is before the courts, and we will allow the courts to do their job.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister will have to give an answer sooner or later, no matter how much he wants to avoid it.

Canadians learned from the police that the Prime Minister's Office actively helped Senator Tkachuk and Senator Olsen alter the report on Senator Mike Duffy's expenses. They altered it seven times. For example, they erased passages that prove that Senator Duffy's residence was, in fact, in Ottawa.

How does the Prime Minister explain that his office altered such important passages in the Mike Duffy report?

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, as I just said, it is quite clear that the Prime Minister's Office provided a great deal of assistance to both the crown and the RCMP in their case against Senator Duffy.

At the same time, I would hope that the opposition would provide that same level of co-operation and assistance to the Canadian taxpayer. As members know, there are some 68 members of the NDP caucus who owe Canadian taxpayers some \$2.7 million because they paid for some illegal offices in Montreal. I certainly hope they will do the right thing for Canadian taxpayers and insist on returning that \$2.7 million to them.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are not talking about kangaroo courts. We are talking about real courts with real police investigating the Conservatives.

The Prime Minister's Office cut a \$90,000 cheque to keep Duffy quiet on residency issues and doctored an expense audit to avoid political and legal fallout. The Auditor General has sent 10 new cases of improper Senate spending to the RCMP, and 30 more senators will be forced to pay for improper expense claims. There are 44 cases of apparent abuse of the public trust. That is more than half the Senate. The Prime Minister's Office is involved up to its eyeballs.

Will the Prime Minister stop defending the unelected, unaccountable, and under investigation Senate?

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 the Auditor General, and of course we expect that the senators will assist the Auditor General in this examination.

However, there are 68 members of the NDP who owe a total of \$2.7 million to the Canadian taxpayer. There are another 23 of them who owe \$1.1 million back to the Canadian taxpayer. By my count, that is three-quarters of the NDP caucus. In fact, the Leader of the Opposition owes \$400,000 to the taxpayers of Canada. It is New Democrats who are in front of the courts. It is they who are refusing to co-operate. It is real money. They should do the right thing for the taxpayer and pay it all back.

*[Translation]***THE ECONOMY**

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian economy is doing very poorly, and everyone can sense it.

We have just returned from a week in our ridings, but the Conservatives do not even seem to have gone back to theirs. More and more Canadians are looking for jobs. The youth unemployment rate is hovering around 15%. Canadians are in debt and they are struggling to make ends meet. They certainly do not have \$10,000 to put into a TFSA.

Why do the Conservatives oppose the Liberals' plan to give back to the middle class and stimulate economic growth?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our economy has already generated over 1.2 million new jobs, and 80% of them are full-time, 80% are in the private sector and two-thirds are in high-wage sectors.

We are continuing to train our workers, lower taxes for employers and workers, and finalize free trade agreements in order to create good jobs for all Canadians.

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, here is the reality of the government's policies: a no-growth economy that has actually been shrinking; poor job creation, down 50% or 60% from two years ago; big job losses at GM, Bombardier, and across the energy sector; job quality at a 25-year low. The recession, which the Conservatives blame for everything, ended six years ago, but there are still 200,000 more jobless Canadians today than before the recession began.

Why is the government so unsuccessful on growth, jobs, and fairness?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals have exactly one idea for the economy, and that is to raise taxes. They want to raise taxes on businesses and raise taxes on Canadian workers. We are taking the opposite approach. Our plan for tax cuts, training, and trade has helped create 1.2 million net new jobs, 80% of them full time and two-thirds in high-wage sectors.

The last thing those hard-working Canadians need is a Liberal tax hike, which would hit the middle class, send shockwaves through the economy, and put people out of work.

Oral Questions

● (1425)

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the economy is so weak, the risk of worsening inequality becomes more severe. By everyone from the Parliamentary Budget Officer to the late Jim Flaherty, the government has been warned about disparities getting worse, but still it is giving a \$2,000 tax break to those making a quarter of a million dollars, with no break at all for single moms. It insists on paying benefits to the highest 1% of income earners, and that means the typical middle-class family gets \$2,500 less.

How is that fair?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just about every fact bullet in the member's talking points is wrong. In fact, the Parliamentary Budget Officer looked at the \$30 billion in annual tax relief we have provided as of last year and confirmed that the overwhelming majority of benefits went to medium- and low-income Canadians.

Since that time, we have brought forward the family tax cut and benefits, which give up to \$2,000 for families through income splitting, and an additional \$2,000 for kids under six and \$720 for kids six through 17. That puts money directly in the pockets of parents.

* * *

[Translation]

ETHICS

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is sad to think that one of the biggest scandals involving the Prime Minister's Office is happening just a few metres from here.

Almost half of the members of the Senate are now under investigation for breach of trust or illegitimate expenses. What is more, most of those senators were hand-picked by the Prime Minister.

Is the Prime Minister finally willing to admit that there is a problem in the Senate?

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, she is quite right. Just happening a few feet from here is a big scandal. The scandal is that \$2.7 million of taxpayer money was used illegally to support a partisan NDP office in Montreal. In fact, the member, who is only a few feet away from me, owes close to \$30,000 to the taxpayers. What the member did was, instead of using money meant for her riding, she funnelled it, illegally, to an office in Montreal that should not have been paid for. Now the NDP is refusing to pay back to taxpayers the \$2.7 million it owes. Pay it back.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): More nonsense, Mr. Speaker.

The Prime Minister has broken every promise he ever made on Senate reform, and look where it has got us. The Auditor General's findings will reportedly include Senate trips that did not appear to involve parliamentary business, indications of widespread spending abuses, and 10 new senators potentially under police investigation.

Canadians have had enough. The Prime Minister once said an appointed Senate is a relic of the 19th century. Why is he using this relic for partisan fundraising and to kill democratically passed legislation?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be very clear. Any senator who has broken the law should face the severest of consequences. It is this side of the House that has been fighting for that for two years. I contrast that to the opposition, which thinks it is funny to have used \$2.7 million of Canadian taxpayer resources, illegally, to support partisan offices in Montreal and in parts of the country where it has no members of Parliament. That is not funny. Canadians work hard for the money they earn, and when they send it to us, they expect it to be used wisely, not for partisan purposes like the NDP did.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Conservative cuts are forcing the RCMP to make impossible choices when it comes to protecting public safety. Faced with the skyrocketing resource demands of counterterrorism, the RCMP is dismantling Project Condor, its very successful program for finding offenders unlawfully at large. This project recaptured over 600 escaped criminals. We are talking about people convicted of murder, bank robbery, and sexual assault.

Why are the Conservatives putting public safety at risk by ending this program that tracks these people down when they escape?

● (1430)

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member knows full well that the RCMP is responsible for its operational choices and priorities. However, what the member and his colleagues can do is stand up in this House for the additional funding announced by the Prime Minister last week in Montreal. I invite the member to open his copy of the budget to page 325. Then he can invest in the RCMP and do as he should have done the seven times he missed it, which is support our budget for more resources for the RCMP.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if we look at that page, we find that four years from now, the RCMP would still be below where it was in 2012.

The reality is that the Conservatives are all talk when it comes to public safety. They are hoping Canadians will not notice that the programs and resources that actually keep communities safe are disappearing. What is worse, the current government tries to hide its failures. Just take the defence minister's comments that funding de-radicalization programs is "unrealistic" and could be counter-productive. Tell that to our allies who are funding these efforts as a front line against terrorism.

Oral Questions

Why is the minister trying to cover up his government's incompetence instead of acting to counter terrorism?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here is what the NDP has to say about terrorism in this country. Let me quote the member for Brome—Missisquoi:

I am confused about what motivated the government to introduce [the Combating Terrorism Act]...because since 2007 nothing has happened in Canada. The country has not been subject to terrorist attacks.

When will the NDP be serious about terrorism in this country? When will it support our initiative?

We have four pillars, the first one is prevention, and we are standing up to protect Canadians every step of the way.

[Translation]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, apparently the Minister of National Defence believes that it would be counterproductive to allocate federal resources to combat radicalization. Now, in the name of combatting terrorism, the RCMP has to cut Project Condor, which allowed us to track down dangerous fugitives unlawfully at large.

Why is the Conservative government putting an end to Project Condor, which was one of the RCMP's most effective programs?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have complete confidence that the RCMP will continue to carry out its operations and make strategic choices. That is why budget 2015 allocates additional resources to the RCMP, the Canada Border Services Agency and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service.

If my colleague wants to do more than express her half-hearted support, then she should vote in favour of the budget so that the RCMP has the resources it needs to protect us.

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the dismantling of Project Condor is not the only example of the Conservative government's incompetence. We have learned that an individual charged with sexual assault was able to cross our border even though there was a warrant for his arrest. That is unacceptable. Canadians expect this government to manage our borders effectively and securely.

Will the minister take immediate action to address this major flaw that puts Canadians at risk?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government takes border security very seriously. That is why our Prime Minister signed the beyond the border agreement with President Obama, and that is why we have also invested additional resources.

Last week, our Prime Minister was at Montreal-Pierre Elliott Trudeau International Airport to announce additional funding for Canada Border Services Agency officers. It is important to remember that these measures are in addition to the nearly 26% increase in the number of front-line officers across our border crossings and our major investment in border infrastructure. One meaningful way to support our border officers is to support our budget.

[English]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have never made up for the massive cuts they made to CBSA, cuts that have seriously impacted front-line security. Canadians have a right to ask how an individual charged with sexual assault was allowed into Canada, despite having an outstanding warrant for his arrest.

Our border needs to be efficient and effective in keeping those who pose a threat to public safety out of Canada. What is the minister doing to immediately address this serious deficiency in our border security? Your cuts are not working. What next?

The Speaker: I remind the hon. member to address his questions to the Chair and not directly to his colleagues.

The hon. Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank you for giving me the opportunity to remind the House that our government has increased the number of border service officers by 26%.

In the last budget, there were additional resources to make sure that CBSA is able to tackle the challenges it faces at the frontier and to meet our requirement to fulfill our engagement and commitment to the beyond the border agreement signed between our Prime Minister and President Obama.

We are serious when it comes time to protect our border from criminals, and we will ensure that CBSA is fully complying with its mandate by giving them the resources they need. Why is the NDP opposing the budget in support of our officers?

* * *

● (1435)

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the question really should be why the minister is unable to tell the honest truth about cuts to CBSA.

The government is also turning away people who are actually legally permanent residents in Canada. Families are being torn apart simply over an expired I.D. card. In 2013 alone, well over 5,000 permanent residents were denied travel documents to re-enter Canada. People are losing their permanent resident status because their card expired and they have not renewed it yet.

When will the Conservatives stop their campaign to make life harder and harder for immigrant families in Canada?

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just because the date has expired on a PR card does not mean that someone loses their status in Canada. We issue thousands of these new cards every year, but applicants, those permanent residents who qualify, have to put in the application, and they have to meet the requirements of permanent residence. That is two years out of five inside the country, and they need all the documentation to prove that.

Oral Questions

We will continue giving good service to Canadian immigrants, to new Canadian citizens, and to all those visiting our country.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister talks about good service, but frankly, we still do not know why he says that. He makes it sound like the only problem is permanent residents themselves.

Does he realize that processing times for renewing ID cards are much too long? In 2013, 5,000 permanent residents were not allowed to re-enter Canada. There is a problem. Another 14,000 people were forced to apply for temporary travel documents.

Does the minister realize that administrative obstacles, and particularly processing delays, are a major impediment that is penalizing permanent residents?

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the best way for permanent residents to travel freely is to become Canadian citizens. That is why our government is so proud that 260,000 permanent residents became Canadian citizens last year. That is the highest number in Canadian history.

We are providing good service to permanent residents who stay here for two years out of five and meet the program criteria. We will continue to do so, because we know how important immigration is to Canada's future.

* * *

[*English*]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Chrystia Freeland (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government's performance on trade continues to fall far short of its rhetoric. The most recent example is a breakdown in bilateral negotiations with Japan. Talks have been stalled for months, with Canadian officials citing Japan's focus on the trans-Pacific partnership as their excuse for the slowdown. However, Japan has continued bilateral negotiations with other countries, so this excuse rings hollow.

Will the Conservatives redouble efforts to schedule a round of negotiations with Japan before we fall behind our foreign competitors, as we did with South Korea, costing Canada billions of dollars and thousands of middle-class jobs?

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we will not take any lessons from the Liberals over there when it comes to trade.

Canada continues to engage with our Japanese partners to advance our trade interests through both bilateral talks and the TPP. The TPP negotiations are at an advanced stage, with all TPP countries focused on concluding a comprehensive and high-standard agreement as soon as possible. We will continue to negotiate with an eye to concluding the best possible agreement for Canadian businesses, workers, and their families.

Ms. Chrystia Freeland (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a \$3-billion trade deficit in March, a historic record, suggests the trade agenda is not working. This is not the first time the government has touted an imminent deal without showing any results. As CETA

winds its way through EU institutions, it is facing mounting criticism from European officials. There is growing talk that portions of the text may even need to be changed to assuage these concerns, even though Canadians have been told that this is a done deal and have had hundreds of thousands of their dollars already spent to celebrate it.

Will the minister finally forego his smoke-and-mirrors act and tell us when CETA, which we have already celebrated, will finally be ratified?

●(1440)

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when they were in government, trade was simply not a priority for the Liberals. During their 13 long years in office, the Liberals signed only three trade agreements. Our Conservative government has reached agreements with 38 countries. We are even expanding and improving on the three agreements reached under the Liberals to maximize the benefits they produce for hard-working Canadians and families. When it comes to creating jobs and economic opportunities through trade, the Liberal Party has proven it cannot get the job done.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, not only does Japan no longer want to talk to us about free trade, but the European Union free trade agreement the Prime Minister has been talking about for the past 20 months seems to be up in the air.

We hear that as it negotiates with the U.S., the European Union wants to reopen certain clauses of the agreement with Canada and that nothing will be resolved before the upcoming election.

Is this another example where this government promises great things and boasts about its economic management but is unable to keep those promises?

[*English*]

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is the most comprehensive trade agreement Canada has ever signed. It is expected to create 80,000 new jobs for Canadians and open up a market of half a billion new consumers for Canadian businesses. We are confident that the EU will bring this agreement into force. The Liberals have been completely absent on the trade file. In fact, when they had to negotiate free trade agreements, they only got three done. We have signed agreements with 38 different countries. We will not take any lessons from the Liberal Party over there.

*Oral Questions***CANADA POST**

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, almost 600 municipalities have serious concerns about Canada Post's decision to end door-to-door mail delivery, and residents in my community are upset, because they know how difficult the end of home delivery will be for seniors, for small businesses, for people with mobility challenges, and for people living in poverty. When will the minister tell Canada Post to go back to the drawing board and start listening to Canadians and communities?

Mr. Jeff Watson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member will know that in 2014 Canada Post delivered 1.4 billion fewer letters than it did in 2006. He should also know that two-thirds of Canadians currently do not receive door-to-door mail delivery.

Canada Post must balance its finances and not be a burden on taxpayers. We expect it to do that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the frustration with Canada Post's decision to terminate door-to-door delivery continues to grow.

Nearly 600 municipalities, including Terrebonne, have expressed their displeasure. On the weekend, the president of the Union of Quebec Municipalities spoke out against Canada Post's attitude and called for a moratorium.

Will the minister finally listen to the public and municipal officials and put the brakes on this reckless decision?

Mr. Jeff Watson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2014, Canada Post delivered 1.4 billion fewer letters than it did in 2006. Two-thirds of Canadians do not receive their mail at home, and Canada Post has to balance its finances without being a burden to Canadian taxpayers.

* * *

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first the Conservatives changed the museum's name. It was called the Canadian Museum of Civilization, and it is now called the Canadian Museum of History.

Today we learned that an important exhibit on the history of the union movement is being eliminated. Whether the Conservatives like it or not, the labour movement, that noble and courageous movement, built our society by improving Canadians' working and living conditions.

Why does the minister want to erase workers' contribution to Canadian history?

• (1445)

Hon. Shelly Glover (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member knows full well, our national museums are crown corporations that operate independently. They are responsible for creating and managing their content.

That said, I am extremely surprised to hear an NDP member talk about our Canadian Museum of History because when we decided to give it more money in order to create more jobs for Canadians, the NDP voted against that. What hypocrisy.

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if members believe the minister's last answer, I have some real estate they might be interested in.

In actual fact, this move has the stink of political interference all over it. First the Conservatives change the name of the museum, then they change the mandate of the museum and then they try and sanitize Canadian history to eliminate any reference to things they do not like.

In actual fact, the Winnipeg general strike was a turning point in the rights of Canadian working people. It is up for its 100th anniversary in four short years.

Why does the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages not butt out of the museum business and let curators curate?

Hon. Shelly Glover (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): I hate to suggest this, Mr. Speaker, but I think the member's underwear is tight again, because he has forgotten that he actually voted against additional funding for this museum.

I might add my own two cents' worth with regards to the Winnipeg general strike. We are proud of the accomplishments of our past. That is why we are going to celebrate Canada's 150th birthday and we are going to do it with pride and dignity, with or without the NDP.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unlike the Liberal leader, we think it is fair to help all Canadian families. Our efforts are making a difference in communities across the country. Can the Minister of Employment and Social Development please update this House and Canadians on how we are helping all middle-class families in Canada?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are doing it by putting money directly into their pockets.

I want to thank the opposition and others who brought attention to some videos that I have made to inform Canadian families about the benefits to which they are entitled. Almost \$2,000 for kids under 6 and \$720 for kids through 6 through 17. We are looking for 200,000 families. My videos have reached 15,000 of them.

We are very excited about the opportunity to reach out to parents and put money directly in their pockets so that they can make the decision as to what is best in how they raise their children.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

CBC/RADIO-CANADA

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if I may, I would like to get back to the important matters.

In the wake of the Conservatives' cuts to CBC/Radio-Canada, a new study by the Quebec and Ontario governments concluded that the public broadcaster simply does not have the means to fulfill its mandate. The Quebec and Ontario ministers are calling for increased funding to CBC/Radio-Canada.

If there is still a minister of Canadian Heritage in the House, will she listen to the demands made by Quebec and Ontario? Will she once again ignore them, or will she finally listen to the public and reallocate the money that Radio-Canada and CBC need?

Hon. Shelly Glover (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said many times, we already give CBC/Radio-Canada more than \$1 billion a year to fulfill its mandate.

The CRTC has the necessary authority to ensure that CBC/Radio-Canada is fulfilling its mandate in accordance with the act. We fully recognize the important role that CBC/Radio-Canada plays in minority communities and in our remote communities, and that is why we give it \$1 million a year.

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister keeps repeating that big number, but it amounts to just \$29 per Canadian per year. Lots of Canadians pay up to \$108 for Netflix. CBC is a fantastic bargain.

Does the minister realize that the study by the governments of Ontario and Quebec clearly states that in the past 25 years, under the Liberals and the Conservatives, funding for CBC has dropped by 50%? Is that why the Conservative MPs are not meeting with the ministers? Are they ashamed of their record?

[English]

Hon. Shelly Glover (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what was just said by that member is absolutely false. I might remind the member that it was in the 1990s that the Liberals, when they were in power, cut the CBC by over \$400 million.

On this side of the room, we are providing over \$1 billion a year to the CBC. It is independent of government in its decision-making. Of course we have seen a change, a drastic change in the media environment to which no broadcaster is immune. It is adjusting and adapting. We will let it do that.

• (1450)

[Translation]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives clearly have a hard time listening to the people. A recent EKOS poll shows that the vast majority of Canadians, even their own supporters, think that the memorial to victims of Communism is a very bad idea, particularly once they see the design plans for the monument.

When will the government finally listen to the people and the City of Ottawa and change its ill-advised plans?

Hon. Shelly Glover (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we all know, 100 million lives have been lost because of Communism. We will build this monument to honour the victims of these atrocities and their families. I would like to name some of the organizations that support our plan.

[English]

Markus Hess, president of the Estonian Central Council, said this about the location of the monument:

By undermining this memorial with shallow, improvised rationalizations that sacrifice principle for insensitive political gamesmanship, you diminish and devalue the victims' contribution to Canada and disrespect their memory.

There is misinformation out there spread by the political parties opposite. We will build this monument.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 82% of residents in the national capital region and almost two-thirds of Conservative supporters oppose the memorial in its current form.

The minister is ignoring the national capital plan, the mayor of Ottawa, the chief justice of the Supreme Court and local citizens. What kind of government and party ignores the opinion of 82% of the population? I will give a hint; the first letter is "c", the second letter is "o", and people can figure it out from there.

Why will the government not actually listen to the community and change the location of this monument?

Hon. Shelly Glover (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this allows me to provide some information about the misinformation about the location.

Of course, it is not going to be constructed in front of the Supreme Court of Canada, like the opposition parties are suggesting, but rather on a completely different plot of land, further west on Wellington Street.

Having said that, we promised in the Speech from the Throne to honour the 100 million lives lost. We just spent some moments of reflection on the journey to freedom day and the 40th anniversary of the fall of Saigon. With hundreds and hundreds from communities that support the monument and its location, we will build this monument.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, spring has arrived in Cape Breton and in many communities across Canada. This is when our construction season normally is getting into high gear, but the Conservative government stalled infrastructure spending last year and it looks like this year will be another repeat. This past weekend I was speaking with many councillors in my riding and they are concerned that there is going to be another year lost.

Is the Conservative government willing to commit to the Cape Breton Regional Municipality and other municipalities to get the job done and get our people back to work?

Oral Questions

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Infrastructure, Communities and Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have delivered the most important plan in Canadian history for infrastructure. We transferred last year, in July and November, two tranches of the gas tax fund to all provinces in Canada. Projects are ready to be announced. Some have been announced in Nova Scotia and other parts of the country, and we will continue to work very hard with municipalities and provinces in respect of jurisdictions and what they did not have in the past.

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CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Trinity—Spadina, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's 150th birthday seems to have caught the government by surprise. The Prime Minister has now cobbled together some sort of a scheme to fund community projects to sort of mark the date, sort of. The deadlines differ from city to city. Some towns have a few days, others a few months or a few weeks to apply. From region to region, the criteria are different and, of course, they have no idea how much anyone can actually apply for because the Conservatives are making this up as they go along.

If anyone is actually in charge of this program, could someone please explain why the process is so complicated, why it is so rushed and why the criteria are so flimsy, or will the Prime Minister just admit it is a slush fund for the upcoming campaign?

● (1455)

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Infrastructure, Communities and Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in addition to our support for the festivities for the 150th anniversary of our country, we will support renovation, expansion and improvement of existing community infrastructure. In communities across the country, in addition to these new investments we will support the implementation of projects that celebrate our shared heritage, create jobs and improve the quality of life of Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, residents in Surrey are worried about their safety and gang violence continues to reach crisis levels. It is time for the government to stop stalling. Photo ops and recycled re-announcements will not cut it. The Conservatives' re-announcement will have no immediate impact. The community needs boots on the ground now. Surrey residents are waiting to hear clear timelines from the government about when additional boots will be on the ground.

Will the minister please tell us how soon the new RCMP officers will arrive in Surrey?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud that our Minister of National Revenue was in Surrey last week to stand up and deliver for safer streets in communities in Surrey. The Government of British Columbia has asked for \$200,000 to prevent gang violence. We are coming up with \$3.5 million because we take this issue very

seriously. More than that, we are saying yes. We are standing by the people of Surrey and I accept the request of the minister of justice of British Columbia to put more boots on the ground. We are standing up, providing more resources, and we will continue to support the people of Surrey.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Yes, Mr. Speaker, resources promised over the next five years, not now.

People are scared and the community is devastated. They need answers and a clear timeline. The community has been waiting for too long and is tired of empty promises. It is time for a real commitment. Surrey needs help now.

Will the minister give Surrey the answer it is waiting for? When will the RCMP arrive on the ground, on our streets in Surrey?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I agree that the people of Surrey need much more than the lip service of the NDP. Why? It is because we adopted tough measures, especially on gang violence, such as new prison sentences for drive-by shootings. We are putting gang members behind bars. Why? It is because we have passed over 30 new tough-on-crime measures.

Where were the New Democrats? They were giving lip service with no action. We are standing up for the people of Surrey.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the death cult ISIS and jihadi terrorism pose a real threat to Canada. They have made it clear that they target by name Canada and Canadians. Thankfully, Canada is not sitting on the sidelines and is facing this threat head on.

Can the Minister of National Defence update the House on the mission to degrade ISIS?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of National Defence and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question and I thank the brilliant work of the Royal Canadian Air Force, much of which is situated in his constituency at CFB Trenton.

I can report that since the beginning of our Operation Impact as part of the multinational coalition against this genocidal terrorist organization, Air Task Force-Iraq has conducted 953 sorties, including 620 from our CF-18 Hornet fighters, 160 refuelling sorties by our Polaris aerial refuellers, and 173 reconnaissance missions by our CF-140 Aurora modernized aircraft.

Thanks in part to the coalition air campaign, ISIS controls 25% less territory than it did last September, but we must continue in the fight.

*Oral Questions***VETERANS AFFAIRS**

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, soldiers like Master Corporal Collin Fitzgerald, a man decorated for his incredible courage under fire, are returning home only to have to keep fighting, this time with the Conservative government. He was medically released with severe PTSD, yet when he applied to Veterans Affairs for benefits he had earned, VAC re-diagnosed him with simple anxiety, denying him help he needed.

It is unacceptable to be told one thing by National Defence doctors for release and the opposite by Veterans Affairs, and denied.

When will the minister compel VAC to accept National Defence doctors' diagnoses?

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for that question.

As he knows, we are closing the seam with the Canadian Armed Forces to make sure that Veterans Affairs is involved more quickly with an injured or ill veteran.

We do accept the medical evaluations of the Canadian Armed Forces. More importantly, we are reducing the stigma, asking men or women to come forward sooner to get the treatment they need. By the end of this year, we will have opened up 26 operational stress injury clinics. There were just a couple open under that government. This is a priority for us.

* * *

• (1500)

[Translation]

HOUSING

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, thousands of Canadians already cannot pay the rent, and yet the Conservatives plan to stop funding another 116,000 social housing units between now and 2018. This includes 21,500 units in Quebec alone. Asking thousands of Canadians to choose between paying the rent and putting food on the table is just wrong.

What measures is the government committed to taking to protect the existing social housing stock and uphold everyone's right to adequate housing?

[English]

Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely wrong. There are no cuts to housing investments. In fact, our government has renewed housing investments, whether it is our investment in affordable housing of \$1.25 billion or our homelessness partnering strategy of over \$600 million across the country.

We are helping in terms of building houses. We are helping in terms of supporting those who are homeless. We are helping vulnerable Canadians by giving them benefits such as the universal child care benefit and tax cuts. These are direct benefits that reduce poverty and help those who are vulnerable.

HEALTH

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, more than 50 years ago, thalidomide was prescribed to treat morning sickness in expectant mothers. Tragically, thalidomide caused serious and permanent physical and emotional damage to mothers, infants, and families.

Canada's drug safety system has come a long way since the days when thalidomide was approved. I have been proud to be part of that change. I was pleased to support the call for full support to be provided to thalidomide survivors. I ask the Minister of Health to please update the House on the government's support for survivors.

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, survivors have exhibited great courage in overcoming daily challenges throughout their lives. I was very pleased on Friday to announce that the government will be providing survivors with tax-free payments every single year, up to \$100,000, for the rest of their lives to make sure that they are able to live in dignity. In addition, they will have access to an extraordinary medical assistance fund.

We are very pleased to be able to support the survivors. In particular, I would like to thank Mercedes Benegbi, who is the head of the Thalidomide Victims Association of Canada, for working so closely with me, with the entire House, and with the government. I want to congratulate her on a great victory.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

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RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, GP): Mr. Speaker, on May 14, the government tabled VIA Rail's troubling annual report. Ridership and on-time performance are down and costs and losses are up, but there may be hope. VIA is off track, but Amtrak is on track.

There are two unfilled positions on the VIA board. Will the Minister of Transport consider appointing former Amtrak president and Cape Breton resident David Gunn to our VIA board?

Mr. Jeff Watson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will let the minister make the appropriate appointments in due course, but the member will know that VIA Rail is an independent arm's-length crown corporation responsible for its operational decisions. Its primary objective is to provide safe and efficient passenger service. In keeping with this, VIA is responsible for providing services in as cost-effective a manner as possible. It must work to ensure it is not a burden to taxpayers.

Routine Proceedings

[Translation]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, people who want to apply for permanent residence on humanitarian and compassionate grounds have until June 1 of this year. That date was set jointly with the Government of Quebec, but only 20% of the people involved have been able to take advantage of the measures in place. That is why Quebec asked the federal government to extend the deadline, but that request has been ignored.

Once again, federal neglect of humanitarian issues is putting thousands of Haitian families in Quebec in jeopardy. Will the government accommodate Quebec's request to extend the deadline until August 31, or will it respond with cold, callous bureaucracy?

• (1505)

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, far from being bureaucratic and cold, Canada still has the fairest and most generous immigration system in the world. That is why we gave Haitians the opportunity to stay in Canada without becoming permanent residents for 10 years after the earthquake and political instability in Haiti. Everyone affected by these measures was informed of the option to apply for permanent residence. We encouraged them to do so. Over one thousand applications have been received.

The figures mentioned by the member opposite are completely inaccurate. A large number of Haitians have taken advantage of this opportunity to become permanent residents of Canada.

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INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this morning, key stakeholders of Quebec's agriculture industry, along with Quebec's agriculture minister, expressed their concern to the federal government about the trans-Pacific partnership negotiations. They are concerned about the pressure applied by trading partners with regard to supply management. That is the program that ensures fair incomes for our dairy, egg, and poultry producers, and generates 92,000 jobs in Quebec.

Can the Prime Minister promise that Canada will not give up its supply managed markets and will refuse to make any concessions in these sectors, as spelled out in the Bloc Québécois motion unanimously adopted by the House?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism, and Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to tell my colleague that we will continue to defend the trade interests of every industrial sector in Canada, including the agriculture sector, through the negotiations of this free trade agreement.

I would like my colleague to know that our government's past actions bode well for the future, since we have signed free trade agreements with the European Union and South Korea and have been able to protect supply management and the agriculture industry.

As always, our government will only sign a free trade agreement if it benefits every sector in Canada.

EMPLOYMENT

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, this winter highly qualified Canadian pilots were unemployed because of a reduction in flights associated with the oil and mining sectors. Now Sunwing Airlines has hired more than 100 foreign pilots while ignoring qualified and available Canadian pilots.

When will the Minister of Immigration tell companies like Sunwing Airlines that they must at all times give priority to hiring qualified, available Canadian pilots?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before hiring foreign workers, the company must prove that it attempted to advertise the job in question to determine whether or not Canadians were available. We have put in place harsh penalties for those who break the rules. Our policy seeks to ensure that Canadians are given priority for jobs in Canada. Any company that breaks the rules will be punished.

* * *

[English]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of His Excellency Galust Sahakyan, President of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and for La Francophonie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the treaties entitled: "Modifications to Canada's Government Procurement Market Access Schedule in the Revised Agreement on Government Procurement, pursuant to Article XIX of that Agreement" done in Geneva on March 30, 2012; "Modifications to Canada's Government Procurement Market Access Schedule in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), pursuant to Article 1022 of that Agreement" done at Ottawa on December 11 and 17, 1992, at Mexico on December 14 and 17, 1992, and at Washington on December 8 and 17, 1992; "Modifications to Canada's Government Procurement Market Access Schedule in the Canada-Chile Free Trade Agreement pursuant to article KBIS-14 of that Agreement" done at Santiago on December 5, 1996; "Modifications to Canada's Government Procurement Market Access Schedule in the Canada-Columbia Free Trade Agreement pursuant to article 1413 of that Agreement" done at Bogota on May 27, 2010;

Routine Proceedings

●(1510)

[Translation]

“Modifications to Canada's Government Procurement Market Access Schedule in the Canada-Honduras Free Trade Agreement, pursuant to article 17.16 of that Agreement” done at Ottawa on November 5, 2013; “Modifications to Canada's Government Procurement Market Access Schedule in the Canada-Korea Free Trade Agreement, pursuant to article 14.4 of that Agreement” done at Ottawa on September 22, 2014; “Modifications to Canada's Government Procurement Market Access Schedule in the Canada-Panama Free Trade Agreement, pursuant to article 16.14 of that Agreement” done at Ottawa on May 14, 2010; and “Modifications to Canada's Government Procurement Market Access Schedule in the Canada-Peru Free Trade Agreement, pursuant to article 1413 of that Agreement” done at Lima on May 28, 2008.

Explanatory memoranda accompany the treaties.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

VETERANS

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs in relation to its study of the main estimates for 2015-16.

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the ninth report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development entitled, “The Aftermath of the Rwandan Genocide – A Study of the Crisis of Children Born of Rape Committed during the Genocide”; and the tenth report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development entitled, “Main Estimates 2015-16: Votes 1, 5, 10, 15, 20 and L25 under Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, vote 1 under International Development Research Centre and vote 1 under International Joint Commission (Canadian Section)”.

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to the ninth report.

* * *

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties, and I believe that if you were to seek it, you would find unanimous consent for the following motion.

I move:

That, during the debate today on the Business of Supply pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), no quorum calls, dilatory motions or requests for unanimous consent shall be received by the Chair and, within each 15-minute period, each party may allocate time to one or more of its Members for speeches or for questions and answers, provided that, in the case of questions and answers, the Minister's answer approximately reflect the time taken by the question, and provided that, in the case of speeches, Members of the party to which the period is allocated may speak one after the other.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PETITIONS

SPECIES AT RISK ACT

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have three petitions to present.

This is another one of the dozens that I have already presented in terms of the Species at Risk Act.

Constituents across southern Alberta as well as Saskatchewan ask that the House of Commons rescind the Species at Risk Act and replace it with an act that encourages voluntary implementation.

●(1515)

PROTECTION OF THE SAGE GROUSE

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is similar. It is on the sage grouse.

The petitioners ask the House of Commons to rescind the strategy that has been in place and create something that is more palatable to the constituents of southeast Alberta and southwestern Saskatchewan.

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my final petition is on emergency protection order for the sage grouse.

The petitioners are asking the government to rescind the emergency protection order and replace it with an order that encourages voluntary implementation.

[Translation]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House on behalf of hundreds of people from Drummond who signed a petition calling on the government to respect the rights of small family farms to store, trade and use seed.

The petitioners are calling on the House of Commons to adopt international aid policies that support small farmers, and especially women, and recognize their vital role in the struggle against hunger and poverty, to ensure that Canada's policies and programs are developed in consultation with small farmers and that those policies protect the rights of small farmers in the global south to save, use and freely trade their seed.

Routine Proceedings

[English]

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Hon. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my petition informs the House that a young person who was 18 years of age was tragically killed by a drunk driver who chose to drive while impaired. Obviously the family has been devastated by the loss of their son.

Families For Justice, a group of Canadians who have had a loved one killed by an impaired driver, believes that Canada's impaired driving laws are much too lenient. They would like the crime to be called vehicular homicide.

It is the number one cause of criminal death in Canada. Over 1,200 Canadians are killed every year by drunk drivers. Families For Justice is calling for mandatory sentencing for vehicular homicide, and for Parliament to support Bill C-652, Cassandra's law.

TAXATION

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions.

The first petition is from Canadian Menstruators, who are concerned that there is a disproportionate financial burden on women because they pay GST on feminine hygiene products. They ask the Government of Canada to extend a 0% GST rate to menstrual hygiene products.

CANADA POST

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from Canadians from across my community.

Last week, we had a town hall in regard to the ending of door-to-door postal services: the delivery of mail. The many people who were there were very clear that this would cause the loss of 6,000 to 8,000 jobs. It would hurt seniors and disabled Canadians. It would have a negative effect on communities.

The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to reverse the cuts proposed by Canada Post and to find innovative ways to ensure that door-to-door service is continued. They suggest postal banking.

AGRICULTURE

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions.

The first petition is in regard to respect for the rights of small-scale family farmers.

The petitioners are asking that the government ensure that Canadian policies and programs are developed in consultation with small family farmers and that it protect the rights of small family farmers in the global south to preserve the use and free exchange of seeds.

HUMAN RIGHTS IN VENEZUELA

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is with regard to the diminishing human rights situation in Venezuela.

The petitioners are asking that the House direct the Subcommittee on International Human Rights to revisit the situation in Venezuela and update its previous report that was adopted on June 18, 2012.

KOMAGATA MARU

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I bring forward a petition today signed by many constituents of mine in regard to what happened in the Punjab assembly in India where they unanimously passed the resolution calling on the Canadian Parliament to apologize for the *Komagata Maru* incident.

The *Komagata Maru* incident was a dark moment in Canada's past. In 1914, 352 passengers aboard a steamship were denied entry into Canada based on discriminatory immigration policy.

The petitioners are requesting that the Prime Minister and Government of Canada provide a formal apology in Parliament with respect to the *Komagata Maru* incident of 1914.

● (1520)

[Translation]

TAXATION

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present to the House a petition signed by hundreds of women and men across the country who are calling on the Government of Canada to eliminate the federal tax on feminine hygiene products. This tax is completely unfair and must be eliminated immediately.

[English]

AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have petitions on autism spectrum disorders. Autism spectrum disorders are characterized by social and communication challenges and a pattern of repetitive behaviours and interests. They are lifelong disorders, affect development and life experiences, and exert emotional and financial pressures on families. The petitioners call on the government to work with the provinces, territories, and all stakeholders to develop a pan-Canadian strategy for autism spectrum disorder.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present to this House two petitions on behalf of my constituents of Parkdale—High Park.

The first petition is concerning child care. My constituents are thrilled that the Leader of the Opposition has put forward a plan to ensure that there is quality affordable child care available for every Canadian child who needs it, with the goal of limiting costs to \$15 a day or less. The petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to work with the provinces and territories to implement this plan for affordable child care.

Routine Proceedings

RAIL SAFETY

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition concerns rail safety. Canadians want the government to bring in more stringent requirements for railway safety. Among those requirements are to strengthen the oversight of rail safety management systems and to increase the number of rail inspectors who audit our rail systems, trains, and rail infrastructure.

The petitioners also want the industry to invest in ways to reduce the volatility of Bakken crude, including the possibility of partial refinement at source, and to require shippers and railways to carry sufficient insurance to cover the true cost of an accident, spill, or derailment through densely populated neighbourhoods.

HEALTH

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions today.

The first is supporting my Motion No. 501, a national strategy for innovation effectiveness and cost effectiveness for sustainable health care. The petitioners note that the strategy would be open to new models of care, delivery and discovery; be holistic in character and patient-centred; emphasize the importance of wellness promotion and disease prevention; and empower the patient with information and choice.

SEX SELECTION

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is calling that the House condemn discrimination against females occurring through selective pregnancy termination. The petitioners note that the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada vehemently opposes sex selection. Millions of girls have been lost through sex-selective pregnancy termination, causing gender imbalance, and contributing to trafficking and prostitution around the world.

[*Translation*]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, I am presenting a petition on behalf of small family farmers. It is signed by 247 people from the riding of Bourassa, which I represent. The petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada and the House of Commons to commit to ensuring that Canada's policies and programs respect the rights of small family farms to store, trade and use their seed and their right to be consulted in this regard. The petitioners are also calling on the government to commit to adopting policies that support small farmers, and especially women, and recognize their vital role in the struggle against hunger and poverty.

[*English*]

CANADA POST

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from a number of citizens from St. Paul's on the issue of door-to-door mail delivery by Canada Post. The petitioners particularly point out the need to provide assistance to the most vulnerable Canadians, which can be both physical and mental; our harsh winters; and the fact that Canadians need Canada Post to continue door-to-door mail delivery.

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. 1076, 1137, 1142, and 1144.

[*Text*]

Question No. 1076—**Ms. Linda Duncan:**

With regard to Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD) activity category "Economic Growth Acceleration Opportunities for Aboriginal Peoples (First Nations, Inuit and Métis)": (a) how does WD define this category for the purposes of a project application; (b) which sectors does WD deem to be included or excluded in this category; (c) how many applicants were successful under this category and what are the details concerning these applicants; and (d) have applicants under this category faced any particular challenges in submitting successful applications and, if so, what are the details of these challenges?

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, with regard to (a), aboriginal economic growth projects must address one or more of the following: supporting greater aboriginal participation in natural resource development opportunities and increasing capacity to capitalize on these opportunities; strengthening aboriginal business development and entrepreneurship; and involving aboriginal groups and partners to increase skills development, technical training and trades training.

With regard to (b), WD does not exclude any industry sector in this category.

With regard to (c), six aboriginal economic growth projects were approved in the initial call for proposals intake. The successful applicants include not-for-profit organizations, aboriginal community-led organizations and educational institutions.

With regard to (d), WD reached out to aboriginal communities regarding the program availability and was not made aware of any particular application-related challenges faced by aboriginal economic growth project applicants.

Question No. 1137—**Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle:**

With regard to the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA): which are the 52 charitable organizations currently being audited by the CRA concerning the spending of more than 10% of their resources on political activities?

Hon. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the confidentiality provisions under subsection 241(1) of the Income Tax Act prevent the CRA from discussing the affairs of a particular organization without the consent of an authorized representative. For this reason, the CRA cannot comment on the identity of charities currently under audit.

*Routine Proceedings***Question No. 1142—Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:**

With regard to government spending on women's rights and sexual and reproductive health as part of its development assistance: (a) As part of the 2010-2015 Muskoka Initiative (the Initiative), how much funding was disbursed specifically (i) for family planning, (ii) for reproductive health, (iii) to women's rights organizations; (b) what percentage of the recently announced \$3.5 billion in new funding for the "Saving Every Woman, Every Child" Initiative 2015-2020 will be directed towards family planning and reproductive health care; (c) how will the government meet its commitment to devote at least 10% of official development assistance to sexual and reproductive health, as agreed to during the 2012 International Parliamentarians Conference on the Implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development; (d) what has been the total amount disbursed specifically for family planning and reproductive health care under the auspices of government spending intended to address sexual violence in conflict-affected areas; and (e) what has been the total amount disbursed specifically for family planning and reproductive health care under the auspices of government spending intended to address child marriage, early marriage, and forced marriage?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of International Development and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with regard to (a), as part of the 2010-15 Muskoka Initiative, \$103.3 million was disbursed for family planning, of which \$85.4 million was for reproductive health specifically. The Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, DFATD, does not report using the women's rights organization Development Assistance Committee code since it is too broad.

With regard to (b), Canada recognizes the need to focus on improving maternal and child health outcomes from pre-pregnancy through childhood as evidenced by the \$3.5 billion in new funding disbursed for the Saving Every Woman, Every Child initiative. Specific allocations for family planning and reproductive health care have not yet been determined.

With regard to (c), Canada endorses and remains committed to advance collective action on a diverse range of population and development goals, such as universal access to education and comprehensive reproductive health, including voluntary family planning services, and the reduction of maternal, newborn and child mortality.

DFATD supports this through promoting safe pregnancies and maternal health; providing access to family planning services; reducing the burden of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS; preventing child, early and forced marriage; preventing female genital mutilation; and promoting women's and girls' rights. Departmental spending in the health sector is based on the priorities identified in the national health plans of recipient countries. Family planning activities are only one component of a broader strategy in maternal, newborn and child health.

With regard to (d), Canada supports an array of family planning and reproductive health care initiatives, some of which may be undertaken in areas of conflict. However, DFATD does not track disbursements in the specific manner requested.

With regard to (e), Canada supports an array of family planning and reproductive health care initiatives, many of which aid in global efforts to stop the practice of child marriage, early marriage and forced marriage. However, DFATD does not track disbursements in the specific manner requested.

Question No. 1144—Ms. Isabelle Morin:

With respect to the appointment of board members to the Canadian Airport Authorities board of directors: why is the government not allowing a civilian representative or an elected local representative to be appointed on the administrative boards of Canadian Airport Authorities for all nationally-significant airports?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadian airport authorities, CAAs, are not-for-profit, non-share capital corporations governed by boards of directors drawn from the local/regional population. The majority of the directors are nominated or appointed directly by municipalities in the region served by the airport, as well as local and regional business or other socio-economic organizations, such as boards of trade, chambers of commerce and consumers associations. The federal and provincial governments also nominate or appoint individuals to airport authority boards of directors.

No elected officials, whether from the municipal, provincial or federal level of government, are eligible for appointment to CAA boards of directors. This practice ensures that public confidence and trust in the integrity and impartiality of shared governance organizations is conserved, and removes any actual or perceived conflict of interest.

* * *

[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, furthermore, if Questions Nos. 1075, 1138 to 1141, 1143, and 1145 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 1075—Ms. Linda Duncan:

With regard to the Western Diversification Program (WDP) for each fiscal year from 2012-2013 to 2014-2015, year-to-date: (a) how many companies, non-profits or other eligible organizations applied for funding; (b) what is the total amount of funding that has been awarded, broken down by (i) fiscal year, (ii) federal electoral riding, (iii) date the funding was approved, (iv) date the funding was actually provided to each approved project; (c) what outreach activities were used to acquire potential applicants and what are the details of individuals or entities invited to briefings organized by Western Economic Diversification (WD); (d) what is the success rate of funding applications, broken down by (i) fiscal year, (ii) federal electoral riding; (e) what is the average amount of funding granted, broken down by (i) fiscal year, (ii) federal electoral riding; and (f) what are the requirements imposed by WD for financial commitments by other sources in order to qualify for a WDP award?

(Return tabled)

Government Orders

Question No. 1138—Mr. Robert Chisholm:

With regard to Employment Insurance (EI) for fiscal year 2014-15: (a) what was the volume of EI applications in total and broken down by (i) region or province where the claim originated, (ii) the number of claims accepted and the number of claims rejected, (iii) month; (b) what was the average processing time for EI applications in total and broken down by (i) region or province where the claim originated, (ii) month; (c) how many applications waited more than 28 days for a decision and, for these applications, what was the average wait time for a decision, in total and broken down by (i) region or province where the claim originated, (ii) month; (d) what was the volume of calls to EI call centres in total and broken down by (i) month, (ii) region or province; (e) how many calls were made to EI call centres that received a “high volume” message, in total and broken down by (i) month, (ii) region or province; (f) what were the national service level standards for calls answered by an agent at EI call centres, broken down by month; (g) what were the actual service level standards achieved by EI call centres for calls answered by an agent, broken down by (i) month, (ii) region or province; (h) what were the service standards for call backs from EI processing staff, broken down by month; (i) what were the service standards achieved by EI processing staff for call backs, broken down by (i) month, (ii) region or province; (j) what was the average number of days for a call back by EI processing staff, broken down by (i) month, (ii) region or province; (k) what was the number and percentage of term employees, and the number and percentage of indeterminate employees, working at EI call centres and processing centres; (l) what was the rate of sick leave use among EI call centre and processing centre employees; (m) what was the number of EI call centre and processing centre employees on long term disability; (n) what was the number of overtime hours worked by call centre employees; (o) how many of the additional 300 staff in EI processing have been hired, in total and broken down by (i) month, (ii) location; (p) how many of the 100 additional staff in EI call centres have been hired, in total and broken down by (i) month, (ii) location; (q) who authored the report on EI processing; (r) what is the Table of Contents for the report; (s) will the government make the report public; (t) how many complaints did the Office of Client Satisfaction receive, broken down by (i) month, (ii) region or province where the complaint originated; (u) how long, on average, did a complaint take to investigate and resolve, broken down by month; and (v) what were the major themes of the complaints received?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 1139—Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe:

With regard to the government’s commitment on January 7, 2015, to resettle 3 000 Iraqi refugees in 2015: (a) how many government-assisted Iraqi refugees have been resettled in Canada since January 1, 2015, in total and broken down by month; (b) how many applications for privately-sponsored Iraqi refugees have been accepted since January 1, 2015, in total and broken down by month; (c) how many privately-sponsored Iraqi refugees have arrived in Canada since January 1, 2015, in total and broken down by month; (d) how many Iraqi refugees have made inland claims for refugee status at the Immigration and Refugee Board since January 1, 2015, in total and broken down by month; (e) how many Iraqi refugees have received a positive decision at the Immigration and Refugee Board since January 1, 2015, in total and broken down by month; (f) how many applications for private sponsorship of Iraqi refugees have been received since January 1, 2015, in total and broken down by month; and (g) how many applications for private sponsorship of Iraqi refugees are waiting to be processed?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 1140—Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe:

With regard to the government’s commitment on January 7, 2015 to resettle 10 000 Syrian refugees by 2017: (a) how many Syrian refugees does the government plan to resettle each year, broken down by government-assisted and privately-sponsored refugees; (b) will the government be fast-tracking applications for privately-sponsored Syrian refugees; (c) what criteria has the government enumerated for prioritizing resettlement on the basis of religion or ethnicity; (d) what instructions have been given to processing officers regarding religion or ethnicity of Syrian refugees; (e) how many government assisted Syrian refugees have been resettled in Canada since January 1, 2015, in total and broken down by month; (f) how many applications for privately-sponsored Syrian refugees have been accepted since January 1, 2015, in total and broken down by month; (g) how many privately-sponsored Syrian refugees have arrived in Canada since January 1, 2015, in total and broken down by month; (h) how many Syrian refugees have made inland claims for refugee status at the Immigration and Refugee Board since July 2013, in total and broken down by (i) year, (ii) month; (i) how many Syrian refugees have

received a positive decision at the Immigration and Refugee Board since July 2013, in total and broken down by (i) year, (ii) month; (j) how many applications for private sponsorship of Syrian refugees have been received since July 2013, in total and broken down by (i) year, (ii) month; and (k) how many applications for private sponsorship of Syrian refugees are waiting to be processed?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 1141—Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe:

With regard to Express Entry: (a) how much has the government spent on advertising-to-date, broken down by (i) medium, including name of publication, website, or media outlet where appropriate, (ii) dates of advertisement, (iii) cost; (b) what is the budget for future advertising, broken down by (i) medium, including name of publication, website, or media outlet where appropriate, (ii) expected dates of advertisement, (iii) cost; and (c) what analysis is being conducted to ensure that advertising is achieving its intended goals?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 1143—Ms. Isabelle Morin:

With respect to the allocation of federal funding: what is the total amount of government funding, for each fiscal year 2010-2011, 2011-2012, 2012-2013, 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 to date, allocated within the constituency of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, specifying each (i) department or agency, (ii) initiative, (iii) amount?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 1145—Mr. Scott Simms:

With regard to the following cases pursued by the Attorney General of Canada and or the following federally initiated reference question, what have been the associated costs (internal and external) and internal tracking numbers of all documents, communications or briefing notes for each of the following cases: (a) Federation of Law Societies of Canada v. Canada (Attorney General), 2013 BCCA 147, SCC Docket No. 35399; (b) R. v. Smickle, 2013 ONCA 678; (c) R. v. Nur, 2013 ONCA 677z; (d) R. v. Charles, 2013 ONCA 681.; (e) R. v. Hill, 2012 ONSC 5050; (f) Canada (Attorney General) v. Whaling, 2014 SCC 20.; (g) CUPW v. A.G. Canada, 2013 ONSC 7532.; (h) Tabingo v. Canada (Citizenship and Immigration), 2013 FC 377; (i) Reference re Supreme Court Act, ss. 5 and 6, 2014 SCC 21.; (j) Canada (Attorney General) v. PHS Community Services Society, 2011 SCC 44.; (k) Canadian Doctors for Refugee Care, et al v Canada (Attorney General), et al (Federal Court File No T 356-13).; (l) Mounted Police Association of Ontario v. Canada (Attorney General) - 2015 SCC 1; (m) Reference re Supreme Court Act, - 2014 SCC 21; (n) Canada (Attorney General) v. Whaling - 2014 SCC 20; (o) SENATE REFORM, 2014 SCC 32, [2014] 1 S.C.R. 704; and (p) R. v. Tse - 2012 SCC 16?

(Return tabled)

• (1525)

[English]

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

COMMON SENSE FIREARMS LICENSING ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-42, An Act to amend the Firearms Act and the Criminal Code and to make a related amendment and a consequential amendment to other Acts, as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

Government Orders

The Speaker: There being no motions at report stage, the House will now proceed without debate to the putting of the question on the motion to concur in the bill at report stage.

[*English*]

Hon. Candice Bergen (for the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness) moved that the bill be concurred in.

The 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: On division.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

The Speaker: When shall the bill be read the third time? By leave, now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Candice Bergen (for the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness) moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak to Bill C-42, the Common Sense Firearms Licensing Act. This is an important legislative measure, since, for the first time in 20 years, it will make a significant change to the way in which firearms licences are awarded in Canada.

[*English*]

There are eight important measures in this common-sense legislation that highlight the clear approach our Conservative government is taking to firearms' policies, namely it is that policies should promote safety but that they must also be sensible.

I served in the Canadian Armed Forces for 20 years, and in doing so acquired professional knowledge regarding firearms, firearms safety and firearms responsibilities. Now as a civilian, I have gone through the process of obtaining my possession and acquisition licence. As a firearm owner myself and as a sport shooter, I can say that the important changes contained in the bill are needed and much appreciated by law-abiding Canadian gun owners.

[*Translation*]

I can also say that these policies and, more generally, this bill, have the support of a large number of Canadians from coast to coast.

Before I get into the details, I would like to start by explaining where I stand on this debate. This is a debate about culture. Hunting, fishing, trapping and sport shooting are all proud parts of our Canadian heritage.

[*English*]

Were it not for these activities, the brave men and women who settled Canada would simply never have been able to undertake and sustain the exploration that has grown into the greatest country in the world. Not only that, many young Canadians can look back fondly on hunting excursions with their family.

[*Translation*]

We need to encourage this type of activity.

[*English*]

However, the firearms policies crafted by the previous Liberal government often served to dissuade people from engaging in these Canadian heritage activities. Policies that criminalize the ownership of firearms will simply discourage individuals from becoming involved. The same can be said for increased needless paperwork.

Former Liberal justice minister and father of the long gun registry, Allan Rock, said that he that he came to Ottawa with the firm belief that only police and the military should have firearms. On this side of the House, we could not disagree more.

[*Translation*]

That is exactly why we introduced the bill before us today.

[*English*]

As I said a moment ago, the bill continues to deliver on our record of safe and sensible firearms policies. These two themes run throughout the bill.

First, I would like to touch on how the bill would keep us safe.

Our Conservative government has a strong record in tackling the criminal use of firearms. We have passed a series of new measures to ensure that criminals who use firearms go to prison for a very long time. For example, we created a new offence to criminalize drive-by and other reckless shootings. The bill before us today builds on this with three key measures.

First, we will establish mandatory firearms safety training for first-time firearms owners. This is a very important change because, in the past, individuals were able to simply challenge the test, which did not ensure any level of consistency in knowledge of how to safely operate a firearm. This change is widely supported. For example, Pierre Latraverse of the Fédération québécoise des chasseurs et pêcheurs said, "This bill...simplifies the procedures for awarding a permit for users who follow the law, while strengthening safety and education".

Second, in the area of public safety, the bill before us today would amend the Criminal Code to strengthen the provisions relating to order prohibiting the possession of firearms where a person would be convicted of an offence involving domestic violence.

● (1530)

[*Translation*]

That is very important. I will repeat for emphasis. It will be mandatory to prohibit the possession of firearms in cases of serious offences involving domestic violence. In fact, nearly two-thirds of all those convicted of spousal homicide had a history of domestic violence. This change makes perfect sense.

Government Orders

[English]

Tony Rodgers, executive director of the Nova Scotia Federation of Anglers and Hunters, had this to say:

The amended Criminal Code to strengthen the provision relating to orders prohibiting possession of firearms where a person is convicted of an offence involving domestic violence is a step in the right direction.

The last public safety measure in this legislation that I would to address is the authorization of firearms import information sharing for restricted and prohibited firearms imported by business.

[Translation]

I would like to expand on this important point if I may. When a business imports a restricted or prohibited firearm, it has to complete forms and the merchandise has to be examined by the Canada Border Services Agency at the border. The business also has to register the firearms when they are received in the shop before they can be sold.

However, the two agencies are operating in silos. If a business tells the Canada Border Services Agency that it has 5,000 units but registers just 3,000 with the RCMP, nobody compares those numbers. Consequently, 2,000 units could end up on the black market. That is a big problem, especially in British Columbia. That is why this was raised during federal, provincial and territorial meetings, and that is why we are pleased to be taking action on this important issue.

[English]

I now would like to touch on our five measures to make our firearms policies more sensible.

First, we would create a six-month grace period at the end of the five-year licence. This would stop otherwise law-abiding individuals from being criminalized overnight for a simple error in paperwork.

[Translation]

Some people have wrongly claimed that this change was made just to satisfy the firearms lobby because no other permit has a grace period after it expires.

[English]

However, I would like to counter that argument with this point. If I let my driver's licence, my dog licence, my fishing licence or any other licence lapse, I may have to pay a fine or be subject to another regulatory punishment. If I let my firearms licence lapse, I could go to prison for a significant length of time. It is clear that the threat of prison time for administrative oversight deserves special attention for leniency.

However, we do not want this new measure to be abused. That is why, under the legislation, an individual would not be allowed to purchase new firearms or ammunition or even use their firearms during that time. However, a person would not become an overnight criminal as the result of a simple, honest mistake. That is common sense policy. No one who is not simply ideologically opposed to the civilian possession of firearms can disagree with this measure.

Even the NDP member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca had to agree that this was common sense in committee. What did he have to say about the grace period? He said, “I do agree with some of our other

presenters is that perhaps a failure to renew shouldn't result in an immediate criminal charge”.

The next measure to make our firearms policies more sensible is the merger of the possession-only licence and the possession and acquisition licence. Again, this makes good sense.

The possession-only licence was created by the previous Liberal government as a grandfathering system. Those who did not want to engage in the new bureaucratic regime would not have their firearms taken away, but they would not be able to purchase any new ones, either. This group of firearms owners averages approximately 60 years of age and has owned firearms in excess of 20 years. This group is clearly experienced in the safe handling and use of firearms. That is why this legislative change would give purchasing rights to nearly 600,000 individuals.

Let me again quote Pierre Latraverse of the Fédération québécoise des chasseurs et pêcheurs, who said:

It's a very positive measure, given that there will only be a single licence under these conditions. This is much more representative of what owning a firearm is like. Currently, there are two licences: a possession licence and a possession and acquisition licence. If you only have a possession licence, you cannot purchase firearms. You have to go back through the system to buy a possession and acquisition licence.

With the merger, a hunter won't have to go through the whole administrative process again to purchase another firearm.

● (1535)

[Translation]

The next sensible measure is the elimination of useless paperwork for authorization to transport restricted and prohibited weapons. Currently, an individual who wants to do target practice with a restricted weapon has to fill out forms when he wants to go to a firing range.

[English]

Sometimes provincial chief firearms officers, or CFOs, will allow for broader authorizations, but I will touch on that and on their discretion later.

This paperwork is then sent to the CFO, or the chief firearms officer, where it is filed in a drawer and never seen again. It is not shared with law enforcement and it is not searchable. Aside from the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry, which our Conservative government proudly destroyed, this is yet another significant waste of taxpayer dollars within the entire firearms regime. It makes no sense to require all of this needless paperwork.

I would like to quote from a *National Post* editorial from earlier this month. It said:

The aims of our gun control system...are worthwhile and important. Our approach to achieving these ends, however, leaves much to be desired, and inflicts burdensome red tape on citizens well beyond what is necessary.

Take, for instance, the current system controlling the lawful transport of restricted firearms...The prospective buyer of a handgun must have a restricted-class licence, and must show he has a valid reason to buy it...The firearm must be stored, unloaded, inside a securely locked container or safe. And it must be equipped with a secondary trigger lock even when so secured. The only place the handgun may be legally transported is from the owner's home to a firing range, or a gun repair shop, and back, by a “reasonably direct route.”

Government Orders

And that's not the end of it. The gun owner must then apply for an entirely separate piece of paperwork — an authorization to transport, or ATT. This permit repeats what the firearms licence already establishes: that the lawful possessor of a registered gun can only transport it via a direct route from home to certain authorized locations.

What good is this? Anyone who qualifies to own a handgun clearly already meets the legal requirements of using it at a certified facility, and anyone who cannot legally qualify to transport a gun back and forth should not be authorized to possess one in the first place. The entire ATT system is redundant.

It simply does not make sense and it does not protect the public. These are two strong reasons to support this important legislation.

What else would this legislation do?

As I mentioned earlier, it would end the arbitrary powers of the chief firearms officers. Elected officials would take their appropriate place overseeing the decisions of CFOs that directly affect law-abiding gun owners.

The current rules and procedures have resulted in a nonsensical patchwork across the country. It is ridiculous that these would differ vastly between Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario. There have to be harmonized standards across the country.

[*Translation*]

The final measure I would like to discuss is, in my opinion, one of the most important ones in the whole bill. We will enable a duly elected government to have the final say in classification decisions.

Why make such a big change? As many have pointed out, the government already has the power to further restrict the classification of a firearm, but it does not have the power to relax restrictions.

That problem became all too apparent on February 25, 2014. That was the day that tens of thousands of Canadians woke up to find that the Canadian firearms program had turned them into criminals with the stroke of a pen. Unilaterally, a change had been made to the Firearms Reference Table. The minister was not consulted, nor was any other Canadian.

• (1540)

[*English*]

There was no legislation, no regulation, not even an order-in-council that authorized this change.

[*Translation*]

Even more worrisome, there was no way to correct the mistake. That is why this bill is so important.

[*English*]

I can reconfirm, as the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness has said numerous times, as soon as the legislation receives royal assent, we will restore the non-restricted classification of the Swiss arms and the CZ858 families of rifles.

It is clear that our Conservative government is standing up for law-abiding hunters, farmers and sport shooters. However, what about the other political parties? Well, I expect that we will hear for the remainder of this debate how awful firearms are and how they ought to be further restricted. That should come as no surprise, given that both the Liberals and the NDP have committed to bringing back

a wasteful and ineffective long gun registry should they ever get the chance.

[*Translation*]

What has struck me, however, is the degree of contempt for gun owners. The member for Trinity—Spadina alluded to some sort of moral equivalence between hunters and terrorists. That is the same member who said in the past that emotional arguments from hunters were not enough to justify not banning the sale of ammunition.

[*English*]

In case anyone thinks this is a rogue junior member, let us listen to the words of the Liberal leader. He said that this bill:

would allow handguns and assault weapons to be freely transported in a trunk anywhere within a province, even left parked outside a Canadian Tire or a local hockey arena.

He even put out a fundraising advertisement with the same comments. This is patently ridiculous. The Liberal leader is either trying to fearmonger or he simply does not have a clue about how firearms are regulated in Canada, or it could be both.

I was pleased to see Conservative members of the public safety committee ask Tony Bernardo, one of Canada's foremost firearms experts, about this advertisement and whether it was accurate. Here is what he had to say: "I've seen the advertisements and they are incorrect".

What is more, the question was also put to non-partisan public servants. The assistant deputy minister of public safety answered with a simple "no" when asked by committee members if the advertisements were accurate.

The facts are these. Despite the claims of the Liberal Party, firearms issues are serious issues. Any serious leader must stand up for these rights, and it is clear that the only leader who will do so is the Prime Minister.

[*Translation*]

In closing, I would like to remind the members of the House that we are talking about Canada's hunting, fishing and sport shooting culture. We are talking about important outdoor activities that are enjoyed by over 4 million Canadians. We should be promoting those activities, not making them less accessible.

[*English*]

Before my colleagues opposite rise to ask questions about why the so-called gun lobby has so influenced the bill, I would like to remind them of something. There are simply ordinary Canadians who enjoy these activities.

I would like to remind my colleagues of the words of Greg Farrant, from the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, who said the following:

Firearms owners in Canada are judges, lawyers, farmers, electricians, mechanics, plumbers, accountants, even federal politicians...who live in and represent urban ridings. They are not criminals. They are not gang members. Rather, they are lawful firearms owners who obey the law.

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I hope that members heed those words when they vote on this important legislation, because I know that the individuals who care about firearms issues and property rights issues will be watching this debate closely.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his speech, but it mystifies me why Conservatives continue to stand and say that the NDP will bring back the gun registry, when we very clearly said we will not. It is gone. The data is destroyed, and it is not coming back.

He cited a quotation from me in committee, and as the Conservatives are very fond of doing, he cited the first half of what I had to say and not the second half. While I did agree that getting an automatic criminal record for inadvertently failing to renew one's licence is probably too harsh, I did not say that there should be a complete get-out-of-jail-free card for everyone who does not renew his or her licence. I said that those who inadvertently forget should probably have a lesser penalty than a criminal record. I think that is common sense.

The bill would take away the ability to challenge the gun licensing exam, and it says that everyone must do a gun safety course. The member talked about representing rural Canadians and those who live in remote areas. How are people in rural or remote areas supposed to access those courses when they are not really available on a practical basis? They require travel. They require overnight stays. Therefore, we moved an amendment at committee asking that we maintain the ability, for those who legitimately cannot do a course because they cannot legitimately access one, because we think courses are valuable, to challenge the gun licence exam. Why are they taking away that ability for rural and northern residents?

• (1545)

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, just to go back to my quote from the member, I did not disparage him in any way. I simply quoted what he said at committee, which he agreed to here in the House, which is that gun owners, should their licence inadvertently expire due to some administrative oversight, should not be threatened with criminal prosecution. He and I agree on that, and I think that is where common sense comes into this legislation. That is why I appeal to his common sense and the common sense of his colleagues to stand and vote on this important bill.

When it comes to the idea of challenging the exam or having to take a firearms safety course, we feel that it is also good common sense that new gun owners take a gun safety course.

I live in a rural area. I am an MP for a rural riding. I have a gun licence, and I acquired it by attending a course. They are not as inaccessible as my colleague would have people believe, and it is not an onerous matter. The courses are very simple. They are very time effective. All new gun owners would be raised to the same standard of understanding regarding gun safety and gun responsibility. That is something I think Canadians support. It is something gun owners support, and it is something my colleagues in the opposition should definitely support.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one cannot help but notice how the member really torques up the Conservative spin that comes out of the Prime Minister's Office with respect to the gun registry.

It is very interesting. If the member were to reflect upon reality and be truthful with Canadians, the member should acknowledge that it was actually Kim Campbell, the Progressive Conservative prime minister, in co-operation with Conservative senators, and I know, because I was a member of the Manitoba legislature when the issue first came up, who actually started the whole movement toward a gun registry.

Does the member feel that it is the reform element that has actually completely overcome the progressive element of Kim Campbell, the former prime minister, to say absolutely no to the gun registry?

I wonder if he would also provide an honest answer, for people who might be viewing, in recognizing that the leader of the Liberal Party of Canada has been very clear. We are not going to be bringing back the gun registry. He knows that. Why would he espouse something that is just not true?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, it was very fanciful skating over there to somehow attribute the gun registry to Conservatives. Everyone knows in Canada that the long gun registry came from the Liberal Party. Talk to any gun owner in Canada, and they will tell us about the loathing they have for the Liberal Party for having brought it in and defended it to its last dying gasp. When that bill to end the long gun registry was in front of Parliament, how did that member vote, I wonder. I will tell members. He voted to keep it. There is no question that the long gun registry is very close and dear to the hearts of Liberal members. That is why they have lost the support of law-abiding gun owners all across Canada, gun owners who respect our laws. They should not be treated in such shameful ways as the Liberals have treated them.

I want to thank the member for having allowed me to highlight this marked difference between the Liberal position and the Conservative position and Conservative leadership on this critical matter.

Ms. Roxanne James (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, part of the changes we are bringing forward in this particular legislation has to do with the authorization to transport. When I hear the Liberal member across the way get up to talk about spin, the Liberal spin was that the bill was somehow going to allow firearms to be brought to supermarkets, and in fact, there was fundraising on that, which is very shameful.

The issue at hand is that it is producing red tape for law-abiding, legal firearm owners across this country. In fact, we had a number of credible witnesses who came to committee and talked about the fact that in their provinces, their ATTs are actually valid for longer periods of time anyway.

I wonder if the hon. member would comment on the fact that the Liberals are using this to fearmonger and to raise funds for the upcoming election.

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• (1550)

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, I think that question highlights how I just responded to the last question. The Liberals are in favour of incredible bureaucracy that constrains law-abiding Canadian gun owners. A good example is the ATT. Just so I get the quote right, this is a direct quote from the Liberal leader. He said:

Bill C-42 would allow handguns and assault weapons to be freely transported in a trunk anywhere within a province, even left parked outside a Canadian Tire or local hockey arena.

That quote shows a remarkable lack of understanding, first about the issue and what an ATT is, and second what the bill would do to correct this issue for law-abiding gun owners. That quote was refuted by witness after witness at committee. The Liberal members should really back away from that, perhaps have a look at their policy with respect to law-abiding gun owners, and take this opportunity to stand up and defend law-abiding gun owners by supporting the legislation.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, out of the many problematic aspects of this bill, there is one aspect in particular that I want to ask my colleague about.

For as long as I can remember, the RCMP has been the body that determines which guns are prohibited and which ones are not. However, under this bill, the Minister of Public Safety would make those decisions.

Does my colleague think it is okay to give this responsibility, which was the RCMP's, to the minister, regardless of his party affiliation? To hand this responsibility over to a politician who—with all due respect to all my colleagues—has no expertise in the matter would be to politicize it.

Furthermore, my colleague referred to Gary Mauser as a leading expert on firearms, when really, he is more like an expert in manipulating public opinion. That is even the title of one of his books. I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on that.

[*English*]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, I would like to hear what my colleague thinks about bureaucrats deciding with the stroke of a pen that thousands upon thousands of law-abiding gun owners would immediately become criminals, illegal gun owners, overnight, with no consultation. What does she think about that? How does she answer to her farmers and to sports shooters about that? That is really the issue.

The minister, of course, is free to consult, and I am sure that he will consult before undertaking such a decision.

The other important aspect of what we are debating here is what I mentioned in my remarks, and that is that the decision made by bureaucrats to basically render thousands of Canadians criminals could not be undone in the current legislative or regulatory form. That is important, because an error was made. The error needs to be corrected, and this bill provides the mechanism, the tool, for such errors to be corrected.

I do not know what the member would have against that.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak against Bill C-42, the government's so-called common sense firearms licensing act, at third reading.

After introducing the bill in October and letting it languish on the order paper, in April the government suddenly found it urgent to press ahead with the bill. I still wonder why that was the case. However, the result clearly is that we now have a bill before us that has received very rushed consideration here in Parliament.

The government used time allocation to push Bill C-42 through second reading and then gave very severe limits on the time to be spent in committee, guaranteeing we would have poor consideration. We ended up having only two days for witnesses, April 28 and April 30, and a very short window of opportunity to even invite witnesses. It was just three days from when time allocation was proposed to when the first witnesses appeared.

As a result, we have Bill C-42 back in front of us without hearing from many important potential witnesses, including front-line law enforcement officers or law enforcement officials of any kind.

This is particularly disturbing, as there does not seem to have been any consultation with the law enforcement community before the introduction of the bill. Any consultations that did take place took place well after the bill had been introduced and took place in private. No one else was consulted, and clearly not any of the victim groups that the government always claims to keep top of mind when it comes to crime.

The parliamentary secretary has tried to characterize this poor consideration as somehow a failure of the opposition to do our job, which is a curious charge that implicitly admits that the bill has not received the consideration it should have. However, that is disingenuous for many reasons, foremost among them the limited and rapid timeframe that the government imposed for consideration of the bill in committee, resulting in a single week, take it or leave it, for witnesses to appear.

We are now faced with another troubling phenomenon, and that is a reluctance of witnesses to appear before the public safety committee. Perhaps that is a result of the experience of some of the witnesses on the hearings for Bill C-51, where they were insulted and had their integrity challenged by government members. Perhaps it is a concern over funding, since we have seen groups that have opposed the government find that funding for their programming has been chopped. Perhaps it is a concern over charitable status, because if the witnesses happen to represent a charity, their organization may end up being audited by the Conservative government. Whatever the cause, the result is that we have Bill C-42 back from the public safety committee unchanged, apart from a technical amendment regarding the number of sections.

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Turning back to the content of Bill C-42 more directly, some on the government side have taken issue with a statement I made in debate at second reading when I said that the bill before us only looks like common sense when viewed from the point of view of the gun lobby. I stand by that statement, but I would point out that the Conservatives have tried to ascribe a very broad meaning to the term “gun lobby” that few others would actually use.

What we on this side of the House mean when we use the term is not all gun owners, not all hunters and fishers, but a small group of people, including some gun dealers and manufacturers and some paid lobbyists, who spend their time hanging around at Parliament to promote a very narrow agenda. That agenda is to remove all restrictions on guns in Canada.

The first target of this narrow lobby was the gun registry, which is now gone and will not be coming back. However, they have now moved on to other goals, and this bill is a part of that lobby effort. It is an agenda that very few gun owners would actually know anything about, and the shorter the time we spend on it in Parliament, the less they will know.

The Conservatives continue to promote the dangerous ideas of this gun lobby. They represent a small minority of Canadians, and, I would argue, a minority even among gun owners. This is the idea that any regulations at all on firearms are so-called red tape that pit the interests of law-abiding gun owners against the government and police and amount to nothing more than restrictions on rights or freedoms.

As I have pointed out before, and like his gun lobby allies, the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness has fallen into the habit of using U.S. rhetoric in his comments on firearms. This was never so clear than on July 23 of last year, when the minister said, “To possess a firearm is a right, and it’s a right that comes with responsibilities.”

Here we have a minister of the crown, one of the government’s chief legal ministers, directly contradicting the Supreme Court of Canada. In 1993, the Supreme Court found in the case of *R. v. Hasselwander* that:

Canadians, unlike Americans do not have a constitutional right to bear arms. Indeed, most Canadians prefer the peace of mind and sense of security derived from the knowledge that the possession of automatic weapons is prohibited.

Therefore, what the minister’s comments last July clearly indicate is that we unfortunately have a government that likes to pander to this narrow gun lobby, and in this case the government does so fairly transparently in order to generate political support from their base.

● (1555)

The Conservatives like to talk about the Liberals doing mailings on gun registry and gun regulations, and they themselves do exactly the same. However, let me remind the House of a few of these initiatives regarding specific firearms regulations wherein the influence of the gun lobby is quite apparent.

In 2011 the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness drafted new regulations for gun shows that would have required things most Canadians would actually see as common sense, such as notifying local police of gun shows to be held in their jurisdiction and requiring tethering of guns on display just as is done

with cellphones in sales kiosks. These gun show regulations would have been brought into force in 2012, but no, that did not happen. Instead, the Conservatives junked the proposed regulations altogether after complaints from the gun lobby that the new requirements would be too onerous. I guess we should have seen this coming when the gun-lobby-dominated firearms advisory committee called for the scrapping of gun show regulations in its March 2012 report.

Regulations were also due to come into force in December 2012 to require each gun manufactured in Canada to have an individual serial number, something actually required by international treaties to which Canada is a party and again something that seems like common sense when it comes to police being able to trace guns used in crimes or in the fight to combat the illegal international trade in small arms. In November 2013, and for a second time, the Conservatives quietly implemented a regulation delaying the coming into force of this requirement until December 2015, after the next election.

When it comes to Bill C-42, I guess we should be glad that the government abandoned the most extreme recommendations of its firearms advisory committee. These were the proposals for 10-year licences and proposals to allow the resale of seized weapons by police forces. We know that the police community very strongly opposed both of those measures, but now we are seeing complaints in the media from the narrow gun lobby that Bill C-42 does not go far enough in that direction.

New Democrats have a different view, one that clearly puts public safety first. New Democrats believe that public safety must always trump politics when it comes to firearms licensing and regulation. The Conservatives like to pose as the ones who understand rural Canadians, but let me say that many MPs on our side also come from rural backgrounds—I am one of those—and many represent rural ridings. I myself represent a riding that stretches from downtown Victoria all the way out to the West Coast Trail trailhead at Port Renfrew, so I do know something about law-abiding gun owners for whom hunting is much more than just a prop to use in arguments about gun registration and licensing.

Most curious, from a government that claims to put the interests of rural areas first when it comes to gun regulations, was the rejection of the NDP amendment proposed in the public safety committee to preserve the right of those in rural and remote areas to challenge the firearms exam without completing a safety course.

Let us make no mistake about it: New Democrats support the requirement for completing a safety course. However, we acknowledge that there are vast areas of this country where these courses are simply not available on a practical basis. We are glad to see that the bill would preserve the exemption for aboriginal people, but we ask why the government rejected our proposals to accommodate other remote rural residents with a similar exemption.

Let me turn back once again to the contents of the bill we have before us and make some of the arguments I made at second reading.

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For me, despite the short title of the bill, there is nothing common sense about the bill's two major provisions: making gun classification a political process and removing the requirement for a transportation permit for restricted firearms to be present in any vehicle carrying them. These two proposals have no public safety purpose and instead respond to explicit complaints from the narrow gun lobby. All the other things the Conservatives want to address in this bill could have been accomplished without these two provisions.

Let me discuss the first change proposed, a change in the way weapons are classified as either non-restricted, restricted, or prohibited.

Right now, recommendations on classification, under the definitions contained in law, are made by firearms experts from the RCMP. The minister's signature is required, but there is no discretion for the minister, providing the recommendations he receives fall within the scope of the existing legislative definitions. What is interesting is to hear the members on the other side say that bureaucrats made this decision and that bureaucrats could not be overruled by the minister. However, the existing legislative definition actually does allow the minister to overrule that recommendation for weapons that have a legitimate hunting or sporting purpose.

• (1600)

Why was the minister unable to overrule this reclassification? It was clearly because the Swiss Arms Classic Green does not have a legitimate hunting or sporting purpose once it is modified to be a semi-automatic weapon.

What Bill C-42 suggests is that cabinet should be able to ignore classification recommendations from the experts charged with keeping the public safe, the RCMP, and substitute its own wisdom about how weapons should be classified. The members on the other side say yes, the minister would be allowed to consult whomever he wants, and some Conservatives have even suggested that the proper people to consult would be gun manufacturers, who could advise cabinet on the classification of the weapons they are trying to sell.

Bill C-42 goes even further by allowing cabinet to grant exemptions for guns and ammunition that would otherwise be prohibited weapons.

Where did this perceived need for change come from? It came from that single case that has been referred to, the reclassification of a single weapon, the Swiss Arms Classic Green, as it is sometimes called. These are military-style weapons that had originally been sold in Canada as a semi-automatic weapon limited to firing five rounds. Before 2013, there were approximately 2,000 of these in Canada, worth about \$4,000 each. Why, then, were they reclassified?

It came about because the RCMP found that so-called refurbished models were showing up in gun shops in Calgary, but they were now operating as automatic weapons. This meant these weapons were now being converted to automatic weapons capable of firing a long series of shots from a single trigger pull, exactly what the designation of "prohibited" was designed to keep off the streets in Canada.

When an outcry resulted from this reclassification, the Conservatives were quick to grant a two-year amnesty in March 2014, an amnesty for which I believe the legal authority is doubtful at best.

Now we have Bill C-42 before us as the longer-term solution, since this bill would give the current Conservative cabinet the power to decide if these dangerous weapons should remain on our streets.

Quite apart from the danger of ending up with automatic weapons on the street, there is another important principle at stake here. When we make laws, we make them in public, after public debate, and they stay in force until there is another public debate about changing them. In fact, what we have in this bill is the creation of a process whereby cabinet can in effect change our gun classification system and the classification of individual weapons and ammunition by making decisions behind closed doors and without any public debate.

Who knows who will be serving in cabinet after the next election? Whoever that is, I know I do not want decisions to be based on political considerations, but instead on the professional recommendations of public officials charged with keeping Canadians safe.

The other major change in Bill C-42 is removing the requirement that exists in most provinces to have a permit in any vehicle transporting restricted firearms and prohibiting any province from reimposing such a requirement. Currently, permits must specify a reason for transporting a restricted firearm and specify that the travel must be from a specific point A to a specific point B. This makes it relatively easy for police to enforce the prohibition on the illegal transportation of firearms.

Bill C-42 rolls transportation permits into the licence to own firearms. This would automatically allow the transportation of firearms between the owner's home and a list of five categories of places: to any gun range, to any gun shop, to any gun show, to any police station, and to any border post for exiting Canada. In my riding alone, this would create hundreds of possibilities for those who wish to violate the law to make excuses for having the weapons in their vehicles, and this change would make the prohibition on the illegal transportation of weapons virtually impossible for police to enforce. Unfortunately, the committee did not hear from the law enforcement community, for a variety of reasons that I addressed earlier.

There are other provisions in the bill about which New Democrats have questions. Members on the other side have raised the question of the grace period. I want to state once again that New Democrats have said that inadvertently forgetting to renew one's licence should not always result in a criminal record. However, the government has gone whole hog the other way and removed any penalties for people failing to renew their gun licences. We have suggested that if it is truly inadvertent, a lesser penalty than a criminal record could be imposed, but a penalty should still exist.

Does anything in this bill look good to New Democrats? Certainly measures that make prohibitions on gun ownership easier in cases of domestic violence are welcome, as are the expanded requirements for gun safety courses.

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•(1605)

Clearly, public safety is not the central priority for the Conservatives in Bill C-42. In fact, its two main provisions seem to pose new threats to public safety.

Media interviews with the government's friends in the gun lobby have made several things clear. One is the close links between this narrow gun lobby and the Conservative Party, especially in terms of fundraising, as I mentioned, the other is that they will not be satisfied to stop with Bill C-42, and they intend to demand more in the future. This close relationship between the Conservatives and the gun lobby is why no one should trust the Conservatives any longer when it comes to putting public safety first on licensing gun owners and the regulations of guns. In the end, that really is the reason why we will be voting against this bill.

We had a chance to have a full and fair debate here in Parliament. We had a chance to hear a full range of witnesses. The government had already decided that neither of those things was going to happen with this bill. As I said, it sat on the order paper from October and it is inexcusable to me that the government should then suddenly whip the bill through in such a short time. It needs full consideration. We need to hear from the law enforcement community about the impacts of this bill, and we need to hear from more Canadians and from disparate kinds of groups. The government did a good job in bringing hunting and fishing groups before the committee. They are legitimate stakeholders and we were glad to hear from them. However, hearing from just one side in this debate does not make for the best legislation.

The government accuses us on this side of fearmongering, and I guess we throw the same charge back at it. The fearmongering we are talking about is based on real concerns about public safety, so I would argue that fearmongering is not the right word. We are talking about what happens in many municipalities, in many cities around the country. We have the example of Surrey, B.C. where we have had a number of murders in that community, which I believe is now up to 25 in two months. There are very high levels of gun violence, so we have to make sure that any of the changes we make to a bill like Bill C-42 do not inadvertently contribute to these high levels of violence. We have seen similar problems with gun violence in downtown Toronto. We see now in British Columbia the gun violence extending to the community of Abbotsford. It is like a cancer that spreads throughout the community. We have to do all we can to ensure that reasonable regulations, and the things that I talked about, such as having serial numbers on guns manufactured in Canada, are in place to help police officers do the work they need to do to keep our communities safe from gun violence. This is not just about hunters and fishers, although we do have to make sure that we have a law in place that is practical and reasonable for them. It is also about safety in our main communities. In this case, I would argue that the government has not found a balance, instead it has gone for one side of the debate only.

What will the government say to families in Surrey? What will it say about the need to attack gun violence there? We heard the minister say in question period today that sometime in the future the government will provide more RCMP. He could not say exactly when, but that there would be money in the future. We have the government saying that the budget has been increased for the RCMP,

for CBSA and for CSIS. However, when we actually look at the budget, as the minister invited me to do, we find that the level of cuts since 2012 will not even be made up for another four years. How do our law enforcement agencies cope with these epidemics of gun violence that are happening in urban areas?

Because of the high level of resources required to meet terrorist threats, we have seen just this week that the RCMP has been forced to cut such programs as the Condor program, which targeted those offenders who left a halfway house or escaped custody and were illegally at large. There was a special task force to make sure that those people who belong behind bars end up back behind bars. However, the RCMP had to cut that due to a lack of funding.

Once again we have come around full circle here for a government that likes to talk tough on crime but not provide the resources needed and, inadvertently, through its ideological approach to gun licensing and regulation, may actually make things worse in our urban areas.

Therefore, once again, the New Democrats will stand up and call for a gun licensing and regulation regime that puts public safety first, and that is not Bill C-42.

•(1610)

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member, in the latter part of his speech, tried to link Bill C-42 to gun violence in Surrey. As a retired member of the force, I am pretty sure there is not a gangbanger out there who has a PAL or an ATT. I am sure they do not even know how to spell it. That is a fair stretch on that part.

My question is with regard to the ATT. As he well knows from committee and elsewhere, the ATT has been formed so that a person can take it from their residence to a gun range and return it in that fashion. I believe that is the most appropriate way. Therefore, I would like to clearly understand where he was trying to go with gun violence in Surrey, specific to a PAL, a POL and an ATT, in which gangbangers do not apply to any of these rules, none.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, I think it applies most directly to the transportation of weapons. What we are talking about here is that when the police stop someone, under Bill C-42 that person would not have to have an authorization to transport the weapon in the car, but they could automatically talk about five different categories of places they could be transporting that gun to.

We are not talking about the law-abiding sport shooter. We are talking about the ability of the RCMP to enforce the laws against illegal transportation of guns on those who are in fact interested in gun violence and crime.

I talked to my local police chiefs about this. I talked to a local member of the RCMP and they acknowledged that they felt this could potentially make enforcing the regulations against illegal transportation of guns very difficult for them. That would have an impact on gun violence in urban areas.

• (1615)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will get a chance to address the House shortly on Bill C-42, but I have a fairly specific question for the member. It is related to the issue of the gun registry.

As we have already witnessed here, within the first hour of debate it has come up on several occasions. I think there is some merit in posing the question straightforward to the member. What is the official position of the New Democratic Party in regard to gun registry? Is it something it would support and would it reinstate it?

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, I am a little puzzled by the member's question because he knows good and well. We have said it repeatedly here. When we become the government after the next election we have no intention of bringing back the gun registry. The registry is dead. The data has been destroyed.

What we have said is, having done that, we have to take care to make sure that the licensing and regulations we have in place do everything they can to promote public safety and community safety at the local level. As I stressed in my speech, we do not think that Bill C-42 meets this standard.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I come from the riding of Surrey—Newton and North Delta. As we know, Surrey—Newton is a part of Surrey, B.C. The residents of Surrey are very disturbed that restricted weapons could be moved around so easily with this legislation. Not only that, we are also very concerned that despite a commitment to provide an extra 100 RCMP we are not seeing any clear timelines or commitments.

From a government that talks about public safety and fighting crime, we feel the government is failing to deliver for the citizens of Surrey—Newton, as well as for other Canadians from coast to coast. My question for my colleague is, do you believe that this particular bill would ensure public safety or would it be much easier to move restricted weapons around and add to the gang violence we are seeing in Surrey, where we have had close to 30 incidents of shooting in the last two months?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before I go to the member, I would remind all hon. members to direct their questions to the chair, rather than directly to their colleagues.

The hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, this is a government that likes to talk tough on crime and point to all its legislation of increased mandatory minimums and all the deterrents that are supposed to happen, even though we all know that there is absolutely no evidence that these tougher penalties have an impact on the crime rate. At the same time, it does things that make it much more difficult for municipal police and the RCMP to do their jobs.

One of those is the government has continued to cut the budgets available since 2012. The Conservatives like to point back a decade ago to 2006 and talk about things they did 10 years ago, but in fact

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for the last three years, until this year, they have been cutting the budgets. This year, they are holding them relatively steady at a level much lower than they were in 2012, which makes it much more difficult for police to do their jobs. It also makes it much more difficult for the RCMP to do things like provide the 100 RCMP members that have been promised, with no timeframe, to address the concerns in Surrey.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to quote the Leader of the NDP from early December 2014 to point out what the member said in terms of his party's view on registering firearms. He said:

A New Democrat government would ensure police are able to track every firearm in Canada.

He went on to say he:

...disputed the Conservative government's contention that gun registration is an unfair, onerous requirement...

Clearly, the NDP wants to bring the long gun registry back. I am somewhat offended by his use of the term gun lobby. Firearms owners in Canada represent a wide cross-section of society. Millions of Canadians own and use firearms safely and in a law-abiding way.

As the chair of the Conservative hunting and angling caucus, I asked for people's views on Bill C-42, and I received petitions from all across the country. Thousands of people from all walks of life urged us to pass Bill C-42.

It is quite clear that the NDP wants to bring the long gun registry back. Quite honestly, I think it is an NDP goal to eliminate the private ownership of firearms in this country.

Will the member come clean and admit the real goal is to eliminate firearms ownership?

• (1620)

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette will have to pardon me if I actually laugh at his question. It is absurd.

What we have said, and he quoted our leader saying something that I have just said, is that we think we should be able to track guns. What does that mean? We think there should be a serial number on guns, every gun manufactured in Canada, so that when the police find a weapon they can find sales records. Having sales records of guns and a discrete number, which we have openly called for, through regulation on every gun manufactured in Canada, would be a good start for police being able to solve gun crimes.

We are not bringing back the registry, which registers individual guns to individual owners, but being able to track the sale of guns, which is actually a very good idea which the police very much support in this country.

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I, too, had to chuckle at that last question.

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It seems ironic to me that the government that hails on spending more money than anybody in the entire universe, on one thing or another, is still so hell bent on not having a responsible program for guns.

We are not talking about gun owners; we are talking about guns. We expect people to register their cars. There are serial numbers on cars. Automobiles are things that are used for useful, peaceful purposes. Guns are made to kill. Whether they are made to kill animals in hunting for pleasure or they are made to kill humans, they are made to kill. The government seems resistant to track that.

Could my hon. colleague comment on the irony of the government that talks about law and order, and responsibility, and how irresponsible this bill is in regard to guns?

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, I will leave checking the irony to the hon. member.

I want to go back to the previous question from the member for Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette. He did mention his offence at the use of the term gun lobby. I said it clearly in my speech, and I have said it many times; the gun lobby is a narrow group. It is not all gun owners in Canada. It is the hon. member who is trying to change the definition of gun lobby.

The gun lobby is those who work here, who are paid lobbyists, and those who work for the manufacturers as paid lobbyists, those who make their living off lobbying for gun changes.

It is not every gun owner or hunter in the country. Most of those people have no idea what has been proposed by the extremists who have been represented by the gun lobby here in Ottawa.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over the weekend, I had the opportunity to hold a town hall in my riding of Winnipeg North, and no one raised the issue of the gun registry, or gun control or Bill C-42. In fact, I could probably count on one hand the number of my constituents who, over the last number of years, have raised this issue.

However, something that is consistently raised is the issue of crime and safety. Crime and safety affect all of us, whether we are in urban or rural areas. It is an area about which there is a great deal of discussion. I suspect I am not the only member of Parliament who has been approached by their constituents. Our constituents want to hear from the government about what it is prepared to do to try to improve the safety conditions of our communities, regardless of the region in which they live.

Certain aspects within Bill C-42 are positive and would make a difference, and I will go into that. However, other aspects of the legislation raise a great deal of concern regarding the issue of public safety. Again, I will get into that issue shortly.

Unfortunately, when I look at Bill C-42, I wonder why we have it before us today. What is the motivation behind the government bringing forward this bill?

It is interesting to note that back in 2014 the RCMP firearms program made a relatively quiet change to the status of the Swiss Arms brand rifles and certain Czech-made CZ858 rifles from non-restricted to prohibited. The guns had been legal in Canada for many years. A headline in the *Montreal Gazette* on August 30, 2014, read,

“Conservatives restrict RCMP’s ability to reclassify firearms; Tories aim to woo gun enthusiasts”. There is a great deal of merit in what the article reported, which is one of the biggest flaws within the legislation proposed by the government today. It is politically motivated legislation, with which the government is trying to woo gun owners.

The government has been fairly successful in trying to keep the issue of the gun registry alive, because it believes it is in its best political interest to do so. What seems to play second fiddle is the issue of crime and safety within our own communities. When Conservatives speak out on this issue, we often hear about the hunting, trapping and fishing industries, sport firing and things of this nature, and that is great. Again, I will provide some additional comment on that. However, we do not necessarily hear the other side. We do not hear about the importance of safety. There are aspects of the legislation that would touch upon that, but that is not necessarily what the government likes to highlight.

Let me go through what the legislation proposes to do. It creates a six-month grace period at the end of that five-year licence period to stop people from immediately becoming criminalized for paperwork delays in licence renewals. That has already been talked about, and it has a great deal of merit.

The legislation would streamline the licencing system by eliminating the possession-only licence, known as the POL, and converting all existing POLs to possession and acquisition licences.

● (1625)

The legislation would make classroom participation in firearms safety training mandatory for first-time licence applicants.

On a couple of these points, I had the opportunity to not only to talk to a couple of individuals, because I anticipated I would be speaking to this legislation, but I also took advantage of visiting a hunting store to get a better sense of its take on the legislation. There are certain aspects of the legislation, especially around safety, in which there is a great deal of support, even from gun enthusiasts who want more gun control. Aspects of the legislation are supported from all sides.

It would amend the Criminal Code to strengthen the provisions relating to orders prohibiting the possession of firearms where a person would be convicted of an offence involving domestic violence.

It would decrease needless paperwork around authorizations to transport by making them a condition of a licence for certain routine and lawful activities. Again, concerns have been raised in regard to that issue.

It would provide for discretionary authority of the chief firearms officer to be limited by regulation. Again, it is of great concern and I will provide further comment.

The legislation would authorize firearms import information sharing when restricted and prohibited firearms were imported into Canada by business.

Government Orders

Finally, from what I understand, it would also allow the government to have the final say on the classification decisions following the receipt of an independent expert's advice.

It is very important at the beginning of the debate to state clearly that the Liberal Party cannot support the legislation as proposed. I think the government was already somewhat aware of the fact that opposition parties, particularly the Liberal Party, would have a great deal of difficulty in supporting the legislation. It is questionable whether it would make our communities safer. Certain aspects of the legislation do not make our communities safer. Therefore, it is very difficult for me as an individual and for the Liberal Party, if we put the safety of Canadians first and foremost, to support Bill C-42.

The Liberal Party, through our critic, has been very vocal in recognizing that if the government truly wanted to do something positive with Bill C-42, it should have been prepared to allow the legislation to be broken into two parts. I suspect certain parts of the legislation would pass unanimously. It could have been passed quite a while ago. By not recognizing that, the government now finds itself in a position, as we have seen with a lot of legislation, where it continues to pass legislation through time allocation, or closure, to get its legislative agenda passed.

Unfortunately, that limits debate for members of Parliament to contribute and share concerns of their constituents with regard to important legislation that ultimately impacts our communities, such as Winnipeg North and all regions of Canada.

It would eliminate the need for owners of prohibited and restricted firearms to have a transportation licence to carry those guns in their vehicles. This means they could freely transport handguns or automatic weapons anywhere within their province, whether it is to a grocery store or a soccer field. Members have made reference to the leader of the Liberal Party talking about a Canadian Tire store.

•(1630)

The government is trying to give the impression that an automatic weapon would be carried from a home, from a locked situation, to a vehicle and to the shooting range, with no stops in between. That is ridiculous. I do not believe there is any true merit for that.

I used to be the justice critic in Manitoba a number of years back. If we take a look at the amount of automobile thefts in the province of Manitoba, either in 2003 or 2004, I believe 14,000 vehicles were stolen in one year. That means we could take the total number of vehicles in any other province, on a per capita basis, and we would still find that Manitoba had double the rate of stolen cars than any other province.

We aggressively pursued that issue and found that a large number of youth were stealing these vehicles. It was not uncommon to have one youth steal 30 vehicles in one year. We are not talking about a dozen; we are talking probably somewhere in the neighbourhood of a couple of hundred youth. It had a very profound impact.

If we checked with people, and it did not matter which region of a province, there was a great deal of concern, but there was a bit more concern in certain areas. When we get those kinds of numbers and hear why cars are being stolen, it is a concern. To be a member of a gang, youth had to steal a certain number of vehicles as an initiation. The number of individuals getting involved in gang activities

skyrocketed during the 2002-03 period. To get hard numbers is very difficult. I speculated that it could range anywhere from 1,500 to 3,000, which is a very high number considering the population base. Imagine the number of vehicles being stolen. Where are they being stolen from? Throughout all communities.

If we relax certain rules that allow for easier transportation of prohibited weapons, we should be concerned. I should express the concerns my constituents have on this legislation. They should be asking me and the Prime Minister whether we are making our communities safer by passing the legislation that would allow easier transportation of automatic weapons and restricted weapons. That is one of the primary reasons why I am very grateful the Liberal Party has taken this position on the legislation.

Often we will hear the Conservatives say that police officers or law enforcement officers are on their side. I have worked with community police officers. I sat as a chair of a youth justice committee for many years. The issues involved with respect to gangs are very serious in nature. Also, I suspect that Winnipeg is not alone, that we would find there are other pockets in other communities where there is a higher element of risk. I think all communities are very much concerned with this.

I do not think we should take it as lightly as we have. Members say that it is just the "transportation of" or that people are law-abiding citizens. Of course, they are law-abiding. Gun owners are law-abiding, wonderful citizens and they come from many different professions. However, they are not the ones who concern me and my constituents when it comes to violence or the potential risk of violence in our community.

•(1635)

It is also important to recognize that Bill C-42 would take the power to classify firearms out of the hands of police, the experts in keeping Canada safe, and would put it in the hands of politicians. I am surprised that there has not been more comment on that issue. I know that the Liberal Party critic has had the opportunity to raise it on a number of occasions. This is a very serious issue. We have a government that likes to think that it knows better with respect to what should be a restricted or prohibited weapon. It wants to make this a political decision as opposed to relying on experts.

I can recall having interviews on the changes in security here on the Hill and what the RCMP, local constables, and the fantastic security guards should be doing to ensure that we can protect the public, the staff, and members of Parliament.

When I asked about security, it was a fairly straightforward response. In dealing with security, we should be turning to and relying on the experts. They bring something to the table that we do not have as elected officials. If there are issues in terms of certain decisions, there are ministerial departments. The opposition parties have critics. Nothing prevents them from picking up the phone, sending emails, or writing letters. There are many different avenues they can use to get a better understanding of why a decision was made. Who knows? It could ultimately end up with the reversal of a decision.

Government Orders

Instead, what do we have? We have a Prime Minister who sees this as a win-win issue for him if he can bring in legislation and tell gun owners and lobbyists that the Conservatives stood tall for them. The government has not stood tall for us. It has disrespected the professional organizations, like the civil service, that understand. Will they make mistakes? At times, yes, but I can assure members that they will be fewer than the government's. Why would the government bring in legislation that would politicize it and allow the Prime Minister or the minister responsible to make decisions? I think that is wrong.

Let me conclude by recognizing that law-abiding gun owners are in all different professions. Liberals recognize that. We recognize the valuable contributions of hunters, trappers, fishers, and sport shooters. These things create economic activity. It is a wonderful lifestyle.

However, I will leave something with the government, and that is that there is another side to the debate. There is a safety element that needs to be talked about. Even though there are certain aspects of the legislation that are positive, if the government had brought them in as stand-alone legislation, they would have received the support of the Liberal Party of Canada. However, because of its attitude in trying to push the envelope and politicize the system, making our communities a little less safe in some ways, we cannot, in good conscience, support this legislation.

● (1640)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before we go to questions and comments, it is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina, Infrastructure; the hon. member for Thunder Bay—Superior North, Infrastructure.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale.

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I suspect that the hon. member has never been through the rigorous training involved in getting a possession and acquisition licence. He probably is not aware that for any club one joins subsequent to that, one has to go through another safety course as well and pass it. He probably is not aware that the authorization to transport is already in effect. The only change we are talking about is that rather than having a permit for every kind of trip one needed to make, in other words for each individual club, there would just be one permit if a person decided to go to different clubs.

However, what really troubled me is that he went on ad infinitum about a crime spree that happened in Manitoba, which was preceded by his notion that people would be driving around with their legal, locked firearms in their trunks and leaving their cars somewhere to be stolen. The reason this misrepresentation bothers me is that he mentioned all these cars that were stolen but never linked them to even one case of a legal firearm in any one of these cars that was stolen along with the car. The reason is that the vast majority, if not all, of the legal gun owners in this country understand the importance of making sure that they are with the vehicle all the time when they have an ATT, and they only drive it from home to a club.

● (1645)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, to quote a colleague, that is stretching it.

First, I can assure the member that I do have some experience. I had the opportunity and the privilege to serve in the Canadian Forces, so I am familiar with the process. Also, as I pointed out, I took the initiative to engage constituents and in fact visited a hunting store prior to debating the bill before us.

I think the member is being irresponsible if he believes that when we have 14,000 vehicles stolen in one year, which has been cut back considerably since then, there has never been an illegal or even legal firearm in a vehicle. We have thousands of homes being broken into every year.

To quote the government, it is not law-abiding gun owners we need to be concerned about as much as the criminal element. They do break into homes and do steal vehicles. That is where the concern should be. This is what we should be looking at in the legislation.

[Translation]

Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, lately there has been a lot of talk about security and terrorism, among other things. Now, there is talk about transporting weapons. I remember not so long ago, in October 2014, when an attacker came here to Parliament with a shotgun.

I am very concerned about that because there are so many weapons out there. There is also the whole problem of firearm trafficking. If I understand correctly, the transport of weapons will not be as tightly controlled under this bill. That is a contradiction. On one hand, the government talks about national security, and on the other hand it allows weapons to be transported without much oversight.

I agree with what my Liberal colleague said. I would like him to elaborate a bit on whether he does or does not agree that people should be allowed to transport weapons as easily as this bill proposes, and whether this contradicts the Conservatives' daily speeches on the need for protection.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, it almost goes without saying that we recognize that there are many situations that arise when guns are being transported or are in homes. There is a certain criminal element out there that is looking at that. For example, I recall a discussion in which it was inferred that there are people who are very much aware of who goes to shoot targets and who uses guns. We cannot underestimate the potential in terms of what gangs can do. Acquiring illegal and legal firearms takes place. I think it would be irresponsible for us not to recognize that.

Again, I am a very strong advocate for law-abiding gun owners and the wonderful attitudes they have in terms of safety. When we talk about the safety courses, they enthusiastically support that aspect of the legislation. It is the criminal element we need to be concerned about.

Government Orders

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member was asked earlier by a member of the Conservative government about car thefts. It is not just car thefts; it is breaking into automobiles that creates an opportunity for people to get their hands on guns illegally. I think that is the point the member was also making, and I would like him to speak about that.

I would also like him to speak about this. Earlier today, he had an opportunity to ask the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs about correcting the record and the myth that the Liberals are going to bring back the gun registry, when our leader, the member for Papineau, has made it very clear that this is not going to happen. It is now history.

I am wondering if the hon. member would like to take the opportunity to comment on that, because curiously, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs carefully avoided answering the question.

• (1650)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, here we are within the first hour of debate, and we have the parliamentary secretary already talking about the gun registry, already spewing, from the Prime Minister's Office, no doubt, that the Liberals are going to bring back the gun registry. Yet truth be known, and the government and the parliamentary secretary know the truth, the leader of the Liberal Party has been very clear that we are not going to bring back the gun registry.

However, knowing the truth has not prevented the government from spewing untruths, knowing full well that it is misinforming Canadians, because the Liberal Party has no intention of bringing back the gun registry.

In answer to the first part of the question with regard to cars, I think the member hit it right on. Cars are broken into. Criminals break into cars and steal cars and so forth. There is no doubt that rifles being transported will be in vehicles at times. There is no way the government can say that this is not the case.

Mr. John Barlow (Macleod, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my esteemed colleague from Nipissing—Timiskaming.

I am delighted to rise today and speak to Bill C-42, the common sense firearms licensing act. This is a fantastic step forward for law-abiding firearms owners across Canada and across Alberta. I am proud to be able to stand here today and support it.

On behalf of the law-abiding firearms owners in my riding of Macleod, I would like to thank the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness for moving forward on this important legislation, and I would remiss if I did not thank the member for Yorkton—Melville, from my home community. This member has carried the torch for years, standing up for the rights of law-abiding gun owners and against needless red tape.

Today we have heard comments from many hunting and sport shooting groups from across Canada supporting this legislation. We have heard from the Canadian Police Association in support of this legislation. I have heard from residents across southern Alberta who are supporting this legislation. That is because it follows our Conservative government's views on firearms policies. These

policies should be safe and they should be sensible. Overall, this bill continues our focus on pursuing common sense firearms legislation, something that has been lacking for far too long.

The focus for my comments today will be answering some questions I have heard while discussing this important legislation with residents in Macleod as well as across Canada.

Some have asked why these changes are being made now. As we have heard today, some of the people here in this House seem to believe this is pandering in advance of an election. This could not be further from the truth. This bill is not about somebody's hobby; it is about an important economic driver across this country. In fact, sport shooting and hunting is a billion-dollar industry in Canada.

It is also about a way of life, both in rural Canada and in urban Canada. There are literally millions of Canadians from all walks of life who enjoy participating in these heritage activities. For them, this is not something about a so-called gun lobby; this is about enjoying a treasured way of life.

Some have also asked why we are combining different licences and giving new rights to possession-only licence holders. Some have also argued that the effect of this proposal would be that they would be required to take a mandatory safety training course.

Let me be clear. This proposal would simplify the firearms licensing system by allowing experienced firearms owners to be able to purchase new firearms if they so choose. There would be no new training requirement for these individuals.

This bill would also eliminate red tape by combining the PAL and POL licences.

I have heard questions during the debate about why there should also be a six-month grace period at the end of the five-year firearms licence. This six-month grace period would protect law-abiding firearms owners from becoming paper criminals overnight as a result of an administrative error. I have already had several residents in my riding of Macleod bring up this issue just in the last few months. No other licence comes with as steep a penalty as a minimum of three years in prison for forgetting to renew. That is why this change is so important. It would allow time for individuals to come back into compliance with the law.

Some have asked why we would mandate a base standard for firearms safety training. Should not those who can pass the test simply be allowed to get their firearms licence?

We believe there is no substitute for learning in a classroom. Firearms safety is extremely important. I think all of my colleagues in the House would agree with that statement. Canadians understand firearms safety is essential to owning a firearm, which is why four out of five applicants for a firearms licence already take advantage of available training.

Government Orders

As a result of an authorization to transport being made a condition of a restricted licence, some people have asked whether it would be a requirement of getting a licence to be a member in good standing of a shooting club or shooting range. The clear answer to this is no. There would be no requirement in law for individuals to maintain a membership at a gun range in order to transport their restricted firearms.

The reforms contained in this bill are safe and sensible. They strike an appropriate balance between tackling the criminal use of firearms and removing red tape for law-abiding citizens. Unfortunately, our Conservative government is the only one that will stand up for law-abiding hunters, farmers, and sport shooters. We have seen all too well that the Liberal Party still embodies the comments made by former justice minister Allan Rock, who said he came to Ottawa with the firm belief that only police and the military should have guns.

• (1655)

The Liberal member for Trinity—Spadina said “emotional reasons” from firearms enthusiasts were not a good enough reason to continue to allow the sale of ammunition. Can we imagine that? If the Liberals had their way, there would be no more hunting and no more sport shooting.

Last fall I had the opportunity to attend and visit Canada's national biathlon training centre in Canmore. I had the opportunity to work with some of Canada's top shooters on the shooting range in Canmore. While I was there, it was interesting to see hundreds of youth from across southern Alberta there training and competing in biathlons. They were outdoors enjoying the sport they loved and obviously staying out of trouble.

If it were up to the opposition, there would be no more Canmore biathlon club, because Canadians simply would not have access to ammunition. Because Canadians could not hunt, there would be no more Pheasants Forever Canada, which is one of our most dedicated conservation organizations and focuses on habitat restoration, public awareness, education, and land management policies and programs.

The views of the opposition are shocking and ignore the real, effective, sensible ways to combat gun crime. What our Conservative government believes in is taking firearms out of the hands of those who are predisposed to commit crimes and in putting those who do commit crimes with firearms behind bars for a very long time.

However, the opposition stalls or outright opposes every measure we bring forward to crack down on gun, gang, and drug crime. Rather than putting criminals behind bars, their philosophy seems to be in favour of making law-abiding hunters register the guns they use to hunt pheasants. It is absolutely illogical, but the Liberals and NDP are determined to bring back the long gun registry in one form or another, no matter how they dance around it here today.

We will not let that happen.

The member for Malpeque said it best when he said that gun control cost the Liberal Party in rural Canada at least 60 seats.

Our Conservative government will never turn our backs on rural Canadians and I will not turn my back on law-abiding gun owners in

my riding of Macleod. I call on the opposition members to reject their tired old rhetoric and to support these safe and sensible measures.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is a great example of rhetoric. The member says the Liberal Party, and to a certain degree the New Democrats, is not only going to bring back the gun registry, but we are going to make sure that there is no more hunting and no more fishing. It is irresponsible for the member to say something that is just so outright wrong and untruthful. The member says the Liberal Party is going to bring back the gun registry, but the leader of the Liberal Party says we are not going to bring it back. When the member states the Liberal Party is going to get rid of sport fishing and hunting altogether, no one believes it.

Could the member please explain to the House why the government feels it can be outright untruthful to Canadians in debate inside the House? How can he say something that is just not true?

• (1700)

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from my hon. colleague, but if he listened to my speech, I said that colleagues in his party have said that purchasing ammunition should not be allowed on an emotional need for gun owners. To me, that is saying that law-abiding gun owners should not be allowed to buy ammunition. If they do not have ammunition, it is really difficult to hunt ducks, pheasants, or whatever. I did not say anything about getting rid of fishing. I think we are safe on that one—

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: No, you did.

Mr. John Barlow: I do not think I did, Mr. Speaker, but that is okay.

The Liberal leader said as early as two years ago that he voted against eliminating the long gun registry and that if he could vote again, he would. I think the Liberals' stance has been very clear.

In terms of the New Democrats, their leader said clearly not very long ago to the media, as NDP members have said today, that they would put the long gun registry back in some form or another. It might be under a different title, but the long gun registry would be there, and to say that is not the case is being disingenuous.

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know my colleague's riding. I have been there before. It is very similar to my own, very rural. Most people there hunt and fish. They sometimes also have firearms around the farm to protect their livestock.

Over the years, my constituents were made to feel like criminals because of the long gun registry. My father still hunts. He is going to be 83 in July. He still has that feeling. Perhaps the member could talk about how some of his constituents feel the same way.

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Owen Sound for his great work on this file, as well as for being a strong advocate for law-abiding gun owners.

Government Orders

We heard a lot about that here today from the opposition. They are trying to connect the common sense firearms licensing act to criminal activity. I do not care what argument they have, because I could probably find less than 1% of criminals who actually have a firearms licence and have an authorization to transport. They are certainly not going to do those things. To be connecting the common sense firearms licensing act to a rash of criminal activity is just absolutely false. He talked about our not being clear with Canadians; I think that is being very unclear to Canadians.

I grew up on a farm. We certainly used our firearms to protect our livestock from coyotes, wolves, and those kinds of things. These people are not hobbyists, and firearms there are a fact of life. These are things we need to protect our livelihood. For politicians to put us in a category of criminals is simply not fair.

What we are trying to do right now is clean up the damage that was done from the long gun registry. If we look at the statistics since we removed the long gun registry, we see that criminal activity with firearms has gone down by more than 30%. That is a telling statistic, and this is a great step forward to repair the damage that was done to law-abiding gun owners with the long gun registry.

Mr. Jay Aspin (Nipissing—Timiskaming, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in this House to discuss an important piece of legislation that would protect the property rights of millions of Canadians. I am, of course, referring to Bill C-42, the common sense firearms licensing act. This legislation will, among other things, remove needless paperwork around the authorization to transport restricted and prohibited firearms and the arbitrary powers of chief firearms officers, and give elected government the final say over firearms classification decisions.

I would like to take this opportunity today to clarify some falsehoods, mistruths and inaccuracies that have been put forth by Liberals and New Democrats over the course of the debate on this legislation.

First, the Liberals put out an advertisement to try to bolster their sub-par fundraising numbers, which claimed that under the bill, the sky would fall and there would be handguns in the trunks of all cars at shopping malls and grocery stores from coast to coast. We all know this is nonsense. There are clear locations where restricted firearms can be taken that are laid out in the regulations under the Firearms Act, and anyone who has read the bill knows that those do not change.

However, the member for Yukon did his due diligence. During committee study of this important bill, he asked the Assistant Deputy Minister for Community Safety and Countering Crime, a non-partisan public servant, if the Liberal advertisement was accurate, and her response was no. We all know the penchant of bureaucrats for speaking in circles. That is pretty clear and simply condemnation of the leader of the Liberal Party and his inaccurate material.

We also heard from the Liberal member for Trinity—Spadina making a moral equivalency between hunters and terrorists. This type of ridiculous hyperbole would be offensive if we did not consider the source. This was the very same member who had previously called for a ban on the sale of bullets as a solution to gun crime.

Let us look at the facts. Based on the evidence from Statistics Canada, Canadians are 26 times more likely to die from a slip and fall than a firearms accident or homicide. They are 24 times more likely to die from a car accident, three times more likely to die while swimming, and equally as likely to die in a bicycle accident as a death involving firearms.

Clearly the Liberals do not have the ability to set appropriate priorities when balancing private property rights against public safety. Perhaps a ban on bicycles would be the next big Liberal policy.

When we talk about factual inaccuracies, New Democrats do not fare much better. First, the leader of the NDP has said that he would bring back the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry. He even said that he wanted to track every firearm in Canada. This is despite the fact that the NDP member for Timmins—James Bay was very clear when he said that the NDP would never bring forward measures to require registration of shotguns and rifles.

Rural Canadians want to know who is it who really speaks for New Democrats, because they seem to have different messages in downtown Ottawa and Montreal than they do in rural Canada.

It is not only confusion in their own ranks that New Democrats suffer from. They seem to also have a disconnect with reality. The NDP member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca said a number of times that the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness personally authorized the reclassification of the Swiss Arms and CZ-858 rifles. This is clearly inaccurate. However, I wanted to take the time to do the due diligence. I looked up the database of all orders in council, and I could not find a single one pertaining to this one.

• (1705)

Clearly, what occurred is a unilateral reclassification by the Canadian firearms program, with no notice to elected officials. It is important that we change this immediately as it flies in the face of democratic principles. These unfortunate comments were made by the same member who berated two expert witnesses in the public safety committee before ending his tirade with, “Well, I’m not sure there’s any point in continuing to ask you any questions, then, if you’re right on everything you’ve already said to us.” It is clear that there is an anti-gun bias across the aisle. These people simply will not rest until they have prohibited all firearms in Canada.

However, it seems that the NDP and Liberals continue to believe that hunting and sport shooting are the remit of backward rural folks. The fact of the matter is that they are wrong. A low estimate puts about four million Canadians being involved in these activities each year.

I will quote Greg Farrant with the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, who said before the public safety committee:

Firearms owners in Canada are judges, lawyers, farmers, electricians, mechanics, plumbers, accountants, even federal politicians...[who] live in and represent urban ridings. They are not criminals. They are not gang members. Rather, they are lawful firearms owners who obey the law.

Government Orders

However, it is clear that the message has not yet sunk in across the aisle. Some Liberal and NDP members have taken the debate on firearms issues as an opportunity to engage in a drive-by smear of outdoor enthusiasts by saying that those who want to be able to obey clear rules are part of an American-style gun lobby or are advocating for a return to, as one NDP member from Quebec said, the wild west gun laws. This is patently ridiculous and offensive to the millions of law-abiding Canadian gun owners. However, they will hear from their constituents in a few short months from now on whether there is support for safe and sensible measures, such as the bill before us today.

I look forward to telling my constituents why I support cutting red tape on law-abiding Canadians. I hope that those who choose to oppose this much-needed bill will be able to face the questions that are undoubtedly coming their way.

● (1710)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to my colleague's speech. My problem is not with firearms as such, but rather with this bill that seems flawed, to say the least. I will get into that a little later.

Nonetheless, I read the bill carefully, hoping to find one or two things that might be interesting. I thought the mandatory firearms safety course was a good idea, but unfortunately it will be impossible to offer such a course to the broader community, in the remote and northern regions.

I would like my colleague to tell me how they plan to ensure that this common sense measure can truly apply across the country.

[*English*]

Mr. Jay Aspin: Mr. Speaker, this bill is not perfect, by any stretch of the imagination. I was proud to have the intent of this bill introduced in my riding of Nipissing—Timiskaming last summer. The minister indicated that is the direction we are working on, reducing red tape and reducing all the idiotic, archaic rules. That is what we intend to do.

This will probably be the first of a number of bills, but this is a good start and a good direction. We are moving to reduce red tape and the stigma of treating law-abiding hunters, sport shooters and farmers like common criminals.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member made reference to the fact that it is not a perfect bill, and we all know it is not a perfect bill. There are certain aspects of the legislation, and these include streamlining; licensing of paperwork, which is perceived as a positive thing; stronger safety training requirements, which everyone seems to support; and making it harder to be able to obtain a gun under a conviction of domestic disputes, that could have passed long ago if, in fact, the bill had been broken into two parts. There are certain aspects of it that would make it safer for our communities.

My question for the member is, why does he believe the government was not prepared to break the legislation into two parts so that we could have had that first part, the non-controversial but relatively good part, actually pass long ago?

● (1715)

Mr. Jay Aspin: Mr. Speaker, the bill has a number of parts. The bill, in my view, is a good start to reducing red tape. We are going with all the parts. We are not reducing one part or another part. We are going with all the parts because we believe that this is a comprehensive good start to reducing red bureaucratic tape. We are going to continue with this start and we will continue in this direction over the coming years to further reduce red tape against law-abiding hunters, farmers and sportsmen.

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, previously, the member for Winnipeg North had talked about firearms being left in vehicles and vehicles being stolen. Bill C-42 would deal specifically with restricted and prohibited weapons.

Would the member explain to this House the obligations of a law-abiding gun owner to acquire both a PAL and an ATT and jeopardize leaving a firearm in a vehicle?

Mr. Jay Aspin: Mr. Speaker, that is one of the essential parts of the bill, that the PAL and POL would be merged. I think it is one of the hallmarks of the bill. Certainly, when I listen to gun owners, long gun owners, in my riding, that is one of the bugbears of existing legislation. We helped to improve that with this legislation by merging the POL and the PAL.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, to begin, I would like to say that I will be sharing my time with the member for Alfred-Pellan, since once again, Bill C-42 has all the characteristics of most of the Conservatives' bills. One of those characteristics is that it is subject to a time allocation motion, which was moved as quickly as possible after the bill was introduced, thereby depriving many members of their right to speak in the House and especially of the right to make the voices of their constituents heard. In order to allow as many people as possible to participate in this debate, I will be sharing my time with the member for Alfred-Pellan.

Some things that characterize this government are the many in camera meetings and the rush jobs that are done in committee, and this also seems to be the case with Bill C-42. Something that seems odd to me and that I am having trouble understanding is that the previous speaker, to whom I asked a question, said right away in his answer that the bill was not perfect. Perfection may be difficult if not impossible to achieve, but that makes it even more difficult to understand another characteristic of how this government does things, and that is the fact that the government does not accept any amendments. If the government already knows that its bill is not perfect and that the role of every opposition member is to try to improve the bill, since we are not in charge of the legislative agenda, then it is strange that the government hardly ever accepts any of the amendments proposed for any of its bills.

Government Orders

Bill C-42, introduced by the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, is sadly reminiscent of some of this government's signature approaches. I want to mention a few others, which have unfortunately become classics. These include systematically using wedge politics, for example, by dividing rural and urban Canadians on sensitive issues such as firearms, as though these two groups should be at odds with each other, which is not the case. Another classic—and I am making an assumption here, but I want to mention it anyway because it seems increasingly obvious—is attempting to use public safety issues to camouflage their lack of economic vision or, at the very least, their poor economic performance in spite of a vision that we could debate at length. Obviously, the third classic is seeking to satisfy the interests of lobbyists at the expense of the public interest.

I would perhaps even add a fourth Conservative classic: their unquestionable ability to choose short titles for their bills. It is hard to be even more sarcastic when the short title in this case is the common sense—I would even say simplistic—firearms licensing act. I would not be surprised if the gun lobby itself named this bill.

I oppose Bill C-42, which means that I also oppose the culture of fear, the divisiveness and the Manichaeism that the Conservatives seek to implant in each of their initiatives. By trying to politicize the firearms issue at all costs, the Conservatives are completely missing the mark. The bill would give firearms owners who may have forgotten to renew their licence a six-month grace period. Very well. I agree that this can happen to anyone. I once forgot to renew my driver's licence. I paid the fees. I was not sent to prison and did not get a criminal record, but I got a fine reminding me of my duty as a citizen.

This legislative provision disregards the most basic principles of public safety. Let us not forget that this grace period will deprive police services of information on gun owners for six months. Every time an owner renews his firearms licence, the process requires evaluations to detect mental health problems. By identifying psychological issues, the process prevents risky behaviour by some firearms owners. However, the six-month grace period short-circuits the effectiveness of that preventative evaluation and could put our fellow citizens' safety at risk.

• (1720)

By instituting this potentially harmful measure, the Conservatives are showing their desire to satisfy a minority represented by lobbyists at the expense of the public interest. However, winning political points seems to be one of the main goals of this government's legislative agenda.

As I continued to study this bill, I nevertheless gleaned what was probably, in any event, the only good provision in Bill C-42. The bill would require each applicant to take the Canadian firearms safety course. I was just about to applaud, but I held back as I thought it was too good to be true. As I continued reading I found out that I was right.

This course would be given by an instructor designated by a provincial chief firearms officer, whose powers are constantly being eroded. Although the fact that the bill requires this course proves that all is not lost and that we can hope for signs that we are making progress with this government, we must recognize that the

Conservatives' goodwill is quite limited, since this course, the only course, will not be readily available to people living in rural or remote areas. Once again, we run up against the Conservatives' old habits in the legislation, which we might call a legislative mirage rather than a legislative measure. Furthermore, Bill C-42 weakens the current legislation that governs the transport of firearms. No one should trust the Conservatives when it comes to implementing the necessary security measures for firearms.

Let us not forget that under the current provisions, firearms owners are required to have authorization to transport to carry their firearms. Bill C-42 makes it possible for owners to get the authorization to transport as soon as they receive their licence. As soon as someone receives their licence, the authorization to transport is automatically issued. There again the Conservatives are demonstrating their will to dismantle weapons transport regulations and potentially harm public safety just to please a voter base.

This measure will have its share of adverse effects because it will make it easier to transport prohibited and restricted firearms. Bill C-42 will truly cause problems for police forces in their fight against the unauthorized transport of firearms. That is why any change to the Firearms Act has to be done carefully and with the primary goal of improving public safety, a goal that was far from met according to my reading of this bill.

Since deregulating the transportation of firearms does not even remotely satisfy the gargantuan appetite of some lobbyists, the Conservatives are now wondering why they should not go even further and tackle the firearms classification standards. To carry out their agenda, the Conservatives stuck to their pattern of centralizing, another tactic that this government has used over and over from the beginning: concentrate the powers in the hands of the minister. With Bill C-42, Public Safety could have the power to set the definitions and classifications of firearms.

I cannot believe I have so little time, but I assume that is because I agreed to share my speaking time. I will wrap things up, since I am running out of time, but I still want to briefly recap the reasons why I oppose this bill. Bill C-42 embodies the Conservatives' philosophy of taking a simplistic and strictly election-minded view of problems. The main objective of this bill is to pander to a minority of firearms owners for whom safety is an afterthought.

True to form, the Conservatives are driving a wedge between Canadians in different communities. I urge all members to vote against this dangerous and ineffective bill.

Government Orders

• (1725)

[*English*]

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course the member was not here in the 40th Parliament when there was a private member's bill designed to get rid of the long gun registry. He did not see the members who had to be thrown under the bus when the numbers were not right as far as that bill being taken to committee. However, a lot of those who did not vote that way are not here because they did not follow the will of their constituents.

The member is from Quebec. There are many people in Quebec who are proud gun owners and might be a little concerned when he says we are simply protecting the minority of owners, where safety is not important. I do not believe that there is anybody who believes that is the case.

I wonder if the member could speak to the fact that there are people in Quebec who believe that we have to continue to respect gun ownership in this country.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Mr. Speaker, what my colleague just said is absolutely right. I was not here in the previous Parliament. I will therefore let him analyze any debates that occurred in the House when I was not here as he sees fit.

However, from what I have seen since I have been here and since we began talking about the transport, possession, purchase and classification of firearms, the New Democratic Party has always been very clear. We are not completely opposed to the idea of people owning weapons for hunting or recreation. We just want to make sure that there are mechanisms in place to ensure that public safety is the priority. We are talking about firearms after all. There is an imminent risk associated with them, and that is what we have always said.

If my colleague wants to know whether the NDP will bring back the Liberals' costly gun registry, I think that the party has been clear about its position, which has been reiterated by our party leader, the member for Outremont.

However, the objective is obviously to make public safety the top priority at all times.

• (1730)

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, earlier, my colleague asked the Conservative member for Nipissing—Timiskaming a question about certain aspects of the bill relating to the north, and the member replied that the bill was not perfect.

The seven amendments proposed by the opposition parties were rejected. Only the Conservatives' single amendment was accepted. One of the NDP's recommendations was about the north and changes for people who do not live near a place where training is available. None of those recommendations were accepted.

What does my colleague think of that?

Mr. Robert Aubin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Hochelaga for her question.

Bill C-42 is an excellent example of the kind of collegiality that no longer exists, as are pretty much all of the other bills the Conservative government has introduced.

As I was saying earlier, the opposition parties do not control the legislative agenda. Nevertheless, it is up to all members of the House, when meeting in committee for a clause-by-clause study of a bill, to propose the best possible amendments to improve the bill.

Even though the Conservative members themselves have acknowledged that the bill is not perfect, they refuse to accept any amendment from any party other than the Conservative Party, as though it were omniscient. That is just amazing. If that is not an outright repudiation of our democratic tools, I do not know what it is.

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is truly an honour to rise today in the House on behalf of the people of Alfred-Pellan to speak to this Conservative bill, Bill C-42, An Act to amend the Firearms Act and the Criminal Code and to make a related amendment and a consequential amendment to other Acts.

I have been serving the people of Alfred-Pellan for four years now. I am fortunate to be a member of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security and to be the NDP deputy critic for public safety. Therefore, I have been following the debate closely. I wish I could say that it has been a substantive debate, but unfortunately, that is not the case. I attended the debate in committee and took part in the discussions with the various witnesses who came to share their views on Bill C-42. Many interesting points came out of that.

As most of my colleagues know, when it comes to firearms issues, I really like to remind everyone that I myself am a hunter. I have a hunting licence. I have taken the Canadian firearms safety course and the introduction to hunting course. I have the good fortune of coming from a long line of proud hunters and fishers. My female cousins and I are part of the first generation of young women who are taking part in hunting and fishing activities in various regions of Quebec. We are very proud of that. Being forced into a category or into a little box by a Conservative government that says it will protect my rights and my sense of liberty as a hunter—I simply do not believe in that. If you dig a little deeper into Bill C-42 and really look at the various provisions, you see that, basically, the issue of firearms in Canada is being politicized to some degree.

What is coming out of this debate and the positions the Conservatives are taking on the issue is really the politics of dividing Canadians in the various regions of Canada. It is pretty sad to hear the Conservatives brag about being the great defenders of public safety. They should have rallied people around the debate on the firearms legislation and held proper consultations. That is what is missing.

Since my time is quite limited, I will quickly focus on the key points of Bill C-42.

Government Orders

I consulted various groups of experts. I also consulted various police associations to get their take on Bill C-42. The first thing that came up was the lack of consultation on the issue. In fact, most police forces were informed after the fact about what the Conservative government wanted to include in its firearms legislation. I think that is terrible, given that the government is talking about public safety and wants the support of the police forces that have to enforce these laws.

I consulted various police departments, in Quebec in particular. They told me about their concerns regarding Bill C-42. One of the main concerns has to do with the transportation of firearms. At present, anyone who wants to transport prohibited or restricted firearms to or from a club, shooting range, police station, gun shop, gun show, or port of exit from Canada must have a prescribed route when authorized to transport prohibited or restricted firearms. Unfortunately, these provisions will be eliminated by Bill C-42. The authorizations will be automatically given with the firearms licence, which greatly complicates the work of police officers across the country. The Conservative government would know this had it consulted our police forces.

The second major concern is the classification of firearms. I feel that there is a serious flaw. Quite frankly I am disappointed with the federal government. At present, non-restricted, restricted and prohibited firearms and ammunition are classified under the RCMP's Canadian Firearms Program.

• (1735)

Bill C-42 will give cabinet a new power, namely, the power to circumvent the definitions of the classifications of firearms set out in section 84 of the Criminal Code through a regulation that provides for exceptions.

If that is not politicizing the debate, then I do not know what is. Determining which firearms will be restricted, prohibited or non-restricted is extremely important and it should be done with the help of experts. The people who are appointed to cabinet, regardless of which party is in power, are often highly qualified, but not necessarily in this area. I am really concerned about the government politicizing this debate, because no matter who is in power, they will have the authority to decide how weapons should be classified.

Right now the classification system is working, although it could still be improved. The RCMP manages the system, but the Minister of Public Safety still has to approve any classifications.

I therefore do not know exactly where the Conservatives are going with this or what the Prime Minister has decided to do and what he is telling his colleagues. However, this government is clearly playing divisive politics with this issue. I know that I use the word "deplorable" a lot, but I find this particular situation completely deplorable.

I attended the various hearings that were held with regard to Bill C-42. Many things were said about the bill, but what stood out the most was the lack of consultation. I always talk about Quebec because that is where I am from. My riding of Alfred-Pellan is very close to Montreal. About 80% of the land is agricultural even though it is located on the the island of Laval. We are very close to a very urban area. We have some small, very urbanized areas, but the riding

is also quite rural. I am proud to represent such a region. What I am not proud of right now is how the Conservative government is using bills like the one before us today to try to divide Canadians by pitting people living in urban areas against those living in rural areas.

What bothers me the most is that once again, Bill C-42 ignores what Quebec wants. The government did not even consult the Government of Quebec on this. It simply informed the province after the fact. The minister responsible for Canadian intergovernmental affairs said:

This flies in the face of the notion of public safety, the safety of citizens. I think there is a huge disconnect when I hear the federal government say that it is doing this in the name of public safety...

It is rare that I agree with the Liberals, but I have to say that I completely agree with what Mr. Fournier said. I would have liked to see the federal government take its leadership seriously and consult the provinces and territories on a bill as important as this one. The government tried to make it seem as though it was not important and it was just removing some things that should have been gone a long time ago. However, when we look carefully at Bill C-42, we can see that, on the contrary, this bill should have received very broad consultation, so that there was no divisiveness on this particular bill.

I would like to emphasize another point about granting licences. Various police forces I consulted also made this point. This licence can be renewed every five years. The Conservative government wants to permanently create a six-month grace period. Once again, this further complicates the problem that police forces in Quebec and the rest of Canada are dealing with.

I see that my time is almost up. I will endeavour to answer questions from colleagues on both sides of the House as well as I can, but I have to say that I cannot vote in favour of Bill C-42. The policies in it are far too divisive. Once again, the Conservatives are going it alone. They are trying to politicize the debate, an attitude that I utterly deplore.

• (1740)

[English]

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I too was at the committee when the witnesses appeared. I listened very carefully to what they had to say. The police officers were invited to come as witnesses, but as far as I know, only one policeman showed up and he was fine with the bill. He had no problems with it. If they would have had a problem with it, they could have come to committee to give their point of view.

I want to correct a couple of incorrect points the member has made. There is not one thing in the bill that compromises public safety, despite what she has said. The authorization to transport is now being harmonized across Canada. There were provinces that automatically included the ATT in their restricted firearms licence. I know British Columbia had years where one simply applied once and got an ATT.

Government Orders

Another thing is that the classification she complained about was very arbitrary. It did not work. Here is an example. A firearm that was legal in Canada for 10 years was suddenly, arbitrarily, reclassified. It made people criminals and they did not even know about it. We as a government had to correct this mistake.

There are many other things I would like to say that were not correct, but those are a couple examples.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, I think it is quite a stretch for my colleague opposite to claim that if police officers had something to say about the bill, all they had to do was appear before the committee. Frankly, it is appalling. I would remind my colleague that, first of all, we were under a time allocation motion when Bill C-42 was being examined, and second, the details regarding when the committee would hear from witnesses and how many would appear were completely and entirely imposed on us.

As my hon. colleague knows, the Conservatives have a majority, which means that it is the Conservatives who dominate the debate in committee and who decide how many witnesses the committee can have on each side. Why did the police forces that were invited to appear before the committee not show up? There was not enough advance notice and they could not get here in time. They sent documentation instead. I invite the member across the aisle to read the documentation that was sent to the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. It proves beyond all doubt that Bill C-42 is an affront to Canada's public safety and that those police services do not support it. I invite the member to read what the police services sent to the committee.

• (1745)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, could the member provide some thoughts with respect to the government being more co-operative. She made reference to consulting, but also co-operation in the House. One of the things it could have done was split the bill. For example, there are some aspects of the legislation that have some value, such as streamlining the licensing paperwork. There are issues of stronger safety training requirements and making it harder to obtain a gun in certain situations, such as a conviction of domestic violence.

I wonder if she might wish to share her thoughts on if the government had split the bill it would have had support for certain aspects of it.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Winnipeg North for his question.

The official opposition has often asked that bills be split up so that we can pass the parts that the entire House of Commons agrees on and then discuss the thornier issues in a subsequent bill. Unfortunately, that proposal is rejected every time, as we have seen in the past four years, since the Conservatives have had a majority in the House. Frankly, it is pathetic.

They keep saying that we voted against proposals that we in fact agreed with. At the end of the day, it is quite simply because they impose omnibus bills that, like this one, affect different regulations.

This bill affects the Firearms Act and the Criminal Code. It has a number of provisions. The Conservatives often take great delight in forcing us to vote on many pieces of legislation in a single vote, in addition to often imposing time allocation motions to restrict the debate and our opportunity to speak on behalf of the people we represent in the House.

That is a flagrant lack of leadership. Unfortunately, I do not think there is any chance the Conservatives are going to split this bill.

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to discuss Bill C-42, the common sense firearms licensing act, but first I would like to say that I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Yukon.

For far too long, law-abiding firearms owners have been treated like common criminals in Canada. They have received this treatment simply for enjoying the Canadian heritage activities of hunting, sport shooting, or simply living off the land.

In fact, former Liberal cabinet minister Allan Rock even said when he came to Ottawa that he came with the firm belief that the only people in Canada who should have firearms are police officers and the military. What a slap in the face for the rural parts of this country.

Our Conservative government could not disagree more with Allan Rock. We believe there should be laws in place to combat the criminal use of firearms, but we also believe that one should not need a law degree to engage in a hobby that is as old as Canada itself.

In other words, we believe in safe and sensible firearms policies. That is why we have taken action to get tough on gang members who are illegally in possession of a firearm. It is also why we have made sentences tougher for those who use firearms to commit crimes. That is why we have made it a specific offence to engage in drive-by or other reckless shootings.

It is also why we scrapped the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry. It is why we have taken needless regulations off the books. It is also why we are here today to discuss this important common sense piece of legislation.

I would like to discuss some of the key measures that the bill advances. We will simplify the licensing system by eliminating the possession only licence and converting to a possession and acquisition licence. This will, upon royal assent, give 600,000 people in this country the ability to purchase firearms. That is good news for law-abiding gun owners and good news for business in Canada.

Further, the bill would provide for a six-month grace period at the end of a five-year licence. This would allow individuals who forget to renew their licence to come back in compliance with the law without fear of becoming a criminal simply for making a mistake.

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Additionally, the bill would require first-time gun owners to participate in a Canadian firearms safety course and pass that test. Members might think this has always been the case, but previously individuals did not have to participate in a class in order to get their licence. We believe it is important that all gun owners have a solid understanding of how to handle their firearms safely.

Some have said that this will lead to those who have held a possession only licence for many years to have to take this course in order to receive their new converted licence. It is absolutely not true, not intended, and is not the case.

What is more, the bill would end the needless paperwork surrounding the authorization to transport restricted firearms. Rather than requiring endless forms and red tape, the bill would effectively make a gun owners licence also the authorization to transport. Some have raised concerns that this provision will lead to some sort of concealed carry notion, which is also absolutely not true. All safe handling procedures will remain in place, such as disabling the unloaded firearm and placing it in a locked container prior to transporting it.

In addition, the bill would end the arbitrary and discretionary authority of chief firearms officers in Canada. Firearms laws should be applied consistently across Canada. There should not be discrepancies between one province to another. It is ineffective and causes a lot of confusion for law-abiding citizens of this country. Unelected officials should not be making decisions that potentially impact the property rights of millions of Canadians.

On top of that, the bill would end the problem of arbitrary and unfair reclassification of firearms, which we saw as recently as in the last couple of years. Last February, thousands of Canadians were rendered criminals overnight by a mere stroke of some bureaucrat's pen. There was not one elected official who had been consulted about this decision. Our government disagrees with the decision specifically, and also disagrees with this process generally. That is why this bill would give the elected government an oversight mechanism to reverse ill-considered classification decisions made by bureaucrats.

● (1750)

Lastly, the bill would strengthen the Criminal Code provisions related to firearms prohibition orders. When someone is convicted of a serious domestic violence offence, they would automatically be barred from possessing firearms. There is a sound reason for that. According to police-reported data, in 2011 there were almost 95,000 victims of family violence in Canada, accounting for one-quarter of all victims of police-reported violent crimes. Between 2000 and 2010, two-thirds of spouses accused of homicide had a family history of violence involving the victim. That is why this bill is so important. It would reduce red tape for law-abiding hunters, farmers, and sport shooters, but it would also refine our gun control system, making it more effective and more sensible.

We have heard where the other parties stand. The Liberal leader has said that if he had to vote again today, he would vote to keep the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry. The Liberal member for Trinity—Spadina said that emotional reasons from firearm advocates was not enough evidence to continue to allow ammunition to be sold to the Canadian public. The NDP leader has been clear about his

desire to bring back the long gun registry, recently calling the data contained therein “useful data”. However, he seems to know that Canadians from the west and the north have no time for such bureaucratic schemes. Speaking in the Yukon, the NDP leader said that he would not consider bringing back the registry. Which is it? I guess that depends on who the leader is talking to: the press gallery here in Ottawa, or the average everyday citizen of the west or the north.

It is about making firearms policies safe and sensible. It is about good old-fashioned common sense. I am proud to stand up to support this legislation, and I hope every member of this House will do the same.

Canada is a large and diverse country with a historic background of hunting, angling, and outdoor life. This legislation supports law-abiding citizens from coast to coast to coast, and I ask all members of this House to stand up and support it.

● (1755)

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Trinity—Spadina, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I heard my riding mentioned, so I thought I would rise to ask a question about the sale of ammunition in cities, in particular hollow-point bullets. These bullets are known as cop killers because they can pierce the armour that protects our first responders.

Does the party opposite not believe that the safety of our first responders, and police officers in particular, should be paramount as we craft any firearms controls? Do the Conservatives not believe that there should be restrictions on selling ammunition, particularly in urban centres where it is not used for any rational purpose?

No one is hunting squirrels in downtown Toronto that I am aware of. Is there not a case to be made that our first responders be protected by making sure that the powerful ammunition which is not used in hunting, and in the recreational or cultural capacity that was spoken to, be restricted? Is there no value to restricting those sorts of things in dense urban areas?

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Well, Mr. Speaker, the parties opposite like to talk about supporting first responders, but when it came time to vote for the firefighters tax credit, of course, they voted against it.

In terms of firearms legislation, all one has to do is to look at some of the changes we have made to make sure we crack down on criminals in this country that were not supported by the members opposite.

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After the tragedy last year in Moncton where three RCMP officers were slain, we brought forward legislation that ensured the perpetrator of that heinous crime was going to serve three consecutive life sentences. Previous to that legislation, that person would have only served one life sentence, or three life sentences at the same time. We made changes. Those parties across the way voted against that. If they had their way, that person would have been out in 25 years and would have been in his fifties. Now he will be in jail until he is 98 years old.

We stand up and support our first responders. We will take no lessons from them about how to support our police officers, our firefighters, our search and rescue officials in this country.

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague mentioned the Leader of the Opposition, and I want to read a quote from something he said on December 3, 2014 and get the member's comments on it. The Leader of the Opposition stated:

I think that it is possible to provide the police with the tools to better protect the public and themselves by making sure they're able to follow every gun, and it doesn't have to be the registry as it was before. But it does have to be a form that allows the governments, federal and provincial, to keep track of those guns. That's our bottom line.

My question for the member is this: What is his interpretation of that comment from the Leader of the Opposition?

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Mr. Speaker, if it looks like a duck, it quacks like a duck, and it floats like a duck, it is likely a duck. What New Democrats are talking about is the resurgence of the long gun registry in this country. Does it matter how we track the guns, if we are tracking the guns? That is the point that the Leader of the Opposition is trying to make. He likes to say one thing in one part of the country. When he is in the east, he likes to talk about bringing back the long gun registry and tracking everybody's guns and weapons, but when he is in the west or the rural parts of this nation, he says he would never bring back the long gun registry. We see the hypocrisy in that.

Everyone can count on our government to be consistent and clear that no matter where we are in this country, whether it is downtown Toronto or in the Yukon, we will never support the resurgence of the long gun registry in Canada.

• (1800)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member just talked about a duck. You do not have to believe me, but when you shoot at a duck, the most you will get is a loud "quack quack". It is not going to turn into a Stuka and it is not going to bombard you with napalm. We are talking about a duck.

Farmers who want to guard against foxes do not need a machine gun. We are talking about a fox. Could we agree that some firearms are dangerous, that they should not be owned by just anybody and that regulations are needed? Anyone who goes duck hunting with a machine gun capable of bringing down a MiG probably has a problem between the ears, and it is perhaps a good thing that they cannot get that type of weapon.

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment and Social Development only has about 45 seconds.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Mr. Speaker, 45 seconds will be all it takes.

We have regulations in this country. We do not allow people to walk the streets with machine guns. Hunters do not use machine guns in the streets to hunt animals. In Canada, there are sensible firearms regulations. That is what this bill is all about. It is about common sense.

I have no idea what the member opposite is talking about. Hunters and anglers in this country, people who like to be in the outdoors, want solid firearms regulations. They want to be able to follow the rules. All we are doing is passing sensible regulations to ensure that they are treated fairly, because these are honest, hard-working people.

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today in support of Bill C-42. Also, I am very happy to be joined by my colleague and friend from Wetaskiwin.

We have a number of members in the House of Commons on this side of the House who join me on the hunting and angling caucus. They do a lot of great work to promote and preserve Canada's rich and proud heritage of hunting, trapping, and sport shooting, and of course, the farmers who use in firearms in Canada as a day-to-day tool. They support a traditional and positive way of life and, indeed, a healthy way of life.

I will spend a bit of time talking about the value of firearms and what role they play in the country and then specifically about Bill C-42.

I was pleased to substitute on the public safety committee when we were reviewing the bill and the committee was undertaking the study. We heard a lot of things from witnesses, and one of the things that stood out for me was some testimony from Greg Farrant, who represents the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters. Mr. Farrant is tuned in, clearly, to a lot of the debate that has gone on with the bill. He understood what was going on and in fact provided testimony as the government was introducing legislation to get rid of the long gun registry.

The one point he made that really stood out was his reflection on the size of the community that engages in hunting and trapping activities in the province of Ontario and right across Canada. He said that we always get branded, and I say "we", because I come from a long, proud tradition and history of hunting. I grew up in the Yukon territory doing that as a wonderful way of life as well and will well into my future. I say "we" in that sense. We get branded by the opposition as being part of the gun lobby, as though that is said in some sort of pejorative sense. That is what Greg Farrant said. He said that we are always branded as a gun lobby, as though that is a bad thing.

Government Orders

Let us talk about what the gun lobby is. We say it with pride, and we say it with the understanding, on this side of the House, of what exactly the gun lobby represents in Canada. It is not the negative, pejorative term that anyone should hide their head from and be ashamed of. What does that gun lobby do? That gun lobby participates in hunting heritage activities. It contributes millions of dollars to conservation in this country. In fact, a recent study from the United States indicates that the group four times more likely than any other group to put their sweat equity and their cash into conservation is the hunting group. That is right. Hunters are four times more likely than any other group to put their money, their time, and their effort into the valuable principles of conservation. That is something they should be applauded for.

Instead, in return, what the opposition does is call them the gun lobby, as though that is some sort of evil moniker they should hide from and have a shadow over them for.

I say that they need to stand and be proud of that one simple fact. They are the ones out there on the land. They are the ones who first recognized the need for the protection and preservation of our environmental heritage. They are the ones who recognize the depletion or the need for conservation practices and principles in a particular area or a particular region for a particular species. It is not only the species they hunt. It is the species, the streams, the habitats, the lakes, and the forests that contribute to the life processes of the wildlife populations in our country. Those people are the ones who are responsible for the abundance, the protection, and the preservation of the wildlife, lakes, land, and water in our nation.

There is no accidental abundance of wildlife in Canada. There is no accidental protection and preservation of the wilderness. There is no accidental protection and preservation of the lakes, rivers, and streams in this country.

How does that happen? Where does that come from? It is from the gun lobby: the hunters, the anglers, the trappers, the sport shooters, and the athletes, the people who own guns and carry guns and spend time in the wilderness.

Where do we get our safety laws from? We did not create them here in the House of Commons, did we? No. Anyone who owns a gun in this country knows, as ethical, safe, law-abiding people in Canada, that they were the first to promote and teach safe ways of handling firearms. They were the ones who developed the 10 rules of firearms safety that those on the other side of the House could not list three of but that probably 90% of the members on this side of the House know inside and out, as though they are a bible to us. They were created by the hunting community and not by politicians.

We can thank the gun lobby. We can thank the conservationists. We can thank the hunters, the trappers, the sport shooters, and the athletes in the country who use firearms in a safe, responsible, and ethical way every single day in this country for the fundamental rules we now call laws.

● (1805)

Is it not ironic that we are here standing up to defend, change, or alter the very laws that this community itself generated? That is because it understands that firearms come with responsibilities. They are a tool to protect and preserve an important way of life, but they

do come with responsibilities. It was those groups, not the House of Commons and not the provincial legislatures, that first created those laws.

I am proud to talk about the measures we are taking in Bill C-42 to ensure that those people who created those laws and do so much for the conservation, preservation, and protection of a great way of life in this country are not burdened by red tape that is unnecessary, are not considered criminals at first blush, and are not considered criminals because of paperwork errors.

Bill C-42 will merge the possession and POL licences to give people more opportunities to own firearms, to simplify things, and to reduce some of the red tape. It will merge some of the ATT conditions in just one licence so that there is a condition for that licence instead of a whole bunch of other papers of authorization, which can inadvertently trip people up and in fact make it more difficult for law enforcement to determine whether a person is in legal possession of a restricted firearm when he or she is going to and from a range. The bill contains sensible measures so that people can transport firearms to shooting ranges, gun shops, a police station, or a point of entry, all things they could do in the past but that can now all be on one licence instead of multiple licences.

Bill C-42 will also take another step to balance responsible firearm ownership and public safety. It will introduce stricter penalties for people convicted of domestic violence and stricter conditions for people involved in violent behaviour and violent activity. Who asked for that? It is the gun lobby, the firearms community, those responsible gun owners. They are every bit as offended, if not more offended, by the illegal and unlawful use of firearms as anyone in this House could possibly be, because it affects that community greatly when someone steps out of line or uses a firearm in an illegal and inappropriate manner. That is not what they taught long before we put laws in place, and it is not what they teach in the present day. Of course they are supportive of the stricter public safety measures we are putting in place. At the same time, they do not want to be treated as criminals for simple paperwork errors.

Government Orders

The bill will reduce red tape and formalize some of the provisions that did not have clear guidelines before, such as the rules and regulations around the determination of what the CFOs can do. Arbitrary decisions were being made from one province to the next that left everyone in a state of confusion, because they were not clear-cut. This legislation will make clear what CFOs can do and what terms and conditions they can and cannot put in place so that firearms owners, the general public, and the law enforcement community have certainty and we do not see decisions like the one made by a CFO in Ontario, who arbitrarily decided that any firearms owner wanting to go to a range with a restricted weapon needed an invitation from another range. That was not spelled out in any piece of legislation at all. It was an invention of a CFO. Clearly, firearms owners need to know what is a reasonable restriction and a reasonable condition on their licence that cannot be made up. This bill will provide that.

I will leave members with this thought. One in every five Canadians participates in hunting, trapping, and sport shooting activities in this country. They contribute \$15.5 billion to the Canadian economy. This side of the House, this party, and this government will stand up for law-abiding firearms owners every single day. While I would like to encourage the members of the opposition to get on board and help support these measures in Bill C-42, it was clear from their testimony at committee that they have no intention of doing that, which is all the better for us. We will be the party that stands up for law-abiding firearms owners.

• (1810)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the seriousness of my colleague's presentation.

With regard to duck hunting, it was decided, through regulations and international conventions, that hunting rifles cannot contain more than three shells, to give the game the chance to escape and to prevent overhunting.

We do it for ducks. Unfortunately, we too often allow firearms to which a magazine that can hold 60, 50 or 40 extra rounds can be attached to be sold over the counter. Incidentally, it is legal to go hunting with this type of firearm with 40 rounds.

My colleague thinks this is amusing, but I would like to point out that the most recent mass murders in Canada were committed with this type of weapon. He thinks this is ridiculous and funny. He is typically Tory. We cannot expect a Conservative to understand the danger of a firearm.

Since there are stringent regulations to make certain firearms less dangerous, why do we not apply those regulations to every firearm?

[*English*]

Mr. Ryan Leef: Mr. Speaker, that clearly illustrates for all Canadians how out of touch the opposition members are when it comes to this.

The reason there are three shells allowed in a shotgun for the purpose of migratory bird hunting, and that alone, is so that when ducks get out of range, people are not firing a fourth and fifth shot at a duck and wounding it. That is a condition put in place because of

the ethics and values of the hunting community. It is a responsibility the hunting community wanted put into law.

I have never seen a shotgun in my life that holds 40 rounds. That is just so absurd I do not know whether to laugh or cry at that question.

If they want to talk about extended mags, which I think the member was trying to drive at, clearly he does not know that there is trapshooting in the Olympic Games, which athletes use shotguns with more rounds than that for. There is trapshooting at ranges, where they can use more than three rounds. There are many purposes for shotguns that are not illegal.

There is this conspiracy theory being generated. It is unbelievably bizarre to hear that any member in this House of Commons would think there is a shotgun on the market today that holds 40 rounds. I would love to see it, but it does not exist.

This is clearly what we are up against.

• (1815)

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Trinity—Spadina, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member from the north talk about the heritage and the cultural values and the safe use of firearms in hunting and in conservation. I do not dispute that story line. However, in urban areas, we deal with the fact that since 1996, close to 65,000 guns in this country have been lost or stolen. Those guns, when they show up in urban areas, cause trouble like we saw in my riding last week, where a young man was shot and a house was shot up.

My question is this: How does making it easier to bring a gun into the city, easier to travel around a city with a gun, and easier to use a gun in a city, where no one is hunting ducks, no one is hunting raccoons, and no one is going after the squirrel population, make our cities safe while we also respect the culture and the values that were spoken to?

Mr. Ryan Leef: Mr. Speaker, we have very clear safe-storage laws in this country. None of that would change under Bill C-42.

What the member is forgetting is that when someone steals a gun, that is criminal intent and criminal purpose with those guns, and we have laws to deal with that. I encourage the member to support all the initiatives we have put in place to deal with that criminal kind of behaviour.

Let me quickly educate that member about this one fact. There are half a million hunters in the province of Ontario, and if he thinks none of them live in Toronto, he is out of his mind. Perhaps he is suggesting that we should have some firearms repository outside of the city of Toronto where people could store their firearms.

The member is clearly ignoring the thousands and thousands of lawful firearms owners who live in the city of Toronto and who engage in hunting activities right across the province of Ontario and right across Canada each and every day. We will stand up for them, while he ignores them.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Gatineau will have only 11 or 12 minutes for her speech.

Government Orders

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform the House that I will be sharing my time.

I have listened to just about the whole debate, in my office as well as here in the House.

I would like to speak on behalf of the people of Gatineau and the different groups with which I have had good discussions and have spoken at length about all the Conservative government's bills. They agree with the NDP's position on firearms, in the broad sense, and they agree that Bill C-42 provides a good example of the difficulty this government has of striking the right balance between security and rights.

This is also apparent with Bill C-51. The Conservatives have difficulty striking a balance between security and human rights. Furthermore, they always try to divide and conquer. That is probably what is frustrating in the long run. Bill C-42 is a fine example of this dysfunctional Parliament.

This week is our fourth-last week in the House. When I look at everything that we accomplished in four years, it is nothing but an endless list of bills. Members on the government benches simply tried to always take a stand against us, although all 308 of us here in the House are supposed to be here to improve the well-being of our constituents and of Canadians across the country.

All afternoon, after question period, members on the Conservative benches kept trying to imply that our questions on Bill C-42 meant that we were against hunters and against law-abiding firearm owners. I think that is absolutely simplistic and insulting.

We have all kinds of people in our ridings and in our caucus who are proud hunters, who follow the law and do things the right way, and who respect firearms. Our colleagues opposite are making it sound as though our questioning of the merits of a bill and what it truly aims to do means that they support hunters and we are against them.

If you look closely, you can see that more than half of the 16 pages of this bill have absolutely nothing to do with cutting red tape.

I am looking at the titles, and I know that others before me have mentioned this, but I still do not understand why the short titles in English and French do not say the same thing. In French, it is *Loi visant la délivrance simple et sécuritaire des permis d'armes à feu*. The word "sécuritaire" is in the bill.

• (1820)

[*English*]

However, in English it says, "This Act may be cited as the Common Sense Firearms Licensing Act".

[*Translation*]

As the justice critic, I have often said that the devil is in the details with the Conservative government. That is the kind of careful approach we have to take to the work the people have sent us here to do.

Nearly 70% of the population did not vote for this government. Those people have the right to be heard in the House and to tell the

government to be careful. Saying that does not automatically mean that we are against all aspects of this bill.

When I gave my speech at second reading, there was time allocation. That is the other trend that shows how dysfunctional this Parliament is because nearly all of the bills have been subject to time allocation.

The government dragged its heels on Bill C-42 for a long time.

That was the bill we were supposed to debate the day after the events of October 22. If that bill was so good, so simple and so extraordinary, why did the government take it off the agenda only to reintroduce it five or six months later under a time allocation motion? The government dragged its feet and tried to sweep this under the rug so as not to get people too worked up, because, as one member said, there was reason to believe that some serious problems could arise in urban centres.

While my colleagues from rural areas are asking us to understand the needs of hunters, sport shooters and gun collectors, my colleagues from urban areas are making a heartfelt appeal to all those law-abiding gun owners, telling them that there is a serious problem in urban centres. Can we not just sit down together and try to find solutions that meet everyone's needs? That is not naive or sentimental; it is simply to say that, with goodwill and by working together, we can do good things.

It is possible to eliminate the irritants that are hurting law-abiding gun owners who might have made a small mistake with their registration, for they certainly do not deserve to be left with a criminal record. I completely agree, but can we also do something to make sure that we are not making things easier for gun and weapon smugglers and that we are not making the classification of weapons so simplistic and easy that it leads to serious problems? That is our most fundamental duty.

The Conservatives like to personally attack us because of some of the positions we take. Some Conservatives go so far as to try to hurt us in press releases and in front of certain groups. I am relatively active with Les Membres Sportifs de Gatineau, a hunting and fishing club. I get together with the members often. I like chatting with them. They organize activities, and one day I will very likely go with them because I am a girl who likes to commit wholeheartedly, not just with words but also with actions, unlike the Conservative government.

When the long gun registry was created, those people told me that it made them feel like criminals, but they absolutely were not. The Conservatives capitalized on that. Instead of getting rid of the sticking points related to the registry, they used it as a blunt instrument to divide Canadians. The vast majority of Canadians, if not all of them, know full well that hunting and biathlon are not being eliminated. I have no intention of doing so.

Government Orders

Some young cadets in my riding recently won awards in biathlon competitions. It is extraordinary to see them. Nonetheless, they learn at an early age how to handle a weapon properly and they know full well that it is like a car. They know they have to be careful when they use it and they cannot proceed any old way. There are rules.

This bill has some extremely disturbing aspects. Again, it is not about reducing red tape. It includes a number of criminal provisions and gives cabinet the regulatory power to make classification changes, which is worrisome.

My colleagues who are members of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security worked hard on getting rid of these sticking points through amendments, which would have allowed us to support the bill.

● (1825)

As usual, the Conservative members of the committee are unfortunately always told to say no to the opposition's requests, even the reasonable ones.

I will proudly vote against this bill. Once again, I wish continued success to all Canadian hunters. I am not against them.

[*English*]

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier on, one of the NDP speakers said, on bringing back the costly Liberal gun registry, that the party had other plans.

Could the hon. member comment on what the Liberal leader had indicated back on December 3, 2012. He said, "I voted to keep the firearms registry a few months ago and if we had a vote tomorrow I would vote once again to keep the long-gun registry".

Exactly two years to the day, on December 3, 2014, he said he, "would not reinstate the gun registry, even in a modified form, because it's simply too divisive". Of course, that would be political suicide. Then he said, "There are other ways to reduce gun violence...including through the classification of restricted and prohibited firearms and through the requirements imposed on the purchase of firearms", speaking about getting rid of the bullets, taking away property.

Are the New Democrats and the Liberals looking at a joint plan as far as the gun registry?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, that was absolutely fascinating.

[*English*]

I will not even attempt to explain the Liberal leader ever in the House. It is something way too complicated for me and for any Canadian, I think.

We have been clear. There is one sentence he said that is true. As justice critic and as the person who was kind of in the lead on the long gun registry position in our party, it is absolutely not our intention to bring back the long gun registry. Our leader was clear.

The fact that we help police around the country does not mean we will be back to the way when the Liberals installed the registry in the 1990s, which created many problems and was so costly. Therefore,

there will be no recreation of the registry. For the rest, let us read what the leader of the third party said a bit more.

* * *

● (1830)

ECONOMIC ACTION PLAN 2015, ACT NO. 1

The House resumed from May 15 consideration of the motion that Bill C-59, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on April 21, 2015 and other measures, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 6:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the amendment to the motion at second reading of Bill C-59.

Call in the members.

● (1855)

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

(*Division No. 405*)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Ashton	Atamanenko
Aubin	Ayala
Bélangier	Bennett
Benskin	Bevington
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Boivin	Borg
Boutin-Sweet	Brahmi
Brisson	Brousseau
Caron	Casey
Cash	Chicoine
Chisholm	Choquette
Christopherson	Cleary
Comartin	Côté
Cromartin	Cullen
Crowder	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Cuzner	Day
Davies (Vancouver East)	Dion
Dewar	Doré Lefebvre
Dionne Labelle	Dubourg
Dubé	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Eyking
Dusseau	Fortin
Foote	Freeman
Freeland	Gameau
Fry	Genest
Garrison	Giguère
Genest-Jourdain	Gravelle
Goodale	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Grogulé	Hsu
Harris (St. John's East)	Hyer
Hughes	Lamoureux
Julian	Latendresse
Lapointe	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	Liu
Leslie	Mai
MacAulay	Martin
Marston	Mathysen
Masse	McGuinty
May	Michaud
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Mourani
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Murray
Mulcair	Nash
Nantel	Nunez-Melo
Nicholls	Papillon
Pacetti	Pilon
Pécllet	Quach
Plamondon	Rankin
Rafferty	

Government Orders

Regan
Sandhu
Scott
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)
Sims (Newton—North Delta)
Sitsabaiesan
Stewart
Sullivan
Tremblay
Vaughan— 117

Saganash
Scarpaleggia
Sellah
St-Denis
Stoffer
Toone
Valeriotte

Watson
Sky Country
Weston (Saint John)
Williamson
Woodworth
Young (Oakville)
Yurdiga

Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Wilks
Wong
Yelich
Young (Vancouver South)
Zimmer— 150

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the amendment defeated.

The next question is on the main motion.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

● (1905)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 406)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy
Aglukkaq
Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambler
Anders
Armstrong
Aspin
Bateman
Bergen
Bezan
Block
Braid
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Butt
Calkins
Carmichael
Chong
Clement
Daniel
Dechert
Dreeshen
Dykstra
Falk
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Galipeau
Gill
Goguen
Goodyear
Gourde
Harper
Hawn
Hiebert
Hoback
James
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kent
Komarnicki
Lauzon
Leef
Lemieux
Lizon
Lukiwski
MacKay (Central Nova)
Maguire
McColeman
Miller
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Norlock
O'Connor
O'Neill Gordon
O'Toole
Payne
Poilievre
Raitt
Rathgeber
Rempel
Saxton
Shea
Shory
Sopuck
Stanton
Sweet
Toet
Trottier
Uppal
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Warawa

NAYS

Members

Adler
Albas
Alexander
Allison
Ambrose
Anderson
Ashfield
Barlow
Benoit
Bernier
Blaney
Boughen
Breitkreuz
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Calandra
Cannan
Chisu
Clarke
Crockatt
Davidson
Devolin
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Eglski
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Fletcher
Gallant
Glover
Goldring
Gosal
Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hayes
Hillyer
Holder
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kerr
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lebel
Leitch
Leung
Lobb
Lunney
MacKenzie
Mayes
Menegakis
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Nicholson
Obhrai
Oliver
Opitz
Paradis
Perkins
Preston
Rajotte
Reid
Richards
Seeback
Shipley
Smith
Sorenson
Strahl
Tilson
Trost
Truppe
Valcourt
Van Loan
Wallace
Warkentin

Ablonczy
Aglukkaq
Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambler
Anders
Armstrong
Aspin
Bateman
Bergen
Bezan
Block
Braid
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Butt
Calkins
Carmichael
Chong
Clement
Daniel
Dechert
Dreeshen
Dykstra
Falk
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Galipeau
Gill
Goguen
Goodyear
Gourde
Harper
Hawn
Hiebert
Hoback
James

Adler
Albas
Alexander
Allison
Ambrose
Anderson
Ashfield
Barlow
Benoit
Bernier
Blaney
Boughen
Breitkreuz
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Calandra
Cannan
Chisu
Clarke
Crockatt
Davidson
Devolin
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Eglski
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Fletcher
Gallant
Glover
Goldring
Gosal
Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hayes
Hillyer
Holder
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)

Adjournment Proceedings

Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	May	McGuinty
Kent	Kerr	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Michaud
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Lauzon	Label	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Leef	Leitch	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Mourani
Lemieux	Leung	Mulcair	Murray
Lizon	Lobb	Nantel	Nash
Lukiwski	Lunney	Nicholls	Nunez-Melo
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie	Pacetti	Papillon
Maguire	Mayes	Péclet	Pilon
McColeman	Menegakis	Plamondon	Quach
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	Rafferty	Rankin
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson	Rathgeber	Regan
Norlock	Obhrai	Saganash	Sandhu
O'Connor	Oliver	Scarpaleggia	Scott
O'Neill Gordon	Opitz	Sellah	Simmis (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind- sor)
O'Toole	Paradis	Sims (Newton—North Delta)	Sitsabaiesan
Payne	Perkins	St-Denis	Stewart
Poilievre	Preston	Stoffer	Sullivan
Raïtt	Rajotte	Toone	Tremblay
Reid	Rempel	Valeriote	Vaughan— 118
Richards	Saxton		
Seeback	Shea		
Shipley	Shory		
Smith	Sopuck		
Sorenson	Stanton		
Strahl	Sweet		
Tilson	Toet		
Trost	Trottier		
Truppe	Uppal		
Valcourt	Van Kesteren		
Van Loan	Vellacott		
Wallace	Warawa		
Warkentin	Watson		
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)			
Weston (Saint John)			
Wilks	Williamson		
Wong	Woodworth		
Yelich	Young (Oakville)		
Young (Vancouver South)	Yurdiga		
Zimmer— 149			

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Finance.

(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[English]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Trinity—Spadina, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rose in the House just a few weeks ago, discussing the situation of a small town in Manitoba. St-Pierre-Jolys has an opportunity to add 300 people, 150 homes, to its community. The trouble is that the waterworks of the town has already passed capacity. It currently has capacity for 800 people but actually has 1,000 people in the community.

It is looking to grow. This is critically important. It is a francophone town in southeastern Manitoba. It needs critical mass to sustain services in French. If it is not allowed to grow and sustain its population base and add jobs and opportunities that providing 150 new homes would create in that community, much is at stake.

Therefore, the town is looking to its federal member and the federal government for infrastructure money, but instead of getting a response what they get are a couple of answers. First, it is a big announcement, but none of the money is available for 10 years. Second, the water services it wants to provide need to be changed and upgraded in order to meet new federal standards. The problem with that is that there is no money in this budget earmarked for water services in small communities, or even large communities, despite the fact that the federal government has actually changed the specifications for cities right across the country.

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Ashton	Atamanenko
Aubin	Ayala
Bélangier	Bennett
Benskin	Bevington
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Boivin	Borg
Boutin-Sweet	Brahmi
Brisson	Brosseau
Caron	Casey
Cash	Chicoine
Chisholm	Choquette
Christopherson	Cleary
Comartin	Côté
Crowder	Cullen
Cuzner	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Davies (Vancouver East)	Day
Dewar	Dion
Dionne Labelle	Doré Lefebvre
Dubé	Dubourg
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseauult	Eyking
Foote	Fortin
Freeland	Freeman
Fry	Gameau
Garrison	Genest
Genest-Jourdain	Giguère
Goodale	Gravelle
Grogulé	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (St. John's East)	Hsu
Hughes	Hyer
Julian	Lamoureux
Lapointe	Latendresse
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Leslie	Liu
MacAulay	Mai
Marston	Martin
Masse	Mathysen

Adjournment Proceedings

We have small towns with the capacity to grow. We have small towns that have urgent needs around water infrastructure. We have an infrastructure fund that is back-end loaded and much of the money will not even arrive until after the next election, forget this election, yet it keeps telling people in these small communities not to worry, that there is money on the table. There was not even a desk to apply to up until late last fall. A year ago, when the town wanted to apply for infrastructure funding, it could not apply. There had not been a provincial and a federal agreement put in place. There is no money earmarked for this now. There will be no dollars set aside for it. Federal standards have changed and this community, which is trying to grow, which has the capacity to grow, is being frustrated because it has no federal partner willing to step up.

My question is very simple. Why has this budget, which we have just voted on, refused to put dollars on the table for small municipalities and towns to upgrade their water facilities so they can grow and provide clean and safe drinking water?

• (1910)

Mr. Peter Braid (Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government's support for public infrastructure in this country has never been stronger. Since 2006, our government has dramatically increased the average annual federal funding for thousands of provincial, territorial and municipal infrastructure projects across the country. We are building on Canada's historic investments with \$80 billion for public infrastructure over the next 10 years, including the \$53-billion new building Canada plan for provincial, territorial and municipal infrastructure. As Canada's largest and longest federal infrastructure plan, the new building Canada plan provides predictable and flexible funding so that municipalities from coast to coast to coast can address their most pressing infrastructure priorities and plan for the long term.

Our new building Canada plan ensures support through a number of different funds. The federal gas tax fund supplies almost \$2 billion in federal funding per year. Since 2006, our Conservative government has extended, doubled, indexed and made the gas tax fund permanent through legislation. We have also expanded its eligible categories so that it covers a wider range of types of projects. Further, municipalities can pool, bank and borrow against this gas tax funding.

Another major component of the plan is the new building Canada fund, made up of the national infrastructure component for projects of national significance. The provincial-territorial infrastructure component has dedicated funding for provinces and territories. Under the provincial-territorial infrastructure component, each Canadian province and territory receives a base amount, plus a per capita allocation over the 10 years of the program.

Not only are the new building Canada plan programs well under way, over \$6 billion in public infrastructure funding continues to flow from the original plan and other federal programs to support infrastructure projects across the country.

Canadian municipalities, including those in Manitoba, have unprecedented ways in which they can put the federal funding to work in their communities. Through the plan, Manitoba will benefit from almost \$1.2 billion in dedicated federal funding, including

almost \$476 million under the new building Canada fund, and an estimated \$713 million under the federal gas tax fund.

The new building Canada plan has been open for business since March 2014, and programs are well under way. We are working with the provinces and the territories to identify projects, and we are processing proposals as quickly as they come in. In fact, more than \$6 billion in total project costs have already been announced under the new program, and we look forward to announcing many more projects in 2015.

Late last year, our Prime Minister announced another \$5.8 billion to address national infrastructure priorities that will have long-lasting, local benefits, including, of course, job creation. There is also significant funding from existing federal infrastructure programs, which continue to support public infrastructure in municipalities across Canada.

In closing, our government is committed to creating jobs, promoting growth and building strong, prosperous communities across this great country.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Mr. Speaker, those are all very nice figures, except when it comes to water plants, there is no dedicated money for them. If we take a look at areas like Cape Breton Regional Municipality and Sydney, Nova Scotia, the cost of putting in a water plant is the exact same amount as the entire municipal budget for one year. It is \$625 million.

While the member talks about money being available, there is a \$440-billion infrastructure deficit in this country, 60% of which is controlled by and under the responsibility of municipalities. Putting in an extra \$5 billion is a drop in the bucket. The trouble is, because we are talking about clean drinking water, it is not drinkable water that is going into that bucket.

We need an infrastructure plan that deals with small towns and water supplies, we need it critically and we need it immediately. None of the programs that were just listed address that issue. Transit money does not build water plants. Housing money does not build water plants. Only water money, money identified for water services, will get the job done.

Why did the last budget not include a penny of funding for water supplies?

Mr. Peter Braid: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, our government's support for public infrastructure has never been stronger. Since 2006, our government has dramatically increased the average annual federal funding for thousands of provincial, territorial and municipal infrastructure projects across the country. We are building on these historic investments with \$80 billion for public infrastructure over 10 years, including, of course, the \$53-billion new building Canada plan.

Adjournment Proceedings

Canadian municipalities have unprecedented ways in which they can put this federal funding to work in their communities. People in St-Pierre-Jolys, Manitoba, can count on their federal allocation through the gas tax fund as a minimum. We look forward to considering investing in projects that this city deems to be important, just as we do for all Canadian municipalities through the new building Canada fund.

Our government is committed to creating jobs, promoting growth and building strong, prosperous communities across this country.

• (1915)

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, GP): Mr. Speaker, infrastructure is the backbone of any economy. Canada's economic success depends on smart and strategic investment in infrastructure programs.

Unfortunately, the Conservative government has allowed Canadian infrastructure to crumble and decay, including by ignoring Ontario, our country's industrial heartland, in favour of subsidizing the energy sector in Alberta.

Ontario pays 39% of all federal revenues but receives only 34% of federal program dollars. My riding of Thunder Bay—Superior North in northern Ontario represents a vast and remote region. However, our region's economy faces unique challenges and threats. Unemployment rates are high, commodity prices are falling, forestry continues to suffer, tourism has fallen without adequate federal marketing, exports have decreased, and there are no roads or power lines to most remote first nations communities.

The economic growth rate in Canada from 2006 to now, under the Conservatives, has fallen to a miniscule 1.77%, the lowest growth rate since 1930. The wrong economist is running Canada.

The IMF estimates that Canada pays out an astonishing \$34 billion a year in subsidies and untaxed externalities to the fossil fuel industries. That is \$34 billion a year to some of the wealthiest corporations in Canada, while total investments in infrastructure, the building block of our economy, are receiving only a quarter as much, at about \$7.5 billion a year.

The population of Canada is 35 million. That means, if we do the math, a whopping \$952, or almost \$1,000, per year in energy subsidies from every Canadian to the oil sector. On average, every Canadian was taxed—it is really a tax—\$952 in 2014 to subsidize big oil. This is on top of the payments we make through our energy bills. David Lipton of the IMF explains that removing these subsidies worldwide could lead to a 13% decline in CO₂ emissions.

Infrastructure monies to municipalities have gone down significantly under the Conservatives. Budgetary holdups meant that some Canadian cities are likely to be receiving no infrastructure funding for the third year in a row.

FedNor has steadily decreased its funding to various programs in northern Ontario, despite increased applications for funding. Those applications are held up, stuck on his desk, by the minister from Kenora, who puts his party before his communities and his constituents.

What could Canada do with an extra \$34 billion a year? We could build about 140 kilometres of badly needed urban subway lines

every year, or we could build about 560 kilometres of light rail transit.

Canada's infrastructure deficit of crumbling roads, rusting rail, and outdated water and sewage treatment is pegged at \$171 billion in backlog. That huge backlog could, and would, be wiped out in five years with the revenue we are subsidizing to the oil, coal, and gas sectors, but our Prime Minister has refused repeatedly to even meet with the premiers to discuss it.

When will this government start supporting important infrastructure projects, including those in Thunder Bay—Superior North and all across Canada?

• (1920)

Mr. Peter Braid (Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, since this Conservative government was elected in 2006, Canada has led all G7 countries with respect to investments and infrastructure as a percentage of GDP. What have been the results of those investments? The average age of public infrastructure is now at its lowest point since the early 1980s.

Our government recognizes that public infrastructure is the backbone of our communities and that investing in infrastructure is vital to ensuring strong, sustainable, and healthy communities with thriving economies. That is why this government is providing an unprecedented \$80 billion for public infrastructure over the next 10 years. This includes the \$53 billion new Building Canada plan, the largest and longest federal infrastructure plan in our country's history. The plan was designed following extensive consultation with our partners. It provides flexible and predictable federal funding in support of infrastructure projects of national, regional, and local significance, and it is made up of a number of different funds.

The new Building Canada plan has been open for business since March of 2014. Moreover, over \$6 billion in public infrastructure funding continues to support infrastructure projects across the country from our original Building Canada plan, which started in 2007.

Providing almost \$2 billion of predictable funding per year directly to municipalities, the federal gas tax fund has been significantly improved since 2006. Not only have we expanded its eligible categories to support a greater variety of projects, but our government has also extended it, doubled it, indexed it, and legislated it as a permanent source of federal infrastructure funding.

Moreover, municipalities can pool, bank, and borrow against this funding, allowing them more flexibility in addressing their local needs. Municipalities, including Thunder Bay, can count on the federal gas tax fund. In fact, last year Thunder Bay used contributions from the federal gas tax fund to help revitalize local roads and bridges. Thunder Bay received more than \$6.2 million in 2014 alone through the federal gas tax fund.

Government Orders

The plan also contains the \$14 billion new Building Canada fund, which is geared toward funding projects of importance to provinces, territories, and municipalities. Under the provincial-territorial infrastructure component, each Canadian province and territory will receive a base amount, plus a per capita allocation over the life of the program. Our government is working with provinces and territories to identify projects, and we are processing proposals as quickly as they come in. We look forward to considering investing in further projects that Thunder Bay deems critical, just as we will for all municipalities across Canada.

Our government is focused on creating the right conditions for economic growth and prosperity.

Mr. Bruce Hyer: Mr. Speaker, it is great that Paul Martin was forced into sharing gas taxes with the municipalities by Jack Layton, but the priorities of the current Conservative government are completely out of whack. While other countries are investing in infrastructure, Canadians are left dodging potholes and falling bridges and dealing with antiquated sewers that back up into basements in Thunder Bay—Superior North.

Meanwhile, Canada is a world leader when it comes to handouts to rich multinational oil corporations. The government needs to smarten up, stop taxing average citizens each at \$952 every year, and giving that money to oil executives to stash in Bermuda and Panama. Instead, when will the government begin giving infrastructure in municipalities across Canada the attention that they deserve and need?

Mr. Peter Braid: Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes that investing in public infrastructure is vital to ensuring strong, sustainable, and healthy communities with thriving economies. That is why this government is providing an unprecedented \$80 billion for public infrastructure over 10 years, which includes our new Building Canada plan.

This plan has been open for business since March of 2014, and over \$6 billion in funding continues to flow from our existing infrastructure programs. Last year, the City of Thunder Bay used contributions used contributions from the federal gas tax fund to help rehabilitate its local roads and bridges. Our government is working with provinces and territories to identify their top infrastructure priorities, and we are processing proposals as quickly as they come in.

We look forward to considering investing in projects that Thunder Bay deems critical, just as we will for all Canadian municipalities, to ensure the long-term prosperity of this country.

• (1925)

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), the motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been withdrawn, and the House will now resolve itself into committee of the whole for the purpose of considering all votes under Finance in the main estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016.

[*English*]

I do now leave the chair for the House to resolve itself into into committee of the whole.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

FINANCE—MAIN ESTIMATES 2015-16

(Consideration in committee of the whole of all votes under Finance in the main estimates, Mr. Joe Comartin in the chair.)

The Chair: Order.

Tonight's debate is a general one on all of the votes related to Finance. The first round will begin with the official opposition, followed by the government and then the Liberal Party. After that, we will follow the usual proportional rotation for the House.

[*English*]

The order adopted earlier today allows parties to use each 15-minute slot for speeches or for questions and answers by one or more of their members. In the case of speeches, members of the party to which the period is allotted may speak one after the other, although the time for speeches should not exceed 10 minutes.

The Chair would appreciate if the first member speaking in each slot would indicate how the time will be used, particularly if it is to be shared.

[*Translation*]

The order states that when the time is to be used for questions and answers, the Chair will expect that the minister's response will reflect approximately the time taken by the question. Furthermore, no quorum calls, dilatory motions, or requests for unanimous consent shall be received by the Chair.

[*English*]

I also wish to indicate that in committee of the whole, comments should be addressed to the Chair. I ask for everyone's co-operation in upholding all established standards of decorum, parliamentary language, and behaviour.

[*Translation*]

We may now begin tonight's session.

[*English*]

The House in committee of the whole, pursuant to Standing Order 81(4)(a), the second appointed day, consideration in committee of the whole of all votes related to Finance in the main estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016.

Debate, the hon. member for Parkdale—High Park.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Chair, I am very pleased to participate in committee of the whole this evening. I welcome the Minister of Finance and I will use my full 15 minutes for questions to the minister, because I have a lot of questions this evening.

Government Orders

The government has lapsed a total of \$7.26 billion, or about 3% of total funds in the recent public accounts. Could the minister give us a projection for lapsed funding in his department for fiscal year 2014-15?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Chair, the lapse included in fiscal projections in budget 2015 reflect an estimate of planned spending that does not proceed in any given year.

Lapses in department spending are to be expected. They result from factors such as lower-than-expected costs for programming and revised schedules for implementation of initiatives.

The lapse expected in 2014-15 is \$7.2 billion, in line with that recorded in 2013-14.

• (1930)

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Chair, that is a lot of veterans' benefits, I think.

Could the minister explain why he has consistently missed or downgraded his budgetary GDP projections in the years after the financial crisis?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, as the member opposite should know and perhaps does, what we do is take the average of 15 private sector economists' forecasts. If there are some outliers, we may adjust for that, but we do not independently arrive at the forecast. These are the forecasts of some of the most expert economic academicians and practitioners in the entire country. They are the ones whose estimates we rely on.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Chair, since 2006, Canada's GDP growth has been a mere 1.77%, which is very meagre.

Could the minister tell the House which was the last government that had such weak growth during its time in power?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, with the help of Canada's economic action plan, Canada's economy has seen one of the best economic performances among all G7 countries.

As we have repeatedly said, however, Canada is not immune to global economic challenges beyond our borders. That is why economic action plan 2015 continues to focus upon supporting job creation and economic growth, while returning Canada to balance.

Of the 1.2 million jobs created from July 2009 to April 2015, more than 90% have been full time, 80% in the private sector and almost 60% in high-wage industries.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Chair, let me remind the minister. The last time a government had such weak growth during its time in power was under R.B. Bennett, during the Great Depression.

Has the government and his department analyzed what portion of this depressed growth is due to the Conservative government's \$14 billion in spending cuts?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, it is important for people to understand, as I would have thought the member opposite would, that we came through the greatest single recession since the Great Depression, a global recession which devastated economies all around the world, cost tens of millions of jobs and over a trillion dollars in economic activity. Canada was not immune.

However, it is rich for the NDP to be criticizing our government's record in the economy and job creation. It voted against every job creation measure our government put forward, including introducing the small business job credit, introducing the largest and the longest history of job-creating infrastructure in Canada, tax cuts for manufacturers to support new equipment—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Chair, I rise on a point of order. I am sorry to interrupt the minister, but, as you know, and as the rules are set out for the committee of the whole, there is some approximation of the length of the question to the length of the answer given. Just in the very short time we have had with the minister this evening, he has taken a minimum of twice, but usually three times, as long to answer very pointed and specific questions from the opposition.

We are here for a long time this evening. In order for us to get the answers that this forum allows us, we have asked very pointed and very specific questions of the minister. For him to make speeches that go two, three and more times as long, and many of them not containing of the data and the actual answers we are looking for, actually undermines this entire process.

I know it is through your guidance, Mr. Chair, and it is guidance, but we would remind the minister that the last series of questions were around 20 seconds long and the last series of his answers were close to a minute in response. That cannot work out in terms of the process we are trying to achieve here tonight. I know through your able guidance, we will be able to actually get some answers from the minister.

• (1935)

The Assistant Deputy Chair: I thank the hon. member for his intervention. It is true that the responses should, as close as possible, equate in time to the time taken to pose the question in the first place.

We are also cognizant in this particular format that if the question compels an answer that would require some explanation then, clearly, the minister should be permitted some time to explain the parameters of the question. In many cases, it depends upon the nature of the question as well.

However, as much as possible, I do monitor the amount of time of each, both in the number of seconds taken by the questioner and the response, and we will do our best to ensure we stay within those bounds. I will signal the minister, in particular, or the person responding for the government, to give some indication as to when we are crossing that threshold.

The hon. member for Parkdale—High Park.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Chair, we were discussing the depressed growth in the country under the Conservative government and I had asked the minister to what degree his \$14 billion in spending cuts contributed to this depressed growth.

I want to just remind the minister that the Parliamentary Budget Officer has said that his spending cuts have actually eliminated tens of thousands of jobs. Therefore, they certainly have contributed.

Government Orders

I have another question about employment. Employment growth over the last year was 0.8%. That does not even keep up with population growth. Does the minister think that less than 1% employment growth is acceptable?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, I am reminded of what Woody Allen said apropos the previous comment about having taken the Evelyn Wood course and read *War and Peace* in 20 minutes. He said, "It's about Russia."

I think we sometimes need a little time to answer questions. In respect to the last question, 1.2 million net new jobs have been created, 20% more, compared to closest competitor, since our government came into office. Our business performance has been the strongest in the G7 over the recovery.

According to the International Labour Organization's global wage report, Canada has the best gains in the G7 since 2006.

The Centre for American Progress says that Canada has experienced continuing middle-income growth, while for many countries it has halted.

We are doing very well compared to other countries, and we are very proud of our economic record.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Chair, could the minister tell us how many manufacturing jobs have disappeared under his government's watch?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, Canada's manufacturing sector is a cornerstone of the economy, accounting for more than 10% of GDP and empowering 1.7 million Canadians. Its performance is central to the overall health of the economy.

Building on the government's strong record of support for manufacturers, our budget announced a number of important actions to help manufacturers succeed in the global economy and to continue to create jobs, including maintaining—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Order, please. The hon. member for Parkdale—High Park.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Chair, could the minister tell us how many manufacturing jobs have disappeared under the government's watch?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, we have a net. We are also expanding access to foreign markets by providing \$50 million over 5 years for a program to share the costs with small and medium enterprises as they explore new export opportunities.

Also in the budget is \$42 million over 5 years to expand the footprint and resources of Trade Commissioner Service.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Chair, perhaps the minister missed my question. Does he know how many manufacturing jobs have disappeared under his government's watch?

● (1940)

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, as I have said, we have created 1.2 million net new jobs. Unlike some other parties, we are taking action to help the manufacturing sector. The accelerated capital cost allowance extension is just one of the important measures we are providing.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Chair, perhaps I can help the minister. Under his government's watch, our country has lost 400,000 manufacturing jobs.

Could the minister remind us of something a little more recent. How many jobs in total were lost just last month?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, as I have said, we have created 1.2 million net new jobs. Individual months vary, as the member opposite knows. They seem to be there when the numbers abate; when the numbers increase dramatically, they are silent.

What we are looking at is the overall long-term trend. We are doing better, by 20%, than G7 countries.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Chair, with respect, I would think a G7 finance minister would know how many jobs were lost last month in his country.

Could the minister tell us how many jobs were lost in Canada last month?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, as I have said, there is a variability from month to month and we are looking at the longer term trend. I have not boasted when numbers went very high in one month. I have had a cautious approach to that, and the job creation record continues apace. We are doing better than most other countries in the world.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Chair, perhaps I can offer that 20,000 jobs were lost last month.

However, I would also like to ask a question about job quality because the CIBC has put out a report on job quality. Could the minister tell us when was the last time that CIBC's job quality index was as low as it is currently?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, the economy has posted one of the strongest job creation records over the G7. The CIBC released a report, but we are talking about the longer term record.

The report fails to consider that there have been significant structural changes to the Canadian labour market, in particular the aging of the baby boom generation, the rising number of people age 55 and over and then again returning to the labour market. As well, there were demographic shifts in terms of full-time and part-time workers.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Chair, perhaps I can just help the minister here. The job quality index from the CIBC has actually never been as low as it is now. This is the lowest on record.

However, given that the minister is a Toronto member of Parliament, would he like to comment on the loss of 98,000 manufacturing jobs under his government? Does he believe that the loss of 98,000 manufacturing jobs in the city of Toronto is acceptable?

Government Orders

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, of course we are concerned if a company downsizes and people are temporarily laid off. This is a concern and that is why we have a number of programs to help these workers. However, the GTA is doing well. It is a very diversified economy. It is an economy that is an engine of growth in our country.

Our budget builds on broad-based and targeted measures since 2006 that support manufacturers, including reducing the general corporate income tax rate to 15% as of 2012, from over 22% in 2007, increasing the capital cost allowance for manufacturing processing buildings included to 10% from 4% and eliminating more than 1,800 tariffs on imported machinery and equipment and manufacturing inputs, providing \$450 million of annual tariff savings and making Canada the first tariff—

• (1945)

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Resuming debate, the hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Chair, it is a pleasure to talk about economic action plan 2015, our government's latest action to create jobs, growth and long-term prosperity. Though implemented in this year's budget, it is the culmination of many years' work. It is a plan laid out in the worst days of the great recession. In those dark days, we spent billions to create jobs when Canadians needed them most.

[Translation]

At the same time, we made a solemn promise: once the crisis was over, we would take the necessary measures to return to a balanced budget. Economic action plan 2015 is the conclusion of that great work.

[English]

However, for such a plan to work, a plan involving billions of dollars over many years, a key ingredient is needed: resolve. When I think of resolve, I recall John Diefenbaker, a great Conservative and a great prime minister. Few men could match his resolve and his devotion to the public. He devoted time to reading letters from ordinary Canadians and writing to them in turn. To those he disagreed with, he was polite. To those who were morally indignant, he often sent the same short reply:

Dear Sir:

This is to inform you that some crackpot is using your name and has recently written to me over your signature putting forward views so eccentric in nature and so much at variance with your usual logical style that the letter could not possibly come from you. I felt that I owed it to you to bring this to your attention.

I do not write letters quite like Diefenbaker, but I respect a leader with the courage of conviction. Canada has a leader with that courage, our great Prime Minister. His resolve has been ironclad.

That was a necessity because when we promised to balance the budget, there were many naysayers. "They cannot do it", the naysayers said, and "Even if they can, they should not". However, we did it. Upon the extraordinary foundation of the Canadian advantage, we have built one more advantage, a balanced budget.

That Canadian advantage flows from the success of Canada's economic action plan, and the evidence of that success is abundant. Canada has demonstrated one of the best economic performances

among G7 countries over the recovery. Over 1.2 million more Canadians are working now than at the end of the recession. The majority of these jobs have been full-time, high-wage, and in the private sector. Canada has posted one of the strongest job performances in the G7. The IMF and OECD expect Canada's growth, already ahead of its peers over the recovery, to continue to be solid. We have absolutely the top credit rating from all of the major credit rating agencies.

[Translation]

Today, the overall federal tax burden is at its lowest level in more than 50 years. Bloomberg now ranks Canada as one of the top countries in the world in which to do business, and Canada's total government net debt to GDP ratio is less than half that of the average for the G7. Yes, that is right: half.

[English]

These advantages have made Canada an attractive commercial partner and investment destination. Canada is a great trading nation. Jobs and prosperity here are tied to jobs and prosperity in the world economy, yet the world economy today is gloomy. Growth in the eurozone is paltry in some places, stagnant in others. The once roaring growth in China has slowed. The United States is thankfully an exception, but one country, however powerful, cannot carry the weight of the world economy by itself.

Of course, there are geopolitical dangers and the ongoing repercussions with sharp decline in oil prices. The hard truth is that risks and challenges remain. We cannot abandon the resolve that saw us through the great recession, the same resolve that built a balanced budget.

• (1950)

[Translation]

We must resolve to continue taking measures to promote job creation, economic growth and long-term prosperity. That is exactly what our most recent budget does.

Government Orders

[English]

We are cutting taxes relentlessly for job creators, supporting innovation, expanding Canada's free trade presence across the globe, and making unprecedented investments in infrastructure. In economic action plan 2015, we will cut the small business tax rate from 11% to 9% by 2019. This is the largest tax rate cut that small businesses have received in over 25 years. We will provide an accelerated capital cost allowance for manufacturers and create a new automotive supplier innovation program: \$100 million over five years. It would support job-creating research commercialization and build a thriving auto sector for Canadian. That way, for generations to come, the words "made in Canada" will continue to fuel pride.

This is not the only budget measure dedicated to innovation.

[Translation]

Economic action plan 2015 provides for an additional amount of more than 1.5 billion over five years to advance the objectives of the government's science, technology, and innovation strategy.

That means more funding for research in universities and colleges through federal granting councils and the Canada Foundation for Innovation, and nearly \$120 million over two years for the National Research Council to support research and development partnerships with the industry.

If they work together, we know that the public and private sectors can build a more innovative economy for everyone.

[English]

This is creating the jobs of tomorrow, but to create the jobs of today, we know what works. That is building the vital infrastructure that our economy relies on. Infrastructure gets us to work every morning and gets us home at night. Every minute that we spend locked in traffic is a minute that we cannot spend with our families. It also means billions of dollars lost in our economy.

That is why, since 2007, this Conservative government has made the largest and longest federal infrastructure commitments in Canada's history, and we are doing even more. We will invest in a new public transit fund, which would grow to \$1 billion a year. Constructing the next generation of transit, it would cut congestion and build our economy. This new fund would help us get people and goods moving across our cities, to our borders, and on to world markets. Because of our Prime Minister, there will be more open markets awaiting them.

Free trade is the heart of our prosperity. Ours is one of the most open and globally engaged economies on earth, and that is a good thing. It creates jobs and growth right here at home. That is why, since 2006, we have concluded free trade agreements with 38 countries, and we are making significant progress toward concluding the trans-Pacific partnership agreement with 11 other Asia-Pacific nations. It is a market of nearly 800 million consumers, with a GDP of over \$27 trillion.

[Translation]

These measures create good-paying jobs. Our government is proud of these measures, which will help build a better Canada.

[English]

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Chair, through you, I would like to ask the Minister of Finance what economic action plan 2015 is doing to help hard-working Canadian families make ends meet.

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, I thank the member for North Vancouver, my dedicated parliamentary secretary, for his invaluable assistance in developing the budget and for that pertinent question.

I have talked about the importance of taking relentless action to create jobs, but we can never forget whose jobs they are. They are our friends', our neighbours', and our family members' jobs. Families are the very bedrock of our nation.

Helping starts with philosophy. Canadians deserve to keep more of their hard-earned dollars, so we have done everything in our power to keep more in their pockets, right where it belongs. This year, Canadian families and individuals will receive \$37 billion in tax relief and increased benefits as a result of actions taken since 2006. For example, a typical two-earner family of four will receive tax relief and increased benefits of up to \$6,600 this year. That is thanks to measures like the new family tax cut, the universal child care benefit, and cutting the GST.

In economic action plan 2015, we will nearly double the annual contribution to tax-free savings accounts, from \$5,500 to \$10,000. Individuals with annual incomes of less than \$80,000 accounted for more than 80% of all TFSA holders in 2013. Some 60% of those who maxed out their TFSA plans had incomes of less than \$60,000. TFSAs benefit the low and middle-income Canadians who need them most.

The budget will also introduce a new, permanent, non-refundable home accessibility tax credit. It will provide up to \$1,500 in tax relief per year to help make homes safer and more accessible for seniors and the disabled so that they can safely stay longer in their own homes.

All of these measures, investments, tax cuts, and these strong actions to build jobs and growth are all made possible by a balanced budget. A fiscally balanced budget permits a socially balanced budget.

Government Orders

• (1955)

[Translation]

Everything is possible with a balanced budget. A financially balanced budget leads to a socially balanced budget. Fiscal responsibility gives us more ways to take action and to lower taxes for hardworking families.

[English]

To protect our top credit rating, to grow social programs, to withstand the unexpected and unavoidable shocks to the system, to avoid saddling our children with our debt, empowers us as we work to create jobs.

Let me end as I began, with resolve. Under the strong leadership of our Prime Minister, our resolve is ironclad. We will continue to take relentless action to make this great country even greater, to build prosperity today and tomorrow, the kind of prosperity that our children and grandchildren can rely on.

Economic action plan 2015 is our road map forward. Through it, we will continue down our Conservative course, the road that is working well for all Canadians. I look forward to talking more about that road map tonight.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Chair, will the minister confirm that his department is spending \$7.5 million in advertising the recent budget?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, it is the responsibility of the government to communicate with Canadians on important programs and services that are available to them. We want to ensure that all Canadians are aware of the measures that are putting more money back in their pockets, including the enhanced universal child care benefit, the family tax plan, the recently expanded TFSA, which is used by over—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Order. The hon. member for Kings—Hants.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, does the minister believe it is reasonable to advertise measures that have not been approved by Parliament?

Hon. Joe Oliver: As I said, Mr. Chair, it is important that Canadians understand what the benefits are. There are over 200,000 Canadian families who are not aware that they are entitled to receive UCCB payments. If they do not register for them, they will not get them, so we want to communicate that, as one example.

• (2000)

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, how much will Finance Canada spend on advertising in this fiscal year?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, the answer is \$7.5 million.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, how much has already been allocated to Finance Canada from the central advertising fund for this fiscal year?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, I will have to get back to the hon. member with the answer to that specific question about the Department of Finance.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, how much did the department spend on advertising in 2014 to 2015, the fiscal year that ended almost two months ago?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, the amount that I gave, \$7.5 million, was for this year. The previous year was \$11 million. The amount that I gave the member is the amount so far this year.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, how much will the ads running during the NHL playoffs cost?

Hon. Joe Oliver: I do not have that detail at this time, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, will the minister confirm that these ads cost approximately \$100,000 per ad during NHL playoffs?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, it is, of course, important for us to run ads when people watch them. That is how we determine it. We leave it to experts to decide where those ads should run to get the maximum viewership.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, with thousands of young Canadians struggling to find work and summer work, does the minister think that it makes sense to spend \$100,000 for an ad when that could create 30 summer jobs for Canadian students?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, we have taken many actions and initiated many programs to help summer students, including job matching, incentives for apprenticeships, and student loans. Student loan programs have been significantly enhanced in our budget, and we will continue to work on behalf of students and youth to maximize their employment opportunities.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, does the minister believe that economic action plan ads have provided good value to taxpayers?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, this is a pretty open-ended question, but, yes, of course they have, in a great many of ways, right across the country for Canadians from all walks of life.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, does the minister support the idea of a non-partisan, independent body to review and approve ads to determine that they are not wasteful and not partisan by nature?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, as I have said, our action plan has introduced a number of very important new measures that we want Canadians to be aware of, such as the family tax credit; the expanded UCCB; the doubling of the fitness tax credit; changes to RRIFs, which are a tremendous benefit for seniors; a new home accessibility tax credit; and increased amounts for TFSAs.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, the minister may not have heard my question, but would he support an independent body to review and approve ads, vetting them to ensure that they actually do provide good value for taxpayers and that they are not partisan by nature? Would he support that?

Government Orders

• (2005)

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, we are very comfortable that we are providing important information to Canadians that they need in order to understand and access our programs. We are doing that with the assistance of our officials. We believe we are providing a public service in so doing.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, can the minister describe the legislative drafting error that was made with respect to income splitting and confirmed in the briefing by departmental officials last week?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, our Conservative government believes in keeping more money in the pockets of Canadian families. Because of the measures our government has introduced, the tax burden on Canadians is at the lowest rate it has been in more than 50 years. The family tax cut, in conjunction with the UCCB and other measures such as the children's fitness tax credit and child care expense deduction, are providing benefits to low- and middle-income Canadians.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, will the minister confirm that this drafting error, if left uncorrected, would cost affected households up to \$750 on their 2014 tax returns? Would he confirm that?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, the budget changes the calculation of the family tax cut to ensure that couples claiming the family tax cut and transferring education-related credits between themselves receive the appropriate value of the family tax cut. We have dealt with the issue.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, can the minister confirm that affected households are those that qualify for both income splitting as well as the tuition, education, or textbook tax credits? Will he confirm that?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, the answer is yes.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, can the minister confirm that the drafting error can be found in ways and means Motions Nos. 16 and 17, as well as in Bill C-57?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, the measures are in the budget implementation act.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, does the minister know if this drafting error is in any other government motions or bills on the order paper?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, I will get back to the member opposite on that question.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, when was the minister first aware or made aware of the drafting error?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, I do not have the exact date, but my officials made me aware of it at an appropriate time when they were dealing with it.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, who made the error? Was it by officials in the department, or was it originally made by somebody outside of Finance Canada, imposing this on the department?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, in respect to the last question, I believe it was during the month of April, and it was a drafting error in the department.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, taxpayers must follow an 85-step process to qualify for income splitting. Even the tax experts who

wrote the legislation actually got it wrong at least three times. Is the minister concerned about the process being too complex if his own department seems to be incapable of drafting the legislation around it?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, the member opposite seems focused on process. Let me remind him of what he said back in 2003. He said that we should change the tax system to treat single income or dual income identically under the tax system in order to stop penalizing Canadian single-income families.

Has the member changed his mind?

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, I do not have to answer the questions here, but I do not mind saying yes, I did change my mind. The facts have changed, and when I read the C.D. Howe report, I changed my mind on income splitting, as did the Hon. Jim Flaherty. When given the choice between being consistent and right, I think it is better to be right, and income splitting is wrong for the 85% of Canadians who do not benefit from it.

Is the minister concerned that income splitting does nothing to help single parents or low-income families?

• (2010)

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, as opposed to being right or wrong, I guess we can rely on the hon. member for having made a decision that he may currently regret but has to stick to.

What we are talking about here is a total package of benefits to all four million Canadian families, all of whom benefit, and disproportionately so for low- and middle-income Canadians.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, could the minister explain how income-splitting benefits a single-parent family?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, as I said, the combined package is of benefit to all four million families with children, disproportionately so to those in the lower- and middle-income classes, and 25% to families earning less than \$25,000 a year.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, is the minister aware that when the PBO examined income splitting, his office found that the largest average benefit from income splitting would go to families with an income of more than \$180,000 per year? Given the constrained fiscal environment, does the minister think that is really fair?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, as I said, single parents and lower-income families with children will benefit from the enhancement of the UCCB and may benefit from the increase in the child care expense deduction dollar limits if they were at the previous maximum limits and have additional eligible expenses.

Government Orders

All Canadians, including single Canadians and lower-income Canadians, also benefit from the GST rate reductions and broad-based income tax relief, such as a reduction in the lowest personal income taxes introduced by our government and the—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Order, please. The hon. member for Kings—Hants.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, does the minister agree with his predecessor, the late Jim Flaherty, who said, “I think income-splitting needs a long, hard analytical look...to see who it affects and to what degree, because I’m not sure that overall, it benefits our society.”?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, my esteemed predecessor was commenting on something that did not include the current overall family benefit program. In addition, it is worth noting that we put in a \$2,000 cap, which I think went a long way in dealing with the issue. When it is combined with everything else, he would have been pleased with the progressive nature of this program in benefiting low- and middle-income Canadians.

The Assistant Deputy Chair: This will be the last question.

The hon. member for Kings—Hants.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, lower oil prices have led to a precipitous drop in Alberta's housing sales. There is often around a six-month lag between when sales fall and prices really start to fall. What does the minister expect will happen in Alberta's housing market this year?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, I am not in the business of forecasting housing prices. I can say that we have introduced a number of important measures to take the froth out of the market.

We continue to monitor the market very carefully, but the Governor of the Bank of Canada, the head of the IMF, CMHC, the OECD, and the Department of Finance all believe that while there may be a soft landing, it is not a bubble.

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Chair, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak here this evening, and highlight our government's record of supporting Canada's seniors and pensioners. It is a record that all Canadians can be very proud of. Our government understands that Canada's seniors helped to build this country, to make our country great. That is why we are proud to be putting money directly back into the pockets of our seniors and pensioners, in a number of ways but certainly by lowering taxes.

At the same time, we have strengthened Canada's retirement income system so that it is there to serve the needs of Canadians for today and for tomorrow. The result of our leadership is clear. Canada's retirement income system is acknowledged to be among the world's best by groups such as the OECD in terms of preventing poverty among seniors and ensuring appropriate income in retirement.

Under our low-tax plan, 83% of Canadians are on track for a comfortable retirement, according to McKinsey & Company. What is more, the 2014 Global AgeWatch Index ranked Canada as the fourth-best country in the world in which to grow old.

Let me also remind members that according to the latest Melbourne Mercer Global Pension Index, Canada has the best

retirement income system in the G7, one of the leading retirement income systems in the world. Scott Clausen, a member at Mercer, said:

Canada's retirement system continues to be one of the strongest retirement systems in the world by providing a combination of universal pensions, income-tested...employer pensions, individual RRSPs and individual TFSA's....

Even Canadian editorialists recognize that Canada's retirement income system is strong. Andrew Coyne at the *National Post* said:

By most measures, Canada's retirement income support system is an outstanding success. The poverty rate for Canadian seniors...is among the lowest in the world.

Our targeted relief effort is building on this success. Under our government, 380,000 low-income seniors have been completely removed from the tax rolls. We also introduced the largest GIS increase in over 25 years, helping more than 680,000 seniors right here across Canada. This GIS increase provided eligible low-income seniors with additional annual benefits of up to \$600 for single seniors and \$840 for couples.

Another way that we are helping Canadians prepare for retirement is by providing new options, voluntary vehicles to help them save. We developed and implemented the framework for pooled registered pension plans, which will provide a low-cost and large-scale retirement savings option to the roughly 60% of Canadians who do not have a workplace pension plan. Pooled registered pension plans, or PRPPs, are of particular help to employees of small- and medium-sized businesses who until now have not had access to low-cost private pension options. PRPPs help them by establishing large-scale, broad-based voluntary pension arrangements available to employees with or without a participating employer as well as even the self-employed. PRPPs are very advantageous for those people who are self-employed. This innovative new option would place a high emphasis on consent, and be available to the federally regulated private sector and crown corporations.

It would add to the other options we have created, such as the landmark tax-free savings account. Eleven million Canadians have signed up for the tax-free savings account. They have opened an account. The majority of accounts belong to low- and middle-income earners. Half of the account holders earn under \$42,000 a year. The tax-free savings account has been particularly beneficial to seniors as neither income earned in a TFSA nor the withdrawals from a TFSA affect account holders' federal income-tested benefits and credits, such as GIS.

Due to popular demand, we increased the annual tax-free savings account contribution from \$5,000 to \$5,500, and then to \$10,000 in economic action plan 2015.

●(2015)

This is also particularly beneficial to seniors. Some 600,000 seniors aged 65 and over with an income below \$60,000 are currently maximizing their tax-free savings account and would benefit from the measure that we have brought forward. This move was praised by CARP, which said:

Government Orders

CARP members welcome government action in Budget 2015...to almost double the TFSA from \$5,500 to \$10,000...

Another staple of our low-tax plan is the introduction of pension income splitting for seniors. Pension income splitting is helping over two million seniors and pensioners every year. I hear from them at tax time. I hear from them after they have visited their accountant, and year after year, they thank us for that measure.

We know that both opposition parties are fundamentally opposed to income splitting. Just like they would take away income splitting for nearly two million families, if given the chance, we believe that they would take away pension income splitting for those two million seniors. We will not let that happen.

There are additional ways that the Liberal Party, in particular, would pick the pockets of seniors. As I have said, under our government, 600,000 seniors are currently maximizing their tax-free savings account and would benefit from the increase to the tax-free savings limit. However, again, given the chance, the Liberal leader would shut those accounts down. The Liberals' billion-dollar blunder in the last plan that they put forward was exposed when they had to airbrush their website. Now, they are proposing to fill the holes in their discredited plan by cutting TFSAs and using the revenue.

It is clear that only our government can be trusted to keep taxes low for Canadians and, certainly, for Canadian seniors.

What we will not suggest is raising taxes on workers while claiming that it is for their own good. Under our government, there will be no mandatory job-killing and economy-destablizing pension tax hike for employees or, certainly, for employers. Let me quote Dan Kelly, of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, who cautioned against forcing Canadians and small businesses to pay higher payroll taxes. He said:

CFIB's *Forced Savings* report shows that increasing Canada Pension Plan (CPP) and Quebec Pension Plan (QPP) benefits would result in higher premiums for businesses and employees, significant job losses and lower wages for Canadians.

What is more, finance department estimates indicate that the NDP would kill thousands of jobs by hiking mandatory CPP contributions. Meanwhile, Ontarians should be aware that the Liberals' new mandatory pension tax hike could cost a two-worker family up to \$3,200 every year. That is \$1,600 for each worker in the household. According to the Meridian Credit Union, the majority of Ontario small business owners believe that this "could be their greatest challenge ever faced".

Our government does not believe in forcing Canadians into a single, compulsory, one-size-fits-all approach, nor do we believe in reaching into the pockets of hard-working, middle-class Canadians and reducing their take-home pay. On the contrary, we will continue to put money into the pockets of seniors and all Canadians. With our low-tax plan in place, we have established a rock solid foundation upon which Canadians can achieve their retirement goals with confidence.

I would be pleased today to respond to any questions about our record achievements. They are records. They are achievements. We are very proud of them.

● (2020)

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Mr. Chair, I so appreciate the comments from our Minister of State for Finance. Given his discussion on the pension situation and what our government has done, and given the sustainability and solvency issues that are being faced by many defined benefit plans, I wonder if the minister would be kind enough to elaborate on priorities going forward to maintain a strong retirement income system and what new options are being considered.

Hon. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Chair, I want to thank that hard-working member for Winnipeg South Centre for the question.

A central focus of our efforts going forward will be continuing to ensure that Canadians have access to effective workplace pension plans. The Association of Canadian Pension Management offers a concise summary of some of the challenges that we are overcoming. It notes that:

Sponsors of DB pension plans are continuing to struggle with the significant funding challenges posed by continuing low interest and annuity rates, complex and increasingly volatile investment markets, chronic solvency funding issues....

Currently, 96% of pension plans across Canada are in defined benefit plans, as compared to 71% in the United Kingdom, 42% in the United States and 15% in Australia, but faced with such recent developments, employers are under increasing pressure to move their employees to defined contribution models, which exposes employees to market volatility and longevity risk.

Our government appreciates that Canadians want a more predictable option and employers want to attract or retain workers with a strong pension plan. That is why we launched extensive consultation on the proposed framework for target benefit plans, or TBPs in April 2014. Our consultation placed a high emphasis on the importance of consent, and proposes to require plan members and retirees to agree to converting existing benefits.

Target benefit plans would offer new, voluntary, sustainable and flexible pension options to the employees of federally regulated corporations. They would not involve changes to federal public sector pension plans that are governed by their own respective legislation.

The proposed target benefit plan framework combines features of both defined benefits and defined contribution plans. Similar to defined benefit plans, TBPs would provide highly predictable income for life for the employee, but as with defined contribution plans, target benefit plans would offer cost certainty for employers.

The plan would also be flexible, allowing for the conversion of both defined benefits and defined contribution plans into target benefit plans. All plan parties would have a say in the decision as to whether or not to adopt the target benefit plan, as well as how the plan would be designed.

Government Orders

Members and retirees would also benefit from the pooling of longevity risk, which is not a feature of defined contribution plans. In short, by providing a better balance of protection and costs, TBPs would offer a sustainable, innovative pension option to help support better retirement savings for Canadian workers.

Having consulted extensively with Canadians, pension experts and industry, our government continues its work in developing a framework for TBPs that meets the needs of all stakeholders.

Although the details of this framework have yet to be finalized, I can assure Canadians what TBPs will not do: TBPs will not take away benefits that retirees already have earned without their consent. We will not bring forward a framework that allows for the conversion of accrued benefits without explicit consent from pension holders.

We are still working toward finalizing an effective and responsive framework for target benefit plans that reflects this commitment. In the meantime, those who are retired or saving for retirement will benefit tremendously from targeted tax relief, new optional savings methods like the tax-free savings account, and the full range of measures that I have outlined here this evening.

• (2025)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP): Mr. Chair, could the minister tell me what percentage of single seniors live in poverty?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, as a result of the measures we have taken since 2006, seniors and pensioners receive additional targeted tax relief of about \$3 million a year, and these measures include a \$2,000 increase in the age credit amount and the introduction of pension income splitting. Furthermore, the government created a guaranteed income supplement top-up benefit for Canada's most vulnerable seniors and strengthened the retirement income system.

• (2030)

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Order, please.

Before we continue, could the hon. member tell us how she will share her 15 minutes?

Ms. Isabelle Morin: Mr. Chair, I will share my time with the member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River.

I would like to give the minister another chance to answer my question. I asked him how many single Canadian seniors live below the poverty line.

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, I am proud to say that we have the lowest poverty rate among seniors in the world.

Ms. Isabelle Morin: Mr. Chair, for the minister's information, Statistics Canada says it is 28.5%.

The OECD has shown that although poverty rates among seniors in other countries dropped between 2007 and 2010, poverty rates are rising in Canada.

Why did the Conservatives choose to make things worse by raising the age of eligibility for old age security?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, as I said, we are proud of the fact that poverty rates in Canada are lower than elsewhere in the world. That

is due to many of our initiatives. We have a very progressive tax system. A million people who used to have to pay tax no longer have to.

Ms. Isabelle Morin: Mr. Chair, once the changes to old age security eligibility are fully rolled out, how much will those changes cost seniors?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, economic action plan 2015 includes several measures to help seniors, such as reducing the minimum withdrawal factors for registered retirement income funds so that seniors can preserve more of their savings to better meet their financial needs in retirement.

Ms. Isabelle Morin: Mr. Chair, it will cost the average senior much more than \$13,500.

[*English*]

What is the cost of this cut to the pensioners who also receive the guaranteed income supplement?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, Canada has one of the strongest retirement income systems in the world. One of the pillars of that system is the old age security program.

Since taking power, our government has introduced numerous measures to give Canadians more savings options and to ensure that seniors enjoy financial security in retirement.

[*English*]

Ms. Isabelle Morin: Mr. Chair, in fact, it is about \$32,000 less for each senior citizen under the Conservative plan.

[*Translation*]

I would like to know what impact the cuts to old age security will have on people aged 65 and 66, according to a study conducted by the Université Laval.

[*English*]

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, as I was saying, we recognize the importance of supporting seniors, who, after all, have helped build our country.

We are providing extra support across the country with lower taxes, solid pensions, and strong health care. Our government's low-tax plan has resulted in over 380,000 seniors being taken off the tax rolls.

We want to ensure that seniors have a choice and flexibility in how they save, and that is why we have modified the RRIF program.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Isabelle Morin: Mr. Chair, according to that study, the number of seniors living in poverty will double as a result.

[*English*]

Does the minister know how much the GIS would need to be increased to eliminate seniors' poverty?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, we have done more, certainly, than the previous government. We are in a position to have a better system for retired persons than other countries.

Government Orders

We have done so many things: introducing pension income-splitting, which the other party voted against; increasing the age credit amount by \$2,000; doubling the pension income credit to \$2,000; enhancing the new horizons for seniors program by increasing funding—

● (2035)

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Order. The hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine.

Ms. Isabelle Morin: Mr. Chair, I am asking the minister how much the GIS would need to be increased by to eliminate seniors' poverty.

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, in 2011 we introduced the GIS top-up of \$600 for single seniors and \$840 for couples, which grows with inflation. This represented the largest increase for the lowest-income seniors in a quarter-century.

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Chair, the minister is free to answer questions with yes, no, or I don't know for any of them.

Can the minister tell us how many Canadians will face a drop of more 20% in their standard of living at retirement?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, we have lowered taxes for seniors and pensioners. We have created the tax-free savings account and have almost doubled the amount Canadians can save, but the NDP would roll back that increase. We introduced income splitting for seniors in the same financial circumstances so they can pay closer to the same tax. The opposition would take this away. We lowered taxes 180 times—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Order. The hon. member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River.

Mr. John Rafferty: Mr. Chair, in fact, I guess he does not know the answer, but 5.8 million Canadians will see a drop in their standard of living at retirement. This is according to CIBC.

The CPP pays an average of less than \$640 per month. Does the minister believe that this is sufficient to live on in retirement?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, we have three pillars. We have the CPP, we have the OAS, and we have private pensions. According to McKinsey, 83% of Canadians are on track for a comfortable retirement under our government's low-tax plan.

Mr. John Rafferty: Mr. Chair, it is interesting that he talks about OAS. Because of Conservative cuts to OAS, Canadian seniors will lose \$13,000 each, so I am asking the minister, what is the total size of the Conservative cut?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, the hon. member is misstating the facts. Canada has one of the strongest retirement income systems in the world, of which the old age security program is only one pillar. Since taking office, our government has taken many steps to expand savings options for Canadians and to ensure that seniors are secure in their retirement, and we are gradually increasing the age of eligibility for old age security—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River.

Mr. John Rafferty: Mr. Chair, in fact, the answer to that question is that the total size of the Conservative cut will be \$11 billion.

Can the minister tell us what he thinks about the overwhelming support from Canadians and from the provinces to boost CPP benefits, and why have the Conservatives blocked all of these efforts?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, just to finish the answer to the last question, the government is gradually increasing the age of eligibility for old age security benefits to ensure the sustainability of the program, in light of changing demographics. Changes to the program will be phased in starting in April 2023, with full implementation by January 2029, to ensure that Canadians have significant advance notification to plan for retirement.

Mr. John Rafferty: Mr. Chair, I wonder if the minister could tell us who has given him that advice that the CPP is unsustainable. In fact, its assets are in excess of one-quarter of a trillion dollars. I just wonder how the minister can square that.

● (2040)

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, we have taken the advice of actuaries and other experts. Our CPP is now sustainable for well over 70 years, but Canadians do not want to pay higher payroll taxes. That is why we lowered taxes and brought forward new initiatives for Canadians to save for retirement, including pension income splitting, improved registered pension plans, tax-free savings accounts, and reducing the mandatory minimum of RRIFs. Despite—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River.

Mr. John Rafferty: Mr. Chair, does the minister believe that workers' pensions are adequately protected in the event that their employers go bankrupt?

Hon. Joe Oliver: As I have said, Mr. Chair, we have a three-tier system. It is providing, according to McKinsey, a secure retirement for over 80% of Canadians, and we have added to that, of course, through our pension income splitting, the pooled registered plans, the TFSA, and modifications to the RRIFs. Despite the opposition's reckless high-tax plans, we will continue to take action to put more money back—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Order. The hon. member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River.

Mr. John Rafferty: Mr. Chair, I wonder if the minister could comment on this next question.

Former Stelco president Bob Milbourne just revealed that U.S. Steel is playing shell games to recover its Stelco acquisition costs in order to shortchange the pension plan. I am wondering what the Minister of Finance is going to do to stop this.

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, we, of course, are always concerned if people lose their jobs or pensioners lose their pensions, so we are providing the support that is appropriate for particular industries. We are encouraging job creation, and we have a whole array of programs, which I have outlined, which will help retired persons in Canada throughout the country.

Government Orders

Mr. John Rafferty: Mr. Chair, I would like to ask the minister what financial impact the minister thinks it would have for the federal government to elevate the creditor status of pension plans during bankruptcy proceedings.

If he did not understand the question, I can ask it again.

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, I understood the question.

In cases of bankruptcy, there are complex legal issues that provide priorities, and where people go into credit arrangements, they have a certain expectation of how they will be created. We, of course, continue to examine the tax system to make sure that it is fair for workers and for pensioners.

Mr. John Rafferty: Mr. Chair, I would like to let the minister know that elevating the creditor status of pension plans during bankruptcy proceedings in fact would cost the government zero. It would not cost it anything, and it would ensure that workers receive what they are owed.

It is a very simple question to the finance minister. Why does the government oppose this, and why is it not in the budget?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, the answer to the question, as I gave it before, is not whether it costs the government money; it is whether a structure can be built that is fair and predictable for all participants. We will continue to monitor these issues to make sure workers and pensioners and other creditors are treated in a fair way in bankruptcy proceedings.

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Chair, I am thankful for this opportunity to appear before this committee. In my time today, I would like to focus on the importance of balancing the budget.

Let me begin by saying how proud I am that our government has fulfilled our promise to Canadians. We have balanced the budget in 2015. We have done it while giving benefits directly to families and by reducing taxes on the middle class. However, the Liberals and the NDP want to take those benefits away and raise taxes on the middle class.

Thanks to the strong fiscal prudence and economic stewardship under our Prime Minister, the deficit has been reduced from \$55.6 billion at the height of the global economic crisis to a projected surplus this year of \$1.4 billion, and \$1.7 billion the year after. That is a solid foundation upon which to build a more sustainable public finance.

On this strong foundation, we are building a brighter future, but we must stay the course with our low-tax plan. Canadians know what to expect from our government. Our budget prudently accounts for changes to the global economy, eliminates the deficit, and continues to deliver low taxes, economic growth, and long-term prosperity.

Contrast our low-tax plan with the Liberal one, according to the current Liberal finance critic:

It is unacceptable, frankly, that the [previous Liberal government] balanced the budget on the backs of ordinary Canadians and [refused] to provide any benefits back to the ordinary Canadian taxpayer.

That is the Liberal plan. In contrast, our government will continue our low-tax plan for jobs, growth, and security, and while balancing the budget as well.

There is a path to prosperity, and then there is a path to spending hikes, tax hikes, and unaffordable debt. We must choose the right course, the course that will create jobs and growth, not stifle the Canadian economy and hurt families. That is what Canadians expect of their government. Unlike the Liberals, our government does not believe that we can nor should tax our way to prosperity.

Let me remind members that it was the Liberal leader who said “Canadians could be convinced to accept a tax hike if it means a better economic plan”.

This type of ideology of tax and spend is not surprising, given the last time that Canada saw a Trudeau in government. Federal spending tripled, prompted by temporary highs in commodity prices, and this type of reckless spending was not in response to economic crisis. As a result, under Pierre Elliott Trudeau's mandate, Canada experienced some of the worst federal budget deficits in peacetime history. We are still paying for it today.

In common Liberal fashion, Jean Chrétien balanced the budget by hiking taxes, cutting vital programs, and slashing billions in transfer payments. Such actions put Canada's health care and education at risk. Everything we have learned from the post-recession history proves that Liberal policies would be devastating for the economy.

Unlike the Liberal leader who thinks budgets balance themselves, our government has brought Canada back to balance this year. Canadians understand the importance of living within their means and expect their government to do the same. Balanced budgets keep taxes low and ensure that government services are sustained over the long run. More importantly perhaps, they ensure that future generations like our children and grandchildren are not saddled with huge debts.

However, if given the chance, the opposition would raise taxes and drive Canada into dangerous levels of deficit and debt. The Liberal finance critic said it himself: “Liberals believe Canadians will not be bothered by being taxed more and more...”. Again, that is an example of the Liberal's tax and spend policies.

This is not a formula for success, nor what Canadians need or want. Canadian families sit around their kitchen table to talk about their budgets and how to stretch every dollar. They cannot afford to pay more taxes. Such Liberal schemes will not help them balance their budgets; in fact, it would do the opposite.

Our government is not only setting an example by balancing our budget, but we are helping families balance theirs as well, by giving money directly into the pockets of every hard-working Canadian family. Again, this is in stark contrast to the Liberal leader, who said, “benefiting every single family is not what is fair”. I believe that contrasts with the very definition of fairness.

Government Orders

• (2045)

Our Conservative government believes it is fair to benefit every single Canadian family and provide opportunities for all Canadians. We will make no apologies for helping all Canadian families. We understand that benefiting every single family is indeed our definition of fair.

Given the ongoing uncertain global economic environment, it is not the time for risky plans or reckless spending as proposed by both the Liberal and NDP leaders. Instead, it is crucial for the government to continue to pursue the objectives that have underpinned the economic action plan since its inception in 2009.

That is why we have introduced balanced budget legislation. It will ensure that the hard-won gains achieved by our government will remain in place for future generations. It will also ensure that the only acceptable deficit will be one that responds to a recession or an extraordinary circumstance, such as war or natural disaster.

It is not uncommon for a government to run deficits to respond to a severe downturn in the economy, but deficits outside of a recession or an extraordinary circumstance are unacceptable, and the need to return to balanced budgets is immediate.

To that end, this legislation proposes that should Canada again enter into deficit, the finance minister would be required to testify before the House of Commons committee on finance within 30 days and present a plan, with concrete timelines, to return to balanced budgets. Moreover, should the deficit be due to a recession or other extraordinary circumstance, operating spending would be frozen, as would the salaries of ministers and deputy ministers government-wide, once the recovery begins. If, on the other hand, the deficit is due to mismanagement, operating budgets would be frozen automatically, and the salaries of ministers and deputy ministers alike would be reduced by 5%.

This approach would ensure that any increase in spending to respond to a recession, war, or natural disaster would be temporary, targeted, and timely. By balancing the budget, we are raising Canada's economic potential and creating stable, well-paying jobs.

By staying the course and sticking to our proven economic action plan, Canada remains on track to a better future for all Canadians. That is what Canadians want and deserve. They cannot afford a tax and spend government, something the opposition is much too eager to do. Canadians know that it is our government that will keep taxes low, help foster jobs, and create long-term prosperity so that our children and grandchildren have a bright future.

In closing, I would like to ask a question to the Minister of Finance. I would like to ask him why balanced budgets matter.

• (2050)

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, I would be pleased to answer the question about why balanced budgets matter.

A balanced budget matters because it allows the government to cut taxes even more for hard-working Canadians, creating jobs, growth, and long-term prosperity. It means less debt for future generations, ensures that taxpayer dollars go toward important social programs like education and health care rather than debt repayment, and it gives the government more flexibility to respond to a crisis

like a recession or war or natural disaster. It preserves our triple-A credit rating, the top credit rating that a country can have, allows for international shocks, and it prevents passing on more debt to our children.

What is also important is how the budget is balanced. In our case, it came from strict fiscal discipline. Unlike the Liberals, we will not raise taxes or slash transfers to people, provinces, and territories. Our government has cut taxes every year since taking office. Over 180 tax relief measures have been undertaken since 2006. What is the result? The result is that Canadians now benefit from the lowest overall federal tax burden in more than half a century.

These benefits of balancing the budget are so important that we are proposing a law with pay cuts to ministers and top bureaucrats if the government falls into deficit in normal economic times. We believe that Ottawa is capable of doing what families have to do every day. That means setting priorities and making choices. We will propose that if a government posts a deficit outside of extraordinary circumstances, an automatic operating freeze would go into effect and there would be a cut in salaries for ministers and deputy ministers by 5%.

Our government will balance the budget and continue to ensure that hard-working Canadian families have more money in their pockets when they need it most. Our government has paid down \$37 billion in debt since 2006, prior to the great recession that rocked the world economy. That forward thinking helped Canada to achieve the lowest total government net debt to GDP ratio in the G7, and made it affordable to boost growth through federal spending without compromising our top-notch credit rating.

Responsible fiscal management and firm control over direct program spending put Canada on a predictable path back to a balanced budget by 2015, providing consumers and businesses with the confidence to invest and grow the economy. As the *The New York Times* recently reported, after-tax income for middle-class Canadians, substantially behind in 2000, now appears to be higher than in the United States. In fact, the Canadian middle class is among the richest in the developed world. *Bloomberg* has ranked Canada as the second-most attractive place in the world to do business.

Our approach is working. Since the depths of the recession, over 1.2 million net new jobs have been created, overwhelmingly full-time, well-paying, and in the private sector.

However, these are tough economic times around the world. It is not time for risky, high-tax, high-spend Liberal initiatives. In a fragile global economy, we must continue taking action to create jobs, growth, and long-term prosperity. Our government plan would do exactly do that by fulfilling our long-standing commitment to balancing the federal budget.

• (2055)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Chair, I will be sharing my time with the member for Davenport.

Government Orders

Canadian retailers have to pay credit card transaction fees that are among the highest in the world.

Can the minister give us an idea of the annual cost of credit card transaction fees for Canadian businesses?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, we have heard the concerns of businesspeople and consumers alike.

Last fall, the government accepted voluntary commitments by Visa Canada and MasterCard Canada to reduce credit card fees to an average effective rate of 1.5% for the next five years.

Ms. Annick Papillon: Mr. Chair, the minister is not answering the question. According to the Retail Council of Canada, the annual cost is \$6 billion.

Does the minister intend to allow Canadian retailers to add a surcharge for credit card transactions?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, in April, the government announced major improvements to the Code of Conduct for the Credit and Debit Card Industry in Canada. These changes address issues raised by merchants and consumers. This improved code of conduct provides greater flexibility and protection to merchants and more choice to consumers.

Ms. Annick Papillon: Mr. Chair, again, the Minister of Finance is not answering the question. I guess he will allow surcharging.

Does the minister intend to get rid of the rule that requires merchants to accept every credit card from the same credit card company? We want short answers.

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, in April, the government launched public consultations on the oversight of national retail payment systems, in order to further enhance consumer protection.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business says, and I quote:

[The code] has served merchants extremely well....[It] has done an excellent job in ensuring some fair ground rules and maintaining Canada's low-cost debit system.

Ms. Annick Papillon: Mr. Chair, I asked a simple question and I want a simple answer.

Will the minister require special branding for premium cards to ensure more transparency for both merchants and consumers, yes or no?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, as I said, last fall the government accepted the voluntary commitments by Visa and MasterCard to reduce credit card fees to an average effective card rate of 1.5% for the next five years.

• (2100)

Ms. Annick Papillon: Mr. Chair, if I understood correctly, the minister does not intend to require special branding for premium cards to help merchants and consumers. I will go on to the next question.

Does the minister want to put in place a dispute resolution mechanism that will enable Canadian businesses to assert their rights when they encounter problems specifically related to payment processors?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, I quoted the Canadian Federation of Independent Businesses and I will now quote the *National Post*: the

code played a big role in saving low-cost debit in Canada and gave merchants some degree of power in dealing with the payments industry.

Ms. Annick Papillon: Mr. Chair, once again, let us check and see if the minister knows his numbers.

Since it is so important, can the minister tell us approximately how much it costs Canadian consumers per year to withdraw their own money from an ATM? I have the answer. Does the minister?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, in Canada, consumers have an array of choices. For example, consumers can choose from over 100 different types of bank accounts, with a mix of features and fees, from 40 different providers.

In fact, almost one-third of Canadians currently pay no monthly banking fees for their bank accounts.

Ms. Annick Papillon: Mr. Chair, unless they pay monthly fees, it costs consumers from \$1.50 to \$6 to withdraw money from an ATM. Obviously, the Minister of Finance does not go the ATM very often, but ATM fees cost Canadians over \$420 million a year.

Does the minister know how much it costs to withdraw money from an ATM in the United Kingdom? I look forward to hearing his answer.

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, at the beginning of this year, I was pleased to announce that the major banks in Canada had publicly committed to enhancing low-cost bank accounts. The maximum monthly fee for these accounts is \$4. They are available to all Canadians. Low-cost bank accounts allow consumers to make 12 transactions per debit card per month and exercise chequing privileges without any additional fees for deposits, debit cards, pre-authorized payment forms and monthly printed statements. The eight main banks in Canada also—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Order.

The hon. member for Québec for one final question.

Ms. Annick Papillon: Mr. Chair, I am pleased to hear that the minister realizes it costs Canadian taxpayers \$4 per transaction, based on the type of ATM, for a total of \$420 million a year. In the United Kingdom, 97% of ATM withdrawals are free.

Does the Minister of Finance think that the amount Canadian consumers pay to withdraw their own money from ATMs is justified, when he sees what happens in other countries, where people do not have to pay to withdraw their hard-earned money?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, as I said, the monthly maximum is \$4 for low-cost accounts. These accounts are offered to all Canadians. Something else that is very important is that Canada's eight major banks are also committed to offering similar no-fee accounts to vulnerable Canadians. Furthermore, these banks are committed to providing free monthly credit card statements to their clients.

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Chair, I would like to start with the issue of banking fees. How much do pay-to-pay fees in the banking sector cost Canadians each year?

• (2105)

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, we are the only party that has stood up for consumers by lowering taxes and putting more money into their pockets.

Unlike the Liberals and the NDP who would raise taxes on middle-class consumers, our government has reduced taxes for the middle class. We have taken action to improve low-cost bank accounts and expand no-cost banking options for more than seven million Canadians.

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Chair, according to the Public Interest Advocacy Centre, that dollar amount is up to \$180 million a year.

The government finally agreed with the NDP and prohibited some pay-to-pay fees on monthly bills and statements. Why did the government exempt the banking sector from this prohibition?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, our government believes that financial consumer interests are protected by high-quality regulatory frameworks designed to give consumers the tools they need to make effective financial decisions, an accessible complaints handling process and a competitive market which provides choice to consumers. The government does not generally regulate the day-to-day operations of financial institutions, including fees.

In Canada, consumers have a vast array of choices. For example, they can choose from over 100 different types of bank accounts.

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Chair, in the last months the big banks have increased fees on basic transactions. Does the government's code of conduct apply to these new fees?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, as I said, the government does not generally regulate fees, but there is an array of choices, over 100 different types of bank accounts, with a mix of features and fees, from 40 different providers.

In fact, almost one-third of Canadians currently pay no monthly banking fees for their bank accounts. Last year, as I said, we were pleased to announce that Canada's eight largest banks were publicly committed to enhancing low-cost bank accounts. The monthly fee for these accounts is \$4.

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Chair, I would like to switch to the issue of youth unemployment. How many Canadians are stuck in unpaid internships across Canada?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, we have taken action to help low-income youth and youth looking for jobs. We will continue to provide support by way of student loans and apprenticeship programs. We are extending support by reforming the Canada student loans program to reduce financial barriers to post-secondary education.

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Chair, it is a simple question. Does the minister know how many Canadians are stuck in unpaid internships across the country?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, under our Conservative government, Canada will continue to have one of the lowest youth unemployment

rates in the G7. Since 2006, our government has helped over six million youth obtain skills, training and jobs. However, we recognize that more must be done. That is why our budget will support the launch of a new labour market information—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Order, please. The hon. member for Davenport.

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Chair, the minister is the Minister of Finance. We take it he is a numbers guy, so does he not think it is time we track this information?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, as I was saying, the budget will launch a new labour information portal for youth and students. It will complement the recent launch of a new career choice portal, which provides information about in demand fields of study. We will amend the Canada Labour Code to clarify the circumstances under which unpaid internships can be offered, and to ensure that all interns under federal jurisdiction, regardless of pay, receive occupational health and safety protection and are subject to basic safety standards.

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Chair, speaking of those basic safety standards, why did the government decide to exclude interns from protections against unreasonable hours of work or sexual harassment in the budget bill?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, we have taken action to help interns. We are looking at labour standard protections to be provided to unpaid interns, which should be specified in regulations following consultation with stakeholders.

The proposed amendments respond to recent concerns about the potential abuse and lack of protection offered to unpaid interns, while not overly restricting or discouraging employers from offering legitimate unpaid internships that primarily benefit the intern.

• (2110)

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Chair, how much has youth unemployment increased under the Conservatives' watch?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, Canada's youth population comprises approximately 4.5 million Canadians between age 15 and 24, representing a significant source of labour force potential. While finding a job remains a challenge for some young Canadians, Canada has one of the highest youth employment rates among its OECD peers. As announced in our budget, the youth employment strategy will support 15,000 internships in high-demand fields.

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The Assistant Deputy Chair: Order, please. This will be the last question. The hon. member for Davenport.

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Chair, since this is the last question, this is more of a values question for the minister. Does the minister really consider nearly 400,000 unemployed youth to be a crisis in our country?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, as I was explaining, we are doing everything to support the youth population. As announced in economic action plan 2013-14, the youth employment strategy will support 5,000 internships in high-demand fields, the skills trade, and small and medium-sized enterprises by March 31, 2016.

The government also supports graduate level research and development internships through Mitacs. The unemployment rate for Canadian youth would compare favourably to other G7 countries.

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Order, please. We will conclude that round. Resuming debate. The hon. member for York Centre.

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Mr. Chair, I am pleased to have this opportunity to address the committee tonight. I am here to highlight one of the central initiatives in budget 2015, the important role our government plays in supporting infrastructure in Canada. Canadians rely on public infrastructure on a day-to-day basis. It gets us to work in the morning and home at night. It moves our goods to market, connecting our people and businesses with the world. It connects our families.

Canada's prosperity and quality of life depend on a vast network of public infrastructure, from roads to highways to bridges to transit systems, water and waste water infrastructure, ports, airports, and recreational and cultural facilities. Investments in Canada's public infrastructure create jobs, support trade, and promote productivity and economic growth in communities across Canada.

The Liberals take great pride in their record when they were in government, but the facts tell a different story. The Liberals under Paul Martin ran an ad hoc, unpredictable and insufficient so-called infrastructure program.

In contrast, through our government's long-term commitment to public infrastructure, we have made significant investments in infrastructure across Canada.

Through the \$33-billion building Canada plan, our government has helped build over 12,000 provincial, territorial and municipal infrastructure projects from one end of this country to the other, but we did not stop there. We went even further.

Economic action plan 2013 committed \$70 billion in public infrastructure over the next decade. This includes the \$53-billion new building Canada plan for provincial, territorial and municipal infrastructure. This funding was unprecedented and the largest, longest federal infrastructure plan in Canadian history.

To build on this record, our government also doubled the gas tax fund to help municipalities address their infrastructure priorities. To top that off, we even made the fund permanent. I know the Liberals do not like to hear that, so let me repeat it. We took a temporary program, passed legislation, over their objections, and made it permanent. Last year we announced it would grow at 2% per year, to be applied in \$100-million increments. This means local municipi-

palities will get an additional \$1.8 billion in funding over the next decade for their roads, sewers, bridges and other like projects.

In York Centre, the riding which I am so privileged to represent, many of the roads, like Wilson Avenue and Finch Avenue have been recently newly paved. Sewers were upgraded on Antibes Drive, just to name a few.

Our government did not stop there. We also added an additional 11 eligible categories, including disaster mitigation, recreation, tourism and culture. As a result, communities have more choice for projects that can be supported by the federal gas tax fund.

Our government listens to local mayors. This fund, which has already done so much for municipalities, will continue to support infrastructure priorities for many years to come.

Another major component of our plan, the new building Canada fund, totals \$14 billion over 10 years. Under the new building Canada fund, each province and territory has been allocated a base amount. Funding under this component is available, not just for provincial, but municipal governments as well. Of course, our government also understands the importance of smaller communities and their needs and priorities. That is why we are guaranteeing that \$1 billion will be reserved for communities with populations under 100,000 across the country.

Taken together, investments in infrastructure will keep Canada moving full speed into the future.

We all know that traffic congestion is getting worse in our large cities. Our government understands every minute spent in a car is one less minute spent with our families. It means higher costs for businesses and less livable cities. Building on our government's investment in public transit to date, economic action plan 2015 introduced a new and innovative fund to promote public transit infrastructure investment that is affordable for taxpayers and efficient for commuters.

The public transit fund is a permanent fund that provides up to \$1 billion per year for major public transit projects. This is the first time ever a federal government has provided directly for public transit. This is just another way our Conservative government is building on the longest and largest public transit program record in Canadian history.

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● (2115)

Here is an important fact. Our Conservative government is investing three times more in infrastructure than the previous Liberal government did. It is no wonder the Canadian Federation of Independent Business applauded our government's action plan 2015 and gave it an A.

That is not all; there is more. The new public transit fund has also been praised by municipalities across Canada. Here is what the Federation of Canadian Municipalities had to say:

The transit investment in this budget is good news for Canadians and marks an important achievement on a key issue they face every day. This level of permanent, ongoing funding has the potential to be transformative for public transit across this country.

The Canadian Council for Public-Private Partnerships also praised budget 2015 and, in particular, the creation of a new public transit fund by saying:

The Federal Government has demonstrated leadership today by continuing to invest in public transit infrastructure that is critical to the economic engine of our municipalities and to people's quality of life.

Mayors from across the country have applauded our new public transit fund. Here is what some of them had to say.

Mayor John Tory of Toronto said, "This is a major step forward for Toronto and for the country." He also said, "This is good news for Toronto and for cities across Canada."

Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson said, "I'm pleased to see a permanent public transit fund being established with enough dollars to generate the federal share of our Metro Vancouver transit plan."

Edmonton Mayor Don Iveson said, "This money will allow us actually to continue building LRT indefinitely until the system is done, which is very exciting news for Edmontonians."

No federal government in Canadian history has ever made a stronger commitment of supporting infrastructure than our Conservative government. This new public transit fund will complement our government's existing infrastructure support by providing significant long-term support for public transit projects that help all Canadians. That is what Canadians expect from our government, and we are delivering.

Through the new building Canada plan, our government is providing stable, predictable funding over the next decade for public infrastructure across Canada. While we have a public transit fund in place, our existing federal infrastructure will continue to support thousands of ongoing or new infrastructure projects across Canada in 2015 alone.

While the Liberal Party plan is to raise taxes and recklessly increase spending, our Conservative government is committed to investing in public infrastructure to reduce commuting times for families, enhance our economic productivity, and encourage job creation and economic growth across Canada.

I now have a question for the Minister of Finance.

What is the government doing to support infrastructure in Canada?

● (2120)

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, I thank the hon. member for York Centre for the question. He has provided dedicated and effective service to his constituents.

Since 2006, our Conservative government has made unprecedented investments in infrastructure across Canada. Under the Paul Martin Liberals' so-called infrastructure program, funding was unpredictable and insufficient. Unlike the Liberals, our government listens to concerns of mayors, premiers and regional chairs. That is why we have made historic investments in infrastructure.

Through the \$33-billion building Canada plan, our government has helped to build over 12,000 provincial, territorial and municipal infrastructure projects from coast to coast to coast. Our Conservative government announced the largest and longest federal commitment to infrastructure in Canadian history, with \$75 billion in support for public infrastructure over the next decade, including \$53 billion for provincial, territorial and municipal infrastructure under the new building Canada fund.

Funding under the plan is now flowing into provinces, territories and municipalities. The new building Canada fund is open for business. The fund will help to build stronger communities and support local economies across Canada.

Recently, the Prime Minister announced \$150 million under Canada's 150 infrastructure plan to 1,800 projects in communities across Canada. The 150th anniversary of Confederation is a time to celebrate the places across this great country that unite and connect us, such as the parks, the trails and the cultural and community centres. The infrastructure program will help preserve and improve these treasured cultural and community locations, allowing Canadians and their families to enjoy moments of sport, recreation, leisure and contemplation for years to come.

I should also mention the gas tax fund, which is federal money that helps municipalities with their infrastructure priorities. It was originally a temporary program, but when we saw how important it was to Canadian cities and towns, we took action. We made it permanent. We doubled it. It grows annually now, representing an additional \$1.8 billion in funding over the next decade. The gas tax fund comprises the largest portion of the new building Canada plan and it is providing \$2 billion to support local infrastructure projects this fiscal year.

Building on these investments, the Prime Minister announced an additional \$5.8-billion investment to build new infrastructure across the country. This funding would support the modernization and repair of important infrastructure assets to create jobs in communities across Canada and to contribute to Canada's long-term economic prosperity.

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Our government is following through on our commitment to build infrastructure that is unprecedented in Canadian history, and our success speaks for itself. We are investing in public infrastructure. We are investing in transit. Our new transit fund is revolutionary and will provide an opportunity for all major urban and suburban projects for years to come. That is what Canadians expect and deserve.

• (2125)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Chair, I have a simple question to start us off. Could the minister please tell us how many Canadians are currently unemployed?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, our government has created 1.2 million net new jobs from July 2009 to April 2015. More than 90% are full-time positions. Over 80% are in the private sector. Almost 60% are in high-wage industry. That is 20% more jobs compared to our closest competitor since our government came into office.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Chair, let us try again. It is a very straightforward question. A G7 finance minister would know the answer to this question, one would hope. How many Canadians are currently unemployed?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, I think the hon. member knows that there is a 6.8% unemployment rate right now.

It is rich for the NDP and the Liberals to be criticizing our government's record on the economy and job creation. They voted against every job creation measure our government has put forward, including introducing the small business job credit.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Chair, it is obviously hard for the minister to spit it out, so I will for him. There are 1.3 million Canadians who are unemployed, a fact that he either does not know or is willing to say.

I would like to hear the minister's comments on what Stephen Poloz said recently when he was asked about the state of the Canadian economy. The Governor of the Bank of Canada called it atrocious. I wonder what the minister thinks about that comment.

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, the governor was very clear. He believes that the first quarter would be slow and there would be a resumption in growth. The Bank of Canada was projecting, I believe, around 1.9% growth this year, and that growth would be better than most G7 countries.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Chair, I wonder if the minister can tell us what the deficit was that he ran in the 2014-15 budget.

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, I believe the exact number was \$2.4 billion.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Chair, can the minister tell us what the cost of income splitting is in its first year?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, as I have said, our government believes in keeping more money in the pockets of Canadian families, and due to the measures we have introduced, the tax burden on Canadians is lower than it has been in over 50 years. Every single family with children under 18 would benefit from the new suite of family measures.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Chair, one more time. It is a very specific question on a major program the current government is running.

What is the cost to Canadian taxpayers of income splitting this year?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, the member opposite seems to harbour the belief that if funds have not been seized by the government then somehow they are lost to the economy. The member opposite seems to think that the government is entitled to hard-earned money. They start with the fact that the money is the government's, and by exception, the people get to keep their own money.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Chair, the only people who are entitled are all those Conservative senators, sitting, collecting from Canadian taxpayers each and every day, and often, just outright stealing it.

The government ran a \$2.5 billion deficit. In fact, it spent \$2.5 billion, borrowed the money, to pay for income splitting, which would do nothing for 85% of Canadian families.

Why does the minister think that 100% of Canadians should pay for a benefit that goes to the top 15%?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, I have said repeatedly, and a number of times this very evening, that our family tax program will overwhelmingly benefit low- and middle-income Canadians. Twenty-five per cent of the benefits will go to families earning less than \$30,000 a year. We estimate that almost \$10 billion in 2015-16, or one-half of 1% of GDP, will be returned to families and invested in the economy over the coming months.

This, again, not only is our philosophical difference, because the opposition believes that money earned by hard-working Canadians is, by right, the government's, but it does not seem to understand the benefit of having money retained in the private sector for economic growth.

• (2130)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Chair, the current government saw no problem with adding almost \$5,000 for every man, woman, and child in this country to the national debt, which we will be paying for for generations to come.

I will ask a question about income splitting, and I am being very specific for the minister. Can the minister tell us which income decile will benefit the most from his income-splitting scheme?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, I think it is important to note that the NDP's plan would only help a few families that are fortunate enough to receive a spot in its bureaucratic program, which, from experience, is usually higher-income families.

Instead, our plan will benefit every single family across Canada, four million families. In providing choice for families, we believe that mom and dad know better how to support their children than bureaucrats in Ottawa.

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Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Chair, we can understand why the finance minister wants to talk about the NDP's \$15-a-day affordable child care plan. It is because his income-splitting scheme does nothing for 85% of Canadian families.

The answer to the question, which he refused to answer, is that the top 80th decile does the best under his income-splitting scheme. Second in line is the top 90th decile for Canadians.

Can the minister tell us how many women will be pushed out of the workforce, according to the PBO study, by his income-splitting scheme?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, first, it is important to understand that under the family benefit program, families will save, on average, \$1,140 from the package. Thanks to measures introduced by our government, the average Canadian family of four will receive up to \$6,600 this year.

Income splitting is already helping seniors across the country, which is why the government is now proposing similar relief for families. The opposition would shut down that benefit for Canadians from all walks of life.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Chair, was the finance minister warned about the cost of the TFSA program and its expected costs, which will swell in just five years and by 2080 to as much as \$132 billion per year?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, 11 million Canadians are participating in the TFSA program. It is permitting them to save for their retirement, save for their kids' education, and save for a down payment on their first home.

It is overwhelmingly a benefit to low- and middle-income Canadians. Three-quarters of the people earn less than \$75,000, and 60% of those who maxed out on their program earn less than \$60,000 a year.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Chair, is the finance minister still comfortable leaving this massive burden for our grandchildren to solve, as he said to the CBC?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, I understand that humour is not really the strong suit of the NDP. Let me make it clear that the advantage of having more money retained by the private sector is not only fair to Canadians, who will, therefore, have a more affordable life, but means more consumption, more investment, and higher economic growth.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Chair, of the billions spent to double the TFSA, how much will go to the wealthiest 20% of Canadians?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, as I said, this program is overwhelmingly used by lower- and middle-income Canadians. Some 60% of those who maxed out their TFSA contributions earned less than \$60,000 a year.

I do not know why the NDP wants to cancel this program. It is an assault on the Canadian middle class.

• (2135)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Chair, economists have shown that within a generation, the TFSA will lead to no taxes being collected on nearly all taxable income. Is this an objective of the Conservative government?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, I have quite a few people who might resonate with the hon. member.

NDP Premier Greg Selinger said, “[TFSA] accounts should be especially helpful in encouraging lower income Manitobans to save”.

The Metcalf Foundation said, “This is a very, very significant new measure for low-income people and has enormous potential”.

Jack Mintz, of the University of Calgary School of Public Policy, said, “It’s a positive step towards encouraging people to save”.

The quotes go on. The fact is, and we have heard from people right across the country, that this is an important savings measure that benefits seniors and low- and middle-income Canadians.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Chair, let us read out another quote for the minister. The top 20% of Canadian earners will get \$9 billion from the doubling of the TFSA. That is twice as much as all the rest of Canadians combined. Does the government think that is fair?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, half of TFSA holders earn less than \$42,000 a year. Some 600,000 seniors with incomes below \$60,000 are currently maximizing their TFSA room and will benefit from the measure.

The Canadian Association of Retired Persons strongly supports our increase. What is the NDP going to say to CARP when it keeps insisting that it will cancel this important program for seniors?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Chair, if the Conservatives want to fight for the wealthiest 20% and allow them double the advantage of all the rest of Canadians combined, I will let the finance minister and his party make that argument to Canadians.

Now I have a question about child care. Of the approximately 125,000 child care spaces the current Conservative Prime Minister solemnly promised to create, can the government update us on how many have actually been created?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, our government has provided a significant increase to the provinces and the territories. We have increased the transfers by 62% since we came into office. We have increased social funding for education. We have increased funding significantly for health care and for equalization. We have not achieved a budgetary balance on the backs of the provinces.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Chair, the question was this: How many child care spaces, of the 125,000 the government promised to create, has it created? The answer is actually quite simple. It is not on a piece of paper handed to the minister by an official. It is zero.

Can the finance minister tell us, in his home city of Toronto, what the average cost for a month of child care is?

Government Orders

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, as I have said, we have provided significant benefits for every single one of the four million Canadian families, and we have done that with a suite of programs, including, in particular, the universal childcare benefit. They all benefit from this. We have provided choice, and we have put our faith in the wisdom of parents.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Chair, the answer is a little over \$1,600 a month. I suppose the minister does not know or does not care.

Can the minister tell us what percentage of income, for an average working mother in his own city of Toronto, would be taken up paying for that child care space?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, the government's commitment is to make life more affordable for Canadian families and to help families make ends meet.

The overall tax burden is at its lowest level in more than 50 years. The measures introduced since 2006 will provide tax relief and increased benefits of up to \$6,600 for the typical family of four in 2015.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Chair, the finance minister often talks about investments. Can he tell us how much is returned to the Canadian economy for every dollar invested in child care?

Let me preempt this, because I suspect that the minister is not actually going to either know or care to answer. It is \$1.75. For every dollar we put into child-care spaces, we get \$1.75 back to the Canadian economy. They would kill for such an investment in any program they have offered to Canadians so far. Why not take up this opportunity to help Canadian families and help our economy at the same time?

• (2140)

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, our government has a proud record of helping Canadian families, helping the middle class, and helping Canadians who are less advantaged. We have done that through a very progressive tax system and by providing benefits directly to moms and dads, who have the interests of their children and have the wisdom to provide the choices that make sense for their children.

While the opposition members may be derisive about the wisdom of moms and dads, we believe in the wisdom of the people.

The Deputy Chair: Regrettably, the time for the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley has expired.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre.

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Mr. Chair, it is an honour to be here tonight talking about small business and the impact that small business has on our economy.

Small businesses are the backbone of the Canadian economy. They account for 99% of all businesses in Canada and employ half the working men and women in the Canadian private sector.

Our government believes that owners of small businesses should spend their time growing their business and creating jobs, not choking on high taxes and wallowing in red tape.

Today I want to give members a quick snapshot of why it is only our government that can be trusted to keep taxes low for all Canadians.

We have cut taxes significantly for small businesses and their owners. We cut the small business tax rate to 11% as of 2008, and by the way, as soon as we pass economic action plan 2015, we will be reducing it to 9%. We increased the amount of annual income eligible for this lower rate from \$300,000 to \$400,000 in 2007 and to \$500,000 in 2009. We cut the general corporate income tax rate to 15% in 2012 from 22.12%. All of these benefits help successful small businesses when their income exceeds \$500,000.

We increased the lifetime capital gains exemption on qualified small business shares to \$750,000 from \$500,000 in 2007. The government further increased this exemption to \$800,000 in 2014 and indexed the limit to inflation, bringing it to \$813,600 for 2015. The exemption is estimated to be delivering over \$1 billion of tax relief annually to small business owners and owners of farms and fishing businesses. By the way, they are creating jobs with those savings.

We also reduced small business EI premiums by introducing the small business job credit. This credit is expected to save small businesses more than \$550 million over 2015 and 2016. These measures will benefit hard-working small business owners all across the country.

Unlike the opposition, our government believes that the best way to create jobs is to lower taxes for job creators. That is exactly what we are doing.

Economic action plan 2015 cuts taxes even further for small businesses. To encourage small business growth, economic action plan 2015 proposes to reduce the small business tax rate to 9% by 2019. This would be the largest cut in the tax rate for small businesses in more than 25 years. It is estimated that the cut to 9% for small businesses would reduce taxes for small businesses and their owners by \$2.7 billion over 2015 to 2019.

For example, a small business with a taxable income of half a million dollars would pay 46% less tax in 2019 compared to when we came into office in 2006. This means that their annual tax reduction can be reinvested in the business to fuel its growth and create jobs for even more Canadians. By the way, we have already created 1.2 million net new jobs since the depths of the recession, and that is only the beginning.

Alongside lower taxes, businesses also need access to capital. They have to have capital if they expect to develop. That is why our government is introducing changes to the Canada small business financing program. This program facilitates the extension of loans by private sector financial institutions to small businesses for the acquisition of real property and equipment and for leasehold improvements.

Government Orders

• (2145)

The program helps new businesses get started, helps established firms to make improvements and expand, and improves access to loans that would not otherwise be available to small businesses. That stimulates economic growth. That creates jobs for Canadians.

Since 2006, when our government took office, this program has provided over 50,000 loans to small businesses, with loans totalling approximately \$1 billion per year.

Economic action plan 2015 proposes to amend the Canada Small Business Financing Act to make two changes: first, it will increase the maximum loan amount for real property from \$500,000 to \$1 million; second, it will raise the small business eligibility criterion from firms with gross annual revenues of \$5 million or less to firms with gross annual revenues of \$10 million and under.

In addition to reducing taxes and improving access to capital, action is also being taken to reduce the amount of red tape that is hindering the growth and success of small businesses across the country.

Any entrepreneur will say that running a small business means long hours and selfless sacrifice. Our government believes that entrepreneurs' time is best served growing their businesses, rather than being bogged down in red tape and having to pay exorbitant taxes. That is why cutting red tape is an absolute priority for us.

Since its implementation in 2012, the red tape reduction action plan has proved to be a very successful control on the growth of red tape, while maintaining high standards for safety and protection.

The one-for-one rule and other reforms have brought a new level of discipline on how the government regulates businesses. The one-for-one rule requires that when a new regulation is added, one must be removed. This measure alone has saved businesses an estimated \$22 million last year alone, along with 290,000 fewer hours dealing with red tape.

Economic action plan 2015 will build on these successes to reduce the tax compliance burden faced by our businesses. That includes a new quarterly remitter category for the smallest new employers, which will reduce the frequency of remittance payments by two-thirds. Beginning in 2016, new employers will be eligible to make quarterly rather than monthly payments to the CRA if their monthly withholdings are less than \$1,000 and they have maintained a perfect compliance record.

That is valuable time employers can reclaim and reinvest in both their operations and their families. Going forward, our government remains committed to continuing to provide tax relief to all Canadians, including small business owners and families.

Speaking of small business owners and their families, I think one of the most important pieces in our economic action plan 2015 is the introduction of an increase to the tax-free savings account. This is being lauded by not only business people, who recognize that this is a pool of capital that will be created for use and investment, but also by our children, who are perhaps saving for their first home purchase. It is being lauded by our seniors, our parents, who are putting a little bit by because they do not want to be terrorized by the

fact that they are living longer. They want to be able to have savings for their wonderful long lives.

It is very important that we recognize that the tax-free savings account is helping all Canadians. As the minister said earlier, 60% of people who hold a tax-free savings account earn less than \$60,000, and half of tax-free savings accounts are held by people who earn less than \$42,000. That is a program that is helping the middle class.

• (2150)

I am thankful for the opportunity to speak on economic action plan 2015 and the previous elements we have completed. I have just reiterated what we are doing for small businesses because it matters so much; would the Minister of Finance speak to what our government has done to help families? I have said what we have done to help businesses. I would love to hear from him how we are helping families.

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, I thank the member for Winnipeg South Centre for her question and for providing dedicated service to her constituents.

Our government holds a fundamental belief that those who work hard to earn their dollars deserve to keep them. That is why we have cut taxes in every way that they are collected. In total, our government has reduced taxes over 180 times, bringing the overall federal tax burden to its lowest level in over 50 years. This includes fulfilling our commitment to cut the GST twice.

It is good for the overall economy. Putting more money back into the pockets of hard-working Canadians allows them to save for their future and spend on important priorities for their families.

Today, because of tax relief and benefit increases introduced by the Conservative government since 2006, a typical two-earner family of four is better off by up to \$6,600. The opposition parties would return us to deficits and increase taxes on Canadians. They do not understand that keeping taxes low for all Canadians will ensure our long-term prosperity.

Beyond tax relief, our government also understands that Canadians expect high-quality health care services and education. That is why our government has balanced the budget while increasing transfers to the provinces for health care and social services by record amounts. In fact, major transfers to provinces and territories, including the Canada health transfer and the Canada social transfer, will amount to almost \$68 billion in 2015-16, an all-time high.

Economic action plan 2015 builds on the government's record of support for Canadian families by continuing to help them save. Through our new family tax measures, every single family with children under the age of 18 in Canada will be better off.

Government Orders

We will introduce tax relief for seniors and persons with disabilities to make their homes more accessible, as well as measures to help students pay for their education.

Since 2006, the government has introduced measures to make life more affordable for families. We have reduced the lowest personal income tax rate and increased the basic personal amount. We have cut the GST from 7% to 5%. We have introduced pension income splitting. We have established tax credits to support low-income workers, public transit users, first-time homebuyers, and families caring for disabled relatives.

We have provided additional support for families with children through the children's arts and fitness tax credits, an enhancement to registered education savings plans, and adoption expense tax credits. Most recently, our government has introduced a new family tax cut, enhancements to the universal child care benefit, and an increase in the maximum dollar limits of a child care expense deduction.

Canadians of all income levels have benefited from the income tax relief introduced by our government, with low- and middle-income Canadians receiving proportionately greater relief.

This year Canadian families and individuals will receive \$37 billion in tax relief and increased benefits as a result of actions taken since 2006. For example, a typical two-earner family of four will receive tax relief and increased benefits of up to \$6,600 in 2015, thanks to measures such as the family tax cut, the universal child care benefit, the goods and services tax rate reduction, the children's fitness tax credit, and other measures.

By reducing taxes year after year and enhancing benefits to Canadians, the government has given families and individuals greater flexibility to make the choices that are right for them.

• (2155)

The Deputy Chair: The time for the member for Winnipeg South Centre has expired.

The hon. member for Kings—Hants.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, according to Finance Canada's report on plans and priorities, the economic and fiscal policy framework will be cut by \$11.8 million, almost 17%, in the next year alone.

It says:

The decrease in 2016–17 relates to a reduction in government advertising and the sunset of funding for government initiatives.

How big is the department's cut to advertising next year?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, as I have mentioned, there is an importance for Canadians to be aware of the measures that benefit them, such as our government family tax cut and enhancement to the universal child care benefit. Every family with children in Canada stands to benefit from our latest tax breaks, and it is important that they understand what they are.

The Department of Finance continues to be responsible for the development of the overarching advertising campaign that supports measures led by line departments. The campaign will continue to inform Canadians of the nature, availability, and ways to access supportive benefits following budget 2015-16.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, the minister did not answer the question of how big the department's cut is to advertising next year, but we know, based on Finance Canada's RPP, that there will be a cut of around \$12 million next year to advertising. Why is the minister prepared to spend more on Finance Canada advertising this year than next year? Why will there be more advertising this year than next year?

Hon. Joe Oliver: In fact, Mr. Chair, it is less. In 2014-15, there was \$11 million, and the main estimates indicate \$7.5 million for 2015-16.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, Finance Canada's RPP was very clear that there will be a cut of \$11.8 million in 2016-17. Again, why is Finance Canada spending more money on advertising this year than next year? Has it anything to do with the election?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, we just put out the main estimates for this year.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, the RPP refers to government initiatives that will have their funding sunset in 2016-17. Can the minister list these initiatives?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, I can get back to the member with that kind of detail, if he would like it.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, can the minister answer the question of how many fewer jobs there are today for young Canadians compared to 2008?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, our government has taken numerous actions to support job creation. We are happy to say that there are 1.2 million net new jobs since the depths of the recession, which is 20% superior to the job creation of G7 members.

• (2200)

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, there are 169,000 fewer jobs for young Canadians than in 2008. When the minister refers to 1.2 million net new jobs, he is ignoring the fact that the working-age population has grown by two million during the same period.

Compared to before the recession, there are now twice as many Canadians who have been unemployed for over a year; they are long-term unemployed. Is the minister concerned about the doubling of the number of long-term unemployed Canadians since 2008?

Government Orders

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, we are very pleased that our government is creating jobs, and we are puzzled as to why the Liberal Party continues to vote against all of the measures. We announced, in our past economic action plan, youth employment strategies to support 5,000 internships in high-demand fields, skilled trades, small and medium-sized enterprises. The government also supports graduate level research and development internships through Mitacs. Since 2006, the government's support for Mitacs' accelerate program has translated into over 10,000 internships being awarded across Canada.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, so far in 2015, Canada's economic growth has been negative. Does the minister agree with Governor Poloz that the state of the Canadian economy in terms of growth has been "atrocious"?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, as the hon. member should know, he did not say that the state of the economy was atrocious. The governor was referring to the first quarter, which he anticipated would be slow or have a flat growth, but he also said and he repeated this, that he expects the next three quarters to pick up and is anticipating an overall growth of 1.9% for the year.

The member opposite likes to pick and choose and take things out of context, but it is very clear what the governor had in mind when he made his comments.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, 1.9% projected growth is still anemic growth.

Why is the minister waiting until 2017 to reduce EI premiums?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, the growth rate to which the member refers is better than that of the average in the G7.

In terms of EI programs, starting in 2017, we are projecting a break-even over the seven year period.

It seems to me that the member opposite, now that he has switched parties, is very poorly placed to be critical about EI payments. Liberals created a \$30 billion-plus slush fund to spend on their favourite bureaucratic schemes.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, that might have been back when the minister was making contributions to Liberal campaigns.

In any case, is the minister aware that the Parliamentary Budget Officer said that the government's plan to keep EI taxes artificially high will cost the Canadian economy 10,000 jobs?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, we are making sure that the EI program is sustainable. It was in a deficit position and it is moving to a solid break-even position, which we will sustain from 2017 for a seven year period. We are committed to doing that. We have confirmed that in our latest budget. This is expected to return in a substantial reduction in EI premium rates.

It is estimated that the savings from the rate reduction will benefit over 16 million Canadians.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, the PBO estimates that the government's small business jobs credit will only create 800 jobs, at a cost of almost \$700,000 per job.

Does the minister think that is fiscally responsible?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Again, Mr. Chair, the member opposite seems to feel that it is somehow desirable for more money to be kept in the hands of the government, wrestled away from hard-working Canadians and job-creating small businesses, which are the biggest job creators in the country. There is 50% of the private sector employment that comes from small business. We are very proud and happy to provide benefits to job creation—

• (2205)

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Kings—Hants.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, the minister quoted Jack Mintz earlier this evening. Jack Mintz criticized the small business jobs credit as creating a disincentive for growth. Why will the minister not support targeted measures, such as an EI premium holiday that would actually reward businesses that hire new workers and expand their workforce?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, our government will not use the EI account as a slush fund like the Liberals did. They raided it for \$50 billion.

We are moving towards the seven year break-even rate for 2017. We have reconfirmed it in our recent budget, and this is expected to result in a substantial reduction in EI premium rates. It will benefit over 16 million Canadians in 2017, including about 2.6 million Canadians who pay no federal income tax.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, is the minister worried about the growth in unpaid internships and the downward pressure that they place on wages?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, our government is working on regulations that would protect unpaid internships when it is appropriate to do so. An internship is a short-term, workplace-based learning experience, which enables an individual to acquire knowledge or experience. They include co-ops, work placements, and job shadowing. They often are part of an educational program. Therefore, the amendments to the Labour Code will specify that an unpaid internship can be offered under two circumstances: where it is part of a program approved by a recognized secondary or post-secondary education institution, in cases where the internship does not exceed four months and is primarily for the benefit of the intern.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, the Bank of Canada says that housing prices in Canada are overvalued by as much as 30%. Has the minister ruled out the possibility of introducing new rules for residential mortgage insurance before October?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, we, of course, monitor the real estate market carefully, but we are not of the view that there is a need for any major change. We have instituted about four changes in the last number of years.

We agree with the Governor of the Bank of Canada, the OECD, and the IMF that while there may be a soft landing, and we may already be seeing that in parts of Canada, we do not see a bubble, and we do not see the need for any major steps at this time.

Government Orders

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, the Bank of Canada says there are signs pointing to a housing correction in Alberta, Toronto, and Vancouver markets, and if that correction happened in these markets simultaneously, the bank has said “the spillover effects to the rest of the economy could be significant”.

Is the minister prepared to heed the Bank of Canada's warning and step in to prevent that from happening? That is not a soft landing when the Bank of Canada is saying that the spillover effects to the economy could be “significant”.

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, the housing market overall remains balanced. There are some differences across regional markets, as we know. Housing prices and activity in Toronto and Vancouver remain strong, supported by population growth and land scarcity. Lower oil prices has led to a slowing of housing market activity and lower prices throughout Alberta and Saskatchewan. Conditions in the rest of Canada generally remain moderate.

Looking at the total market picture, which we are monitoring very carefully, we do not believe that major initiatives are required at this time. We are mindful of the fact that affordability has actually increased over the last five to ten years.

• (2210)

The Deputy Chair: Regrettably, the time for the member for Kings—Hants has expired.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Kelowna—Lake Country

Hon. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Chair, it is a pleasure to rise this evening to participate in this important meeting of committee of the whole to discuss Canada's prudent economic policies. I would like to focus my comments this evening on our government's steadfast support for Canada's seniors, folks who have helped build a country that is strong, prosperous and secure.

Our government respects Canada's seniors for their efforts, but more than respecting them, we are empowering them to become stronger, more prosperous and more secure, just as they did for Canada. We have a well-established record of achievement in this regard. Among the foremost of our achievements is ensuring that more seniors are not burdened with paying taxes after having already given so much to their country.

As a result of our low-tax plan, about 400,000 seniors have been removed from the tax rolls. Since 2006, our government has increased the age credit amount by \$2,000, \$1,000 in 2006 and another \$1,000 in 2009. We have doubled the maximum amount of income eligible for the pension income credit to \$2,000. We have introduced pension income splitting, which is benefiting over two million Canadians every year.

However, sadly to say, the Liberals have stated that they would take away income splitting for nearly two million families. Just like they would take away this tax saving from families, I have heard they would also take this income-splitting plan away from seniors. We regret that both opposition parties plan to raise taxes on middle-class seniors.

By contrast, as a result of actions taken by the government to date, seniors and pensioners are receiving about \$3 billion in additional

annual targeted tax relief. In 2015, a single senior could earn at least \$20,000 and a senior couple at least \$40,000 before paying federal income tax.

Not only are we leaving seniors with more money in their pockets, but we are empowering them to make the most of their savings. In the fall of 2014, we partnered with the Minister of Finance, the Minister of State for Finance and as well the hard-working Minister of State for Seniors. Under the guidance of the new Financial Literacy Leader, our government released a strategy to enhance the financial literacy of seniors. Its aim is to help seniors and near-seniors plan for and manage their finances during their later years and ensures they get the fair treatment they deserve. This is a request that I have heard from my constituents. We responded, and we required enhanced disclosure by banks and the costs and benefits of using powers of attorney for joint accounts and more robust bank processes and staff training.

By building on this record of support for seniors, economic action plan 2015 takes us a step further in helping seniors to effectively manage their finances.

As the member of Parliament for Kelowna—Lake Country, I am very proud to represent a high proportion of seniors, including folks like Mr. and Mrs Sawatzky who were on Parliament Hill today and many other of my seniors, who maybe watching the other channel as the Rockets are just a few wins away from winning the Memorial Cup, we hope. Go Rockets, go.

However, what I heard, loud and clear, and have communicated to the finance minister, was a need to relax the rules surrounding registered retirement income funds, known as RRIFs, as seniors are living longer and with healthier lifestyles. We listened and acted. The budget would do exactly this. It would strengthen seniors' retirement options. By permitting more capital preservation, the new factors would help reduce the risk of out-living one's savings, while ensuring that the tax deferral provided on registered retirement savings plans, or RRSPs, and the RRIF savings accounts continue to serve a retirement income purpose.

At the same time, economic action plan 2015 would increase the tax-free savings accounts, otherwise known as TFSAs. The annual contribution limit would go from \$5,500 to \$10,000. This gives Canadians, including seniors, more room to save money tax free. At the end of 2013, about 46% of individuals who contributed the maximum amount to their tax-free savings account were seniors.

Taken together, these new measures will support the retirement income needs of seniors, providing them with increased flexibility to manage their savings in a tax-efficient manner.

However, that is not all. Economic action plan 2015 also proposes a new home accessibility tax credit for seniors and persons with disabilities. This permanent, non-refundable credit will help with the cost of renovations to allow seniors and persons with disabilities to live independently and safely in their homes.

Government Orders

• (2215)

At the same time, economic action plan will extend compassionate care benefits from the current six weeks to six months to ensure employment insurance benefits are available when Canadians need them most, something on which all of us in the House have heard from our constituents. It is a very welcome addition to budget 2015. Also, it will provide up to \$42 million over five years, starting in 2015-16, to help improve seniors' health through innovation by establishing the Canadian centre for aging and brain health innovation, which is another important area of research.

These are all important advancements we are making for the benefit of seniors, and they are building on a solid foundation of support that we continue to strengthen.

I will quickly touch on how we have acted to strengthen Canada's retirement income system to serve the needs of today's and future retirees.

We increased benefits for the guaranteed income supplement, GIS, for Canada's most vulnerable seniors. This investment of roughly \$300 million each year improves the well-being of approximately 680,000 seniors across Canada and represents the largest GIS increase for the lowest-income seniors in a quarter century, a caring and compassionate measure I might add. We have also improved the regulations supporting private retirement savings and expanded opportunities through new private savings vehicles, like the pooled registered pension plans. Taken together, these initiatives provide a strong foundation upon which Canadians can achieve their retirement goals with confidence.

The effectiveness of our government's achievements is underscored by expert third-party analysis. Canada's retirement income system is acknowledged to be among the world's best by groups like the OECD in terms of preventing poverty among seniors and ensuring appropriate income retirement.

With all the actions I have outlined today, we are making Canada's seniors stronger, more prosperous and more secure. By doing so, we are giving back to them what they have given to us.

My question for the hon. Minister of State for Finance is this. What are we doing to support the growing number of seniors who choose to remain engaged in the workforce in their communities?

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Chair, I want to thank the hard-working member for Kelowna—Lake Country.

We know in western Canada that many of our prairie seniors find their way to Kelowna for retirement. The member is from a beautiful constituency, and I know he represents it very well.

As a complement to a strong retirement system, we are also supporting the growing number of seniors who choose to remain in the workforce. Many senior Canadians are now making this choice in order to stay connected with our social network or to add to their financial resources. These employment opportunities not only help these individuals in meeting their personal goals, but they also provide access to experienced talent that is often sought by other employers.

To support labour force participation by seniors, our government renewed the targeted initiative for older worker program in 2014. It was renewed for a three-year period, which helps the unemployed workers aged 55 to 64 living in small economically-vulnerable communities to improve their employability and reintegrate into the labour market.

Since its launch in 2007, our total investment in this initiative will be an estimated \$345 million by March 31, 2017. To date, more than 35,000 unemployed older workers have been targeted to participate in the initiative.

We similarly invested \$6 million over three years in economic action plan 2012 to extend and expand the third quarter project, an initiative that has helped approximately 1,200 experienced workers who are all over 50 years old. It helps them find a job that matches their skill set.

In addition to working, a large number of seniors also want to give back to their communities through volunteerism. The new horizon for seniors program helps seniors both benefit and contribute to the quality of life in their community through social participation and active living.

Since 2006, new horizons has funded over 13,000 projects, including those helping seniors and community members, to recognize elder abuse in all its forms and to improve the quality of life, safety and security of seniors.

I am proud to say that even in my riding of Crowfoot, I have had the opportunity to meet with senior organizations that have applied for and received funding through this new horizon program. I am also pleased that, through economic action plan 2014, we invested an additional \$5 million per year for new horizons to support projects that have enabled seniors to share their knowledge, skills and experiences with others, bringing total funding for the program to \$50 million annually.

New horizons is yet another example of how we are making Canada's seniors stronger, more prosperous and more secure. I am very proud of the work we have accomplished with our seniors.

• (2220)

Hon. Ron Cannan: Mr. Chair, I thank the Minister of State for Finance for his hard work in representing his constituents in Alberta so well. The fact is that seniors from all across Canada, many of whom come from the Prairies, retire in British Columbia. Whatever part of Canada they choose to retire in, they appreciate that the government's low-tax plan keeps them financially safe.

However, the other aspect is from a security perspective. Would the Minister of State for Finance please expand on the government's actions to date to help keep seniors safe in their communities?

Government Orders

Hon. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Chair, again, I would like to thank the member for Kelowna—Lake Country for his steadfast support for seniors and, also, for his strong advocacy, even in our caucus, for supporting the seniors. I know his riding of Kelowna—Lake Country has a large number of them. I know many of them benefit from numerous measures that have been introduced by our government. Not only are we helping to support a comfortable retirement for Canadians, but we are also supporting a safe retirement for Canadians.

There are a number of initiatives we have taken to do that. To protect seniors from mistreatment, in January 2013 we put into force the Protecting Canada's Seniors Act. This legislation rightly amended the Criminal Code of Canada so that age would be considered an aggravating factor for criminal sentencing purposes.

As members know, Canadian seniors can trust our government to take appropriate action to help prevent crime and to be tough on crime. Our government continues to focus on increasing awareness of the signs of elder abuse and providing essential information on available resources and supports. We have taken action to combat social isolation of seniors. We know that seniors are better off with this Conservative government.

One of the things we recognized, as far as the security of seniors in their financial well-being, was the importance of our financial literacy program. Our Minister of State for Seniors, the member for Richmond, has done amazing work with our seniors and helping with financial literacy. We recognized the importance of financial literacy to the degree that our government was the first one to bring forward a financial literacy leader for Canada. She will work with a task force to bring in a national strategy.

One large component of that strategy in financial literacy was to help seniors. We understand that when they have the skills and the knowledge, when they understand the financial terminology, and not just the markets, such as what an annuity or a RRIF is, the regulation changes around RRIFs, when they have the confidence, they feel more secure. That is what we want to accomplish. We want to ensure those seniors can move forward with confidence. Therefore, we are helping them enhance their skill set that way, as we are with all Canadians, certainly, newcomers, first nations and our youth.

Again, the security of our seniors is so important. We have brought forward measures. Canadian seniors understand that they are better off with this Conservative government.

• (2225)

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Chair, first of all, I would like to know if the minister can tell us how much the employment insurance operating account surplus will be for 2015-16.

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Chair, economic action plan 2015 reaffirmed the government's commitment to implementing the seven-year break-even rate-setting mechanism in 2017. This measure should result in a significant reduction in employment insurance premiums. We estimate that savings from this rate reduction will benefit more than 16 million Canadians in 2017, including about 2.6 million who do not pay federal income tax.

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Chair, my question was simple. I was not talking about premiums. I asked the minister if he can tell us what the expected surplus in the employment insurance operating account will be for 2015-16.

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, the employment insurance operating account reached a cumulative deficit of \$9.2 billion in 2011 due to the impact of the global recession. Since then, it has been recording annual surpluses that will eventually eliminate the cumulative deficit, consistent with the principle of breaking even over time.

In September 2013, the government took steps to protect businesses from major increases in employment insurance premiums. We froze the rate at \$1.88 for three years beginning in 2014.

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Chair, I asked a simple question. I want to know what the projected surplus is for the employment insurance operating account for 2015-16.

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, our budget reaffirmed the government's commitment to implementing the seven-year break-even rate setting mechanism in 2017. Consistent with the principle of breaking even over time, the employment insurance operating account should return to cumulative balance in 2015.

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Chair, that is not an answer. I asked what the projected surplus is. We are asking for a number, and that number is \$1.8 billion, according to the budget presented by the federal government.

Now my next question for the Minister of Finance might be a little easier.

Can he tell us what the government's projected budget surplus will be for 2015-16?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, as the member knows, the projected surplus is \$1.4 billion, along with a \$2 billion contingency fund.

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Chair, finally, an answer.

Thus, there is a \$1.8 billion surplus in the employment insurance fund and a \$1.4 billion budget surplus. On December 6, 2013, Jim Flaherty, who was finance minister at the time, said:

[English]

We do not take EI funds and use them to balance the budget. That's what the Liberals did.

[Translation]

Why did the Minister of Finance renege on this promise?

[English]

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, we have a budget of over \$291 billion. The reason we have a surplus is that our revenues are greater than our expenses.

If we want to pick one item that is the most significant, pick the \$18.5 billion that flows from our constraining government expenditures.

Government Orders

• (2230)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Chair, according to my calculations, the \$1.8 billion taken from the employment insurance operating account is more than the \$1.4 billion surplus. It is obvious that the Conservatives are using the employment insurance fund surplus to fund their balanced budget.

I would like to go back to the issue of the GM shares that were sold by the Conservative government.

Can the minister tell us how much the Government of Canada received from the sale of the 73.4 million GM shares that it owned?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, thanks to the strong measures taken by the government to support General Motors and Chrysler, we were able to protect 52,000 Canadian jobs. Our investment in GM was always intended to be temporary. In early April, we sold our remaining shares in GM in order to protect taxpayers. We earned a solid return on our shares and we followed the advice of the best experts.

[*English*]

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Chair, the finance minister used to be an investment banker. I am asking a simple question. The government sold 73.4 million shares in GM following its investment. I would like to know how much the government received for the sale of those 73.4 million shares.

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, we sold our shares after every other government did and sold them at a higher price than any government before us, including the Government of Ontario. The shares were sold. Those proceeds of \$3.3 billion were received and there was a book value deducted from it. We are very pleased that we were able to sell the full amount at an attractive price, a price higher than that subsequent to it, including today.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Chair, it is not that difficult to answer questions.

Once again in reference to the GM shares, could the minister tell us what financial assistance the Government of Canada provided to GM in exchange for the 73.4 million shares it subsequently held?

[*English*]

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, the government has recovered \$6.4 billion of the \$7.2 billion support it provided to GM through a combination of loan repayments and related interest payment share sales and redemptions and dividend payments.

We have saved 52,000 jobs and protected the automobile sector. We are in fact, in budget 2015, providing another \$100 million for the automotive supply sector for support for an innovation program.

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Chair, once again I am asking a simple question. I would like to know when government decided to financially help General Motors back in 2009 and got 73 million shares in exchange. I would like to know what the investment was in GM to ensure that the 73 million would go to the government?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, I do not know if the member opposite is listening. I just provided him with details. Does he want me to repeat what I just said?

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Chair, I did not get an answer, but I will move on because it seems that tonight it is very hard to get answers from the minister.

[*Translation*]

I want to ask the Minister of Finance whether he believes that Canada's fiscal risks have diminished by two-thirds since last year.

[*English*]

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, there is one fiscal risk that has diminished significantly and that relates to the price of oil. The price of oil was at a high of about \$108 to \$110. Oil fell to \$44 and it is around \$60 or so now. That precipitous decline, which had an impact across the country and cost the federal treasury many billions of dollars, has of course been reduced. That is a significant point.

I think I know where the member opposite is going and I will deal with his next question.

• (2235)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Chair, he talks about just one risk, but at the end of the day, for at least the past 15 years, the federal government has had a \$3 billion contingency fund for emergencies. The price of oil is just one risk. There are many risks, and the government had a contingency fund.

Why reduce the contingency fund from \$3 billion to just \$1 billion for the coming years?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, the amount of the contingency fund is updated in every budget in order to take into account the risks to the economic outlook. Since last fall's update, the downside risks for which the contingency fund was established have materialized to a great extent. We also have a surplus, and last year we had a deficit. With the surplus and the contingency fund, we have enough money for contingencies.

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Chair, let us be clear. It took \$2 billion plus the \$1.8 billion from the employment insurance operating account to balance the budget this year. That is the only reason the government went in that direction.

In 2014-15, the hon. member will remember that small businesses were given an employment insurance premium holiday, which cost the government approximately \$550 million.

I would like to know how many jobs were created as a result of that EI holiday.

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, we are proud to have advanced \$550 million to small businesses. Reducing costs for businesses through measures such as the small business job credit encourages those business to hire workers and promotes economic growth. It should also allow small business owners to save money over the next two years. Small businesses can use that money to more easily absorb the cost of hiring new workers.

Government Orders

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Chair, the government decided to give businesses an EI holiday of over half a billion dollars. It claimed that this was a job creation measure.

Now that the program is complete, how many jobs were created as a result of that measure?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, we conduct in-depth analyses of every program, but we do not calculate how many jobs each program creates.

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Chair, speaking of in-depth analyses, the minister defended the measure as one that had been subject to an in-depth analysis by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business and not by the Department of Finance.

I will ask my question again: now that the program has come to an end, did the Department of Finance conduct an analysis that included results showing how many jobs were created through this program?

The minister just said that the Department of Finance was responsible for analyzing the programs. I would like an answer.

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business estimates that the credits will lead to the creation of 25,000 person years of employment in the coming years. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business published a detailed explanation of its methodology online.

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Chair, the Parliamentary Budget Officer said that the \$550 billion would create just 800 jobs. We are talking about jobs created and not person-hours.

Did the Department of Finance conduct analyses of the expected number of jobs created and did it conduct analyses of the number of jobs created through this program?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, the program is under way and it is ongoing. We do not have the figures right now. We can do the calculations once the program is over.

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Chair, I get that the program is ongoing, but the Department of Finance should at least follow up on how job creation funds distributed to small businesses are being used.

Did the Department of Finance analyze how many jobs the measure was expected to create, and is it currently analyzing the number of jobs created by this measure?

• (2240)

[English]

Hon. Joe Oliver: As I said, Mr. Chair, we did, of course, a complete detailed analysis of the program, as we do with all programs, but we did not do that in respect of employment. It is not normally done, nor has it been done in the past. However, this is an obvious benefit, which the CFIB supports, for 780,000 small businesses, a benefit which would permit them to grow and create employment. It is good for the economy, it is good for employment, and it is fair to small businesses.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Mr. Chair, a solid middle class is the foundation of Canada's economy. Our government has consistently recognized that our country can only be as strong as its middle class. Fortunately, Canada's middle class has been steadfast in an uncertain world. They have seen increases of about 30% in their take-home incomes since 1976. The

share of Canadians living in low-income families is now at its lowest level over the past three decades.

A recent Statistics Canada study has revealed that since our government has taken office, the middle class has flourished significantly:

The median net worth of Canadian family units was \$243,800 in 2012, up 44.5% from 2005 and almost 80% more than the 1999 median of \$137,000, adjusted for inflation.

Another study, this one from the *New York Times*, has indicated that Canada's middle class is better off financially than that of the U.S.:

After-tax middle-class incomes in Canada—substantially behind in 2000—now appear to be higher than in the United States.

Furthermore, since 2006, Canadian families in all major income groups have seen increases of about 10% or more in their take-home incomes. However, in an economic context, as well, Canada is doing well and continues to improve, which sets a positive environment for the middle class.

Our country continues to move forward in the face of a fragile external environment and profound global economic uncertainty. In fact, Canada has achieved one of the best economic performances among G7 countries after the recovery. Real gross domestic product has increased more in Canada than in any other G7 country since the end of the recession. It goes to show that Canada's economic action plan is working.

At a time when other countries' financial systems were brought to the brink of bankruptcy, Canada's banks remained the soundest in the world. When other countries increased taxes, Canada kept its taxes low. In fact, the overall federal tax burden is the lowest it has been in over 50 years.

One of the easiest and best ways to help the middle class is to let them keep more of their money not in government coffers, not in wasteful bureaucratic programs, but directly with them in their own pockets. It is why our government has been so committed to cutting taxes for all Canadians, but especially for the middle class.

Indeed, since 2006, Canadians have benefited from significant, broad-based tax cuts introduced by our Conservative government. These tax reductions have given individuals and families the flexibility to make choices that are right for them and have helped build a solid foundation for future economic growth, more jobs, and higher living standards for Canadians.

In total, our government has introduced over 180 tax relief measures since 2006, reducing taxes in every way the Government of Canada collects them. Canadians of all income levels are benefiting from tax relief, with low- and middle-income Canadians receiving proportionately greater relief.

Government Orders

Some of the key actions we have taken to reduce taxes for all Canadians include the following: reducing the lowest personal income tax rate and increasing the basic personal amount; cutting the GST from 7% to 5%; introducing pension income-splitting; establishing tax credits to support low-income workers, public transit users, first-time homebuyers, and families caring for disabled relatives; and providing additional support for families with children through the children's arts and fitness tax credit and enhancements to the registered education savings plan and the adoption expense tax credit.

Our government has introduced even more measures to go even further to help families make ends meet.

● (2245)

For example, we are implementing the family tax cut, which would allow a higher-income spouse to effectively transfer up to \$50,000 of taxable income to a spouse in a lower tax bracket. We are increasing the universal child care benefit for children under six and are expanding it to children aged six through 17; as of January 1, 2015, parents are eligible for a benefit of \$160 per month for each child under the age of six and for \$60 per month for children aged six through 17. We are also introducing the child care expense deduction dollar limits by \$1,000, and for those parents who put their children into sports, we have doubled the children's fitness tax credit to \$1,000 and made it refundable.

Our government has also established the tax-free savings account, which is the most significant advance in the tax treatment of personal savings since the RRSP. This year, in order to help Canadians save even more of their hard-earned money, economic action plan 2015 proposes to increase the TFSA annual contribution limit to \$10,000.

As a result of our government's actions, a typical two-earner family of four would receive tax relief and increased benefits of up to \$6,600 in 2015. This represents real, concrete savings for the middle class.

These important measures are just a handful of examples illustrating how our government has responded to the needs of Canadian families and helped Canadians keep more of their hard-earned money.

However, the opposition members think very differently. They believe that taxing Canadians more will in fact bring long-term prosperity. We will not raise taxes on Canadians. They believe that it is not fair when our actions benefit every single Canadian family. We believe that is completely counterintuitive. When we are benefiting every Canadian family, that is the exact definition of fairness.

The opposition members believe that plans of high debt and high deficits have no bearing on the everyday Canadian. We reject this idea, which would raise the cost of living in Canada, saddle families with higher taxes, and burden future generations with these reckless schemes. There is a clear divide between our Conservative government and the opposition, which does not seem to understand just how devastating tax hikes and reckless spending would be, not only to the Canadian economy but more so to the middle class.

Perhaps one of the most significant ways to ensure the prosperity of Canadians is to keep Canada's books in order and bring the budget to balance, as I mentioned. When the great recession hit us, we

responded quickly and effectively with a historic stimulus program, and we emerged from the recession faster and stronger than virtually any other major advanced economy. When the crisis passed, we promised Canadians that we would balance the budget. We delivered on that promise, but we did not do it by raising taxes or cutting transfers for education and health care. We focused on controlling operating expenses for federal departments, identifying efficiencies to make government operations leaner.

A balanced budget will preserve Canada's low-tax plan and allow for further tax reductions, fostering growth and the creation of jobs for the benefit of all Canadians.

Balanced budgets play a significant role in helping the middle class. By taking the time to make smart fiscal and economic decisions under the leadership of our Prime Minister, we are ensuring that the choices we make today will not hurt the futures of our children and grandchildren. I know that is what many Canadian families are concerned about, and let us make no mistake: high debt and high deficits now will saddle future generations with an even greater burden.

This government understands the importance of middle-class Canadians and their future, and as our actions have shown, we listened and worked diligently to ensure that Canada's middle class is among the richest in the developed world. Needless to say, we will continue this trend and look for more ways to help the middle class thrive and contribute to the Canadian economy.

I have a question for the finance minister. On that note, I wonder if he could elaborate on how the government is helping to create jobs for the middle class.

● (2250)

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, I thank the member for Chatham-Kent—Essex for his question and for his great service to his constituency.

Our government's top priority has always been to create jobs and growth. As a result of our actions, over 1.2 million more Canadians are working now than at the end of the recession in June 2009. This represents one of the strongest job creation records in the G7 over this period. The majority of these net new jobs have been full-time positions in high wage, private sector industries.

When it comes to jobs, our government understands that small businesses are the lifeblood of the economy. They account for 99% of all businesses in Canada and employ half of the working men and women in the Canadian private sector.

Government Orders

Our government believes that small businesses should spend their time growing their businesses, creating jobs and hiring Canadians, not choking on high taxes and red tape. That is why we have repeatedly cut taxes significantly for small businesses and their owners.

Building on our record, budget 2015 proposes to reduce the small business tax rate to 9% by 2019, the largest tax rate cut for small businesses in more than 25 years. When the proposed reduction in the small business tax rate takes effect in 2019, combined with previous actions taken by our government, the amount of federal corporate income tax paid by a small business with \$500,000 of taxable income would be 46% lower than in 2006. This means an annual tax reduction of up to \$38,600. That money could be reinvested in the business to create new jobs for Canadians. These changes, among others, would help enhance the ability of small businesses across Canada to retain their earnings, to grow their businesses and create jobs.

However, we are also building on our efforts to connect Canadians with the areas that need help. Increasingly, a number of jobs are going unfilled due to a lack of people with the matching skills. That is why we have enhanced labour market information for Canadians, which would efficiently help match Canadian workers with available jobs, reforming the skills training program and encouraging journey persons to start or expand their own business.

These are but a few of the ways we are creating new jobs and filling demands that the private sector is yearning for.

Furthermore, economic action plan 2015 would bring tax relief to manufacturers. We believe that manufacturing will continue to play a major role in Canada's economic success. For our government, the words "made in Canada" continue to fuel pride, not to mention jobs.

That said, we must give manufacturers the tools they need to create the products and the jobs of the future. That is why we are announcing a 10-year tax incentive to encourage investment in machinery and equipment used in manufacturing and processing. When Canadian companies invest in state-of-the-art equipment and structures, they increase their productivity and competitiveness.

I see that my time is nearly up. I could continue for hours on why job creation is our government's main focus. However, as long as there are middle-class Canadians looking for work, our job is not yet done.

Economic action plan 2015 is the next part of our long-term plan to ensure we get Canadians back to work and continue Canada's economic growth and prosperity.

• (2255)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): Mr. Chair, I would like to ask the minister the following question: of the five most popular destinations for Canadian direct investment abroad, how many are tax havens, to his knowledge?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, we have major policies to address the problem of tax system fairness, to ensure that everyone pays their fair share of taxes, to keep taxes low for Canadian businesses and families and to help maintain public confidence in the tax system.

That is why our government is committed to strengthening tax compliance and closing tax loopholes that enable some businesses and individuals to avoid paying their fair share.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Mr. Chair, I will be sharing my time with the member for Victoria.

Out of the five largest destinations for Canadian direct investment abroad, there are three tax havens. How much money did Canadians invest in those offshore tax havens last year?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, our economic action plan takes steps in two areas when it comes to closing tax loopholes: it increases funding for Canada Revenue Agency programs that target the underground economy, offshore non-compliance and aggressive tax avoidance by large complex entities; and it also proposes a number of measures to improve the fairness and integrity of the tax system.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Mr. Chair, how is it possible that three out of five destinations for Canadian investment abroad are tax havens? Some people estimate the tax losses to be as high as \$7.8 billion a year. Are we losing \$7.8 billion a year in uncollected taxes because of Canadian investments in tax havens?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, economic action plan 2015 announced an additional \$200 million over five years to further strengthen the Canada Revenue Agency's ability to combat the underground economy, international tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance. That includes \$118 million over five years to expand the agency's underground economy specialist teams and \$25 million over five years to allow the agency to expand its activities to combat international tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Mr. Chair, I moved a motion in the House calling on the government to calculate how much tax is lost annually because of Canadian investments abroad in tax havens. The government refused.

Why did the government refuse to calculate how much tax revenue is lost annually? Why refuse to submit the necessary documents to the Parliamentary Budget Officer so that he could do this analysis?

Government Orders

• (2300)

[English]

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, our government is committed to working with its international partners to improve compliance and address cross-border tax evasion. Canada is one of more than 90 jurisdictions that intend to implement the OECD's G20 common reporting standards in the automatic exchange of financial account information.

It is proposed that this standard be implemented in Canada as of July 2017, allowing for the first exchange of information in 2018. I have been in meetings with the G20, where we discussed this issue.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Mr. Chair, there are 1,859 names of Canadians on a list of HSBC Switzerland clients who evaded taxes. How many of those 1,800 people were charged?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, the government is taking strong action in order to ensure the integrity of the tax system and protect Canada's revenue base. Since 2006, the government has introduced more than 90 measures to eliminate tax loopholes, clarify tax rules, reduce aggressive international tax avoidance and improve the integrity of the tax system.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Mr. Minister, there were no charges. However, 264 people used the voluntary disclosure program. How did they come to use this program if they got caught? That is not voluntary.

[English]

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, I have to say that while New Democrats are focused on this issue, they continue to demand reckless spending and want to impose higher taxes. We want to stay the course with sound fiscal management and balanced budgets.

We will continue with our low-tax plan. We will, of course, also continue to make sure that companies in Canada, operating in Canada and around the world, pay their fair share.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Minister, you do not seem to have an answer. Does the government not have the resources to combat tax evasion? How many full-time jobs will be eliminated by the Canada Revenue Agency in the next three years?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, the tax integrity measures will modernize a group of existing anti-avoidance rules and dividend rental arrangement rules. Taxpayers have found ways to get around those rules. This measure will ensure that the dividend rental arrangement rules apply to certain operations in which equity derivatives, called synthetic equity arrangements, are used. It will prevent creative taxpayers from claiming significant recognized tax losses on some of these operations.

[English]

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Chair, I first want to ask the minister questions about tax loopholes. What is the annual cost of the employee stock option deduction? Just the figure, please.

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, I do not have that specific number at hand, but I will be pleased to provide it to the hon. member.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Chair, I wonder if the minister can explain why the government supports this tax loophole that subsidizes the compensation of CEOs and other senior executives, like investment bankers, through these stock options. Why?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, it is of course very traditional for taxes to be imposed only when the profit is realized. To tax people on the receipt of shares before they are realized would, of course, in many cases, require them to sell the stock immediately. This is what is done in the United States and other countries in the world. It is a very standard tax practice.

• (2305)

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Chair, the minister has been talking about TFSAs and interactions. Does the minister believe that millionaires should be able to collect OAS and guaranteed income supplement benefits that are, of course, intended to help low-income seniors?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, we have discussed TFSAs at length. They are clearly a benefit overwhelmingly for low- and middle-income Canadians. Half of TFSA holders earn less than \$42,000 a year.

NDP Premier Greg Selinger says that the TFSAs should be especially helpful in encouraging low-income Manitobans to save.

I do not know why the NDP is so intent on taking away this important savings measure from lower-income Canadians.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Chair, GIS supplements are available only to people with low incomes. Of course, a loophole allows the wealthy to draw from their TFSAs while at the same time collecting GIS.

Does that seem fair and proper to you, minister?

The Deputy Chair: I would ask that members ask questions to the Chair.

The hon. minister.

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, we always look to see whether there is unfairness in the tax system. We do not see an issue at this point. We are focusing on the benefits TFSAs can provide to seniors and to low and middle-income Canadians to save for a down payment on a home, or for education for their kids and for retirement.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Chair, the minister refused to answer that question as well.

Government Orders

I would like to turn to the auto sector. Was the minister aware of the pending 1,000 jobs being lost at GM's Oshawa plant when he decided to sell off the government's GM shares at a loss to balance the books?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, there are so many errors in that statement that one does not know where to begin. First, we did not sell it at a loss; we sold it at a profit. The fact that we sold it had absolutely nothing to do with what the automotive company did or would have done. It is frankly quite naive of the member opposite to think otherwise.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Chair, speaking of naiveté, then what guarantees did the government seek and receive about the continuation of GM's Canadian operations?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, we saved over 52,000 jobs. We saved the automotive sector and we did that because we believe in manufacturing. There is no relationship between the sale of the minority shares and GM's operational decisions.

We continue to support the industry, including providing up to \$100 million over five years to support product development and technology demonstration by automotive parts suppliers through the automotive supplier innovation program.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Chair, were guarantees secured or even sought?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, yes they were.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Chair, part 3 of the omnibus budget implementation bill would retroactively change a lot to absolve the RCMP from wrongdoing at the same time as the police are investigating whether it broke the law. How does this provision of the minister's budget bill address the Canadian economy?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, our Conservative government has fulfilled its commitment to end the wasteful and inefficient long gun registry once and for all. It is a \$2 million Liberal plan that ballooned to a \$2 billion boondoggle. It is still possible to access outdated copies of the long gun registry through access to information legislation. The will of Parliament was made clear and all copies of the registry were to be destroyed. This technical amendment would address this issue.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Chair, with respect to income splitting in the current budget plan, why did the government decide to proceed with its handouts to wealthy Canadians rather than putting those funds toward the working income tax benefit to help low-income, hard-working Canadians?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, as I have said, the family benefit program overwhelmingly would benefit low and middle-income Canadians. Two-thirds of the benefits would go to them, and 25% would go to families earning less than \$30,000 a year. It is expected that families will save on average \$1,140 per year from this package. Thanks to measures introduced by our government, the average Canadian family currently will receive up to \$6,600 this year.

• (2310)

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Chair, our government's long-term commitment to keeping taxes low is making life more affordable for all Canadians. By reducing taxes year after year and enhancing direct benefits to Canadians, the government has given families and

individuals greater flexibility to make the choices that are right for them.

Canadian families and individuals will receive \$37 billion in tax relief and increased benefits in 2015-16 as a result of actions taken by our government since 2006, including measures announced by the Prime Minister on October 30, 2014. These new measures will provide more than \$4.6 billion in annual tax relief and increased benefits to all families with children under age 18.

These measures include an enhanced universal child care benefit that will provide \$160 per month for children under the age of 6 and a new benefit of \$60 per month for children aged 6 through 17, and that is effective January 1, 2015; a \$1,000 increase in each of the maximum dollar amounts that can be claimed under the child care expense deduction, effective for the 2015 taxation year; and the family tax cut, a federal non-refundable tax credit of up to \$2,000 for couples with children under the age of 18, effective for the 2014 taxation year.

Among the multitude of tax relief measures this government has introduced, perhaps the most popular is the tax-free savings account, or TFSA. The TFSA is the most important new savings vehicle introduced in Canada since the RRSP was introduced over 50 years ago. As a matter of fact, as of the end of 2013, nearly 11 million individuals had opened a TFSA and the total value of assets held in TFSAs was nearly \$120 billion. The TFSA gives Canadians the flexibility to save for their priorities. Whether they want to purchase a new home or car, start a new business or save for retirement, Canadians have many reasons to save at every stage of their lives. That is why the government introduced the TFSA in the first place.

Available since 2009, the TFSA is a flexible, registered, general purpose savings vehicle that allows Canadians aged 18 or older to earn tax-free investment income. I should point out that it is a voluntary program. The contributions are not tax deductible, but investment income earned in a TFSA and withdrawals from it are tax free. Unused TFSA contribution room can be carried forward, and the amount of withdrawals from a TFSA can be re-contributed in future years.

The TFSA provides greater savings incentives for low- and modest-income individuals because, in addition to the tax savings, neither the income earned in a TFSA nor withdrawals from it affect a person's important benefits and credits. Like the Canada child tax benefit, or old age security and guaranteed income supplements that supplement benefits, it is no wonder that Canadians have embraced the TFSA for their savings needs. Best of all, Canadians of all income levels can benefit from TFSAs.

Government Orders

The opposition claims that TFSAs benefit only the rich. This is categorically false. In fact, at the end of 2013, individuals with annual incomes of less than \$80,000 accounted for more than 80% of all TFSA holders, and about half of TFSA holders had annual incomes of less than \$42,000. About 1.9 million individuals have contributed the maximum amount to their TFSAs. About 46% of these individuals were seniors and over 70% were aged 55 and older. About 60% of the individuals contributing the maximum amount to their TFSAs had incomes of less than \$60,000.

In order to provide Canadians with greater opportunity to save on a tax-free basis, this budget proposes to increase the TFSA annual contribution limit to \$10,000, effective for 2015 and subsequent years. This new measure will help Canadians save from coast to coast to coast.

• (2315)

Take, for example, Giselle, a small business owner who saves in her TFSA. She now has the flexibility to contribute \$10,000 per year to her TFSA. By earning tax-free investment income on \$10,000 of annual savings for 10 years, Giselle can accumulate about \$3,700 more dollars in after-tax savings than if she had saved the same amount for 10 years under the existing TFSA annual contribution limit with the remainder in a taxable savings vehicle. Giselle will be able to better save for future priorities, which will be good for her, good for her business, and good for the Canadian economy.

The TFSA is also a great savings tool for seniors. The fact is that Canadians are living longer than ever, which is great news. Since 2006, seniors have been benefiting from important money-saving measures such as pension income splitting, and taking advantage of their tax-free savings accounts. In fact, as of the end of 2013, close to 2.7 million Canadian seniors had TFSAs. In a low-interest rate environment, the TFSA can help to boost after-tax returns, as these returns are not subject to taxation. The TFSA provides seniors with a savings vehicle to meet their ongoing savings needs, something to which they previously only had limited access to once they were over the age of 71.

Here is another example. Barry is a retired 72-year-old who does part-time consulting work, and is required to withdraw a minimum amount of \$18,000 from his registered retirement income fund, or RRIF. Taking into account his other pension income, his income from part-time consulting work, and his income taxes, Barry's RRIF withdrawal exceeds his current needs by \$7,000. With a \$10,000 TFSA annual contribution limit, Barry can now save the entire \$7,000 remaining from his RRIF withdrawal in his TFSA.

This government understands that Canadian society thrives in a low-tax environment. It is why we introduced the tax-free savings account. It is why we have cut taxes over and over again, in fact over 180 times since we became government in 2006. It is a shame that opposition members have opposed our changes to the tax-free savings account. They do not realize the benefits that it would bring to Canadians across the country. Unlike our Conservative government, the opposition believes in a high-tax, high-spend agenda.

Our government has lowered taxes every year since coming into office and, as I mentioned, we have introduced over 180 tax-relief measures. This equates to over \$37 billion in savings for all Canadians, and \$6,600 in average savings per year for the average

Canadian family. As a result, the overall federal tax burden is now at its lowest level in over 50 years. In fact, John George Diefenbaker was the prime minister the last time that taxes were this low. Going forward, we will remain committed to keeping taxes low and allowing Canadians to save more of their hard-earned money.

I would like to ask the Minister of Finance a question. In what other ways is the government helping Canadians to save and prepare for their retirement?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, we have spent a lot of time talking about tax-free savings accounts, and it seems that we have not been able to penetrate the opposition members, who are focused on a misunderstanding of the central fact that TFSAs overwhelmingly benefit low and middle-income Canadians. Two-thirds of the benefits go to them, and 25% to families earning less than \$30,000 a year.

The TFSA is a marvellous tool to save for a first home, for the kids' education, or for retirement. Of the 11 million Canadians who participate, three-quarters of them earn less than \$75,000 a year, half of them earn less than \$42,000 a year, and 60% of those who have maxed out earn less than \$60,000 a year. This is a very important measure for low and middle-income Canadians and, of course, for seniors. This is part of our government's plan to create jobs, growth, and long-term prosperity.

Since we have spent so much time discussing the TFSAs, perhaps I could move on to the broader discussion of Canada's economy.

• (2320)

[*Translation*]

Through Canada's economic action plan, our country's economy has seen one of the best economic performances among all G7 countries, as we have said many times. However, Canada is not immune to global economic challenges beyond our borders. That is why economic action plan 2015 continues to focus on supporting job creation and economic growth, while returning Canada to balance.

[*English*]

When one reflects on some of the questions, it is really rich for the NDP and the Liberals to be criticizing our government's savings record and our record on the economy and job creation. They voted against every job creation measure our government has put forward, including introducing the small business job credit, introducing the largest and longest investment in job-creating infrastructure in Canada's history, including the new Building Canada fund; and introducing tax cuts for manufacturers to purchase new equipment and expand their operations.

The NDP continues to push for risky economic policies, including a \$20 billion carbon tax that would be a tax on everything and everybody and would hurt Canada's economy.

Government Orders

Meanwhile, the Liberals have introduced a plan full of holes that would return Canada to deficits and jeopardize our strong economic position. In fact, the Liberal leader's plan simply does not add up. He already admits to a \$2 billion shortage. We have discovered an additional \$1 billion in his rudimentary miscalculation of the cancellation of the UCC benefit, and of course he has wildly overestimated the amount of tax he would collect through his tax hike. In addition to that, there are more high-cost spending programs to come. The question is, where will he get the money? Will it come from piling on more debt? Will it come from increasing taxes? Will it come from cancelling important programs, such as income splitting for seniors or increased funding to the brave men and women in uniform? We do not know, and we suspect the Liberal leader does not know either.

We can contrast all that with our low-tax plan. On the other side, the Liberal leader thinks that Canadians should be convinced to accept a tax hike, believes that budgets balance themselves, and does not think we should provide benefits to all Canadian families.

[*Translation*]

From July 2009 to April 2015, our government created 1.2 million jobs. More than 80% of these jobs are full-time, more than 80% are in the private sector and nearly 60% are in high-wage sectors. Since our government came to power, we have created almost 20% more jobs than our closest competitor. Canada posted the strongest business investment record in the G7 during the recovery.

Both the International Monetary Fund and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development expect Canada to show solid economic growth in the coming years. For the seventh consecutive year, the World Economic Forum rated Canada's banking system as the soundest in the world. Canada leapt from sixth to second place in Bloomberg's ranking of the most attractive destinations for business.

• (2325)

[*English*]

The Deputy Chair: That concludes the time for the hon. parliamentary secretary.

There are three minutes remaining for the hon. member for Davenport.

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Chair, does the minister know how many workers in Toronto cannot gain traditional, secure full-time employment with benefits?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, both prior to this economic action plan 2015 and through our current budget, we have provided a suite of proposals and initiatives that would enhance job creation right

across the country for small businesses and for large businesses. For small businesses, we are reducing the tax rate from 11% to 9% and we have introduced an accelerated capital cost allowance.

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Chair, the answer has been all over the media. The finance minister is from Toronto, so he would know that the answer to that question is that over 50% of all workers cannot access full-time, stable jobs.

Does the minister know how many of Toronto's unemployed are receiving EI benefits after paying into the program for years?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, I will get that information for the member.

Mr. Andrew Cash: It is 17%, Mr. Chair.

Is the minister satisfied with that number, now that he knows what the number is?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, as I have said, we have taken many measures to improve employment. We have job-matching services. We have a variety of programs for youth internships. We have the student loan programs. We have programs to help people get the training they need for Red Seal accreditation and Blue Seal accreditation. We will continue to provide benefits to job-creating companies right across this country.

The Deputy Chair: Last question, the hon. member for Davenport.

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Chair, could the minister explain why the current government is featuring Camaro production in its recent ad, given that the Camaro is no longer going to be manufactured in Canada?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Chair, we have been communicating with Canadians on a variety of important measures that we have introduced to benefit Canadians across the country. It is very important that they have these measures in mind because, just to take one example, the UCCB is very beneficial for Canadian families, but there are over 200,000 families that do not have the information they would need in order to register, and they have to be alerted to the potential benefits for them.

The Deputy Chair: It being 11:28 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), all votes are deemed reported.

• (2330)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 11:30 p.m.)

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