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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, June 12, 2012
(Part A)



Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, June 12, 2012

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

● (1005)

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 34 petitions.

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INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian joint delegation of the Canada-China Legislative Association and the Canada-Japan Inter-Parliamentary Group respecting its participation at the 19th annual meeting of the Asia Pacific Parliamentary Forum, APPF, which was held in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, from January 23 to 27, 2011.

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association respecting its participation in the Parliamentary Mission to the Republic of Cyprus, the next country to hold the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union and the United Kingdom, held in Nicosia, Republic of Cyprus, and London, United Kingdom, April 19 to 26, 2012.

* * *

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-431, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (release of taxpayer's notices of assessment).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased and honoured to introduce a bill to amend the Income Tax Act with respect to the release of taxpayer information. The bill is seconded by the member for Chatham-Kent—Essex.

The purpose of this bill is to require the minister, upon a court order, to provide a taxpayer's notices of assessment to any person to whom the taxpayer has a legal obligation to make child support payments.

The bill is designed to give support to the many single parents who struggle to receive the child support payments they are entitled to from those who have a legal obligation to provide such payments.

This change to the Income Tax Act would make certain that delinquent parents could not evade their responsibilities by hiding behind the privacy provision. It is the right thing to do for children and responsible parents who are legally entitled to this support.

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

* * *

[Translation]

HOLIDAYS ACT

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-432, An Act to amend the Holidays Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts (St. John the Baptist Day).

He said: Mr. Speaker, every year St. John the Baptist Day is a special day in Quebec communities. This holiday conjures up events and symbols that remind us of our own experiences, especially as members of the Francophonie.

Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day is not just Quebecers' national holiday; it is also celebrated in many other places, including other francophone communities in Canada and North America.

I am proud to introduce my bill in the House. The bill amends the Holidays Act by recognizing June 24 as a legal holiday celebrated across the country. I am honoured my colleague from Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou is seconding the bill.

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

* * *

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-433, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (student transportation).

Routine Proceedings

He said: Mr. Speaker, my bill amends the Income Tax Act to provide a non-refundable tax credit applicable to the cost of lunchtime transportation for students between their elementary school and residence.

The Government of Canada must take into account diversity of lifestyles when implementing measures for families. Currently, parents of young children can deduct child care expenses when calculating their income tax. It is not the parents who use the child care services. It is the children.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure you understand that there is some value in sitting down to lunch together with one's children. It is a choice that families should be able to make.

Providing a tax credit for the cost of lunchtime transportation as a measure of supporting family solidarity would ensure more fair and equitable treatment and would respect the lifestyle choice of some Canadian families.

I am lucky enough to have this bill seconded by my colleague from Saint-Lambert.

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

* * *

• (1010)

[English]

PETITIONS**ABORTION**

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to present two petitions in support of Motion No. 312.

GASOLINE PRICES

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I too have two petitions to present this morning.

The first one is a set of petitions that keep pouring into my riding of Hamilton Mountain.

The petitioners call on the government to take action on the price of gasoline by adopting my Bill C-336.

Statistics Canada keeps underlining that rising gasoline prices are the biggest trigger in raising our rate of annual inflation, so the petitioners know that they are getting hosed at the pumps. Unfortunately, as it stands now, they can only complain to each other because there is no official avenue through which they can seek redress.

That is why the petitioners are calling for the speedy passage of my Bill C-336, which would establish the oil and gas ombudsman. The ombudsman would be charged with providing strong and effective consumer protection to make sure that no big business could swindle, cheat or rip off hard-working Canadians.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from people from right across the country who are really concerned that child care is often not accessible or

affordable for Canadian families and is often of uncertain quality for children.

The petitioners call on the Government of Canada to legislate the right to universal access to child care, and to provide multi-year funding to provincial and territorial governments to build a national system of affordable, high quality, public and not-for-profit early childhood education and child care, accessible to all children.

INTERNATIONAL AID

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition signed by a number of people in the Montmartre area in Saskatchewan dealing with Canadian foreign aid.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to demonstrate international responsibility by recommitting Canada to contribute 0.7% of GDP to overseas development assistance. The petitioners would like to see responsive funding to those NGOs that Canadians support and which have seen their funding cut in recent years by CIDA. In the spirit of global solidarity, the petitioners wish to see a grant in full of the funding of \$49.2 million requested by the Canadian Catholic Organization For Development and Peace over the next five years.

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have five petitions to present today, four of which are on the same topic.

The petitioners point out that Canada's 400-year-old definition of a human being says that a child does not become a human being until the moment of complete birth, which is contrary to 21st century medical evidence, and that Parliament has a solemn duty to reject any law that says human beings are not human.

The petitioners therefore call upon the House of Commons to confirm that every human being is recognized by Canadian law as human by amending section 223 of our Criminal Code in such a way as to reflect 21st century medical evidence.

ABORTION

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fifth petition indicates that Canada is the only nation in the western world and in the company of China and North Korea without any laws restricting abortion, and that Canada's Supreme Court has said it is Parliament's responsibility to enact abortion legislation.

The petitioners therefore call upon the House of Commons to speedily enact legislation that would restrict abortion to the greatest extent possible.

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have petitions from Canadians of all walks of life who genuinely support our veterans and wish that their contributions would be reflected in the treatment they receive.

The petitioners request that veterans hospitals serve not just World War II and Korean veterans, but also the peacekeepers and the 200,000 members of the Canadian Forces who have contributed to taking care of Canada in missions abroad.

The petitioners also ask that the Government of Canada extend the mandate of veterans hospitals to include those modern day veterans, because at this point in time they are excluded from long-term care.

The petitioners ask that the clawback to all veterans pensions be ended and that the widows benefit become a non-taxable benefit.

CANADA-EUROPEAN UNION PROCUREMENT AGREEMENT

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to submit a petition signed by a significant number of Canadians mostly from my riding in Guelph. They add their voices to the thousands across Canada and the 16 municipalities across the country calling on the House of Commons to urge the government to exclude all sub-federal governments and their public agencies, including municipalities, from any Canada-European Union procurement agreement.

Municipalities such as Guelph are rightly concerned that they will lose the right to have independent procurement policies and the ability to buy local materials and services. These restrictions will cripple the ability of municipalities to stimulate local innovation, foster local community economic development, create local employment and achieve strategic public policy goals.

• (1015)

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition requesting that registered professional counsellors be approved and included as providers under the first nations non-insured health benefits program.

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION BILL

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a petition on behalf of residents from across Canada, from British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec, who have great reservations about the government's omnibus budget implementation bill. The petitioners recognize that many measures in Bill C-38 were not mentioned in the March 29 budget at all, and many have nothing to do with implementing a budget.

Further, they note that omnibus legislation such as this subverts the parliamentary process because there is no way to properly scrutinize mammoth bills like this. They petition the government to withdraw Bill C-38 and to start over.

[Translation]

OLD AGE SECURITY

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise today to present a petition signed by residents in the riding of Manicouagan who are worried about the changes announced to old age security.

These people have signed the petition, first of all, because experts agree that our old age security program is sustainable in the long term and, secondly, because increasing the age of eligibility will affect seniors living closest to the poverty line most of all.

The petitioners are therefore calling on the government to leave the old age security program alone, to maintain the eligibility age at 65, and furthermore, to improve the guaranteed income supplement

Routine Proceedings

in order to lift all seniors out of poverty, because it can be done. The number of Canadian seniors living in poverty today is a disgrace.

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by citizens from right across Canada who are concerned with the proposed mega-quarry in Melancthon Township in Dufferin County, Ontario, which would be the largest open pit quarry in Canada at over 2,300 acres. They are concerned with a number of items, one of which is based on the proposed mega-quarry applications. There are distinct issues relating to the use of water operations based on NAFTA considerations which may have a very substantially negative financial implication federally and provincially.

The petitioners are asking the Government of Canada to conduct an environmental assessment under the authority of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act on the Highland Companies' proposed mega-quarry development.

[Translation]

BILL C-38

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise here this morning to present two petitions.

The first group of petitioners are from across Canada: from Alberta, Nova Scotia, British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec. The petitioners are calling on the government to withdraw Bill C-38, because it is illegitimate and because it affects and repeals important environmental protection legislation.

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition comes from residents of British Columbia, from Roberts Creek, Gibsons and Sechelt. They urge that the Conservatives stop promoting one specific project that British Columbians oppose by a margin of three to one, the so-called Enbridge project across northern British Columbia, and its risky supertanker scheme.

It is my honour to present both petitions.

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I present a petition from individuals from the city of Winnipeg which deals with the issue of unethical and illegal phone calls. They state that the integrity of our election process is at stake and Elections Canada must have the power to properly investigate individuals, political parties and other stakeholders that may have attempted to corrupt the last federal election.

The petitioners are calling upon members of Parliament to immediately enact legislation that would give Elections Canada the ability to restore public confidence in Canada's electoral process.

*Government Orders***QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER**

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

JOBS, GROWTH AND LONG-TERM PROSPERITY ACT

BILL C-38—TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC) moved:

That, in relation to Bill C-38, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 29, 2012 and other measures, not more than 10 further hours shall be allotted to the consideration at report stage of the Bill and 8 hours shall be allotted to the consideration at third reading stage of the said Bill; and

that, at the expiry of the 10 hours for the consideration at report stage and at the expiry of the 8 hours for the consideration at third reading stage of the said Bill, any proceedings before the House shall be interrupted, if required for the purpose of this Order, and in turn every question necessary for the disposal of the stage of the Bill then under consideration shall be put forthwith and successively without further debate or amendment.

• (1020)

[English]

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 67.1, there will now be a 30-minute question period. I would invite hon. members to try to keep their questions or comments to around a minute and the responses to a similar length.

As we have done in the past with the rotation, I will give preference to opposition members, although government members will be given an opportunity to ask questions as well.

The hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this represents the 26th time that the government has invoked time allocation and closure, shutting down debate and thereby breaking a record of previous governments.

Never before have we seen a bill like Bill C-38, the Trojan Horse budget bill. The government will claim that there has been a lot of debate. With 720-plus clauses, more than 400 pages and more than 70 acts of Parliament which would either being changed profoundly or ruined altogether, we have raised concerns from the opposition and from the voices of Canadians from coast to coast to coast. In this Trojan Horse of a bill, hundreds upon hundreds of pages, the implications of which Canadians can perhaps be fearful of a government that so fears transparency, we have raised opposition to these time allocations.

Our words have not swayed it, nor have the words of Canadians who are fearful of what the government plans. Perhaps the words of the Prime Minister may sway the government. When he was in opposition, and maybe his principles have since changed, he said the following:

Madam Speaker, this will be the only opportunity I have to address [this bill] in the Chamber. I was not able to speak to the bill at second reading because there was time allocation then. Now there is time allocation at report stage....It is unfortunate that in the end most members will be lucky to have 10 minutes to speak to this bill.

Where have those principles gone, for the need to have democratic debate in this House—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Questions and comments. The hon. Minister of State for Finance.

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Madam Speaker, democratic debate is exactly what we have had. Democratic debate was taken away from all of the members in the House, if we will recall. Madam Speaker, I am sure you will recall the 13 hours of Twitter regurgitation that we sat through. In my books, that is not exactly learned debate.

We had a budget that was tabled in this House. Merely moments after, a very substantive budget document was read into the record outlining the government's overarching plan for this year. The NDP members announced that they would vote against it. Then they put up a speaker, the speaker for Burnaby—New Westminster, who basically stole everyone else's time. Every other elected member of Parliament who could have had an opportunity to either speak in favour of, or to ask questions of, the budget chose not to.

However, 13 hours of tweeting is not substantive debate.

• (1025)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, the hon. parliamentary secretary will find little dispute from me about the time spent by the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster. It is irrelevant to this debate. That was not blocking any discussion of Bill C-38 because it had not been tabled at that time.

I dispute the sort of nonsense we have heard from the government House leader that there has been abundant debate. Budget bills between 1995 and 2000 averaged 12 pages long. It has been only this Conservative brand, under the current Prime Minister, that has taken budget bills and made them Trojan horses. It was 800 pages in 2010, and now a 420-page bill changing environmental assessment and fisheries and only 12 hours of witnesses in a committee. That is an outrage.

Hon. Ted Menzies: Madam Speaker, starting off, the hon. member's address to me as parliamentary secretary actually shows that she has not been following the debate. I was quite honoured to be asked by the Prime Minister to become the Minister of State for Finance. I carry that challenge honourably. I would also like to point out that was just the first mistake in the question or first unfactual comment.

I understand there was actually 70 hours of witnesses appearing at two subcommittees, not only one. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of those individuals, all of those elected members of Parliament who sat until midnight many nights listening to all of those witnesses. That is the way policy should be debated in the House.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, I wish to apologize to my hon. friend. I misspoke. I certainly know he is a minister of state. I find it a matter personal privilege in the assertion that I have not followed this debate. I have followed every minute of this debate and 12 hours—

Government Orders

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. The member has apologized. I think we will move on at this point.

On the same point of order, the hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Actually, I would like to raise a new point of order, Madam Speaker, if that point of order has been resolved.

The Deputy Speaker: I consider the apology made and the issue closed. I would like to move on.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I would like to read from our Standing Orders directly into the record. It is in regard to the time allocation motion that the government has just moved. I would seek your advice as to whether or not this particular time allocation might be a valid point of order. The government might want to reconsider whether it is a valid motion at this time.

Madam Speaker, if you look at time allocation motions on page 51, Standing Order 78(3)(a) halfway down states:

...for the purpose of allotting a specified number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of proceedings at that stage; provided that the time allotted for any stage is not to be less than one sitting day and provided that for the purposes of this paragraph an allocation may be proposed in one motion...

Today, because of extending sitting time, which the Liberal Party had agreed to, we are actually sitting for 14 hours. You will note that the time allocation motion makes reference to 10 hours. It would seem that would contradict what is being stated in the Standing Orders.

Would you, as the Speaker, review that and provide some input as to whether or not the government might be in violation of the Standing Orders, or maybe you could just provide a better interpretation for me of that clause.

The Deputy Speaker: After I have had a chance to look at the motion in detail, I will take the comments of the hon. member into consideration and will come back to the House as necessary.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing.

• (1030)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Madam Speaker, I find it really atrocious to see another time allocation motion to discuss a bill that is so large in proportion and would have such an impact on Canadians.

We are still finding out some other details that are coming out of all of this. There is still a lot of concern being raised by Canadians about what is really in the bill. Our colleague across has indicated that there has been lots of time allocated, but when we do studies in committees, we hear more hours of debate on one particular act or one particular change to an act than we do on this budget bill.

I am wondering how the Conservatives can really prevent democracy in relation to such a large bill. The impact it would have on Canadians would be felt on our young generations as well, so how can the Conservatives make so many changes and not allow for proper debate on each piece? Why will they not separate the bill to be discussed properly and effectively?

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to start off by apologizing to my colleague from Saanich—Gulf Islands. I should not have suggested that she was not following the debate. What I intended in my remark was to suggest that she was not listening to the facts and figures in that debate. I would like to offer that apology to my colleague.

We talked about the length of time. We have had double the time to discuss the overarching budget implementation act that is no different from any other budget implementation act. We call it budget implementation act one because there is a lot in a budget. There is a lot in a government's plan that is put forward during the year. It usually takes two budget bills to get all of this through.

This is a momentous year for us. We have been recognized around the world as being on the right track financially. We need to continue on that. It takes decisive actions. That is exactly what we put into the budget implementation act, the decisions that will keep us on the right financial track.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have listened to the Minister of State for Finance indicate that the Conservatives are on the right track. The fact is that they inherited the right track and now they are destroying it.

We have discussed over the years changes to the Fisheries Act. The discussion was going to take place right across the country. Now we cannot even go to the fisheries committee. What is going on is a disgrace. This bill would also give the minister authority to do many things in the fishery, such as taking quota in order to pay for science. There are massive changes to EI that would hurt Prince Edward Island in many ways. Many of the people on EI might have to work for 70% of the salaries they now make. If they do that, then next year it will be 70% of that.

I ask the Minister of State for Finance, is this a race to the bottom? Is this to make sure that the people who work part time in Prince Edward Island make little or nothing? Is that the government's idea behind this massive bill that should be split into many bills?

Hon. Ted Menzies: Madam Speaker, absolutely not. What is in Bill C-38, budget implementation act one, is exactly what we heard from Canadians in consultation across this country. We need to make government more effective. We need to make government reflect the value of Canadians. There are lots of people looking for work. There are lots of people in the hon. member's province looking for work. The improvements to EI would provide them a conduit to find jobs within their region and skills sets. That is only common sense.

That is what this entire budget implementation act is all about. It is making sure that we protect the fisheries where it is important to protect them, not on my back forty out in southern Alberta where there never has been a fish. Those are the challenges we are facing. The old Liberal government liked to maintain a process in Fisheries and Oceans that actually impeded productivity on the Prairies and we have said that is not right. Let us focus our money and efforts where they are needed: in protecting the fishery.

Government Orders

• (1035)

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. My hon. colleague indicates that he did all this discussing with groups. I would think, for the House's sake, it would be important for him to name a few fisheries groups that he—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I see that there is a real difference in points of view, but it is debate.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Hamilton Mountain.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in the House today, although I have to say I rise more in sadness than anger and not on my own behalf. It is not about silencing members in the House, it is about not allowing us to give expression to the legitimate concerns of people in our ridings about this budget bill.

This is a bill with 753 sections and 425 pages. People in my community are concerned about this bill. One-third of it deals with gutting environmental regulations. It would fundamentally change the EI system which the government does not pay for, but that people have paid for through their wages. It would change old age security and attack the wages of construction workers. People in communities across the country are mobilizing against this budget.

If the government is so certain that this bill is great for all Canadians, I am surprised. It is not usually shy about self-promotion. Why would it not allow public consultations from coast to coast to allow Canadians to voice their concerns, instead of, for the 26th time in a row, shutting down debate prematurely, when it knows that Canadians are fundamentally concerned about the direction of the government and that they deserve to be heard?

Hon. Ted Menzies: Madam Speaker, there is a quote that I have been looking forward to reading. It is a good answer to the question from the hon. member on why we need to get this done. This is a quote from the *Toronto Sun*, which states:

As Europe stands poised on the brink of a disastrous economic wildfire that could blacken the world, NDP leader's hypocrisy and self-obsession is in full flame.... vowing to delay the passing of [economic action plan 2012]...by playing silly—

and I won't use the term

—silly [games] with amendments and procedure.... This is nothing but grandstanding.... This is a budget designed to create jobs and inspire economic growth, and it comes to the House of Commons at a moment that can only be described as the 11th hour of a global economic conflagration.... Right now, there is only one enemy in our fight to protect Canada from the repercussions of Europe's burning. And it's [the NDP leader].... This is inarguable.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am rising in response to the point of order raised by the hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Standing Order 78(3) states that the amount of time allotted to any stage of a bill shall be not less than one sitting day. However, it also does not mean we should not take that particular reference to be interpreted as the length of the sitting day on which the bill is scheduled for debate or when the motion is moved.

Standing Order 78(3) affords the government the option to allot a specific number of "days" or "hours". Sometimes time allocation motions allot sitting days. When a motion refers to a sitting day, we take the timeframe of a sitting day literally. It does not mean how

long the day is or what the circumstances dictating the time available for government orders might be. On other occasions, time allocation motions have allotted hours. The hours allotted in those motions were respected.

Let me give some examples. On November 13, 1975, a motion allotting five further hours for the second reading stage of Bill C-58, which amended the Income Tax Act, was adopted; similar motions were adopted on March 10, 1976, for Bill C-68 amendments to the then Medical Care Act; on March 29, 1977, for Bill C-27, the Employment and Immigration Reorganization Act; and on November 22, 1977, for Bill C-11, another bill to amend the Income Tax Act. In relation to Bill C-18, the National Transportation Act, 1986, a motion allotting four hours for report stage and four hours for third reading was adopted on June 15, 1987.

Most recently, the House adopted two such motions last Thursday, June 7, 2012. One allotted five hours for third reading of Bill C-25, pooled registered pension plans act, and the other allotted seven hours for second reading of Bill C-24, the Canada–Panama free trade bill. Needless to say, both motions were in order last week and each was adopted by the House.

Of interest, regarding the 1987 case, the report and third reading stages happened to be the second order of the day called by the government on each sitting day, and the debates were interrupted by the Speaker after the expiry of the time provided for in the time allocation motion but before the end of government orders. It should be further noted that on both occasions, after Bill C-18 was dealt with, the government called a third order of the day.

Looking at our recent example of Bill C-25, yesterday's order paper said we had 2 hours and 24 minutes of debate remaining on the bill. Had we resumed debate on it at 3:00 p.m., after question period last Thursday, the debate would have ended before the end of government orders at 5:30 p.m. With routine proceedings and the consideration of procedural motions, it is not inconceivable to end up with a situation where only a few minutes are available to debate a bill on a given ordinary sitting day. Those few minutes would satisfy the minimum requirement of Standing Order 78(3) if the motion allotted one sitting day.

Our motion refers to hours. When dealing with hours, it makes more sense to interpret the minimum requirement of one sitting day differently because the number of available hours could vary from day to day.

As members are aware, not every sitting day is the same. Under the usual calendar, five and a half hours are set aside for both routine proceedings and government orders on Mondays; six and a half hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays; two and a half hours on Wednesdays and Fridays. The longer routine proceedings take, the less time there is for government orders. When allotting hours, the reference to one sitting day should be interpreted as a sitting day and not the sitting day on which the bill has been scheduled for debate.

I would argue that when referring to hours in a time allocation motion, the minimum allotment of hours should be consistent with the shortest day available under the current Standing Orders, and that is two and a half hours, and that assumes we breeze through routine proceedings in a heartbeat. Of course, our motion contemplates ten hours of debate for report stage and a further eight hours for third reading, which in both cases is at least three times the two and a half hour figure I just cited.

On three of the five sitting days each week, the time available for government business is routinely no more than five hours. Some may ask what impact there may be, given that we are operating under extended hours. I would say it should not be a relevant consideration. Calling government orders is the prerogative of the government. In other words, any item on the order paper could be called this week or this fall, when we are not in extended sittings. However, should the fact we adopted a motion yesterday under Standing Order 27(1) bear relevance to the chair's consideration, let me advance two further points.

First, Wednesday, tomorrow for example, would have at most eight hours for government orders, and the coming Friday is operating in the usual schedule, with two and a half hours for government business.

• (1040)

The government could, if it so chooses, call Bill C-38 on either of those dates, and yet 10 hours could not be fully used in a single day. In fact, I believe everyone understands that we will be calling Bill C-38, in part, tomorrow.

Second, the 1987 precedent that I cited earlier speaks to our present circumstances. On Friday, June 12, 1987, the House adopted a special order respecting sitting hours, effective the following Tuesday. Now, recall that the time allocation motion was adopted on Monday, June 15. The House, knowing that extended hours were upon it, adopted the time allocation order for four hours for each of two different stages of the bill.

Report stage was called on Tuesday, June 16, as the second order of the day, and after all of the recorded votes at report stage there were still a couple of hours left in the day for a third item of government business. Third reading followed the next day, when again there was more than ample time in the day to accommodate that debate.

Looking at the cases I cited earlier, but in both the case of Bill C-18 in 1987 and Bill C-25 on Thursday last week, the minimum requirement of one sitting day was not interpreted by the Speaker as the length of the days on which either bill was scheduled.

Although no ruling was then given in 1987, I would submit that Mr. Speaker Fraser likely interpreted the length of the shortest available day to be the minimum time required by the Standing Orders, and as far as I can surmise, it would also have been the view of the Speaker last week.

Accordingly, I believe our motion should be allowed to stand for the same reason that it allots a greater number of hours than the shortest day on which it could be scheduled. Indeed, it will be a longer number of hours than in the normal circumstance would be

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provided any day at any other time of the year that we would be debating it in the House.

I believe the precedents are amply demonstrative that the motion you have before you, Madam Speaker, is in order.

• (1045)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, the government House leader makes some interesting points.

He talks about the usual circumstances but, if members will remember, just yesterday in the Speaker's ruling on trying to allocate the number of votes and amendments to Bill C-38, the omnibus Trojan Horse budget bill we are talking about, the Speaker himself a number of times referred to these as extraordinary circumstances. Part of the reason for that is that this is an extraordinarily bad bill, massive in its implications and broad-sweeping.

To suggest that the government, and I want to get this right, in my friend's motion, seeks to have a distinction between “a” sitting day and not “the” sitting day is a debate that may be lost in its minutiae on Canadians, yet is important in its implications of what the government is doing.

We are in the midst of debating another closure motion from the government, another motion to shut down debate. It is the 26th time the government has moved time allocation and closure in this House. Twenty-six times is a lot for any government, in fact a record that the government seems proud to be breaking and setting anew for Canadian democracy.

The question and the challenge we have with this motion is that in redefining what “a day” is, the government is essentially trying to further speed its agenda through the House of Commons, to further shut down the amount of time MPs have to understand the implications of more than 420 pages of a budget implementation bill, and to further suggest to Canadians that the House of Commons and the members of Parliament do not have the responsibility to hold government to account.

We in the NDP take this job extremely seriously. I lament the fact that my friends across the way do not share that responsibility and feel that shutting down debate, invoking closures and time allocations, should be de rigueur for the government, and I lament that we are now into a debate about defining what the difference is between “a” sitting day and “the” sitting day and trying to pretend that this is somehow a normal circumstance.

There is nothing normal about the circumstance at all. It is extraordinary, as the Speaker of the House said just yesterday. If the Speaker wants to rule that we are going to change the definition of a day, and the government seems so encouraged to change the definition of what debate and democracy may mean, the government has a certain ease with which it is removing principles it used to hold, principles that it actually said at one point—

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Do you want the votes today or tomorrow?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: With all the interruptions from the government House leader, I will continue.

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If the government wants to say that the principles it used to hold while in opposition are no longer principles it holds so dear, that is fine. That is for it to work out with the people it seeks to represent.

For us, a principle is a principle. The fact is that this is a Parliament, based within the very name itself, a place where we discuss the matters of the nation not cram through omnibus Trojan Horse bills and start to redefine what a day actually is. I think most Canadians would find this entire discussion not just obtuse but obscene.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, given that it was I, representing the Liberal Party, who raised the issue in terms of the government appearing not to be following the Standing Orders, it is important that I respond to what the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons has now put on the record.

I admit I am not a lawyer, but I have a fairly good understanding of House procedures and what a day is and is not. I can read the Standing Orders just as well as I suspect many others inside the House of Commons can. I believe that the Standing Orders are fairly clear and that is why, earlier, I raised the point of order on behalf of the Liberal Party that the government would appear to be breaking the Standing Orders. It is an important rule that needs to be respected, so by raising it in that fashion, I was hopeful that the government members would respond by recognizing that they had made a mistake and that the mistake can be easily fixed by allotting a few extra hours to debate this very important bill.

In his response, the government House leader tried to confuse the matter. He said that there is this situation here or this situation there, giving the impression that it has happened before. Well, it has not happened before where it has been brought to the Speaker's attention that a rule has been violated.

It is much like if someone stands up and says something that might be determined as being unparliamentary but no one brings it to the attention of the Speaker, so the Speaker does not make a ruling on it. However, if someone stands up and points out that someone said something that is unparliamentary, there is an obligation on the Speaker to enforce the rule. I believe that the Standing Order is fairly clear on this point. There is nothing wrong in admitting he made a mistake, and the government House leader should just acknowledge that they made a mistake, that they did not read or interpret the rule properly and that they are going to have to extend the amount of debate on the bill in order to comply with the Standing Order.

I suggest the government House leader may take some time. Maybe we could recess for a few minutes so the government House leader can get his motion in proper order, so we can have a continuation of the half-hour question and answer on the time allocation. The government House leader would recognize that Canadians as a whole would love to see the government follow the rules and procedures of the House of Commons and that it is not appropriate for the government House leader and the Conservative Party to be abusing this rule.

Madam Speaker, I look to you and suggest we need to have a ruling on this. It is a very simple, straightforward issue. Regarding the examples the government House leader brought forward, there was no extended sitting that was being suggested. The bottom line is

that we are sitting until midnight, which far exceeds the number of hours that this time allocation motion is stating, and that puts it in contradiction to the Standing Order. I suggest we have a recess so the government House leader can bring forward a motion that would be in keeping with the Standing Order. I leave it at that and I hope the government will do the right thing on this matter.

• (1050)

The Deputy Speaker: I thank all the hon. members for their comments. There were some interesting precedents presented, and there does seem to be some lack of clarity on that specific issue. However, for now I propose to the House that we continue the debate. I stopped the clock. I will come back with a decision in 15 minutes when this debate is over.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to ask the Minister of State for Finance a question with regard to something that is somewhat confusing for me.

I know that the NDP put forward a number of amendments with regard to the bill. I believe that sometimes these amendments are simply delay tactics, which is unfortunate because delay simply for the sake of delay is, frankly, obstruction. Nevertheless, some of the amendments are confusing.

I would like to ask the minister of state about a particular amendment that would see the RDSP positive changes in the bill eliminated. I am confused because stakeholders, with regard to the registered disability savings plan, have been asking for these changes in order to allow for plan holders to be expanded, et cetera. It would help the most vulnerable. I would like to know why the NDP would want to eliminate these positive changes.

• (1055)

Hon. Ted Menzies: Madam Speaker, I will have to disappoint my hon. colleague because I actually do not have the answer to that question of why the NDP would vote against that. In fact, it was the opposition finance critic and the opposition deputy finance critic who actually put forward the motion to delete clause 6 which deals with the registered disability savings plan.

We can find quote after quote all across the country about how effective this could be. We are adding these clauses in to make it more effective. We are working with the provinces, which have partial jurisdiction over this, but we have the tax law portion of that. This legislation in some provinces currently bars some people with intellectual disabilities from accessing the plan without compromising their legal status. The provinces want to move forward with this. The groups that are promoting this, in fact the families that are dealing with the issues of, we use the term "legally incompetent" or "disabled Canadians", were expecting this.

I wonder whether the next speaker who rises from the NDP might give us a quick answer as why the NDP voted against the disabled people in this country.

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[Translation]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Madam Speaker, if the Minister of State for Finance wants to talk about hypocrisy, we should take a look at the government. During the election, it did not announce the changes in its plans and it moved forward.

I would also like to say that the Canadians I have met are alarmed and worried about the tactics of this government, which is not only silencing this House, but is also silencing Canadians without leaving any room for debate.

I would like to ask the member how much progress he thinks the government can make when it is not listening to the public? How far can we go?

[English]

Hon. Ted Menzies: Madam Speaker, that is exactly what we have done. I have been consulting with groups, businesses and organizations across the country since early last fall, as has the finance committee. The all party finance committee travelled to different regions of the country and brought in witnesses from different regions across the country. This is a reflection of what we heard from those individuals.

It is very troubling when an hon. member stands in this House to suggest that something that is in the budget implementation act was not actually in the election platform.

I would remind that hon. member that the only party that ran in the last election that actually had an economic plan for this country was the Conservative Party. I do not remember even seeing that referred to in the NDP platform, so I guess the NDP ran on nothing.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I just want to make an addition to my colleague's point of order. The amount of time allocated for any stage may not be less than one sitting day.

Also, these proceedings were days when there was no extension.

Also, the Standing Orders have been amended several times since the citations. That is why the member is reaching back to 1970 for examples. The fact is that the Standing Orders have been changed.

• (1100)

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member, and, as I said, I will be coming back to the House in a few minutes with a decision.

Questions and comments. The hon. member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Madam Speaker, we heard the minister of state talk about what his party ran on in the last election. This is a very good point because the Conservative Party in the last election did not tell Canadians that it would change employment insurance and it did not tell Canadians that it would change OAS.

Like the minister of state, I travelled the country and did 47 town halls across the country and not once did I have anybody ask to have OAS changed.

From the standpoint of the finance committee, and being a member of that committee, we would be sitting there with six or

seven people, some were there for fisheries, some for modified seeds and some for the environment, but in the five minutes we had each one of these people had to choose one person to ask a question of.

I am concerned about what is happening to the capacity of MPs to do the due diligence necessary. It does not require a lot of understanding of process to understand that changes to the Employment Insurance Act belong in a different place, or that the Fisheries Act belongs with fisheries, or that human resources development belongs with human resources, to get clear due diligence applied that is necessary but that has not happened.

Hon. Ted Menzies: Madam Speaker, we have, indeed, heard from Canadians about employment insurance from all regions of the country for various reasons. One of the resounding complaints we heard was how people who are on employment insurance and want to work find jobs in their own region. It is not the easiest thing to do.

What the minister is attempting to do is to pair up those people who are now on the safety net of employment insurance. It is good to have it there when people have lost their jobs, but they want to be paired up. They would rather be working than be on employment insurance.

It is our role as government to ensure that we can pair those two up. It is that simple and we think it is important that the government play that role.

We have seen an incredible increase in jobs, almost 760,000 net new jobs, but if there is one Canadian still looking for work we should not give up on him or her.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have two very quick points.

I appreciate my colleague making reference to page 667 of O'Brien and Bosc in regard to the amount of time allocation for any stage not be less than one sitting day. That provides clarification in terms of the point of order that my colleague had raised.

My question is for the government regarding Conservative backbenchers on Bill C-38.

We had an individual from Kootenay—Columbia, a Conservative member of Parliament, who made fairly profound statements. It is on YouTube if people want to click into it. He makes reference to the Conservative backbenchers and feels that they are not a part of Bill C-38. It sounded as if the backbenchers were blindsided by this.

Why were the Conservative backbenchers not allowed to engage the cabinet on this Trojan Horse bill? Were they consulted? Was the member from Kootenay—Columbia wrong when he sat down with his constituents to discuss the issue or was the government negligent in not working with the Conservative backbenchers on the issue?

Hon. Ted Menzies: Madam Speaker, I fly to Calgary every Friday night to get back to my riding, as does the member for Kootenay—Columbia to whom the hon. member referred. I remember very well that flight as the hon. member for Kootenay—Columbia was studying the budget and underlining and highlighting things. He would lean over to me and say, "This is good. I'm glad we're doing this. Can you help me explain this to my constituents?" The hon. member understood what was in that budget.

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What my hon. colleague for Winnipeg was talking about was obviously taken out of context. The member for Kootenay—Columbia studied that budget. I am not sure that everyone else in here did. However, he studied it deeply and actually went back and explained to his constituents the benefits in the budget implementation bill.

• (1105)

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Madam Speaker, my question with respect to limiting debate has to do with the fact that a number of government members represent similar areas to the one that I represent, not just in my province of Manitoba but across northern Canada and the far north.

The budget will have a devastating impact on the regions that many government members represent, whether it is the cuts to Fisheries and Oceans, like the work at the Experimental Lakes Area, or whether it is the changes to EI. I wish the Minister of State for Finance would speak in great detail to the impact of the EI changes on seasonal workers, like forest firefighters, the people we depend on to keep our communities safe, or the cuts being made to the immigration system, a model that exists in Manitoba, which, unfortunately, the government has failed to promote.

On a whole host of issues, the government is failing to stand up for our province and our regions and is limiting debate to boot.

Hon. Ted Menzies: Madam Speaker, some of the member's constituents have been wondering why she did not listen to them when it came time to vote in support of their ability to use their long guns for their livelihood.

We are here representing our constituents and our constituents have told us that Canada is on track toward getting back to balanced budgets. This budget implementation act would simply move us from the stage of jobs and economic growth to long-term stability. We need to make some serious decisions that will help us in our long-term sustainability. Canadians have asked for that and it is time we get on with it.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Madam Speaker, we have here a government that, in the past, has prorogued this House for purely partisan reasons. Again for purely partisan reasons, it also forced an election when, at the time, the election was supposed to be held on a set date. So then, it should come as no surprise that, for purely partisan reasons, the government is proposing an omnibus bill in place of a budget implementation bill. The government has included many measures that it said nothing about before.

Clearly, the government wants to hide all sorts of things in a bill that the public will not have time to thoroughly examine. That much is clear.

I have a very specific question for the minister of state about what has been hidden in the bill. The Public Appointments Commission was created under the Federal Accountability Act, which was passed by his government. Yet, the budget implementation bill does away with this commission.

In the minister's opinion, does the government no longer need an appointments watchdog, even though one was needed when the

Federal Accountability Act came into effect? Given that the government has decided to do away with the commission in this bill, does that mean that the government is now going to be able to appoint whomever it wants to whatever position it wants without any oversight? This matter was not discussed, so the minister can hardly say that it was debated.

[English]

Hon. Ted Menzies: Madam Speaker, every appointment that this government makes is based on merit. When we attempted to bring in a very credible individual whose background and reason for being nominated was based on non-partisan, unbiased merit, the opposition of the day chose to politicize an incredibly intelligent individual and a successful businessperson who was willing to provide advice to the government for virtually nothing.

We are getting tired of the opposition just simply opposing because it can oppose. Those members are opposing all of the good things that are in the budget. By the way, if they were hidden, as the hon. member is suggesting, then I do not know why he raised it in a question.

• (1110)

The Deputy Speaker: This concludes the period of questions and comments.

I will now respond to the point of order raised earlier by the hon. member for Winnipeg North. I want to thank him, the government House leader, the House leader of the official opposition and the hon. member for Cardigan for their interventions.

The matter has been considered, and we find that the motion does respect the provisions of Standing Order 78(3). I am rendering this decision now for the purpose of the vote that will take place, but I can assure members that the Speaker will come back and provide substantive reasons to justify this. He will be returning at the earliest opportunity.

Therefore, I find the motion in order and will now put the question to the House.

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

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● (1150)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 280)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Alexander	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Ambler
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Armstrong
Ashfield	Aspin
Baird	Bateman
Benoit	Bernier
Bezan	Blaney
Block	Boughen
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinoooge
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Carrie
Chisu	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Daniel	Davidson
Dechert	Del Mastro
Devolin	Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Fantino	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Flaherty
Fletcher	Galipeau
Gallant	Gill
Glover	Goguen
Goldring	Goodyear
Gosal	Gourde
Grewal	Harper
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hiebert
Hoback	Hoepfner
Holder	James
Jean	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kent	Kerr
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lauzon
Lebel	Leaf
Leitch	Lemieux
Leung	Lizon
Lobb	Lukowski
Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Mayes
McColeman	Menegakis
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
O'Neill Gordon	Obhrai
Oliver	Opitz
Paradis	Payne
Poilievre	Preston
Raitt	Rajotte
Rathgeber	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Rickford	Ritz
Saxton	Schellenberger
Seebach	Shea
Shipley	Smith
Sopuck	Sorenson
Stanton	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Tilson	Toet
Toews	Trost
Trottier	Truppe
Tweed	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	Yelich
Young (Oakville)	Young (Vancouver South)
Zimmer— 157	

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Angus	Ashton
Atamanenko	Aubin
Ayala	Bélanger
Bellavance	Bennett
Benskin	Bevington
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Boivin	Borg
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi	Brisson
Brosseau	Byrne
Caron	Casey
Cash	Charlton
Chicoine	Chisholm
Choquette	Chow
Christopherson	Cleary
Coderre	Comartin
Côté	Cotler
Crowder	Cullen
Cuzner	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Davies (Vancouver East)	Day
Dewar	Dion
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Dubé
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseau	Easter
Eyking	Fortin
Freeman	Fry
Garneau	Garrison
Genest	Genest-Jourdain
Giguère	Godin
Goodale	Gravelle
Groguhé	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (St. John's East)	Hassainia
Hsu	Hughes
Hyer	Jacob
Karygiannis	Kellway
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Latendresse	Laverdière
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Leslie	Liu
MacAulay	Mai
Marston	Martin
Masse	Mathysen
May	McCallum
McGuinty	Michaud
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Mourani
Mulcair	Murray
Nantel	Nash
Nicholls	Nunez-Melo
Pacetti	Papillon
Patry	Pécllet
Perreault	Pilon
Plamondon	Quach
Rae	Rafferty
Ravignat	Raynault
Regan	Rousseau
Saganash	Sandhu
Scarpaleggia	Scott
Sellah	Sgro
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	
Sitsabaiesan	St-Denis
Stewart	Thibeault
Toone	Tremblay
Trudeau	Turmel
Valeriote— 135	

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PAIRED

Nil

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

* * *

● (1155)

POOLED REGISTERED PENSION PLANS

The House resumed from June 11 consideration of the motion that Bill C-25, An Act relating to pooled registered pension plans and making related amendments to other Acts, be read the third time and passed, and of the motion that this question be now put.

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is my great pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill C-25, the pooled registered pension plan.

I want to congratulate the Minister of State for Finance on the amazing and wonderful work he has done on this bill and on chairing the committee headed up by the minister and all the provincial finance ministers. I want to congratulate him on his efforts in guiding this bill through the House of Commons.

I have been a member of Parliament now for a little over a year. What has really struck me in my time here so far is the negativity I hear from across the aisle from the nattering nabobs of negativism. No matter how good a public policy initiative is coming out of this government—

An hon. member: It's all good.

Mr. Mark Adler: —and it is all good, the members opposite oppose it.

I am reminded of the movie *A Few Good Men*. Jack Nicholson is on the stand and is being cross-examined by Tom Cruise. Tom Cruise says, “I want the truth”, and Jack Nicholson barks back, “You can't handle the truth”. Those are the people we are opposing on the other side of the House. They cannot handle the truth. They prefer to live with *Tattoo on Fantasy Island*, and those in the third party, well, they are just *Lost in Space*.

As a government, we have the responsibility to make decisions. We have a heavy burden on this side. We are the only party standing in the way of the NDP forming government. That is a very heavy burden, one which we do not take lightly.

We on this side are not concerned about 2015. We hear about the NDP and its rush to form government in 2015. In fact, I hear it is even cornering the market on orange carpeting for their ministerial offices already. Let me say one thing. We on this side are not concerned about 2015. We are concerned about 2020, 2030, 2040, 2050. The legislation we are proposing is not just to get us to the next election. We are proposing legislation that is good for our children, our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren for generations to come.

Before I speak specifically to the bill, I will talk about where we are in terms of our economic situation. We are number one in the G8 in terms of economic performance.

An hon. member: Thanks to this government.

Mr. Mark Adler: The member is right. It is thanks to this government.

We have recovered all of the jobs that we lost during the recession. Since July 2009, we have created 765,000 net new jobs. The World Economic Forum says we have the strongest financial and banking system of any country around the world. *Forbes* magazine says we are the best place to do business.

A few months ago, Governor Branstad of Iowa said on *Meet the Press*, “The Canadian government has reduced their corporate income tax to 15%. I've had companies that I've called on in Chicago to come to Iowa say, 'We like Iowa, but if they don't change the federal corporate income tax, we're probably going to go to Canada'”.

It is all about the profits, and with profits come jobs. Moody's has given us a AAA credit rating again, as has Fitch.

● (1200)

Our strong economy, the jobs we have recovered and being number one in the G8 are not good enough. We are not standing still with that. I will be speaking to Bill C-38, the budget implementation bill, tomorrow.

Everything we do on this side of the House, every legislative initiative, has a purpose. Everything is tied together. It is part of our comprehensive plan. Again, it is for Canada's future. We are investing in Canada's future, in our people, not in the next election.

With respect to our retirement system, we have identified that 60% of Canadians will not have a sufficient amount of money to retire. That is unacceptable to the government. That is why we have put forward Bill C-25, the pooled registered pension plans act. Under this plan, we will add a fourth pillar to the retirement income system that we have.

Let us take a look at our retirement income system as it stands today. We have the OAS and the GIS. We increased the GIS in last year's budget by 25%, the largest increase in the history of the GIS, and it was opposed not once, but twice by the opposition. In fact, the first time the opposition forced an election because it was opposed to the initiatives we had in our budget, particularly those to create jobs and to help seniors.

The second pillar is the CPP and the QPP. Both are actuarially sound, yet we still took time to improve the CPP under its mandatory five-year review.

The third pillar is the RPP and the RRSP. The RRSP is an interesting vehicle. That vehicle is open to all Canadians; however, we find that \$600 billion is underfunded in the RRSP. This indicates that people are not saving enough for retirement. That is a problem.

What else have we done to help seniors in this country? We have given them, on average, \$2.3 billion in tax relief. We have given our seniors pension income splitting. We have doubled the maximum amount of income eligible for pension income credit. We have established the TFSA.

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The PRPP is needed in our country. I will close with a personal anecdote. My father was an immigrant to the country and he worked hard. I remember when I was a young fellow looking through the window late at night, waiting for my father to come home. He would pull up in the car, which had a very distinctive sound. I remember running to the window and watching him get out of the car. He was so tired he could barely drag himself out of the car and get into the house.

My father did not have a retirement income mechanism in place at the time. My father has since passed away. My father owned a shoe store and had one employee. It was a small business. This would have been so beneficial for him and his family, and for the employee and her family.

This is the kind of country we are trying to create in Canada, where our seniors have a proper amount of income so that they can retire in dignity and live a full life of quality.

• (1205)

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, just to extend the analogy in regard to *A Few Good Men*, it might be remembered by this House that the Jack Nicholson character was found guilty of supporting heinous and violent crimes.

I did want to ask a question in regard to the fact that only about 30% of Canadians have the fiscal ability to put savings into RRSPs. Unfortunately, over a 40- to 45-year period, the RRSP is reduced significantly. About 40% of the money that goes in goes to pay fees to the financial institution.

I wonder if the member opposite would like to circle that square.

Mr. Mark Adler: Mr. Speaker, I do not know if it is geometrically possible to circle a square.

The hon. member raises a rather interesting question because she seems to be offering more of an answer. She said that 30% of people cannot invest in an RRSP, which is all the more reason that we need a PRPP.

The hon. members on the other side are proposing an increase to the CPP. They do not understand two things. One, we need to have the agreement of two-thirds of the provinces representing two-thirds of the population to make any changes to the CPP mechanism. Two, CPP comes out of people's paycheques. This would be just another tax on people, which would be a job killer, which the NDP would probably support in any event.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my distinguished colleague is talking about a plan that will guarantee pensions, but what is the point of a pension plan when we do not know how much money it will generate? That is a major problem.

People know exactly how much they will have to pay every month, but the amount they will get out of the plan after 30 or 40 years remains a complete mystery since the employer will choose who administers the plan and the level of risk of the investment. Employees may have to invest in a high-risk plan without having any say in the matter.

Is that what the government calls planning for retirement? Is that what the government calls planning a pension income?

[English]

Mr. Mark Adler: Mr. Speaker, it is pure speculation on the part of the hon. member to say that. He clearly does not know the facts. He has not read the legislation.

There is a strict regime in place. That is why they are called pooled registered pension plans. They will be pooled. Administrative costs will be kept down. This is what Canada needs. This is what our seniors need to live a life of quality and dignity.

We owe our seniors so much in this country. This government recognizes that. This government is prepared to do something about it, unlike those people on the other side.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonaville—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a supporter of this particular initiative for all the reasons that were outlined throughout this debate, some of it is pretty good. The idea of pooling pensions and the risk taken is mitigated as a result of this, no problem.

However, would the hon. member say that this is the be-all and end-all? Is there not a second part to this that the government could do, such as a supplementary CPP or something else? Is this really it for the Conservatives' economic action plan when it comes to pensions?

Mr. Mark Adler: Mr. Speaker, once again, we are debating Bill C-25, the pooled registered pension plans act. Any further initiatives that would be forthcoming from this government would be total speculation and conjecture at this point, and really, nobody can answer that.

• (1210)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to some key measures in Bill C-25, an act that would implement the federal framework for pooled registered pension plans, or PRPPs.

This Conservative government stands with hard-working Canadians who are counting on their pension plan for a stable retirement. As part of this commitment, we continue to take the steps necessary to ensure that Canada's pension framework remains strong. In doing so, we are building on all that has been accomplished so far.

I will offer a few examples of what we have already achieved.

In 2009, we announced an improved regulatory framework to better protect members of federally-regulated pension plans. This included reducing funding volatility for defined benefit plans, making it easier for participants to negotiate changes to their pension arrangements. We ensured that pension plans were fully funded when they were terminated and we modernized the investment rules.

At the same time, the federal government, along with the provinces, agreed to a number of improvements to the Canada pension plan that would modernize the plan and would better reflect the way Canadians live, work and retire.

Government Orders

The hon. members on the other side should know that pensions share joint jurisdiction with the provinces. Only by continuing to work with the provinces will we make the system better. A stronger national economy must include a stronger personal retirement system built with the provinces. In fact, that is exactly what led to the development of the PRPP.

In December 2009, our government held a meeting with provincial and territorial finance ministers to discuss the retirement income system and, in going forward, how to address the issues of retirement income adequacy for all seniors.

In June 2010, federal, provincial and territorial governments agreed to develop options to improve Canada's retirement income system. One of those options was to expand the CPP. Many of the provinces raised strong objections to the idea of expanding the CPP as this would require increased contributions from employees, employers and the self-employed.

Canada's economic recovery is still fragile, and with the debt crisis in Europe still unresolved, now is simply not the time to impose a payroll tax on small and medium-sized businesses. As a former small business owner, I understand that point very well.

To be clear, it is not only our government that feels this way. According to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business:

For every one percentage point increase in CPP premiums beyond the current 9.9 per cent rate, it would cost 220,000 person-years of employment and force wages down roughly 2.5 per cent in the long run...

Simply put, an expanded CPP would hurt both small and medium-sized business owners and working Canadians. This government wants to create jobs, not destroy them.

Since expanding CPP was not feasible, priority was given to the PRPP framework. That is why at the 2010 meeting of finance ministers there was unanimous agreement on the decision to pursue a framework for pooled registered pension plans.

The PRPP will mark a significant step forward in advancing our retirement income agenda by improving the range of retirement savings options available to Canadians. They will make well-regulated, low cost private sector pension plans accessible to millions of Canadians who, up to now, have not had access to such plans. In fact, many employees of small and medium-sized businesses and self-employed workers will now have access to a private pension plan for the first time.

For many years, I operated a private dental practice in Kitchener and employed up to five people. It would have been impossible for me to enrol in a pension plan on behalf of my employees. However, I would have liked nothing better than to access a pooled program in which, by putting our resources together with a number of employers, we could have accessed a pooled registered pension plan.

We can think of other businesses. My colleague mentioned a shoe store. I can think of small engine repair shops, farm implement dealers and hairdressers. We can go on with the number of small and medium-sized employers that would benefit from a measure like we have proposed. When they look for employees, they compete on the employment market and the ability to offer a good pension plan to an employee, in addition to an attractive salary and benefit plan, would

go a long way in competing for the best and brightest people who could help to move their companies ahead.

● (1215)

This is an important part of gaining access to pension options and this access to pension options is a key improvement to Canada's retirement income system.

PRPPs will also complement and support the Government of Canada's overarching objective of creating and sustaining jobs, leveraging business investment, securing our economic recovery and encouraging sustainable private sector driven growth, an objective I wish members opposite would understand and support.

Quite simply, the PRPP framework is the most effective and targeted way to address the prime areas for improvement identified by provincial and federal governments in our recent review of the retirement income system, modest and middle-income individuals who do not have access to employer sponsored pension plans.

PRPPs would address this gap in the retirement system by providing a new, accessible, straightforward and administratively low-cost retirement option for employers to offer their employees. It would also allow individuals who currently may not participate in a pension plan, such as those self-employed and employees of companies that do not offer a pension plan, to make use of this new option. It would enable more people to benefit from the lower investment management costs that would result from membership in a large pooled pension plan, allowing for the portability of benefits that would facilitate an easy transfer between plans and ensure that funds would be invested in the best interests of plan members.

These are all important areas where our retirement income system can and should be improved. That is why federal, provincial and territorial governments are working to implement PRPPs as soon as possible, and we are doing it collaboratively. Once again, I remind hon. members that this pooled retirement pension plan approach was agreed to as the best by all of Canada's finance ministers, provincial and territorial. These plans will help Canadians, including the self-employed, to meet their retirement objectives by providing access to a new, low cost accessible pension option.

The bill before us today, the PRPP act, represents the federal portion of the PRPP framework and is a major step forward in implementing pooled registered pension plans.

In addition, the tax rules for pooled registered pension plans have been developed by the Government of Canada and were released in draft form for comment in December of 2011. Comments received during that consultation period, which ended in February, are being reviewed currently. The tax rules for PRPPs will apply to both federally and provincially regulated PRPPs and will be implemented in 2012. By working in concert with the provinces, we can accomplish so much more by working together.

I would urge all the provinces to take the advice of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business and the Canadian Life and Health Insurance Association Inc. when they collectively said, “The longer governments take to establish a system of PRPPs, the less time those employees will have to use this vehicle to save for their retirement”.

It is clear that Canadians want their governments to act on their priorities and deliver results on a timely basis, and the PRPP should be no different.

Many people in my riding work for small and medium-sized businesses and who are self-employed. As a former small business owner myself, I know how greatly they would benefit from the advantages presented by pooled registered pension plans.

It is for this reason that I urge, not only the Government of Ontario, but all provincial governments, to put in place their respective legislation as soon as possible so that all Canadians can start saving for their retirement. Once provinces implement their own legislation, PRPPs will be a key element of the third pillar of Canada's retirement income system. PRPPs will complement and operate alongside registered retirement savings plans and employer sponsored registered pension plans.

With all the measures we have put in place and with Bill C-25 bringing the federal PRPP framework into force, Canadians can be confident about the long-term viability of their retirement system. We are listening, and will continue to listen, to the views on how we can strengthen the security of pension plan benefits and ensure that their framework is balanced and appropriate for the long term.

Canada's retirement income system is recognized around the world by such experts as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the OECD, as a model that succeeds in reducing poverty among Canadian seniors and in providing high levels of replacement income to retired workers.

• (1220)

With Bill C-25, we are making it better by working toward a permanent, long-term solution to encourage greater pension coverage among Canadians. At the same time, we will continue to ensure our retirement income remains one of the strongest in the world.

I would encourage all members of the House to support this important bill.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am somewhat surprised that government MPs are portraying themselves as pension plan champions when this very government refused to do a thing to protect plans like Nortel's and AbitibiBowater's.

This is the same government that decided to raise the retirement age from 65 to 67 when there was really no financial need to do so. This same government is proposing a pension plan that is supposed to be the greatest thing ever, but it is refusing to include any provisions to control administrative fees, payout amounts and, most importantly, the bankers' ability to pay themselves bonuses out of the fund's returns.

Government Orders

Is it not bizarre that whenever there are corporate welfare bums to support, the Conservatives are always ready to give them whatever they want? They are privatizing profits, but ordinary Canadians are the ones who will have to cope with losses.

[*English*]

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, I find it strange that people across the aisle would say that changes to the OAS system are not necessary. I have not spoken to one person in the past number of months, since we have talked about implementing this, who has not agreed that some changes are necessary. There has been a wide variation in terms of what the proposed solutions would be.

In the 1970s there were seven workers contributing to CPP for every retired worker. Currently that number is down to roughly four workers for every retired worker. In about 20 years that number will be reduced to two workers for every retired person.

Canadians understand. If the numbers are going from seven to one, now four to one and projected to be down to two to one, it was absolutely crucial that we had the courage to make these changes so my children, my grandchildren and great-grandchildren would have a plan in place that would see them have a sustainable retirement system, the Canada pension plan.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I disagree with the member's statement on the crisis situation that he has tried to portray to Canadians in regard to the OAS program. As a result, the government is going to increase the eligibility age from 65 to 67, something with which the Liberal Party totally disagrees. It is not necessary and the evidence is clear to demonstrate that.

The Liberal Party supports the principle of a pooled pension plan. For this plan to be as effective as it could be, a number of things should have happened. Amendments should have been accepted that would have modified the program.

There is one other component that is really important, and that is the participation of provincial governments in the plan and how they would be engaged in promoting it and bringing in legislation to support it.

Could the member provide an update as to what other provincial jurisdictions are doing to support or complement this program that the government is bringing in through this legislation?

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague may have misunderstood the intent of the OAS changes. He said that we see a crisis. Nobody on this side of the House has said there is a crisis.

The system we are putting in place would be implemented starting in 2023. I do not see a crisis in looking that far ahead. We are going to avoid a crisis that would see the country thrown into a situation where there would be no long-term, sustainable Canada pension plan. By planning ahead to 2023 to begin implementation of the plan, to have it fully implemented by 2029, is a practical, measured approach that would ensure future sustainability.

My colleague mentioned provincial co-operation. I did mention in my speech that all provincial and territorial finance ministers agreed that this was the way to move ahead.

Government Orders

• (1225)

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to rise today and speak on Bill C-25, an act relating to pooled registered pension plans. In truth, it is legislation from the Conservative government that is really a savings scheme, not a pension plan. Like the omnibus Trojan Horse budget bill, it reminds Canadians of the mess the Conservatives have created for Canada and for our pensioners.

This hole that Canadians find themselves in becomes unacceptable, especially when we see the shovels in the hands of the Conservative government digging the hole.

Let us separate fact from fiction in the government's spin on being good managers of the economy. In fact, the Conservatives' us-them, winners and losers ideology has exposed them as very bad managers of the economy.

Fact number one is that 1.6 million seniors live in poverty.

Fact number two is that 12 million Canadians lack a workplace pension plan.

Fact number three is that most Canadian workers have no RRSPs, but the proposed legislation advises that they invest despite disastrous investment returns.

Fact number four is that last year, only 31% of eligible Canadians contributed to RRSPs. How little money Canadians really have for their RRSPs is evident in the fact that unused RRSP room now exceeds \$500 billion.

Fact number five is that the Conservatives tolerate overall poverty numbers of around 10%, one in every ten Canadians. They write off three million Canadians from contributing to productivity or paying taxes. The Ontario food bank estimates that the bill to Canada that the Conservative government writes off is costing our country close to \$90 billion.

Facing all these facts, what do the Conservatives do? They bring forward legislation with limited benefits for the self-employed and for those with small and medium-sized businesses. They stick with our country's miserly pension plan rather than bringing it up to the level of other countries that more fairly and generously look after their seniors.

The proposed legislation would do nothing to fix our pension crisis. There is too little money on the revenue side for our country precisely because of the spending and the deep hole that the Conservative government has dug with its ideology-driven priorities.

There is no money for Canadian seniors and their pensions because the Conservative government ignores a declining crime rate and goes on a multi-billion dollar spending spree on crime that the provinces say they do not want and cannot afford.

There is no money for seniors, but there is money for F-35 fighter jets. There is money for a minister's \$16 glass of orange juice and money to spend on search and rescue personnel to ferry the Minister of National Defence on his own errands.

The Prime Minister has said that the Canada pension plan is adequately self-financing, but "for those elements of the system that

are not funded, we will make the changes necessary to ensure sustainability."

What changes does the government propose? It plans to cut old age security, denying it to seniors who are 65 and 66. This program provides \$526.85 a month to seniors below the income cut-off.

New Democrats recognize the demographics in our country showing that the number of Canadians older than 65 will double in the next 20 years. We also recognize that the pension plan is financially sustainable in its various demands, up and down, over the next 20 years.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer has backed us up with strong evidence, but what is increasingly having Canadians lose confidence in the government is its failure to manage the economy and deal with the inequality that exists in our communities.

There is less money for seniors because of ridiculous spending decisions by the Conservative government. It reduced corporate taxes and had ministers for the G8 spending like drunken sailors.

We on this side of the House have no problem with an honest dialogue with Canadians about belt-tightening, about hard choices that have to be made regarding our pensions and pensioners. However, we will not frame these choices as the Prime Minister does, ignoring the facts and making our seniors pay.

Let us be clear: our seniors and future pensioners need protection and real help. Pool registered pension plans fail to protect retirement security because they encourage families to gamble even more of their retirement savings on failing stock markets. Anyone who has watched the RRSP plummet over the past years knows how risky savings tied to the stock market are.

• (1230)

How out of touch can the Conservative government be to sell such a scheme to Canadians?

The bill is designed to appeal to the self-employed and workers at small and medium-sized firms, companies that often lack the means by which to administer a private sector plan.

The plan created would be a defined contribution plan. Employees would contribute a portion of their salary into the retirement account, where it could be invested in stocks, bonds, mutual funds, et cetera. Some companies would make a matching contribution, up to a certain percentage. The account would grow through contributions and investment earnings until retirement.

In such a direct contribution plan, there are no guarantees about how much of a person's money will be left when he or she retires. The risks are borne entirely by the individual. In these types of plans, the amount of money available at retirement depends upon the outcome of the investments, which cannot be relied upon. Defined contribution plans lack the security of defined benefit pension plans like the CPP and the QPP, which pay a guaranteed set amount upon retirement.

There is also the profit margin taken from these plans by the regulated financial institution, such as banks, insurance companies and trust funds. Bill C-25 also fails to place a cap on administration fees or costs and merely assumes lower costs will emerge through competition in the marketplace, and unlike the CPP and the QPP, the pooled pension plan would not be indexed to inflation.

On the other hand, the NDP has put forward a series of retirement income security proposals that would bring genuine security to our pensioners.

We want to double the guaranteed CPP-QPP benefits, to a maximum of \$1,920 each month. Growing the CPP and QPP is the best and lowest-cost pension reform option we have.

We have committed to work with the provinces to build the flexibility of individuals and their employers to make voluntary contributions to individual public pension accounts. We would amend federal bankruptcy legislation to move pensioners and long-term disability recipients to the front of the line of creditors when their employers enter court protection or declare bankruptcy.

New Democrats would increase the annual guaranteed income supplement to a sufficient level, in the first budget, to lift every senior in Canada out of poverty immediately.

These are real reforms. This is the real help for seniors barely getting by or workers forced to delay a hard-earned retirement.

Let me quote the commentary of the Canadian Labour Congress on this bad bill.

[Translation]

The proposed PRPPs [pooled registered pension plans] do not guarantee low management fees that would prevent large management fees from eating up such a large portion of your savings. In fact, there is only a promise that the design of PRPP will result in large pools of capital that might lower fees, with no guaranteed or legislated results. Nothing in the PRPP proposal sets management expenses at levels equal to or lower than those of the CPP. As a result, CPP is still a better deal than PRPP; not only because of its guaranteed indexed retirement income, but because of its much lower management fees.

[English]

The government is already engaged in damage control on trying to increase the retirement age from 65 to 67. It is trying to reassure seniors that it would not affect those now retired or soon to be retired. What the government should be afraid of is the large number of Canadians aged 50 to 65, the people who vote in this country, who are seeing freedom 55, and now freedom 65, slip away.

Our seniors have worked hard and managed their budgets, only to see the government dig this very deep hole by giving up revenue it would have had from corporations and spending it on its priorities that are now not the priorities of many Canadians.

This will be the fight of their lives. New Democrats will join this fight. We need to value our seniors, not beat up on them.

• (1235)

[Translation]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, according to Statistics Canada, more than 14% of senior women who live alone are living in poverty. The NDP supports enhancing the Canada pension plan to address these instances of poverty.

Government Orders

However, with respect to the pooled registered pension plan scheme, benefits will depend on investments and the stock markets. This scheme will do nothing to address poverty among the elderly, especially senior women.

Could my colleague comment on that?

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her very good question. She is quite right.

The Conservative government's plan will force Canadians to invest their money in the markets. Everyone knows what happens when the market drops: pension plans shrink and Canadians no longer have the money to retire.

This is the NDP's plan: we want to increase the CPP and the QPP to lift the poorest people out of poverty. The members on this side of the House are aware that only the poorest seniors receive old age security. The government's plan will make the poorest even poorer. The poorest of the poor, especially women, will be affected, not the rich.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over the years I have heard a great deal about the importance of CPP, OAS and GIS through the Liberal critic for seniors and how we need to invest in, enhance and improve these programs. I share in the passion for improving and moving forward with those programs, so I appreciate the comments of the member from the New Democratic Party on that particular point.

Where I disagree, and where I would ask the member to respond, is with respect to this: why would the NDP oppose outright the opportunity for some individuals to benefit from this pooled registered fund?

My understanding is that even the New Democratic Party in Manitoba was supportive of this fund being brought in. What I do not quite understand is why the federal New Democratic Party would vote against allowing individuals to benefit. It is a small tool, but it will derive some—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. The hon. member for Nickel Belt.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Mr. Speaker, the reason we do not support this pooled pension plan is that there are no benefits to it.

When people invest their money in the stock market—which is what the government wants, seniors investing in the stock market—and the stock market falls, the pension plan falls. Therefore, the seniors who lose their money in the stock market would not have a retirement pension plan.

Government Orders

If today's seniors want to invest and have the extra money, albeit there are people in this country who do not have extra money to invest in RRSPs, they can do that now. What we would like to do is increase the CPP and the QPP to include everyone in Canada who could contribute to and collect from the CPP and the QPP.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): There are about 30 seconds left for a brief question.

The hon. member for Hochelaga.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to know whether my colleague agrees that the government is trying to distract Canadians by passing a bill with the words "pension plan" in its title to suggest that it is improving the pension system when really the government is more or less creating a pooled RRSP?

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her question. I would simply say in response that the Conservative government will stop at nothing to violate Canadians' rights.

• (1240)

[English]

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to add my voice in support of today's debate on retirement income security.

Before I commence my remarks, I will correct something that I believe the member opposite just said, which is that old age security is only available to the poorest seniors. OAS is universally accessible to our seniors. If he is getting mixed up between OAS and GIS, the guaranteed income supplement, it is true that our poorest seniors can apply for that supplemental income through GIS. However, OAS is universally acceptable.

As all members are well aware, seniors have led the way in making Canada the dynamic and successful nation that it is today. Through their sacrifices, succeeding generations have had the opportunity to prosper. There is at times the perception that our senior population may be forgotten in the rush of modern life but the reality is that when it comes to our government, nothing could be further from the truth.

Since 2006, we have taken important steps to improve government support for seniors. I know I have participated in round tables on seniors issues in my riding and met with numerous seniors groups to hear their concerns first-hand, as I am sure so many of my colleagues have as well.

We believe today's legislation would build on our success by improving the range of retirement savings options available to Canadians. The pooled registered pension plan, or PRPP, would make well-regulated, low cost, private sector pension plans accessible to millions of Canadians who have, up until now, not had access to such plans. In fact, many employees of small and medium-sized businesses and self-employed workers would now have access to a private pension plan for the very first time. This would be a key improvement to Canada's retirement income system.

PRPPs would also complement and support the Government of Canada's overarching objective of creating and sustaining jobs, leveraging business investments, securing our economy recovery and encouraging sustainable, private sector driven growth.

Some of the retirement income system proposals we heard in our consultations would have significantly raised costs for employers and employees. They would have been unacceptable in the midst of a very tentative economic recovery.

Promoting the retirement income security of Canadians is an important goal of the Government of Canada. We will continue to ensure that our policies, programs and services meet the evolving needs of Canada's senior population.

I am the fifth of six children in my family. Quite typically for modern Canadians, my father lived to the age of 89 and my mother to the age of 93. My father was a self-employed electrician and electrical contractor. Except for four years in her later life, my mother stayed at home to raise six children.

At the beginning of my father's working life, Canada did not even have a Canada pension plan. Our country has come a long way in the intervening decades. However, innovation is required and should be welcome.

The Canadian Chamber of Commerce commented in November 2011 that this legislation had the potential to benefit the estimated 60% of Canadians who have either no or insufficient retirement savings. This legislation ushers in excellent opportunities for employers and employees to work together and the self-employed to benefit in a way that can create a more secure future in one's senior years. This would have helped lifelong contributors to the Canadian economy, like my father and his family.

Through these legislative and policy efforts, we recognize the contributions seniors have made and continue to make to our nation. They deserve pension security and we are ensuring that the retirement income system and the tax system support those goals.

We are doing so in a number of ways. For example, the CPP provides a secure indexed lifelong retirement benefit. To ensure that the CPP remains on solid footing, it is regularly reviewed by federal, provincial and territorial governments that have successfully acted as joint stewards of the plan since its inception.

As a result, the chief actuary indicated in his most recent report on the CPP that the plan was sustainable, at least for the next 75 years, at current contribution rates and benefits.

Canada's retirement system includes tax assisted private savings opportunities to help and encourage Canadians to accumulate additional savings for retirement. This includes registered pension plans, RPPs, and registered retirement savings plans, RRSPs.

• (1245)

RPPs are sponsored by employers on a voluntary basis and can be either defined contribution or defined benefit with employers and often employees responsible for making contributions.

RRSPs are voluntary individual defined contribution savings plans. Employers may provide a group RRSP for employees and may remit a share of contributions on behalf of their employees.

Contributions to RPPs and RRSPs are deductible from income for tax purposes and investment income earned in these plans is not subject to income tax. Pension payments and withdrawals are included in income and taxed at regular rates.

In all, the cost of tax assistance provided on retirement savings is currently estimated at approximately \$25 billion per year in forgone revenue for the federal government and about one-half that amount in forgone provincial revenue.

However, that is not the only way the government helps Canadians ensure that they have more money available when they retire. I will quickly elaborate on some other measures our government has introduced to assist seniors and pensioners which, together, are providing roughly \$2.5 billion in additional annual targeted tax relief to seniors and pensioners.

Since 2006, our government has increased the age credit amount by \$1,000 on two occasions, doubled the maximum amount of income eligible for the pension income credit to \$2,000, introduced pension income splitting, and increased the age limit for maturing pensions and RRSPs to 71 from 69 years of age.

In 2012, a single senior can earn \$19,542 and a senior couple \$39,084 before paying federal income tax. Due to measures taken since 2006, about 380,000 seniors will be removed from the tax rolls in 2012.

In addition, in budget 2008, our government introduced the tax free savings account, TFSAs. The TFSA is a general purpose savings vehicle that helps all adult Canadians, including seniors, to meet their ongoing savings needs on a tax preferred basis, including those who are over age 71 and are required to begin drawing down their registered retirement savings.

Of note, the income earned within a TFSA and withdrawals from the account are not subject to income tax and do not affect eligibility for federal income tested benefits or credits, such as old age security, the guaranteed income supplement or the goods and services tax credit. This feature improves savings incentives for low and modest income Canadians who would expect to receive GIS benefits in retirement. In its first five years, it is estimated that over three-quarters of the benefits of saving in a TFSA will go to individuals in the two lowest tax brackets.

Last year, we introduced measures strengthening the GIS, which is a benefit for low income seniors. Budget 2011 included a new GIS top-up benefit targeted to the most vulnerable seniors.

On top of all these efforts, our government provided an additional \$10 million over two years to enhance the new horizons for seniors program, funding that will enable more seniors to participate in social activities, pursue an active life and contribute to their community. The program provided funding for projects that will increase awareness of elder abuse and promote volunteering, mentoring and improved social participation of seniors. We are continuing to help seniors.

I have been approached by constituents on this legislation who had two primary concerns: whether the PRPP was portable and whether a worker who does not opt into such a plan initially can opt in later. The answer to the first concern is, yes, the plan is portable.

Government Orders

We urge all provincial governments to move quickly with their mirroring legislation. The answer to the second concern is yes. A worker who does not opt in initially can opt in later.

In fact, Dan Kelly, vice-president of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, said, in November 2011 in media interviews, that the pooled plans are desperately needed because presently only about 15% of small and medium-sized businesses his company represents offer some form of retirement savings plan for their employees. He further stated, "This can't come soon enough from our perspective".

In conclusion, I will reassure seniors that in carrying out our plan to restore budget balance, this government will not raise taxes. There are employers and employees across the country in all sectors who are anxiously looking forward to seeing this fundamental change in Canada's pension landscape becoming available. I would, therefore, encourage all members of this House to support this very important legislation.

● (1250)

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the opposition members have mis-characterized PRPPs as somehow being the silver bullet cure-all for retirement, when it is simply another tool or plugs another gap in the retirement savings system for Canadians.

Would the member care to comment on how necessary that particular tool is, how it does fit a portion of the Canadian public who are without pensions currently, and what the status might be with regard to the fact that Canada pension plan discussions are still ongoing with the provinces?

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay: Mr. Speaker, the point here is that we are trying to broaden the scope of retirement savings options for Canadians. We have some 60% of Canadians who do not have pensions through employment. This is an opportunity for employers and employees to work together to create an option for retirement and a benefit for their senior years, which they do not have now. It is one of several options we have introduced and strengthened.

We continue to stand up for seniors and those working Canadians who need this kind of assistance.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I note that, in her statement, my distinguished colleague left out something very important.

Every independent commentator has essentially said that this is not the solution and that the old age security program and the guaranteed income supplement are financially viable.

When I say independent commentators I am not talking about those who want to manage the contributors' money, but truly independent experts: the Superintendent of Financial Services, the Parliamentary Budget Officer and Canada's actuaries.

Government Orders

I am not asking the Conservatives to consult their friends, the corporate welfare bums. I am asking them instead to consult the people who are not financially dependent on their friends. All these experts are saying that there is no problem with old age security and the guaranteed income supplement.

What do the Conservatives make of the fact that these people are telling them that they are entirely wrong?

[English]

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay: Mr. Speaker, the fact is that we have been applauded for this initiative, not just by industry and employers but by employees and the groups representing them. All the provinces are on board with the idea of providing small and medium businesses with such a plan. We are being lauded by so many.

I have an example. Ingrid Laederach Steven, owner of a store in Toronto, told reporters she has only two employees. She said, "...if I feel it's something that will benefit them, absolutely I would" offer this PRPP to them.

The NDP is fond of saying they are standing up for workers. Well, 60% of workers do not have a pension plan. A majority of workers in Canada are not part of a union that has bargained for pension plans. We need to bring in something that fits the reality of working life for most Canadians.

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it really struck me, as I was talking to one of my constituents last weekend, how grateful my constituents are for this particular pooled pension plan simply because, as my colleague said, if one did not have a pension, there was nothing feasible.

I would like my colleague to outline very succinctly how this pension plan would work and how it would benefit the people who do not have one.

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay: Mr. Speaker, as someone who was self-employed throughout most of my career before becoming a member of Parliament, and in small to medium-sized law firms in my case, I know this is something that would be most welcome. We did not have a vehicle to offer this sort of retirement security to our employees.

I would urge the provinces to get on with their mirroring legislation. The provincial and territorial governments are on side with this. They see the benefit of it. This is something that would benefit us all and benefit the economy.

• (1255)

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to really discuss the issues raised by Bill C-25. This bill should have been an opportunity to improve pension plans in Canada, something that would have made Canadians wealthier. Unfortunately, with this system, the only ones who will benefit will be the corporate welfare bums.

It is important to understand how this system is funded. Employees do not get to decide who administers their retirement savings; the employer decides. Employees are not the ones who

decide the level of investment risk they will assume or where their money will go. Once again, it is the employer who decides.

Ironically, the employer that decides the level of risk and chooses the administrator is in a conflict of interest with regard to that administrator. What happens when the employer does business with the same financial institutions with which it negotiates its line of credit, its insurance and all the other financial products a business might need? It is a blatant conflict of interest.

On top of that, in this bill the government is saying that employers, the business owners, are not responsible for their actions under the law. If they choose the worst administrator or the highest level of risk, this legislation exonerates them. Legal exoneration is included in Bill C-25. This is unbelievable. People are either strongly for or strongly against these corporate welfare bums. The Conservatives strongly support them, and Bill C-25 is proof of that.

The government has decided that no matter what the returns on the investments—be they negative or positive—the financial institution will be the first to benefit. Imagine that. The institution will charge administrative fees regardless of the returns. Then it will collect its profit margin because it is a private company. Then, depending on the level of risk, it will collect bonuses. Inflation is also a factor. If the return is 3% and inflation is 2%, then the net return is 1%. Unfortunately, people will not even get that 1% because they are the very last in line after administrative fees, bonuses and rates of return. Basically, this means that no matter what the situation, the administrators will be the ones making money. Whether the market is up or down, they will make money.

Paradoxically, if the deductions are too high, the people investing in the pooled registered pension plans proposed in Bill C-25 will experience consistently negative returns. A person who invests \$600 a year for 30 years can expect to withdraw at least \$18,000, right? Not so. With this wonderful plan, he might have much less than that. He is not even guaranteed to get back the money he put in. This is not a pension plan or even a lottery. It is outright theft.

The Conservatives have decided to put the financial future of retirees in the hands of people whose primary interest is to earn the maximum amount of money, not to generate a return or guarantee a pension, but to earn money now, right away.

The icing on the cake is that the Conservatives say in the bill that administrators are prohibited from using gifts to encourage employers to allow them to manage the pension fund. However, this type of deal is allowed according to the regulations. Not only is there already a clear conflict of interest, but this also legalizes bribes. Unbelievable. Then they claim that it is for the good of the employees.

We have proposed that, at least, the right to charge administrative fees should be dependent on the return.

• (1300)

If pension funds are properly managed, the administrator has the right to charge a fee, but if they are poorly managed, the administrator should not be paid. The administrators must take on part of the risk, which would motivate them a bit to always aim for big returns. But no, they do not take on any risk. The only risk is taken on by the employees, who do not even have the right to choose their administrator and level of risk. That is outright abuse. This is where Bill C-25 systematically goes after workers.

This is not a pension plan, but an extremely toxic financial product just like the junk bonds we saw in the 1970s and 1980s, and the commercial papers we saw in 2008. That is how toxic this is. People absolutely must not invest in this. I would like to take this opportunity to tell people that the last thing they should do is choose to participate in such a plan. They should buy a house. We hear a lot about pension plans, but at the same time, we have never seen such a high number of Canadians who own their homes.

Quite often, Canadians' main investment is their home, and that is smart. However, the Conservatives are not taking that into account. They are saying that 60% of people do not have a pension plan. That is not true. Canadians are investing in their pension by investing in their homes. A house is a capital asset that appreciates in value rather than depreciating like the plan the government is proposing.

What can we say about a regime, a political party, a government that systematically stands up for the rich? The government is ignoring the needs of all Canadians to help only 1% of the population, the wealthiest members of our society. Since the Conservatives have come to office, the gap between the rich and the poor has been widening. The poor have become poorer, as has a large part of Canada's middle class—in short, the vast majority of Canadians. Meanwhile, the Conservatives' friends, the corporate welfare bums, have grown even richer. And that does not bother the Conservatives at all. Clearly, they are even in favour of it.

This type of government regime, which robs the vast majority of people to favour its friends, is called a kleptocracy. That is exactly what we are dealing with here: people who work only for the wealthiest members of our society in the hopes that perhaps, one day, these extremely rich people will invest their wealth and use it to buy goods, which will drive the economy. However, what we have been seeing for the past 10 years is that these people are not investing in Canada. They are taking the money that they get in Canada and investing it abroad, in financial products and corporate acquisitions. That is not creating any jobs at all. It is even causing us to lose jobs.

The Conservatives could have taken action to prevent situations like the ones that occurred at Nortel and AbitibiBowater from happening again, but they did not. Their friends, the corporate welfare bums, did not want them to. They did not want regulations to be imposed, and regulations are still not present in Bill C-25. The Conservatives are not regulating this bill.

They say that the market will determine how to proceed. But right now, the market is not favourable to workers in this country. It only works for the people opposite in this kleptocracy, people who only work for the rich. They have once again decided to systematically favour the rich. This pooled registered pension plan is a highly toxic

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financial product. I urge all Canadians not to invest a single penny in it, because it is a guaranteed loss. The only people who are going to make money from those plans are the ones administering them.

• (1305)

[English]

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as one of the people who the member across the way considers corporate welfare bums before I got into politics, I take great offence. This warped view of the NDP members that employers, business owners, entrepreneurs, corporations and companies in this great land of ours are somehow the enemy of this country and of workers could not be further from the truth. This is more warped than I have ever heard anybody speak of before. They are the people who hire people, who take the risks and create the wealth.

However, my question for the member is this. How does he square this when the people he represents, who are unionized labour, take their pension money and invest it in these corporations of corporate welfare bums for a return on their investment?

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Giguère: Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. Corporate welfare bums are entrepreneurs who never take a financial risk, even in investment. They always manage to make us pay for them. If there is money to be made, they are going to make it, and if there is a risk or a financial loss to assume, the community of Canadians is going to assume it.

If you were that type of entrepreneur, it is really sad, but you are one of the corporate welfare bums. But if you were not and you were honest, assuming the risks and the danger of a financial operation, I congratulate you.

In terms of investments, what risks do administrators run? None. Administrators pay themselves first, even when there is a deficit and a performance loss. They make the loss worse.

Where is the notion of risks for entrepreneurs? You are saying that private business is a good thing, but in this case, it is not private business. The fact of the matter is that people leave with the money and we are left with the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I will remind the hon. member that his comments are to be made through the Chair.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to repeat a question that I asked a little while ago. Why it is that the New Democratic Party has chosen to oppose this bill?

We in the Liberal Party have recognized that there are flaws in the bill. There are things that could have been done that would have ensured that the consumer would have been able to derive a larger return. We have made suggestions to that effect.

However, with respect to the principle of being able to provide another alternative to a consumer, someone who is looking at retirement, and allowing that to move forward, it would seem to me that the NDP are on an island by themselves. There are even provincial New Democrats who support this. It seems to be just the federal New Democrats who do not support the opportunity this bill would enable.

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I can assure the House that the member is no more of an advocate for OAS than I. I do not quite understand why the NDP members would oppose this as a tool that could be used—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. The hon. member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Giguère: Mr. Speaker, what astonishes me is the Liberal Party's ability to often, always, eternally try to have their cake and eat it, too. But they always discover that they have eaten the cake. They are dismayed to find out that they have eaten the cake.

The problem with this financial product is that the Liberals do not dare acknowledge that it is extremely toxic. We must not invest money in something that does not guarantee a minimum return. It is a pension plan, not a financial risk.

Now, the Liberal Party representative would really like us to ignore this simple reality: at age 65, people will have to have a guaranteed minimum income, which this product absolutely does not guarantee them.

• (1310)

[English]

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to rise once again in this House and speak again on Bill C-25, pooled registered pension plans act.

This proposed piece of legislation is of vital importance to my constituents in Etobicoke Centre. I have hundreds of businesses, especially small and medium-sized businesses, in Etobicoke Centre. I really do appreciate the opportunity to elaborate on the bill's many merits here today.

As a member of Parliament, I am immensely proud to be part of a party that has the best record in providing retirement security options and for introducing legislation that would encourage the entrepreneurship of the ma-and-pa shops, which are the drivers of our economy and form an essential part of my riding of Etobicoke Centre, as I am sure they do in the rest of the country and in many ridings across the country.

Since 2006, our Conservative government has established a strong record when it comes to aid for small businesses. We have reduced the small business tax rate, provided \$20 million to support the Canadian Youth Business Foundation and extended the accelerated capital cost allowance to help businesses make new investments in manufacturing and processing machinery and equipment.

Our government's square focus on incentivizing business has resulted in real growth. Canadians can rest a little easier knowing that our country has the enviable position of creating jobs in a fragile global economy, more than 760,000 so far.

Canadians have come to expect good economic stewardship from this side of the House, and we will continue to deliver that good economic stewardship. As part of this commitment to action, our government introduced the pooled registered pension plans, which would provide for a new accessible, large-scale and low-cost pension option to employers, employees and the self-employed.

In my last speech, I spoke about wide-ranging support for this pension option. I drew particular attention to the fact that all our provincial partners are on board and that stakeholders like the Canadian Chamber of Commerce and the Canadian Federation of Independent Business have urged the government to make PRPPs a reality as soon as possible.

As my colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, said earlier, Ingrid Laederach Steven, owner of the Swiss chocolate shop in Toronto, is very welcoming and glad of this because there are so many different things for retailers, restaurants, farmers and so on. She wishes it could have been done 25 years ago.

The support is warranted, given the attractive features of the PRPPs, including their portability, whereby many employees will be able to transfer funds between administrators when they change jobs, and their auto-enrolment feature, which would reduce administration costs and increase participation rates in the program.

PRPPs would also have the added bonus of having a very low cost, given their scale, design and lower investment management costs compared to the average mutual fund. This makes it affordable and reachable for the people who work in small and medium-sized businesses.

PRPPs would improve the range of retirement savings to Canadians and provide an accessible option to the 60% of Canadians who do not currently have access to workplace pension plans. In the end, PRPPs are an essential tool, given the aging demographics we face in the future and our need to provide more retirement income options for our constituents.

Instead of acknowledging the many benefits of this plan, as other stakeholders have done, and get working on Canada's economic recovery, as this government does each and every day, members across the way are doing what they do best, trying to delay our economic progress and throwing false accusations our way.

For example, they allege that the pooled registered pension plans would come at the cost of further progress on reforming the Canada pension plan. To that I reiterate yet again what my colleagues have said before me: pooled registered pension plans are meant to complement the services our government has already provided for Canadians' retirement security and not replace them.

Pooled registered pension plans would work in conjunction with new initiatives that our government introduced, including pension income splitting, tax free savings accounts, as well as traditional retirement income vehicles like the CPP.

Furthermore, changes to the Canada pension plan, as the opposition knows full well, require the consensus of two-thirds of the population. We have already seen at the 2010 finance ministers meetings that a number of provinces hold strong objections to expanding the CPP benefit. They are unanimous, however, in pursuing a framework for pooled registered pension plans.

The opposition also glazes over the fact that its suggestion to increase contribution rates for CPP would mean higher payroll costs for small and medium-sized businesses and higher premiums for workers and the self-employed. Since CPP is mandatory rather than voluntary like the pooled registered pension plan, an expansion of CPP would mean that Canadians would face another obligatory reduction from their paycheque and Canadian entrepreneurs would face another barrier in making their business profitable, which is something we cannot abide.

● (1315)

Dan Kelly, the senior vice-president of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, which represents 108,000 businesses across Canada, said a CPP enrichment would be a payroll tax and is “very worrisome” for businesses.

He went on to state that:

For every one percentage point in CPP premiums beyond the current 9.9 per cent rate, it would cost 220,000 person-years of employment and force wages down roughly 2.5 per cent in the long run.

That is clearly unacceptable.

Our government, unlike the opposition, does not believe in jeopardizing Canadians' economic welfare by imposing higher barriers for job creation. The opposition also objects to the pooled registered pension plans as a private sector solution and takes particular offence at the fact that these plans would invest in the stock market.

However, as one of my hon. colleagues pointed out earlier in the debate, the entire pension system, both public and private, relies upon the stock market. My colleague drew on the example of Canada pension plan, 49.6% of which is invested in equities or stocks.

Last, the opposition has hijacked this debate to make repeated accusations, criticizing our Conservative government's strong record on seniors' issues. I take exception to those allegations, given that my riding has a large and thriving seniors population and I am consistently working hard to ensure that their voices are being heard in this House.

Contrary to what the opposition alleges, our government has created an enviable retirement security system in Canada and has prioritized seniors' issues. After all, it was our government that introduced pension income splitting, doubled the maximum amount of income eligible for the pension income credit and increased the age credit amount. As a result of actions like these taken to date by this Conservative government, seniors and pensioners will receive \$2.5 billion in targeted tax relief for the upcoming fiscal year.

A joint federal-provincial research working group, in May 2009, found that Canada's retirement income system was providing Canadians with an adequate standard of living upon retirement. It found, for example, that the disposable income for Canadians age 65 years or over was about 90% of the average disposable income of all Canadians and was the third highest of selected OECD countries.

This report, however, found that despite the many measures already instituted by our government, some Canadian households, especially modest and middle-income households, are at risk of

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under-saving for retirement, and that is of great concern. It is precisely because of this that pooled registered plans are so needed and this bill is so important.

I am convinced that pooled registered plans are the way forward, as they would offer an enormous potential to improve the retirement security of all Canadians and, particularly, the 60% of those Canadians who do not have the luxury of a workplace pension.

This program has already drawn the interest of small-business employers, stakeholders and all our provincial partners.

In these fragile economic times, a sound, innovative policy like that behind the pooled registered pension plans is essential for Canadian competitiveness and for the welfare of our citizens.

I urge all members in this House to support the bill.

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his intervention. He quoted statistics from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, saying we cannot afford even a 1% increase in the Canada pension plan. However, part of the spin that the Conservative government has given us around pooled registered pension plans is this whole idea that employers welcome it with open arms, as if somehow the employers would actually, perhaps, contribute something. However, he just articulated that small and medium-sized businesses are saying, “Wait a minute; we can't afford even 1% in CPP”.

I wonder where indeed this idea comes from, from the government, that somehow small and medium-sized enterprises, if we had this plan, would contribute to this one versus the Canada pension plan. If they cannot afford that one, how could they afford the other? It seems quite an articulate balancing act, almost the equivalent of Mr. Wallenda walking on that tightrope across Niagara Falls, as to how exactly he is going to do that.

I know the member for Niagara West—Glanbrook and I will probably be in attendance when that happens, Niagara being such a great place.

Clearly, employees can actually have a savings plan through an RRSP through their employer if their employer wants to do that. This is nothing more than a glorified registered pension plan with another name, with this whole idea of “You're in, unless you want out”.

It reminds me of the negative billing we did away with when it came to cable TV; we would now take that option and put it back in.

● (1320)

Mr. Ted Opitz: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member on one point. Niagara is an outstanding place. As the former commander of the Lincoln and Welland Regiment, I know that well.

The hon. member is entirely wrong, because this would offer a vehicle for many people who do not have the option of a large company pension plan or are in the more modest and medium income brackets. This would give them greater potential. It would be another tool in the toolbox.

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This is a government that looks to the long term of Canadian prosperity and Canadians' well-being, and this tool in the toolbox would help Canadians save over the long term for their retirement. As with so many other programs, this is yet another program that would help many Canadians be able to do that and look forward to a very comfortable retirement in the years to come.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I could challenge the member on a variety of different counts. I am glad he used "tool in the toolbox", given the fact that it is exactly what I referred to. It is a tool, but it is a very small tool in a very huge toolbox that needs a lot of different ways of dealing with the pension crisis that is facing future generations in the country.

When I was recently in the member's riding and talking to a variety of people, they did not talk to me about Bill C-25 and what a wonderful thing it would be. They talked to me about changing the age from 65 to 67 and the budgetary changes. Their concerns were with the direction the government was going in. It clearly was very much opposite to the concerns the hon. member mentioned.

Next time I am talking to his residents, I will clearly tell them that the member is supportive of pooled pensions but is also supportive of changing the age. How is he responding to those who raised that as a concern?

Mr. Ted Opitz: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for doing a drive-by in my riding.

I talk to my constituents all the time, every day that I am home, all weekend. I work right through Sunday and I talk to a wide variety of residents and constituents. They write to me, email me and phone me, and I phone them back as well as visit them at their homes. They are interested in a wide variety of things.

This is a tool in the toolbox, as I articulated, but the government is building a bigger toolbox all the time. That is what we are going to do for Canadians.

When it comes to pooled registered pension plans, hundreds of businesses in my community are going to benefit from that. The business owners I have been talking to in my community, because I actually live there and work there and talk to those constituents, tell me that they are in favour of the pooled registered pension plans and that this would be another tool they can look forward to in helping themselves, helping their employees and helping our constituents who do not have access to these plans to prosper, grow and make sure their retirement is comfortable because they would have a new opportunity to save for their retirement.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before I recognize the hon. member for Burlington, under resuming debate, I will just let him know I will need to interrupt him at 1:29, this being the end of the time allocated for the current motion that is before the House.

The hon. member for Burlington.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise as the last speaker on third reading of this bill. I know you will regret interrupting me because my speech will be so good.

I have spoken to Bill C-38, the pooled registered pension plans act, before. Therefore, I will try to summarize what I think are the four important points and then I will respond to some of the things

I have heard over the last number of readings. I spoke to the bill at second reading and report stage. It is a very important bill and it is the right opportunity available to the government at present.

Previous speakers have said over and over again that there are other options, which other parties have been promoting, including changes to the CPP. However, that requires two-thirds of the provinces with two-thirds of the population to make the changes, and that is not available to us at this moment. The provinces are onside with an opportunity to bring forward legislation of their own to match the pooled registered pension plans act. We can pass something in the House that will affect federally-regulated industries. What is important for me and the residents of my riding is that it is available to all industries.

I believe the Liberal Party is in support of the bill, which we will see when we vote shortly, and we appreciate its support. It has, throughout the discussion, pointed out some areas where it feels there are other opportunities. We do not disagree with that. There are other opportunities.

What I do not understand is the position of the NDP members on the bill. They have an option that they would like to see happen. We have been very clear that the option is not available to the government at this time, but that should not stop members of the official opposition from supporting this tool. It makes no sense to me that they made the claim during an election time that they would come to Ottawa to make things work, to work with other groups that hoped to form government, I guess. Going from third place to becoming government would have been very difficult, but they did very well and they need to be congratulated for that.

The idea those members were selling at election time was they were coming here to work for average Canadians, who they met at the kitchen tables, and they were going to make Parliament work. Here is a perfect opportunity. The bill does not solve all the problems with regard to retirement income that Canadians face now and in the future, but it is a tool, an option and an opportunity that is available and can be supported by all parties. That is making things work for Canadians and that is why they should be supporting it.

The member for Welland said that this was the same as an RRSP. It is not the same as an RRSP. Two things are different. First, employees have six months to opt out. It involves people in the program. It is portable and people can take it with them if they change jobs. That is an important difference from an RRSP, where people have to opt in.

The other comment was that the owners of businesses were saying they could not afford to do it. They cannot afford the RRSP program because they have to manage the process on their own and that is tough for small businesses that only have a few employees. Even for medium-sized businesses, it is a very costly endeavour. The pooled registered pension plan would average out the costs, spread the costs out and would offer ease of entry into the program for employers. It is a perfect tool for employers to keep and attract employees.

One of the issues, maybe not from my generation but from my daughter's generation, is that workers move from employer to employer every three, four or five years. This is an opportunity for employers to use the pension plan to attract and retain employees. It is an excellent program.

We have not voted on third reading stage yet, but I would encourage the NDP to do the right thing and support the bill.

• (1325)

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and I believe you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, at the conclusion of the debate on the motion for third reading of Bill C-25, the pooled registered pension plans act, and on the previous question, the question be deemed put, a recorded division be deemed requested and deferred to immediately after the time provided for oral questions later this day, provided that there shall be no extension pursuant to Standing Order 45(7.1).

• (1330)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Does the Chief Government Whip have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[Translation]

JOBS, GROWTH AND LONG-TERM PROSPERITY ACT

The House resumed from June 11 consideration of Bill C-38, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 29, 2012 and other measures, as reported without amendment from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel has six and a half minutes left.

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday evening, I spoke about the fact that, with this bill, the government is showing its utter contempt for Parliament and for democracy; it is concentrating more and more power in the hands of the executive, to an incredible extent, in fact.

The Conservatives tell us not to worry and to trust them. How can we trust a government that does not listen to experts—indeed, that treats them with contempt—that stifles debate, that does not listen to voters, that eliminates transparency measures and that even reduces the authority of the Auditor General?

This bill simply gives more power to the cabinet, because it will no longer have to listen to the National Energy Board, for example. The Conservatives will be able to approve projects that had

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previously been rejected. At the same time, this bill reduces the scope of public participation in the environmental decision-making process. This means that, regardless of the number of people who are opposed to a major energy project and regardless of the grave environmental consequences it may have, Conservative ministers will have the last word.

The elimination of the position of Inspector General of the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service, CSIS, is another move that will have the effect of reducing transparency in government. This move is particularly interesting because the government says that it stands for law and order and for protecting the rights of Canadians. But the Inspector General's duty is to oversee the activities of Canada's spy agency and his position was established as a guard against the breaches of Canadians' civil liberties that CSIS has the potential to commit.

Even worse, the Conservatives are eliminating the Auditor General's oversight of certain agencies. They are reducing the powers of the Auditor General, who is responsible for holding the government to account, by eliminating oversight and mandatory audits of the financial statements of 12 agencies: Northern Pipeline Agency Canada, which is subject to the Northern Pipeline Act; the Canadian Food Inspection Agency; the Canada Revenue Agency; the Canadian Transportation Accident Investigation and Safety Board; the Canadian Institutes of Health Research; the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety; the Exchange Fund Account, which is subject to the Currency Act; the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada; the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada; the Canadian Polar Commission; the Yukon Surface Rights Board; and the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy.

[English]

Across Canada, we are witnessing growing cynicism toward the Conservative government and a lack of confidence in the ability of our parliamentary institutions to represent it. The process by which this bill before us today will become law is an example of why that is the case. For the past several years, we have witnessed an erosion of the function of the House and now this bill is unlike anything the House has ever seen. It is making a mockery of Parliament and the very function and purpose of parliamentary democracy.

As I said earlier, the bill, at 421 pages and enveloping over 700 clauses, including widespread comprehensive changes to laws and institutions that my constituents care deeply about, is not about job creation or prosperity. It is literally a massive job killer, that will directly eliminate 19,200 jobs with a larger effect, estimated by the Parliamentary Budget Officer, of costing Canada 43,000 jobs. That is not jobs, growth and prosperity.

However, not only is this bill's purpose obscured, it also bears the misleading name of "implementing the budget". As I spoke about this last night, it is not about implementing the budget because it goes so much further than that and it goes against many of the things the Conservatives said during the election campaign.

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Bills should reflect a central theme, but this legislation only pretends that changing the role of the Auditor General, scrapping employment equity standards and removing Canada from the Kyoto protocol are issues that have anything to do with one another. It is for this reason that opposition members of the House cannot understand why the measures have all been packed into the budget implementation bill.

Over the past few weeks, opposition members have heard from thousands of Canadians, from coast to coast to coast, who are outraged by Bill C-38. It challenges the integrity of this institution by ramming through these changes in a misleading bill. We as parliamentarians and, by extension, the Canadian public are entitled to the debate and discussion that should occur in this place. Instead, with this bill and with the record number of time allocations and debate closures we have been subjected to as well, it is clear that the government has no respect for Canadians and we should all be deeply concerned.

● (1335)

[Translation]

In short, this bill is a clear and direct threat to my constituents in Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel. For this reason, I will be voting against this budget implementation bill.

[English]

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, does the member opposite realize that in her entire time allotted to debate the bill she never mentioned anything about the bill specifically, but talked just about the process? Is there a problem with the bill? This is the member's opportunity to debate the bill, but this is, as the government has been saying about the opposition, simply wasting time.

Ms. Mylène Freeman: Mr. Speaker, given that this was my second time speaking to the bill, I really wanted to talk about the fact that this was about process. This process has made it particularly difficult for members to speak to all the issues.

Last time, I spoke about the proposed changes to OAS and the fact that the Conservatives did not tell people about those changes during the election last year. I do not think a lot of people would have voted for them if they had known about that. They knew they were taking away the pension security of their grandchildren, among other things. The bill would repeal the Kyoto protocol. Back home in Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel this is a very big concern to my constituents. It would gut the environmental assessment regime and the fish habitat protection to speed up major projects.

It is a huge bill that we cannot even debate and that is why it is important to raise the point that this is not a transparent or democratic process.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the interest she has shown in this process. This is what concerns me. I sit on the finance committee. We were about to look at a budget bill and we had environmental changes that should have been before a different committee. We had the fisheries. They belonged where they could have people come in and do the due diligence necessary, with experts brought before the committee.

We talked about OAS and, as the member said, the Conservatives did not mention this in the last election. There was not a word. As well, they did not mention changing EI.

However, the one thing that stood out to me as very odd was the Conservatives took away the civilian oversight over CSIS. The people who live in that shadowy world, we would think Canadians would say that it made no sense at all to have that a budget bill.

● (1340)

Ms. Mylène Freeman: Mr. Speaker, the member made excellent points. I mentioned in my speech that the way CSIS is overseen is being changed. It is just ridiculous. Experts are saying it is just not going to be the same anymore. In fact, it was implemented to make sure that the proper oversight was done to protect Canadians' civil liberties. The government says it is all about an individual's liberty not being interfered with. Clearly that is not true.

What is really damaging about this bill is that we could not really study it because there are so many things in it, and in committee members had only a few minutes to question a witness on a variety of subjects. With more than 700 clauses, it is ridiculous to think we could do an indepth study of the bill and ascertain the impact all the different comprehensive changes are going to have.

[Translation]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on her speech, which was instructive as always.

Last week, the President of the Treasury Board was in Thunder Bay trying to sell the bill we are debating. This is what he said about the environmental assessment process:

[English]

“Current joint-panel review environmental assessments are duplicating the process and allowing individuals to use the assessment to discuss irrelevant issues that delay projects from mining to oil and gas that create jobs.”

[Translation]

I would like her comments on that.

Ms. Mylène Freeman: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou for his comments.

The environmental assessment process is a way of ensuring that projects are okay, but for the Conservatives, of course, it takes too long. The process cannot move swiftly enough for their friends' sake.

However, the fact is that the people who live in these regions have the right to say whether something will affect them. The Conservatives are using this bill to eliminate this process. I think that is one of the major problems with the bill before us.

[English]

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the chance to speak to Bill C-38, the jobs, growth and long-term prosperity act, and against the opposition amendments to defeat it.

Before I continue, as a member of the finance committee, let me acknowledge the detailed examination at committee stage. The finance committee and a special subcommittee studied the bill for nearly 70 hours, the longest consideration of budget legislation in committee in decades. We heard from literally hundreds of individuals and organizations, from government officials, business leaders, academics, labour groups, industry associations and many more.

As we all know, the bill proposes to legislate key measures of economic action plan 2012, measures vital to ensuring Canada's continued and ongoing economic recovery.

As its very title makes clear, it is a plan that focuses on jobs, growth and long-term prosperity. In doing so, it looks ahead not only over the next few years, but over the next generation. It will help further unleash the potential of Canadian businesses and entrepreneurs to innovate and thrive in the modern economy.

Of course, in reaching this goal, Canada starts from an enviable place. For some time now our country has had one of the strongest records among the advanced economies. The World Economic Forum says our banks are the soundest in the world. *Forbes* magazine ranks Canada as the best country in the world to do business. The OECD and the IMF predict our economy will be among the leaders of the industrialized world over the next few years.

Our debt to GDP ratio remains the lowest in the G7 by far. Since July 2009, Canada has seen employment increase by nearly 760,000 jobs, the best job growth record in the entire G7.

However, we cannot be complacent. There are many global challenges and uncertainties still confronting the economy, especially from Europe. The recovery is not complete, and across this country too many Canadians are still looking for work. The global economy remains fragile, and any potential setback would have an impact on Canada.

It is for these very reasons we introduced Canada's economic action plan 2012. I will now describe why its passage into law is so important to our country and why these opposition amendments to defeat it and delay it are so troubling.

Let me start by highlighting one of the plan's key initiatives. All across the country throughout our consultations with Canadians, one major issue kept repeating itself: the future health of Canada's retirement system. Old age security, the single largest program of the federal government, was designed for a much different demographic future than Canada faces today. Canada has changed and OAS must change with it.

Accordingly, economic action plan 2012 and Bill C-38 will make gradual adjustments to the old age security program to ensure that the next generation can count on it. These adjustments will not affect current recipients or those close to retirement. Starting in 2023 and

Government Orders

ending in 2029, we will gradually increase the age of eligibility from 65 to 67. This phased approach will enable younger Canadians to plan ahead with confidence.

We will also make the program more flexible for those approaching retirement. As of July 1, 2013, Canadians will be given the option to defer the start of OAS. This volunteer option will enable them to receive a higher annual old age security pension as a result.

Our government has always acted responsibly to ensure that the social programs Canadians count on will be there when they need them. With these changes, the OAS program will be on a sustainable path.

Indeed, we certainly heard plenty of support and need for these changes at finance committee from a range of independent third party witnesses. For instance, here is what the Macdonald Laurier Institute told the committee:

I think the changes to OAS are a step in the right direction.... [U]sing the traditional definition of sustainability, [OAS] was not sustainable because it either would require more resources or crowding out of other spending.

Along with retirement security, the bill also recognizes that a critical responsibility of any government, and certainly our own, is to support, encourage and protect our most vulnerable citizens. That is why it has been the number one priority in our government's budgets.

● (1345)

In budget 2007, we announced the introduction of the registered disability savings plan, RDSP, to help parents and others save to ensure the long-term financial security of a child with a severe disability.

In budget 2011, we introduced the new family caregiver tax credit for those who care for family members with infirmities. In the same budget the government announced that it would undertake a review of the RDSP program in 2011.

Government Orders

As part of the review, a consultation paper was released which included a number of questions on which Canadians were invited to provide feedback. In response, the government received more than 280 submissions from individuals and organizations. Based on the input received during the review, economic action plan 2012 proposes measures to improve the RDSP. Together they will: allow spouses, common-law partners and parents to establish RDSPs for adult individuals who might not be able to enter into a contract; provide greater access to RDSP savings by reducing the penalty associated with small withdrawals; provide greater flexibility to make withdrawals from certain RDSPs and ensure that RDSP assets are used to support the beneficiary during his or her lifetime; provide greater flexibility for parents who save in RESPs for children with disabilities; provide a better transition as well as increased potential for maintaining an RDSP without disruption for beneficiaries who cease to qualify for the DTC in certain circumstances; and improve the administration of the RDSP for financial institutions and beneficiaries.

Bill C-38 takes the first step toward implementing these changes.

Again, we heard strong support for these amendments from the Council of Canadians with Disabilities at committee, which stated:

—important and positive were the revisions to the Registered Disability Saving Plan (RDSP) that removed a significant barrier for persons with intellectual disabilities and their families to opening an RDSP [account]. The RDSP continues to be a program of significant benefit to Canadians with disabilities and their families.

I would be remiss if I ended my speech without quickly reviewing other important initiatives in Bill C-38 that we cannot have delayed by the opposition amendments.

They include: enhancing the government's oversight framework for Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation to ensure the corporation's commercial activities are managed in a manner that promotes the stability of the financial system; expanding the health-related tax relief to better meet the health care needs of Canadians; legislating the government's commitment to sustainable and growing transfers to provinces and territories in support of health care, education and other programs and services; and modernizing Canada's currency by gradually eliminating the penny from Canada's coinage system.

In conclusion, as I have noted today, economic action plan 2012 contains a host of benefits for every part of the country. Through this comprehensive and ambitious plan, we will maintain and strengthen our advantages by continuing to pursue our strategies that made us so resilient in the first place: responsibility, discipline and determination.

This bill marks an important milestone, the next major step in creating a brighter future for our country. I urge all members to help us pass Bill C-38.

• (1350)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I honestly believe that my colleague from Chatham-Kent—Essex is too good a member of Parliament to actually believe the speech that he was sent in here to read dutifully, like a parrot, because it is the same speech we have heard over and over again. I want to tell him how much I profoundly disagree with every word that he just said.

If my colleague were any kind of a democrat, he would have prefaced his remarks by apologizing to the House of Commons and the Canadian people for the outrageous affront to democracy that Bill C-38 is. Because the government moved closure yet again and is denying us the opportunity to debate the many aspects of this bill, we will not have time to point out all the shortcomings of what he just read into the record in the House of Commons. However, I want to begin with just one point, which is all we will have time for.

Does the member believe, as I do, that fair wages benefit the whole community? If so, why would his government use this Trojan Horse to repeal a bill called the Fair Wages and Hours of Work Act? What does he have against Canadians who work—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. We need some time for the hon. member to respond.

The hon. member for Chatham—Kent—Essex.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: Mr. Speaker, I cannot possibly imitate that fine—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. The hon. member for Chatham-Kent—Essex has the floor. I am sure hon. members would like to hear the hon. member's response.

The hon. member for Chatham-Kent—Essex.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: Mr. Speaker, I would not try to imitate this fine member's great acting ability. It is something I would never attempt.

I would say that I do believe everything that I said in my speech. I believe it not only because I know that the government is on the right track, but also because I served in finance and was one of those members who sat through long hours listening to witnesses and to the concerns from our members across the way as well. It is the right thing to do for our economy at this time. I believe that we need to pass the act and pass it quickly.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member, my seatmate, for his fine speech. I want to thank him for pointing out the changes that we are making to the registered disability savings plan, a plan that came as a result of this government. When I was on the finance committee and we were doing a tour across the country at pre-budget time, this idea was brought forward. It was fleshed out by our finance minister and brought forward in a budget. I appreciate that clarity.

My colleague is a member of the finance committee. I think it is important for the House and those listening in to understand how much time the committee has spent in listening to testimony on this measure. If he could give us an overview of the committee's schedule in hearing from Canadians on the bill over the last couple of weeks, it would be appreciated.

• (1355)

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend, my colleague, my seatmate from Burlington for that fine question.

I do not want to sit here and pine about the hours that we spent, but I will say that it was a significant amount of time. Not only did we spend time on Bill C-38; we spent hours, days, weeks and months on consultation before the bill was an act.

This is the result of long hours, long study and long consultation. This is precisely what the people of Canada want us to do at this particular time in the history of Canada when we have such major challenges. This is the right bill at the right time.

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, in 1994 the member of Parliament for Calgary West, who is now our Prime Minister, spoke in this House about a Liberal omnibus bill, one that was much smaller than this one. He said:

In the interest of democracy, I ask: How can members represent their constituents on these various areas when they are forced to vote in a block on such legislation and on such concerns?

I ask if the hon. member agrees with that member from 1994 from Calgary West.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from my colleague across the way, but the point I wanted to make on the last question from the hon. member for Burlington was that these are indeed trying times. These are times that demand a solution to problems that we have not experienced—at least, I have not in my lifetime, and possibly no one else in this House has.

A group of us travelled on a parliamentary association to the Netherlands a number of months ago. The Netherlands is a country with 16 million people, a country about the size of Nova Scotia, and it is going to trim off 15 billion euros from its budget.

We see that in order to do that, there will be a number of things that we will have to enact. Many acts are going to be affected; consequently, this is going to be a larger bill than possibly some in the past have been, but nothing has been done that does not have to be done.

That is the reason we are doing it. That is why Bill C-38 has to pass.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

DEMOCRACY

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, in 1994 the member of Parliament for Calgary West spoke in the House regarding a Liberal omnibus budget implementation bill, one that was a lot smaller than the 452-page bill before the House today. He said, “In the interest of democracy, I ask: How can members represent their constituents on these various areas when they are forced to vote in a block on such legislation and on such concerns?”

He went on to say, “How do we express our views and the views of our constituents when the matters are so diverse? Dividing the bill into several components would allow members to represent views of their constituents on each of the different components in the bill.”

Statements by Members

He further went on to say, “I would also ask the government members, particularly those who have spoken on precisely this question in the previous Parliament with precisely the same concerns, to give serious consideration to this issue of democracy and the functionality of this Parliament now.”

The member is now the Prime Minister, and it is time he heeded his own words and split this undemocratic omnibus budget bill.

* * *

CLASSY CONCOCTIONS

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, congratulations to students Andrew Berger, Ryley Cozart, Larissa Kurz, Ty Langer, Brett Loeppky, Corben Miller, Gina Rehbein, Laura Sawatzky, Landon Schultz, Sarah Wist and Eric Yonge, and to their teacher Colette Wilson and adviser Barbara McKinnon.

Classy Concoctions is a junior achievement company created by the 2012 graduating class of Central Butte School for the Entrepreneurship 30 course. Last month it was named the Junior Achievement of Saskatchewan's company of the year and received the production excellence and VP of marketing awards.

The students' goal was to build a food services business and provide customers access to homemade treats. Classy Concoctions supplied holiday goodies and beef jerky throughout the school year.

Initially 12 shareholders paid \$20 a share. As of May 4, each share was valued at \$555, and in the end the net profit to Classy Concoctions was over \$7,000, split between the school, the local rink and a graduation scholarship.

What a contrast to some of the other student activity we see.

* * *

● (1400)

REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES INDEPENDENCE DAY

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise and bring to all members' attention that today, June 12, is Independence Day in the Republic of the Philippines.

As co-chair of the Canada-Philippines Parliamentary Friendship Group, I extend congratulations and warm wishes from all parties in the House to every Canadian of Filipino descent on this important occasion.

June 12 celebrates the anniversary of the day in 1898 when the Philippines became an independent country. On that date, the official flag was revealed and the national anthem was introduced. The Declaration of Independence was written by Ambrosio Rianzares Bautista and signed by 98 people.

Today, all across Canada, Filipino Canadians are building our communities. Their labour, professional and business activities, deep contributions of culture, and renowned love of life are all making Canada a richer place for everyone.

Statements by Members

Tonight we will mark this special occasion with a reception in Parliament graced by His Excellency the Ambassador of the Philippines. I invite all members to join us in a celebration of friendship between our two nations.

To every *kabayan*, *salamat*, and *mabuhay* Philippines.

* * *

TAXATION

Ms. Wai Young (Vancouver South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians everywhere are celebrating an important milestone. Yesterday marked tax freedom day, the day when Canadians have earned enough to pay the taxes they owe to all levels of government for the entire year. This is over two weeks earlier than under the former Liberal government.

Our Conservative government has reduced the overall tax burden on Canadians to its lowest level in nearly 50 years, saving the typical family over \$3,000. In addition, over one million low-income Canadians are now completely off the tax rolls.

This is great news for Canadian families, who welcome this extra money in their pockets.

On behalf of the people of Vancouver South, I urge our opposition colleagues to stop playing games and pass budget 2012 so that we can continue to keep taxes low, create jobs and keep British Columbia and Canada on the path to long-term economic prosperity.

* * *

REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES INDEPENDENCE DAY

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, independence of the Philippines was declared on June 12, 1898. Today around the world people of Filipino heritage and others will be celebrating that declaration of independence.

It was on June 12, 1898, in Kawit, Cavite, where the Filipino people witnessed the public reading of the Declaration of Independence, which was written by Ambrosio Bautista. The national flag was also unveiled along with the singing of the new Filipino national anthem.

The Philippines is a beautiful country, a place where I have been on many occasions. I have the experience that as a whole, people of Filipino heritage are hard-working, have strong moral values, are kind and generous, and love fun. If any members have ever been to a Filipino fiesta, they will know what I mean.

As our Filipino community and others across Canada celebrate this day in many different ways, on behalf of the Liberal Party I would like to extend our best wishes to all of those who will be participating in celebrating this very important date in world history.

Later today on Parliament Hill, the Canada-Philippines Friendship Group and the Ambassador of the Philippines will be hosting a special event in recognizing the day. I would encourage members to please stop by.

Mabuhay to one and all.

NEW DENMARK FOUNDER'S DAY

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this coming weekend, the community of New Denmark, the oldest Danish community in Canada, will be celebrating the 140th anniversary of its Founder's Day. The community was settled in 1872 by a handful of families. The initial Danish settlers left Denmark starving from a crop failure. Promised farmland and accessible roads and available shelters, they arrived to something very different, a hilly, desolate area of northwestern New Brunswick and a land covered by virgin forest and not-so-open fields. Facing this hardship, these pioneers built a life in New Brunswick. They carved out an agricultural community through hard work and determination. Their descendants have spread into many neighbouring communities.

A symbol of their skiing heritage, and a fact not well known outside the community, was the construction of a ski jump in the 1930s called the "Big Hill" overlooking Salmon River. While the ski hill does not operate today, and like many other rural communities the community has undergone changes, one only has to attend Founder's Day to see the pride the residents have in their pioneers.

I know that all members of the House will join me in congratulating New Denmark on its 140th Founder's Day. I thank them for their contribution to the fabric of our region and our country.

* * *

● (1405)

LA CLOCHE—MANITOULIN LIGHTHOUSE ASSOCIATION

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for groups like the La Cloche—Manitoulin Lighthouse Association, that is trying to preserve our heritage lighthouses, the reality that most of these properties are fixer-uppers is coming into sharp focus. In fact, money is turning into a major stumbling block. Now these properties could be destined for the scrapheap of Canadian history. The Dawson citizens' committee reports that the Mississagi lighthouse alone requires \$500,000 in upgrades, \$80,000 of that for immediate repairs so the building can survive the next six months.

Contaminated sites and dilapidated buildings may lead to worst-case scenarios as even high-profile lighthouses, like the one in Peggy's Cove, could end up demolished, despite hosting half a million tourists a year.

With all petitions in place, groups like La Cloche—Manitoulin are waiting with bated breath and big funding questions. Without a cash infusion, no commitment to these heritage symbols is complete. Surely it is time for the government to make funds available to clean up sites and do basic repairs before handing over our national treasures.

WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP

Ms. Eve Adams (Mississauga—Brampton South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I had the honour of speaking at the annual Women and Leadership conference in Toronto. Accomplished women from major corporations including Manulife Financial, Sobeys, RBC and Cisco came together to share the battleground stories behind their successes.

Our budget creates an advisory committee of leaders linking corporations to a network of women with professional skills and experience. However, that is not all the budget does for Canadians. It will return our country to balanced budgets without raising taxes. The global economic recovery is extremely fragile. That is why our Conservative government, under our Prime Minister, is implementing sound economic policy that is a model to the world. We are pushing long-term economic growth with unprecedented free trade agreements and a modernized immigration system. We are looking to the future by funding research and development.

As our Prime Minister said yesterday at the Conférence de Montréal, “Economic growth and fiscal discipline are not mutually exclusive. They go hand in hand”.

I am so proud to be a member of the only party that focuses on creating jobs and economic growth for Canadian families.

* * *

[Translation]

YEAR OF THE FRANSASKOIS

Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, I want to acknowledge the “Year of the Fransaskois”.

According to Paul Heppelle, president of the Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise, Franco-Saskatchewanians are known to be explorers, pioneers, builders and investors in their native province.

The Year of the Fransaskois recognizes the centennial of the ACF, but it is important to note that francophones have lived in Saskatchewan for much longer than a century. Franco-Saskatchewanians have played a fundamental role in developing the fabric of Saskatchewan.

They have made important contributions to education, economic growth, health and immigrant assistance. They have strong ties to the anglophone majority and to francophones across the country and around the world.

I am always pleased to meet Franco-Saskatchewanians from Saskatoon—Humboldt and other parts of my province.

I want to wish those who are celebrating it a happy Year of the Fransaskois.

* * *

[English]

ANGELS IN PINK

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to take a moment to honour the Angels in Pink, a group of passionate, courageous and dedicated women. They have devoted

Statements by Members

their time to raising awareness about breast cancer and to fundraising for a breast coil attachment to be added to the MRI in Sudbury. The sixth annual Women of Distinction Awards gala recently honoured the group and their tireless work for this important cause.

Annette Cressy started the organization after being forced to travel to Timmins for her MRI. The Angels in Pink have raised over \$200,000 through bake sales and other fundraising events over the past three years. Every dollar raised at these events has been donated to the cause of breast cancer awareness. Thanks to these efforts, women throughout northeastern Ontario will now have access to this critical medical tool for generations to come.

I thank and congratulate Ms. Cressy and the rest of the Angels in Pink: Jane Tessier, Lorraine Baldisera, Sue Chartrand, Bev Briscoe and Angela Corsi-Raso.

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REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES INDEPENDENCE DAY

Mr. Bob Dechert (Mississauga—Erindale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to mark the 114th anniversary of Philippine independence. In recent years, Canada and the Philippines have developed close ties of co-operation, trade and friendship. Our bilateral relations are continuously strengthened by the over half a million Canadians who trace their roots to the Philippines. Filipino Canadians continue to make valuable contributions to our great country, in all fields of endeavour. I am proud that under our government, the Philippines has become the number one source country for new immigrants to Canada.

For all Canadians, this holiday represents an excellent opportunity to honour the rich history and cultural heritage of the Filipino community and to enjoy celebrations taking place across the country, including in my riding of Mississauga—Erindale.

On behalf of our government, I wish the Filipino community a happy independence day and *mabuhay* Philippines.

* * *

● (1410)

[Translation]

PORTNEUF RELAY FOR LIFE

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I wish to congratulate all those who took part in the third edition of the Portneuf Relay for Life, which was held in Donnacona on June 9 and 10.

The Portneuf Relay for Life is an annual fundraising event for the Canadian Cancer Society. This year, nearly 500 participants walked around Donnacona Park in relays for 12 whole hours, each doing their part to contribute to the fight against this terrible disease—cancer.

Among the participants, some 130 were cancers survivors themselves who led the relay by taking a symbolic first lap of the park. I salute the courage, optimism and perseverance of these survivors, who are true role models for the rest of us.

Statements by Members

I also wish to congratulate everyone who walked in the third Portneuf Relay for Life whose efforts and energy helped raise the impressive sum of \$124,000 for the Canadian Cancer Society.

That is a record for the Portneuf region, and I am very proud of this accomplishment.

I wish to congratulate Lucie Côté and her entire team, as well as all participants in the relay who made this event such an enormous success.

* * *

[English]

EUROPE

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the solution to a debt crisis cannot be more debt. Yet, the NDP leader attacked the Prime Minister for refusing to provide a euro debt bailout and the Liberal Treasury Board critic said that such a bailout should be “massive”.

Any group of countries that has taxed every dollar out of its own economy, borrowed every dollar that anyone in the world would commercially lend to it, exhausted the half-trillion euro EU bailout fund and still has no plan going forward is not a good credit risk for Canadian taxpayers.

A better approach to protect Canada against the European debt crisis is for us to reject a bailout and move forward with our economic action plan, which would balance the budget within the next three years.

* * *

CAPTAIN JOHN RUSSELL

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
sor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, just recently Captain John Russell of Bonavista in my riding passed away at the age of 105.

“Captain Johnny”, as he was affectionately known, was a seagoing captain, who first commanded sailing schooners long before ships were powered by steam or diesel. He spent a lifetime earning a living from the sea: fishing, sealing and transporting goods all over North and South America, as well as the Caribbean.

Captain Johnny was more than a sailor. He was a war veteran, a businessman, an author, a poet, a mentor and a captivating storyteller. A man of wit and wisdom, he was the subject of many documentaries and newspaper articles. First and foremost, Captain Johnny was a family man. His beloved wife, sons, daughters and grandchildren were always his priority. In 1956, he moved to Bonavista from his birthplace in Red Cliff so his children could get a better education. His friends played a special role in his life. I am proud to say that I was among those friends.

Captain Johnny will be sadly missed by all who knew and loved him so dearly. I say goodbye to my friend.

* * *

EUROPE

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week, the member for Markham—Unionville said that he thinks that

the solution to the eurozone debt is “...putting massive funds into the scene. If the funds are massive enough, that will calm the markets”. Yesterday, his interim leader made the outrageous claim that “any Canadian transfer to the IMF...goes on our books as an asset”.

With such irresponsible economic policies, it is no wonder that the Canadian public relegated the Liberals to the third-party status. The Liberal position is no better than the leader of the NDP's position. He advocates for billions of Canadian tax dollars to be sent to bail out Europe's banks.

This is Europe's debt problem. Europe should act and must not delay.

* * *

● (1415)

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, dissent is growing within the Conservative caucus. First, some members publicly expressed their disagreement with the omnibus Trojan Horse bill. Now, bilingualism for officers of Parliament is sowing confusion in the ranks. Some Conservative members believe that bilingualism is a cumbersome, useless burden. Little wonder they won only five seats in Quebec in the last election.

It has been the custom for officers of Parliament to be fluent in French and English, but once the Conservatives came to power, they showed us just how little they care about the country's official languages. The NDP is not alone in condemning these practices. The Commissioner of Official Languages also criticized the Conservatives following the appointment of unilingual officers of Parliament.

My bill will give the Conservatives no choice but to respect bilingualism when appointing individuals to Parliamentary positions.

The Conservative caucus has an opportunity to do the right thing and support my bill. I hope that the other Conservative members from Quebec and across Canada will join the NDP and their colleague from Beauce in supporting my bill.

* * *

[English]

EUROPE

Mr. Ted Opatz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government rejects the NDP and Liberal calls to send good Canadian dollars to failing European banks before European countries have even taken action to deal with their own debt crisis. Why does the leader of the NDP expect Canadians to bail out European countries that have borrowed to the brink?

Economic experts agree that the Prime Minister was right to dismiss the IMF's calls for Canadians to fund a European bailout. Stephen Gordon even stated that the problem with the eurozone is not the lack of cash, it is a lack of political will, like the members opposite lack. Unlike the NDP and Liberals, our Conservative government will not adopt the same fiscally reckless policies that exacerbated the debt crisis in Europe, nor do we think that Canadian taxpayers should be on the hook for Europe's unsustainable accumulation of debt.

This is Europe's debt problem. Europe should and must fix it. The NDP leader needs to explain to Canadians why he thinks we should fix it for them.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's mammoth bill is an all-out attack on environmental protection.

The Conservatives are gutting the Fisheries Act, the Species at Risk Act, the Kyoto Protocol Implementation Act, the Environmental Violations Administrative Monetary Penalties Act and the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, none of which has anything to do with budget implementation.

How can the Prime Minister justify these attacks on the health of the environment and that of Canadians?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, as I have said a number of times, we are maintaining a rigorous environmental assessment system. We also want to have clear deadlines for investors.

In our opinion, environmental protection is not the only important thing; there is also the development of our resources. This is important, and it is not a disease as the leader of the NDP seems to think. It is an important resource for the Canadian economy.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is giving his ministers the authority to bypass, modify or even disregard environmental assessments. At the same time, he is leaving Canadians out of the process.

According to the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, the number of environmental assessments will drop from 6,000 to only a few dozen a year. It is completely irresponsible to do this, and even more unjustified to do it in an omnibus bill.

Where are good governance and transparency? Where is the respect for democratic institutions and Canadians?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, environmental assessments will still take place. They are already being conducted by other levels of government. We do not need to duplicate those efforts at the federal level.

As I have said, the development of our economy is key, including the development of our resources. I understand the Leader of the

Opposition's opinion that our resource industry is a disease affecting the country, but we do not share his position. It is important to protect our environment and develop our economy.

[English]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, referring to an earlier omnibus bill, the Prime Minister once said, "I would argue that the subject matter of the bill is so diverse that a single vote on the content would put members in conflict with their own principles".

Yet, the Prime Minister now asks his own MPs to blindly vote in favour of a budget without proper study.

Where are the Prime Minister's principles now? Where is the Prime Minister's respect for the principles of his own members of Parliament?

• (1420)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government makes no secret of the fact that it brought forward a budget in March that is very comprehensive in its efforts to ensure that we create jobs and growth for the long term for the Canadian economy.

We have had a record amount of study of this particular piece of legislation. It has been major work before Parliament for three months. On this side of the House, we are prepared to continue getting on with continuing to produce jobs and growth for the Canadian economy. I encourage the members over there to also do their work and get things passed after a few weeks of work.

* * *

HEALTH

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the NDP stands up for its principles against reckless Conservative budgets that leave Canadians behind.

In the last election, the Conservatives pledged to preserve health transfers and promised not to download costs to provinces but these promises have been broken.

Will the Conservatives abandon their plans to cut provincial health care transfers by \$30 billion and instead sit down with the provinces and work out a solution?

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has it exactly wrong.

We actually planned for increases to health care transfers of 6% going forward. We want to ensure that the increases we made to health care transfers every year from where we were at the beginning of our mandate continue out until 2017 and, to increase those. We put a floor in so they could not, after that, go below 3%.

I am not sure where that question came from but it certainly was not from fact.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the facts are that the Conservatives' unilateral decision means \$30 billion less in health transfers. It is no wonder the Conservatives refuse to consult with Canadians on their Trojan Horse bill.

Oral Questions

In NDP hearings, we heard witnesses paint a bleak picture of this budget. The CMA president warned about the health consequences of raising the OAS age, of cutting health transfers and refusing to move forward on a national pharmaceuticals strategy.

Why are the Conservatives downloading more costs onto the provinces instead of bringing forward a national pharmacare plan?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada's economic action plan confirmed our government's commitment to deliver stable, sustainable, record high transfers to the provinces and territories.

Our government has increased transfers at every opportunity, from \$19 billion when we formed government to \$27 billion this year and up to \$40 billion. To call these significant increases a cut is a clear attempt again by the NDP to mislead Canadians.

* * *

THE BUDGET

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has stated over the years, and certainly back in 1994 as a member of the Reform Party, that omnibus legislation was in itself bad. He stated very clearly that this kind of legislation could not be carried out without abusing Parliament. He stated very clearly that this kind of an effort could not be made without causing a serious attack on the privileges and rights of members of Parliament.

Has the Prime Minister simply been corrupted by power?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our focus, as we said back in March when we first tabled the budget, is on ensuring that we have jobs and growth for Canadians.

Canada's economic performance in what has been a very difficult time for the world remains superior to most other developed nations but we are in a very difficult international financial situation. That is why we need to take all the steps that are necessary, not just now but into the future. The government has been very clear in its plans before Parliament and those plans have been before Parliament for more than three months.

I know that the leader of the Liberal Party rejected all of this in the first minutes but we have been working hard and we are prepared to get this done.

[Translation]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I suppose that since the Prime Minister did not respond to a direct question, it means that he agrees that since he took power, his approach has become more and more like a dictatorship.

Since he is looking at the notes he just received from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, once again giving him the substance for his response, I would like to ask the question again.

Can the Prime Minister deny that he has been corrupted by power?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our objective as a government is economic growth and job creation for Canadians.

Our performance remains superior to most other developed nations, but we are in a very difficult international financial situation and there is much to be done. In March, we submitted our proposals to Parliament, and three months later, the Conservative members are working very hard to get these measures passed.

I encourage the opposition members to also do their job and to work towards making these reforms actions a reality for the Canadian economy.

[English]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister speaks complacently to his record.

Let us look at the record. The government has increased its net debt by \$117 billion, unemployment since 2006 is up from 6.4% to 7.3% and 300,000 manufacturing jobs down the table. Bill C-38 is an unprecedented assault on Parliament, a dumping on the provinces, a dumping on people and without precedent in the history of our Parliament in terms of its abuse and the way he has acceded power to himself.

That is some record. The Prime Minister has no right to boast to other countries about the Canadian record.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we have 750,000 net new jobs that have been created. On this side of the House, we have the lowest debt ratio in the G7, and by a country mile.

In terms of power and corruption, I notice that the man who said that he would never run for the permanent leadership of his party is now, apparently, prepared to accept it, which I guess proves, down in that corner of the House, lack of power can corrupt.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

* * *

[Translation]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are asking us to vote—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

Mr. Philip Toone: Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are asking us to vote blindly on a budget bill that will bring draconian changes to the Fisheries Act, but they refuse to answer any questions about the impact of those changes.

The minister told us that a temporary disruption of the fish habitat will be allowed.

Can the minister at least answer a simple question? How long is temporary? Is it two years, 10 years, 100 years? How long?

[English]

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fact is that we are making major improvements to the Fisheries Act. We are going to focus on fish and fish habitat and not on farmers' fields. We are making improvements to several conservation tools. We will allow a creation of new, clearer and accessible guidelines for Canadians to follow for projects in or near water. We will have partnerships with conservation groups, which so very important to the fisheries in this nation. These changes will allow regulations to be made that will prohibit the import, export and possession of live aquatic—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what the minister does not seem to get is that aquatic ecosystems are more complicated than PMO talking points. What is becoming increasingly clearer every day is that the budget bill would allow—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour has the floor.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, what is becoming increasingly clear is that the budget bill would allow levels of pollution that, while not affecting target fish, would devastate everything those fish need to survive, killing off fish-bearing lakes, rivers and streams. The Conservatives cannot even explain these consequences or even show that they understand them.

How can the minister ask members to vote on changes that have been so poorly explained and pose such a risk to our fisheries?

• (1430)

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is an absolutely ridiculous fabrication. We are protecting fish and fish habitat. That is the primary focus of the Department of Fisheries.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities said:

When you first announced changes to the Fisheries Act earlier this spring, Mr. Speaker, we welcomed a number of specific reforms that would make the Act work better for communities, by reducing duplication, streamlining processes for small, low-risk projects, and removing unnecessary and costly administrative burdens on municipalities.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, from dismantling fisheries protection to gutting public safety oversight, the Conservatives are still pressing ahead in their attempt to sneak through major changes disguised as a budget implementation bill. For example, clause 378 would delete the Office of the Inspector General of CSIS. For the Conservatives that is “strengthening oversight”. For Canadians, in plain language, it means less civilian oversight for Canada's spy agency.

Oral Questions

Why are the Conservatives getting rid of oversight tools instead of strengthening them? Why is the minister so eager to shrug off his responsibility to oversee CSIS?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we are doing is eliminating \$800,000 in administrative costs that do not contribute to oversight. We are ensuring that the agency responsible for the oversight of CSIS has the necessary power to do exactly that. What we are doing is eliminating needless administrative costs and ensuring that the independent function of SIRC continues.

[Translation]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister is once again confusing the roles of the two oversight entities.

The inspector general makes sure that CSIS complies with the legislation and with its own policies and regulations. But the parliamentary secretary refers to the inspector general's role as a simple administrative expense, and the minister is taking the only tool that lets him keep an objective eye on the actions of CSIS and is throwing it out the window.

Is this decision driven by bad faith or by simple ignorance?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is rather odd that the NDP member would get up and say, “Somebody reporting to you should still continue because that person is somehow objective”. That individual reported to me. What we are ensuring is that the administrative costs for that function will be eliminated and we improve the objective and independent function of SIRC. That is exactly what we are doing.

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, less transparency, less accountability: it seems to me that this contradicts their campaign platform.

The Auditor General's report on the F-35s was clear: the Conservatives knew what the total cost of the F-35s was, but they did not share that information with parliamentarians.

However, they want to wait until the fall to disclose their most recent cost estimate. Why should Canadians wait even longer to get straight answers about the F-35s? When will the Conservatives finally show some transparency?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member knows that no money has actually been spent on the acquisition of new fighter aircraft for the Department of National Defence. We have responded to the Auditor General's concerns with a seven-point plan for the process to replace Canada's fighter jets.

In terms of the costs being tabled in Parliament, I have said repeatedly that we will not support the tabling of updated estimates by the Department of National Defence until they are independently validated and verified. We will ensure we take the time to get it right.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what is the point of a seven-point plan if it is not respected?

Point 3 states: "These updates will be tabled within a maximum of 60 days from receipt of annual costing forecasts...".

The forecasts were received in early May. So, the government has to disclose the costs in early July, not this fall.

The Conservatives have broken all the rules with the F-35s. Why, after accepting all the Auditor General's recommendations, are they deciding to break their promise at the first opportunity?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said repeatedly in the House, I will not support the tabling of documents in the House in terms of updated estimates unless they are independently verified and validated. There is still work to be done. The secretariat has made that recommendation. It needs more time and I support its recommendation.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the F-35 secretariat was the Conservatives' chance to hit the reset button, but like its namesake, it could not fly either.

We are back where the Conservatives have always been on this file, ducking and diving. The Minister of National Defence knew before the June 2010 F-35 announcement was made, that the costing information they were using was wrong. Both the minister and the associate minister were briefed a month before he sat in his model F-35 for a photo op, and again in April 2011 and February 2012, about the rising costs of the F-35.

When will the Conservatives drop the pretence and tell us the real—

● (1435)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Works.

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, importantly, no money has been spent on the acquisition of fighter jets for the air force at this time. We have put in place a seven-point plan to respond to the Auditor General's comments.

However, as I have said repeatedly, and I stand by that, we will not table cost estimates from the Department of National Defence

until they are independently validated. The secretariat needs more time to do that and we respect that. We will take as much time as it needs to get it right.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that familiar feeling those members have on the other side of the House is the feeling of being caught, again.

We all know that the Conservatives know what the costs are. Since 2006, the government has received 15 formal bilateral briefing packages. There are DND employees working in the joint strike fighter office, providing the Conservatives with costing information, so this should be easy.

The Americans post their costing information online, but we will accept a hard copy. Therefore, when will the government provide us with the true costs of the plane?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we all know in the House that the Department of National Defence did provide the Auditor General with cost estimates and he did not find those to be enough, and we agree.

We have agreed and we have put in place a seven-point plan to implement his recommendations. As I have said, I support his recommendation. We will not table cost estimates from the Department of National Defence in the House until they are independently validated and verified. We will ensure that we get those numbers right.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is another troubling sign in the government's handling of the suicide of an Afghan war veteran. Canada's top soldier personally ordered seniors aides to search for errors in a newspaper article about the suicide of the soldier. This very unusual move was to find mistakes that could justify demanding a retraction from the newspaper, mistakes that were never found.

Why is the government so focused on minimizing embarrassment rather than trying to fix a broken system to help soldiers deal with mental injury.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is quite the contrary. This is why we have moved, since taking office, to double the number of mental health professionals working within the Department of National Defence. We have on many occasions moved to provide information, as we have with the Military Police Complaints Commission, on this specific case. I have met personally with Sheila Fynes, Corporal Langridge's mother, in this case. We have provided additional funding for the Fynes family throughout this process. We continue to support the process.

The member opposite knows full well, and it is unfortunate that he is trying to score political points on such a serious issue, that this process is still ongoing.

ETHICS

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the evidence continues to mount against the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister on allegations that he breached the Canada Elections Act. Yet the member is unable to produce one shred of evidence to show he is innocent. First he said he would produce the documents that would prove he was innocent. Now he claims that Elections Canada has the documents. Maybe the documents do not exist, maybe the dog ate them.

Will the Prime Minister relieve the ethically-challenged ethics spokesperson immediately?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary has indicated that he submitted all the elections financing related documents back to the agency almost four years ago. Those documents were audited and approved by Elections Canada. Presumably, if that agency has a problem with them, it will eventually contact him.

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, no one is going to take any ethics lessons from that parliamentary secretary. He made a personal commitment to resign just after serving two terms. That was eight years ago, four elections later, and I can tell by the monotone noise over there, he is still here.

The Prime Minister's PS and ethics spokesperson must come clean immediately or the Prime Minister must take away his responsibilities.

My question is for the Prime Minister. What is it going to be? Is he going to stand up and defend his parliamentary secretary or is he going to send him packing?

• (1440)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for reminding me of that particular commitment, which I made in a university essay many years ago. I am glad that he is reading my essays because I believe he has a lot to learn from them. In fact, I can send him over a whole package.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister has already done exactly the same thing. He provided all of his election financing to Elections Canada almost four years ago. They were approved, they were audited. We stand by him. He is doing a terrific job, and we are proud of his work.

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ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 70% of Inuit preschoolers live in homes where there is not enough food. Nutrition north has been a total failure. The Minister of Health designed it and she stubbornly refused to fix it.

My question for the Minister of Health is this. Why is she not standing up for hungry northern children? Why is she refusing to

Oral Questions

stand in the House and commit here and now to fix this problem she created?

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are committed to providing northerners with healthy food choices at affordable prices—

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: It's her portfolio not yours.

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development has the floor. If there is one time when the member for St. Paul's should listen to the answer, it is when she has asked the question.

The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. John Duncan: Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are 10% of this place and make 90% of the noise in this place.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs has the floor.

Hon. John Duncan: Mr. Speaker, we are investing approximately \$60 million in 103 communities to lower the cost of nutritious food. We created the Nutrition North Canada Advisory Board, which is made up of northerners, to take stakeholder concerns and provide recommendations to the government. As the program continues to develop, it has resulted in lowering the cost of a healthy food basket for northern families.

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[Translation]

PENSIONS

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, millions of Canadians have done honest work all their lives, earning enough to make ends meet and setting a little money aside for their old age. They looked to the future and dreamed of a well-deserved retirement.

But the Conservatives have decided that they are going to change the rules right in the middle of the game and that those workers will just have to wait a little longer.

Can the Conservatives account for their arbitrary choice of 2023 as the year in which they are going to start stealing money from seniors? Why not 2030 or 2020? We want details and we want to know why.

[English]

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in order to maintain the sustainability of OAS, the age of eligibility will be gradually raised to the age of 67, starting in 2023 and gradually increasing to 2029. Our government is committed to sustainable social programs and a secure retirement for all Canadians.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what we gather from that answer is that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour is unable to account for the details of the changes to old age security.

The program is sustainable, but that doesn't matter; they will still steal \$24,000 from seniors. In that way, they can give even greater tax cuts to the companies that make the biggest profits in the country.

If the Conservatives have any doubts about how to fund the program, we can help them. The NDP has solutions that do not involve stealing money from seniors at all.

Why are the Conservatives making seniors and future generations pay for their poor economic choices?

• (1445)

[English]

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be very clear. We are about ensuring that there are sustainable social programs for all Canadians. That is why we are gradually increasing the age from 65 to 67 over a six-year period.

I would like to ask the NDP why it is that every one of these initiatives that we take to support seniors and young people in our country it never seems to want to support them.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the system is already sustainable. It is Conservative arrogance that is not.

Canadians pay into OAS their entire working lives. Now Conservatives tell them that is just not enough.

These changes will affect Canadians regarding the GIS, veterans benefits, aboriginal benefits and corporate pension plans. Furthermore, widows and widowers will have to wait two extra years for survivor benefits.

The OAS system has already been proven sustainable. Why are the Conservatives forcing Canadians to work longer and pay more?

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it feels a little like *Groundhog Day*. I want to say, yet again, in order to ensure that we have a sustainable social system, we are gradually increasing the age from 65 to 67, from 2023 to 2029. We want to ensure there are sustainable social programs for Canadians.

With respect to the GIS, this government has been the one that has gradually and continually increased GIS to ensure that those low-income seniors have what they need.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, people currently paying into these systems are being hung out to dry. Alarm bells are ringing.

The head of the CPP Investment Board said that the Conservative's PRPP needed significant changes, that it would not get the job done. However, the Conservatives are not interested in the facts.

They are using this Trojan Horse budget bill to undermine our social safety net.

When will the Conservatives start listening to the experts and the people of our country about what they want and need for decent retirement?

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, that hon. member does not even understand that Canadians do not contribute on an individual basis to OAS. I actually thought the NDP members understood this program. I guess that is why we have heard, and I hope it is wrong, that after question period when we vote on the pooled registered pension plan, a plan that all of the provinces support the framework going forward on, the NDP will vote against it.

It is absolutely unbelievable. We offer up something that would help Canadians and what do NDP members do? They vote against it.

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THE ECONOMY

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when our constituents turn on their TVs or read their newspapers, they can not help but hear what is currently taking place in Europe. After years of high levels of debt spending, many European countries are facing financial crisis. As this eventually could seriously impact the global economy, Canadians watch with concern. While the NDP might want to engage in reckless deficit spending and create bloated government bureaucracies, we see the cost of such fiscal irresponsibility.

Could the Minister of State for Finance please update Parliament on the latest developments on the situation in Europe?

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a very serious situation that we are watching unfold in Europe. We are encouraging Europe to continue supporting itself, not with Canadian tax dollars but with its own money. It has the capacity and the capability to overwhelm this challenge. It is very important that it does.

We have consistently told the Europeans that they have the resources to solve this problem. We certainly hope they will move forward to a timely implementation of this. It is very important for them and it is important for the rest of the world.

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[Translation]

ETHICS

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister is in trouble these days, and even in hot water.

Information in the *Ottawa Citizen* indicates that tens of thousands of calls were made for him, in his riding, during the 2008 election campaign, except that this information does not appear in his election report. It is strange. However, telephone calls are made by local campaigns, are they not? Many pieces of the puzzle are missing here.

Will he do the only honourable thing and step aside until the authorities can get to the bottom of this controversy?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is still making baseless allegations. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister did his job properly and we support him. He has already given the information to Elections Canada.

The member opposite made donations to an openly separatist party, Québec solidaire. Does he continue to support Québec solidaire? Is it still the provincial equivalent to the NDP?

• (1450)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, trying to change the subject and sending someone to bat to defend the member does not answer the questions we are asking.

Let us get back to the issue at hand. I am not trying to put the cart before the horse; the presumption of innocence still applies, but the allegations against the hon. member for Peterborough are extremely serious.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister says that he will submit new documents. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities says that all the documents have already been submitted. Who is telling the truth?

Once again, will the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister do the honourable thing and step aside during the Elections Canada investigation?

[English]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have already answered that question, but the hon. member has not answered the question posed to him.

Québec solidaire is a party that says the PQ and the Bloc Québécois are not separatist enough. The hon. member gave donations totalling \$3,700, including \$150 which he gave while sitting in a supposedly federal Parliament.

I invite the member to stand in this House and confirm if he continues to be an active financial supporter of the hardest line separatist party in Quebec.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, given the seriousness of the issue, I would suggest the member for Peterborough get a more qualified advocate than the conspiracy theorist from Nepean, because it has been over a week since the election investigation in Peterborough story broke and they still cannot seem to get their stories straight.

Oral Questions

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister has told Canadians that he will be coming forward with all of the documents soon, but the member from Nepean keeps saying that all of the documents were handed over four years ago. This is a question about the accuracy of the documents and his credibility. When will he bring forward those documents?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have already answered all of those questions, but the NDP has not answered the question that I just twice posed. Perhaps the member who just stood could turn to his seatmate and ask him if he continues to support Québec solidaire, a party to which he gave donations.

While he is at it, he might ask his leader how much in illegal union donations did the NDP accept and how much is it being forced to pay back.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate the eagerness of the member from Nepean to get in the story and change the channel with his little partisan ankle biter routine, but he is not helping the member for Peterborough. We now know thousands of calls were made into Peterborough in the 2008 election and yet no record apparently exists. Where are those documents?

Unfortunately, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister has been compromised. The government can treat this as a joke, or it can take it with the seriousness it deserves. I am asking the hon. member to do the right thing for his party and for Parliament and stand aside while this investigation is ongoing. Will he do that?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us observe the difference here.

The hon. member gave all of the documents that Elections Canada requested almost four years ago. They were audited. They were verified. He has heard nothing from Elections Canada ever since.

On that side, they accepted donations from unions in clear contravention of the law. They were investigated, it was confirmed, and they were found guilty. Now they need to stand and explain to Canadians how many illegal union donations they accepted and how much they paid back.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is so incompetent on the F-35 that we are not going to know the cost until October. Oops, there goes point three on the seven point plan, which the government has bragged so much about.

The government decided to buy this airplane two years ago, and we still do not know the cost. What a way to run government. Normally when one buys something, one knows the cost; otherwise it is not very smart to come out and talk about buying it.

Oral Questions

Why is the government so incompetent? The taxpayers are getting soaked.

• (1455)

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me remind the hon. member that no money has been spent on the acquisition of fighter aircraft. What we did see, though, is the Department of National Defence did put forward cost estimates on the F-35, which the Auditor General did not think were accurate. We agree with the Auditor General. We think more due diligence needs to be done. On that note, we have put forward a seven point plan to meet the Auditor General's recommendations.

I will not support tabling the updated cost estimates from the Department of National Defence until they are independently validated and verified. The secretariat has made the recommendation that it needs more time, and we agree with it.

* * *

SHIPBUILDING INDUSTRY

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, defence experts warn that the national shipbuilding program is in jeopardy due to Conservative bungling.

It is worrisome that there is not one signed shipbuilding contract. This would not be the first time the Conservatives failed to deliver on their promise. Arctic icebreakers, supply ships, armoured trucks are just a few examples.

The government is always big on photo ops, but short on delivery. How can shipyard workers have any confidence in the government's job promises?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after a very transparent, successful and competitive process, two shipyards were chosen in Canada to build our navy and Coast Guard ships moving forward. Agreements were signed with both shipyards. I have every confidence that both shipyards, Irving and Seaspan, will work very closely over the many years we have a relationship with them to make sure our ships for the Coast Guard and navy are built on time.

Of course, this does entail a lot of co-operation, collaboration and trust between the shipyards and the navy and Coast Guard, and I fully expect that will happen.

* * *

[Translation]

CULTURE

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in Manitoba, the francophone and Métis cultures are under attack from the Conservatives.

Major cuts to culture, such as to the weekly paper *La Liberté*, are going to undermine our heritage. It is vital to keep the former funding formula, which allows *La Liberté* to be the voice of French-speaking Manitoba.

Do the Conservatives realize that, with these attacks on the future of the Franco-Manitoban community, they are destroying our rich

cultural heritage? When will they reverse the cuts and stand up for Manitoba instead of taking us for granted?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me provide the hon. member with a clarification. There have been no cuts.

Our investments in this area are completely protected in the budget that is currently before the House of Commons. Our government has increased its funding and has protected it in each of its budgets. We will continue to invest in our heritage in both of Canada's official languages.

The changes she mentions were announced three years ago. I am happy that she has finally opened her eyes and ears, but the announcement was made three years ago. There is no reduction in our investments in this area and for publications of this kind.

* * *

[English]

RIEL HOUSE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Louis Riel was a hero, not a traitor, a champion to the Métis nation, the founder of Manitoba, a Father of Confederation murdered by the crown, and some even argue the best member for Provencher that Canada has ever elected.

Riel House will not survive without the stable core funding that was reduced to zero in the brutal budget bill. Is \$60,000 a year too much to honour the memory of the best member for Provencher ever elected, to honour this great Canadian hero, this icon?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague asks a great question, but it is somewhat insufficient on facts. We have not eliminated the budget. We have trimmed the budget. Parks Canada is doing its part, as all departments and agencies across government are doing this year.

Riel House National Historic Site is not closing. Visitors will still be able to enjoy self-guided tours, as they can at all of Canada's less visited historic sites. The house will remain open.

* * *

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION LEGISLATION

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, economic action plan 2012 is a plan for jobs, growth and long-term prosperity here in Canada, a plan that keeps taxes low and helps encourage businesses to expand and create jobs. It is no surprise that on March 29, after only a few short minutes, the tax and spend NDP declared its opposition to this pro-jobs, pro-growth plan. Now, nearly three months later, the NDP, led by its high tax, big spending leader, is playing procedural games to try to further delay the implementation of economic action plan 2012.

Oral Questions

Would the Minister of State for Finance explain to Canadians why it is so important that we get Bill C-38 passed?

• (1500)

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, in talking to the member for Peace River, I understand that his constituents are very deeply concerned, as are many Canadians, that the NDP is playing games with what is very important at this time, and that is moving forward with our economic action plan, a plan for jobs, growth and long-term sustainability.

I know NDP members think the resource industry is a disease on the country. It is a driver in our country. What are the NDP members voting against? They are planning on voting against a more efficient approval process for these resource development projects. They are planning on voting against better oversight for Canada's housing market and more—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Bourassa.

* * *

[Translation]

RIEL HOUSE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE OF CANADA

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about Riel House. Not only are the Conservatives going to cut the guided tours, they also want to close down the house. All visitors will get will be a leaflet. I am asking for some respect. It was the Conservatives who hanged Louis Riel. Today, they should at least honour his memory.

What are the Conservatives waiting for to make an investment of \$50,000 to honour the memory of one of the Fathers of Confederation and the founder of Manitoba?

The hon. member for Saint Boniface is doing nothing and the Métis want something to be done. What are the Conservatives waiting for? They oppose a sex exhibit, but what are they doing to protect—

The Speaker: Order. I regret having to interrupt the hon. member.

The hon. Minister of the Environment now has the floor.

[English]

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, bluster cannot compensate for a deficiency of facts. Riel House National Historic Site—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. Minister of the Environment has the floor.

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, again, my colleague, in his continued questions from across the floor, is completely and factually wrong.

Riel National Historic Site will remain open to the public. The house will remain open to visitors. Artifacts on the site will remain in the house. There will be staff on—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Joliette.

[Translation]

CANADA POST

Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP): Mr. Speaker, behind closed doors, the Conservatives are continuing their mission to shut down as many regional post offices as possible. In the meantime, the people in the rural areas of my riding and across Quebec have fewer and fewer services. This situation is harming not just the people, but also the local businesses that deal with Canada Post.

Do the Conservatives realize that the cuts to Canada Post in the regions are hurting the regional economy?

[English]

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is committed to ensuring that rural post offices stay open, and that is what we are doing. If the NDP members were really serious about Canada Post and ensuring its long-term viability, last year they would not have filibustered to prevent us from getting Canada Post delivering the mail the way it ought to be delivered. The NDP members just care about their big union bosses, rather than the average Canadian.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians who are ill and nearing their end of life need and deserve compassionate palliative care that improves their quality of life. Providing care and support to a loved one and easing the strain on families is important for families so they can make the most of the time that they have left together.

Could the Minister of Health please update the House on the announcement made today that indicates the commitment that our government has on this file?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, palliative care is all about making individuals comfortable and providing quality care in their final days. That is why I announced today \$3 million that will go toward taking care of people near the end of their lives out of a hospital setting.

It is my hope that, through work with the provinces and the territories and palliative care experts, we can respond to the specific needs of people with life-threatening diseases and their families.

* * *

• (1505)

[Translation]

ARTIFACTS

Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Quebec City has built its reputation on the wealth of its heritage, which draws thousands of tourists to the city every year. Instead of focusing on this heritage, the Conservatives are relocating five million artifacts to the federal capital. What is more, they are doing the same to Calgary, Winnipeg, Cornwall and Halifax.

Crating, transporting, uncrating, installing and classifying the artifacts in a new building will cost millions of dollars, and it is not clear that this will save any money in the long run.

Government Orders

Why spend so much money to lock up these artifacts? Why not give cities like Quebec City the chance to use the artifacts as tourist attractions and enjoy the resulting economic spinoffs?

[English]

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again my colleague has some of the facts wrong.

Artifacts that are currently stored in Quebec City, which have no appropriate place of presentation, can be more efficiently consolidated along with other stored artifacts across the country in Gatineau, Québec.

I spoke with the minister of heritage of the government of Quebec only several days ago, and we are working to find some appropriate locations, some appropriate museum or other venues to display these historic artifacts, which this government recognizes are important to the province of Quebec.

* * *

[Translation]

BILL C-38

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Prime Minister urged countries in trouble to combine fiscal discipline with economic growth measures.

Yet this same Prime Minister is forcing the passage of Bill C-38, a bill that will harm Quebec's economy.

We have only to think about the cuts to the Maurice Lamontagne Institute, the jewel of marine research, the cuts to the budget for regional economic development, the reform of employment insurance that will make the unemployed poorer and deprive businesses of the employees that they themselves have trained.

Why is the Prime Minister not practising what he preaches? What is the reason for these measures that are weakening Quebec's economy?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, since our economic action plan was implemented, 750,000 net new jobs have been created across the country. Quebec has obviously benefited from that. We are now continuing to move forward with the 2012 economic action plan. Our focus is on job creation and economic growth. Our measures will have tangible benefits for the economy of Quebec and Canada. I encourage the hon. member to join us in supporting Bill C-38.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1510)

[English]

POOLED REGISTERED PENSION PLANS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-25, An Act relating to pooled registered pension plans and making related amendments to other Acts, be read the third time and passed, and of the motion that this question be now put.

The Speaker: Pursuant to an order made earlier today, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the previous question at the third reading stage of Bill C-25.

Call in the members.

● (1515)

Before the Clerk announced the results of the vote:

The Speaker: The hon. Chief Government Whip is rising on a point of order.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, I would like you to confirm that the member for Beauce was included in the vote. He was, okay.

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 281)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy
Adler
Albas
Alexander
Allison
Anders
Andrews
Ashfield
Baird
Bélanger
Bennett
Bernier
Blaney
Boughen
Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)
Butt
Calandra
Cannan
Carrie
Chisu
Clarke
Coderre
Cuzner
Davidson
Del Mastro
Dreeshen
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Easter
Fantino
Flaherty
Fortin
Galipeau
Gameau
Glover
Goldring
Goodyear
Gourde
Harper
Hawn
Hiebert
Hoepfner
Hsu
Jean
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kent
Komarnicki
Lake
Lauzon
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
Leitch
Leung
Lobb
Lunney

Adams
Aglukkaq
Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambrose
Anderson
Armstrong
Aspin
Bateman
Bellavance
Benoit
Bezan
Block
Braid
Brisson
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Bruinooge
Byrne
Calkins
Carmichael
Casey
Chong
Clement
Cotler
Daniel
Dechert
Dion
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Dykstra
Eyking
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Fletcher
Fry
Gallant
Gill
Goguen
Goodale
Gosal
Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hayes
Hoback
Holder
James
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kerr
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lamoureux
Lebel
Leef
Lemieux
Lizon
Lukiwski
MacAulay

MacKay (Central Nova)
 Mayes
 McColeman
 Menegakis
 Merrifield
 Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
 Moore (Fundy Royal)
 Mourani
 Nicholson
 O'Connor
 Obhrai
 Opitz
 Paradis
 Penashue
 Poilievre
 Rae
 Rajotte
 Regan
 Rempel
 Rickford
 Saxton
 Schellenberger
 Sgro
 Shipley
 Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)
 Smith
 Sopuck
 St-Denis
 Storseth
 Sweet
 Toet
 Trost
 Trudeau
 Tweed
 Valcourt
 Van Kesteren
 Wallace
 Warkentin
 Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)
 Weston (Saint John)
 Wilks
 Wong
 Young (Oakville)
 Zimmer— 191

MacKenzie
 McCallum
 McGuinty
 Menzies
 Miller
 Murray
 Norlock
 O'Neill Gordon
 Oda
 Pacetti
 Payne
 Plamondon
 Preston
 Raitt
 Rathgeber
 Reid
 Richards
 Ritz
 Scarpaleggia
 Seeback
 Shea
 Shory
 Sorenson
 Stanton
 Strahl
 Tilson
 Toews
 Trotter
 Truppe
 Uppal
 Valeriot
 Van Loan
 Warawa
 Watson
 Williamson
 Yelich
 Young (Vancouver South)

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)
 Ashton
 Aubin
 Benskin
 Blanchette
 Boivin
 Boulerville
 Brahmi
 Caron
 Charlton
 Chisholm
 Chow
 Cleary
 Côté
 Cullen
 Davies (Vancouver East)
 Dewar
 Donnelly
 Dubé
 Dusseault
 Garrison
 Genest-Jourdain
 Godin
 Grogue
 Harris (St. John's East)
 Hughes
 Jacob
 Lapointe
 Latendresse
 Leslie
 Mai
 Martin
 Mathysen
 Michaud
 Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)

Angus
 Atamanenko
 Ayala
 Bevington
 Blanchette-Lamothe
 Borg
 Boutin-Sweet
 Brosseau
 Cash
 Chicoine
 Choquette
 Christopherson
 Comartin
 Crowder
 Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
 Day
 Dionne Labelle
 Doré Lefebvre
 Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
 Freeman
 Genest
 Giguère
 Gravelle
 Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
 Hassainia
 Hyer
 Kellway
 Larose
 LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
 Liu
 Marston
 Masse
 May
 Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
 Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)

Government Orders

Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
 Nantel
 Nicholls
 Papillon
 Pécelet
 Pilon
 Rafferty
 Raynault
 Saganash
 Scott
 Sims (Newton—North Delta)
 Stewart
 Toone
 Turmel— 97

Mulcair
 Nash
 Nunez-Melo
 Patry
 Perreault
 Quach
 Ravnagat
 Rousseau
 Sandhu
 Sellah
 Sitsabaiesan
 Thibeault
 Tremblay

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

The next question is on the motion. The hon. Chief Government Whip is rising.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, if you seek it I believe you will find agreement to apply the result of the previous vote to the current vote, with the Conservatives voting yes.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this fashion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Turmel: Mr. Speaker, we agree to apply the vote. The NDP will be voting against the motion. I would like to add the name of the hon. member for Victoria, who has arrived.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Mr. Speaker, the members of the Liberal Party will be voting in favour of the motion.

Mr. Louis Plamondon: Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois will be voting in favour of the motion.

[*English*]

Mr. Bruce Hyer: Thunder Bay—Superior North will be voting no.

Ms. Elizabeth May: The Green Party votes no.

Mr. Peter Goldring: I will be voting yes.

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

(*Division No. 282*)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy
 Adler
 Albas
 Alexander
 Allison
 Anders
 Andrews
 Ashfield
 Baird
 Bélanger
 Bennett
 Bernier
 Blaney
 Boughen
 Breitzkreuz
 Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
 Brown (Barrie)
 Butt

Adams
 Aglukkaq
 Albrecht
 Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
 Ambrose
 Anderson
 Armstrong
 Aspin
 Bateman
 Bellavance
 Benoit
 Bezan
 Block
 Braid
 Brisson
 Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
 Bruinoooge
 Byrne

Privilege

Calandra
Cannan
Carrie
Chisu
Clarke
Coderre
Cuzner
Davidson
Del Mastro
Dreeshen
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Easter
Fantino
Flaherty
Fortin
Galipeau
Garneau
Glover
Goldring
Goodyear
Gourde
Harper
Hawn
Hiebert
Hoeppner
Hsu
Jean
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kent
Komarnicki
Lake
Lauzon
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
Leitch
Leung
Lobb
Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)
Mayes
McColeman
Menegakis
Merrifield
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Mourani
Nicholson
O'Connor
Obhrai
Opitz
Paradis
Penashue
Poilievre
Rae
Rajotte
Regan
Rempel
Rickford
Saxton
Schellenberger
Sgro
Shipley
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)
Smith
Sopuck
St-Denis
Storseth
Sweet
Toet
Trost
Trudeau
Tweed
Valcourt
Van Kesteren
Wallace
Warkentin
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John)
Wilks
Wong
Young (Oakville)
Zimmer— 191

Calkins
Carmichael
Casey
Chong
Clement
Cotler
Daniel
Dechert
Dion
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Dykstra
Eyking
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Fletcher
Fry
Gallant
Gill
Goguen
Goodale
Gosal
Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hayes
Hoback
Holder
James
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kerr
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lamoureux
Lebel
Leef
Lemieux
Lizon
Lukiwski
MacAulay
MacKenzie
McCallum
McGuinty
Menzies
Miller
Murray
Norlock
O'Neill Gordon
Oda
Pacetti
Payne
Plamondon
Preston
Raitt
Rathgeber
Reid
Richards
Ritz
Scarpaleggia
Seeback
Shea
Shory
Sorenson
Stanton
Strahl
Tilson
Toews
Trottier
Truppe
Uppal
Valeriot
Van Loan
Warawa
Watson
Williamson
Yelich
Young (Vancouver South)

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)
Ashton
Aubin
Benskin
Blanchette
Boivin
Boulerice
Brahmi
Caron
Charlton
Chisholm
Chow
Cleary
Côté
Cullen
Davies (Vancouver East)
Dewar
Donnelly
Dubé
Dusseault
Garrison
Genest-Jourdain
Godin
Grogulé
Harris (St. John's East)
Hughes
Jacob
Lapointe
Latendresse
Leslie
Mai
Martin
Mathysen
Michaud
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Nantel
Nicholls
Papillon
Péclet
Pilon
Rafferty
Raynault
Saganash
Savoie
Sellah
Sitsabaiesan
Thibeault
Tremblay

Angus
Atamanenko
Ayala
Bevington
Blanchette-Lamothe
Borg
Boutin-Sweet
Brousseau
Cash
Chicoine
Choquette
Christopherson
Comartin
Crowder
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Day
Dionne Labelle
Doré Lefebvre
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Freeman
Genest
Giguère
Gravelle
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Hassainia
Hyer
Kellway
Larose
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Énard)
Liu
Marston
Masse
May
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Mulcair
Nash
Nunez-Melo
Patry
Perreault
Quach
Ravignat
Rousseau
Sandhu
Scott
Sims (Newton—North Delta)
Stewart
Toone
Turmel— 98

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.
(Bill read the third time and passed)

* * *

PRIVILEGE

BILL C-38

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, arising from a question of privilege that we raised just recently, it is incumbent upon us to respond to the government's intervention on this point.

As you will remember, Mr. Speaker, the question of privilege had directly to do with the access to information that all members of Parliament require for the vote that is coming quite shortly with respect to Bill C-38.

The question of privilege that was raised is a significant one because it talks about the central role of members of Parliament from all sides and, in particular, the role of the opposition to hold the government to account. We listened very carefully to the House leader's response from the government, and perhaps he was ill-prepared or ill-informed, but his points beared no merit to the case that we presented. We wanted to ensure, Mr. Speaker, that you understood the case as put forward by Canada's official opposition. In particular, the government House leader raised the issue of timing.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, questions of privilege must be raised at the earliest possible moment. The fact is that since the budget was introduced, we have sought, through every available means that we have at our disposal, such as questions on the order paper, during question period, at committee and through the Parliamentary Budget Officer, to find out what the implications are of this particular piece of legislation, in particular, the cuts to services and the cuts to employment that Canadians will be facing.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, from our deposition of yesterday, that information exists. The government has refused to offer that information for what we believe borders on bogus terms that came from the Privy Council Office directly, which works, obviously, hand-in-hand with the Prime Minister.

It is unlawful for the Privy Council Office to keep this information from parliamentarians and from the Parliamentary Budget Office. The timeliness of this was required as we waited for the government to provide the information that it was legally obligated to do. It was only after its final refusal in letters dated April 12 and then confirmed on May 9 that we knew that we had a question of privilege in front of us.

We have demanded and continue to demand that the government release this information so that we do not have members of Parliament voting blind on a piece of legislation. Again, it is incumbent upon all members of Parliament to be informed before they vote. The fact that the Conservatives seem to have no problem voting blind is a concern to me but not our problem. Our concern in the opposition is that we have everything available to us before we vote.

The third point, which is an important one, is that, in the intervention from the Privy Council Office, the Prime Minister's chief bureaucrat, it is illegal to break section 79.3(1) of the Parliament Canada Act, which is to hold known information from parliamentarians, in this case, holding it directly from members of Parliament and also through an officer of Parliament in the Parliamentary Budget Officer. We have been demanding this information for quite some time.

The last point is that the government house leader made some response that we needed to cite any particular section or provision of the bill but he knows better than this. As we know, a question of privilege is the intervention on the rights of all members of Parliament to perform our duties. The particular example here with Bill C-38, the Trojan Horse bill, is one more example that privilege applies in the individual or the collective when members of Parliament are unable to perform our functions on behalf of Canadians while the government knowingly withholds information that is pertinent to the vote that we are about to take.

Privilege

As you know, Mr. Speaker, and as Speaker Milliken knew in one of his last rulings before leaving this place, this is significant. In the case of Speaker Milliken's ruling, it had to do with the Afghan detainees. In this case, it has to do with the budget. However, the consistency of withholding information is the same. This is problematic, not just for the government in place now but for the function of Parliament and for the sanctimony with which we hold this place.

In order to do our jobs for those we represent every day, we must have the information that exists. The information exists and it has existed for some weeks. The government has refused, at all stages and at every opportunity we have given it, to respond in an honest and forthright way.

The second act the Conservatives moved once in government was the accountability act. This breaks their own act but, more important, it breaks the right and respect that we have for this place and the privilege that members of Parliament have to seek the truth and to understand the information available to us so we can vote with a clear conscience. That is a principle of Parliament and one that we will consistently hold.

Mr. Speaker, as you will make your ruling in some hours to come, I ask that you find this to be a breach of privilege in the individual and the collective case.

● (1520)

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for his further contributions on this point.

The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I do not wish to belabour the point but I do support the question of privilege just made by the hon. House leader of the official opposition.

I think we should all be quite shocked, as I was, that our Parliamentary Budget Officer, whose job it is to advise parliamentarians so we can do our work reviewing how the public purse is being dispensed and the impacts of the decisions we make in this place on the full functioning of the apparatus and the architecture of our government, has been unable to obtain information that should be readily available to his office, as it should be to all of us, represents a breach of privilege and, indeed, a further contempt.

● (1525)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in further response to this question of privilege, which, as I said, seems a little out of place, the reason I challenged the NDP House leader to cite which provisions of the bill or which sections were impugned by the lack of information he was looking for, which normally comes through appropriations, is because he is saying that we cannot go forward with the bill because he does not have the information related to it.

Government Orders

I do not see any of the information that he is seeking being related specifically to any provision of the bill. As I said, the disclosure of government spending on programs like this is normally done through appropriations bills, which are provided to Parliament, not through legislative structures in a budget implementation bill. I am sure the NDP House leader, as he becomes familiar with this process, will come to appreciate that.

The other element I want to address very briefly is the notion of the contrast with the other situations he raises. He raised the situation where there had been a resolution of a parliamentary committee or of Parliament's sending for papers. This budget bill went to the committee and the committee did its evaluation. The committee did not send a request to the government for papers, for information or for any of the things that he here is today seeking. I do not see that those situations are at all analogous.

The core issue is that what he is talking about is not part of a budget bill. The core issue is that what he is talking about is part of an appropriations bill. It is the information that gets disclosed to Parliament through the appropriations process. Therefore, there is really no merit to the question of privilege that has been raised here.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the last Parliament, the government ended up being charged with contempt for not providing proper information, which, basically, is the bottom line. This is very similar to that. The government has a record of not providing information to committees, to the Parliamentary Budget Officer and to this House. I think that is a very serious issue.

When we are asked to vote on a bill that covers some 70 pieces of legislation in one omnibus bill and Parliament, which is representative of Canadians, is not provided with proper information, that is, indeed, a very serious issue.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I have not had time to fully answer the government House leader's point but I would refer him to section 578 of Bill C-38, for which we have not had any effort to assess the impacts but which will be severe on Canada's economy and environment.

Mr. Speaker, I again refer you to clause 578 within Bill C-38.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. members for their further contributions and I will get back to the House in due course.

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[English]

JOBS, GROWTH AND LONG-TERM PROSPERITY ACT

The House resumed consideration of Bill C-38, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 29, 2012 and other measures as reported (without amendment) from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in support of Bill C-38 and to speak against the opposition amendments to delay this important legislation. I will focus my remarks on proposals for the new Canadian environmental assessment act 2012, which is contained in part 3 of the bill.

Before turning to some of the highlights, I will briefly explain why this legislation is important. The current federal regulatory system for project reviews is a patchwork of laws, regulations and policies that have been put in place over a number of decades. While founded upon the best of intentions, the result is an overly complex set of processes that have been plagued by delays and inconsistencies.

In 2007, our Conservative government took action by creating the major projects management office to provide oversight and to inject some coherence and consistency in project reviews. An additional \$30 million per year was also invested in the regulatory system. I am pleased that this funding has been renewed through budget 2012.

Despite this effort, it has become clear that fundamental legislative change is required. It is needed both to address the challenges at hand and to take advantage of Canada's promise and opportunity. This is why Bill C-38 introduces measures to promote responsible resource development. The four pillars of this initiative are straightforward: providing predictable and timely reviews, reducing duplication, strengthening environmental protection and enhancing aboriginal consultations.

The portion of Bill C-38 devoted to the Canadian environmental assessment act 2012 supports each of these pillars. First, Bill C-38 would provide for predictable and timely reviews through reasonable and certain legislated timelines for environmental assessments. This is important for investment decisions and the jobs that result from those decisions. This is important for participants in these reviews and is important for federal-provincial co-operation.

The second pillar of reducing duplication is an obvious objective in a federation like Canada where responsibility for the environment is shared between the levels of government. Bill C-38 would accomplish this through new co-operative mechanisms for environmental assessments. Substitution and equivalency provisions would provide for one project one review. The law ensures that environmental standards are not compromised.

There have been statements questioning this fundamental point. Subclause 34(1) of the new act is clear. It states:

The Minister may only approve a substitution if he or she is satisfied that

(a) the process to be substituted will include a consideration of the factors set out in subsection 19(1);

The factors in section 19 that must be considered are at the heart of a federal environmental assessment. A province would have to commit to meeting this standard before substitution or equivalency can be approved. Clause 34 goes on to ensure that the public is provided an opportunity to participate in a substituted environmental assessment and would have access to documents to enable meaningful participation.

Strengthening environmental protection is the third pillar of responsible resource development. I will speak more to this issue later on, but adding enforcement provisions to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act represents a significant step forward.

Enhancing consultations with aboriginal groups is the fourth pillar. The Government of Canada will continue the practice of integrating aboriginal consultations into the environmental assessment process for major projects. In fact, changes to the environment that affect aboriginal peoples are one of the specific environmental effects identified by the act that must be assessed.

A subcommittee of the Standing Committee on Finance was established to deal with part 3 of Bill C-38.

• (1530)

A few quotes from the witnesses who appeared before the subcommittee during committee stage further illustrate how the new Canadian environmental assessment act 2012 will support responsible resource development.

Mr. Ward Prystay, of the Canadian Construction Association, stated:

We believe the changes to CEAA will establish a regulatory framework that assures one project, one assessment. This will minimize duplication of process, improve timelines, and free up federal resources to tackle projects with the potential for greater environmental consequences.

Mr. Terry Toner, of the Canadian Electricity Association, pointed to the efficiencies that would result from this legislation without compromising environmental protection. This is what he had to say:

The efficiencies realized by the changes in Bill C-38 will in no way diminish the efforts and actions of the Canadian Electricity Association's member companies in protecting the environment throughout project design, construction, and operation.

Mr. Warren Everson, from the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, said:

I think the establishment of timeframes is very critical for all parties.

There has nevertheless been much debate about the impact of Bill C-38 on protection of the environment. I want to devote my remaining time to this, the third pillar of responsible resource development.

The facts are clear. Bill C-38 will strengthen environmental assessment and, in doing so, the federal government's ability to protect the environment.

The Minister of the Environment has spoken in the House and elsewhere about the importance of enforcement. I want to expand on what he has already said.

The existing Canadian Environmental Assessment Act does not have enforcement provisions. Environmental groups have long noted this gap. A Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development identified the lack of enforcement provisions as a matter of concern in 2003. This issue was raised again during the statutory review of the act this past year by the standing committee.

The proposals in Bill C-38 address the enforcement gap in three ways.

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First, a decision statement will be issued at the end of an environmental assessment. It will contain conditions that are binding on the proponent.

Second, there is authority for federal inspectors to ensure these conditions are being met.

Third, there are financial penalties of \$100,000 to \$400,000 for violations of the act, such as a failure to fulfill the conditions set out in the decision statement.

The bill also proposes a new tool to address the challenge of addressing cumulative effects. Currently the act is restricted to a single-project focus. This makes it difficult to assess cumulative effects, particularly in a region experiencing significant development through multiple projects and activities. Bill C-38 includes new authority for the Minister of the Environment to launch regional environmental assessments in co-operation with another jurisdiction. These studies will provide a better understanding of cumulative effects. This in turn will lead to the development of better mitigation measures.

Mr. Pierre Gratton, of the Mining Association of Canada, supports these regional approaches. He is not alone. He recently said:

This was a significant recommendation we had made, and I think has been overlooked by many as an important environmental improvement.... I think environmental groups and industry have been calling for this type of measure for many years and it is in this legislation.

There are other ways that Bill C-38 will strengthen environmental protection. For example, by moving from over 40 responsible authorities to just three, the government is focusing resources and creating true centres of expertise for environmental assessment.

• (1535)

To sum up, I want to emphasize that the four pillars of responsible resource development set out complementary objectives. It is possible to deliver timely, high-quality environmental assessments in a manner that avoids duplication. It is possible to make timely permitting decisions. It is possible to consult aboriginal peoples in a meaningful way.

Bill C-38 would provide the tools to make this happen.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have in front of me copies of a number of letters to the Prime Minister that I have received from constituents in Victoria. I would like to quote from the first of these letters and see if I can get a comment from my colleague on it. The letter is addressed to the Prime Minister. It says:

Dear Prime Minister

I have come to the conclusion that you do not intend to run for office in the next federal election. I have arrived at that supposition because by the year 2015 the damage you have wrought on Canadian society and the environment that sustains us will far outweigh any economic benefits of the policies you have pursued.

The letter goes on to say:

What's more, there is no guarantee that your government pension will be secure. You and that flock of sheep you call a government will have so far eroded the tax base with tax breaks for the rich and corporations and the reduction of jobs—virtually cancelling opportunities for our sons and daughters—that retirement in Canada may not be an option.

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I would like to get some comments from my colleague on that.

● (1540)

The Deputy Speaker: I want to remind members who are reading comments that any unparliamentary language contained in the letter is not allowed. What is not allowed directly cannot be spoken indirectly.

The hon. member for Richmond Hill.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Madam Speaker, I thank you for that clarification. I want to thank the hon. member for reading that epistle from an obviously very partisan constituent of his.

Let me just say this: we are very proud of the significant steps we have taken as a government under the leadership of our Prime Minister, who has led Canada to be one of the most successful economic countries in the world.

As a matter of fact, Canada today is first among the G7 countries. The International Monetary Fund is projecting that Canada will continue its leadership role over the next two years.

There are so many wonderful things happening. Canada was one of the first countries to come out of the global economic crisis, and we believe we are on the right track toward a balanced budget that this Prime Minister has led our nation to.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Madam Speaker, far beyond the process that many have talked about here today, the uncertainties created by the measures in the budget are vast.

Could my colleague clear up just one aspect? The questions that have been raised around EI are many, but this question is very simple, and I could do with a yes-no answer on this one.

We talk about EI claimants having to take suitable work. I have received inquiries from many in organized labour, from people in the building trades across the country who go from job to job and receive benefits in between. Will they have to take non-union jobs or risk losing their benefits? If they leave one union job and, let us say, the fish plant needs an electrician, will that union carpenter have to take that non-union job or otherwise risk losing his or her benefits?

Perhaps the hon. member could clarify that for the people who have contacted my office about that issue.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Indeed, Madam Speaker, in part 4, division 43 of the EI Act is being amended, but it is looking at the many critical points that are very needed at this juncture.

It includes aligning the calculation of EI benefit amounts with local labour market conditions, the refund of premiums to self-employed persons, the administration of overpayment of benefits, the assignment of benefits and the premium rate setting. Specifically in response to the hon. member's question, I would like to add this: it is important for us to try to get as many people as possible back to work once they lose their job.

Let me just say that since 2009, 750,000 net new jobs have been created by this government under the leadership of our Prime Minister.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am not happy to be getting up here today and talking about Bill C-38 in the

form in which it is before us, an assault on democracy resulting from a 452-page omnibus bill that would change over 70 pieces of legislation.

My colleagues on the other side can ooh and aah and all the rest of it, but I can say that when they were on this side of the House and the Liberals introduced what they called an omnibus bill—which was far less than what we have here, because we did not have all these changes to legislation—they hollered, screamed and banged the tables. I think we are very calm on this side and directly addressing the points that are giving us concern.

It would be one thing to bring forward a 452-page document called a “budget” in September and work from September through to June on it. That would be plenty of time for all of the committees and the rest of us to examine it. However, the Conservatives are clearly using this omnibus bill, which they have called a “budget”, to get through everything they want to clean up everywhere.

It will change 70 pieces of legislation. The omnibus bill will change the face of Canada.

If the Conservatives had the confidence level that they should have as the governing party, they would have sent the bill to committee, given us lots of time to examine it and accepted some of the amendments that would have come out at committee level, which probably would have improved some of it. Maybe some of it would never have come back into the House. That would have shown that they had respect for democracy in this country.

There is no minority-government concern hanging over our heads as we had previously, so there was lots of time to debate and discuss the bill. It is not as though the government has anything so pressing on its agenda that it has to shove this bill through today. The Conservatives could have separated the bill into a variety of different areas.

Clearly this is a Reform-style document that forgets democracy. The Conservatives can go abroad and talk about democracy in other countries around the world and tell them how they have to become more democratic and provide votes and opportunities. Here at home, quite frankly, what is happening is becoming an embarrassment.

I have done some traveling overseas this last little while, and I was asked by very many people what has happened to Canada when it comes to issues of human rights or how Canadians are being treated. Clearly there are questions around the world about our country and what has happened to it.

When we used to travel around the world, we were very proud to say that we were from Canada, that we were Canadians. I am not getting that sense back from people now. They are all asking what happened to Canada. They are seeing a significant change.

Well, that is what happens with governments: people elect them. Unfortunately, this election was clearly interfered with, which is something that I suspect Elections Canada will give us more information on. We know already that there were clearly some disparities and ongoing issues in some of the ridings.

However, we move beyond that because we respect democracy in Canada. We would like to think that everybody does the right thing and is honest and straightforward. Clearly, from what we are hearing, it does not sound as though that was the case.

The reality is that we have a majority government today. One of the government members was saying to me yesterday that there will be no election until October 14, 2015. Even when I questioned, there was no chance of an election before then. Well, everything is in the power of the Prime Minister, and he can decide tomorrow, for whatever reason, to have an election. However, if the government is so confident of not having an election until sometime in October of 2015, what is the pressure and the worry that it has to change EI today?

The changes the Conservatives would make would affect so much, including the temporary foreign workers who come over to work on farms and in the agricultural industry. Many of them have been coming to this country to work on farms in Canada for many years; now, all of a sudden, that door is closed for them, even though many of the farmers are saying that they will not be able to get enough workers. By the time they get around to responding to all of this process, their season will be over. That will clearly be a significant problem for their economy.

● (1545)

When we are looking at the changes to EI, seasonal work is a big part of Canada. There are weather issues. Who is going to do all of the seasonal work if the fishers in Newfoundland or New Brunswick are told that they cannot work seasonally any more and they have to go out west or wherever to find a job? Who is going to do the fishing if they all take full-time jobs out west? There are an awful lot of implications. I can appreciate the intent of what the government wants to do, but I do not think it has been thought through as thoroughly as it could have been.

I will now talk about seniors for a few minutes. I am the critic for the seniors file and have spent a lot of time calling on the government to give them more help and additional funds. What does it do? It decides it is going to increase the age for accessing old age security by another two years. Is that happening tomorrow? We have closure on this bill and we have to shove it through. We are going to be up for two or three nights voting because there is an urgency for this 452-page document to be passed this week, when all it would take to satisfy the opposition would be to break up the bill and allow parts of it to have more debate at committee.

On the issue of changing the date of entitlement for old age security, other countries are changing it, but those countries have a pension that makes up 60% to 70% of what people were earning before. It has a huge hit on the GDP. Here in Canada we have a very modest pension system when people reach 65, which is about 25%, or 2.1% of the GDP. It is a very small amount. It is a recognition of the money people paid in taxes and it is going back to them, plus the CPP, and for some, the OAS.

If we consider all of those amounts and that people are now going to have to wait until age 67, it means that every Canadian under the age 54 will be losing \$15,000 a year for two years, which amounts to \$30,000. The government talks about not raising taxes and all of that stuff, but it is a pretty big tax hit when people lose \$30,000 out of

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their gross net income over the period of their lifetime. Members should not say that is an easy thing to deal with. That is going to have a huge impact on a lot of Canadians, but it is a long way away, so why is there a need to push this bill through by using closure? There is no rationale for it, other than the fact that the government wants it done. The government wants to do things its way and it is going to push it through whether we like it or not. A lot of Canadians who watch these proceedings really do not understand why it is necessary to do that.

Aside from the fact that this is clearly an abuse of power and an assault on democracy, all Canadians should be enraged. We live in this peaceful country and people do not know what is coming until they knock on the door, whether it is a seniors issue, an environmental issue or an EI issue. When people need the services of the government or see that the country itself is eroding is when they start asking questions. Otherwise, the streets would be filled with people protesting.

Let us look at the changes to the environmental regulations. It is very important that we protect the environment, but what is the government doing? It is practically deregulating everything and removing all of the environmental protections and safeguards that would better protect all of us, and our kids and grandkids in the future. A lot of the impacts as a result of this budget are not going to be felt for years to come, and that is exactly what the government wants. The government wants to get this through quietly with as little trouble as possible, and then go on to dismantle the country.

The Prime Minister said several times that if he had an opportunity to become prime minister, he would change the face of Canada. There is a quote somewhere by the current Prime Minister. That is exactly what he is doing, step by step, a little at a time so Canadians do not get too alarmed. He is moving forward on changing our country, exactly what he said when he was the head of the Reform Party, not the head of the Conservatives.

● (1550)

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's presentation, although I do not agree with the premise of her speech.

We were elected to the House, as the member indicated, to get things done. This budget implementation bill is a function of what was in the budget. The budget is the policy document. The implementation bill puts things into action to make required changes.

Which clauses in this bill would the member support if they were moved out of the bill and voted on separately? I want to know which parts of the budget implementation bill the Liberals actually support.

● (1555)

Hon. Judy Sgro: Madam Speaker, we all welcome change.

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However, this is the Parliament of Canada. This is not the Parliament of the Conservative Party. The 308 members in this chamber were elected to represent our country and Canadians. That means we should be part of the decision-making. That means when a bill goes to committee, there are lengthy discussions with Canadians and with organizations and agencies on what is the best way for Canada to move forward.

If the government wants to have pension reform, then some time should be spent consulting across Canada on what is the best way to move forward on pension reform. It should not just be decided that the age is going to be moved up to 67. That is not the appropriate way to do things. That is the way the Reform Party said it would do it, and sure enough, that is exactly what it is doing.

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member's comments about the lack of consultation on this bill. It is a huge omnibus bill which includes changes to 70 pieces of legislation. Just one of those pieces of legislation would be significant.

I have a letter in my hands from Jim Harvey of Victoria. He is writing to the Prime Minister. He is concerned about the lack of consultation as well. He said:

I am writing you this letter to voice my opposition to Bill C-38. I am very concerned that a budget bill has so many other pieces of legislation attached to it that should not be there. Of particular concern to me is the power given to cabinet concerning final decisions about large energy projects. This is too much power [in their] hands....

This is a democracy! Please let our MPs debate this omnibus bill piece by piece and vote on each section of this bill separately.

We have called on the government to consider that and it flat out rejected it. I am wondering if my hon. colleague can comment on that approach.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Madam Speaker, as I said earlier, if the government really had confidence in the pieces of legislation it is proposing to change, it would not have had a problem defending it. Clearly, the government does not have that confidence, so it has thrown 70 pieces of legislation into an omnibus bill.

This is supposed to be a budget bill, items that clearly affect the budget, but the government has included everything but the kitchen sink in it. Clearly it is not going to be good for the country. We are prepared to do whatever is necessary on behalf of Canadians to fight to get the government to do what is right.

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this morning in the natural resources committee, we heard testimony about the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act. It was very revealing to see how it was arrived at. It was supported by industry, environmental groups, labour groups, and all kinds of players in Yukon society. It took three to four years to craft it. It is in complete contradistinction to what the government is doing here.

I think the government could take a page and learn from the Yukon experience to come up with a better regulatory process, improve it, which is something we all want to see for Canadians, but do it in a way that is inclusive, meaningful, consultative, and ends up with a process that everyone believes in.

Perhaps my colleague could respond to that.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Madam Speaker, that is the way things are supposed to get done. In my 25 years in political life, we have had good success when we have done exactly as the hon. member has suggested. One brings all the affected people together to design a plan and a program. That is how one moves forward. That is the way one has true success, not by deciding in a backroom on the way one wants to go.

We do not have the money, anyway. The Conservatives are starving the government for revenue. At the rate they are going, between the GST reductions and other reductions, government is not going to have enough money to function. That will be their rationale as to why they will have to do other cuts, because they do not have the money to do the oversight required.

• (1600)

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to debate the government's budget implementation bill, Bill C-38, the jobs, growth and long-term prosperity act.

This is a very necessary bill. Procedurally, it follows the adoption of a very important budget that continues to move us on a low-tax track for jobs and growth. This builds on that. Of course, the government is razor focused on the economy. The government was given a strong mandate by Canadians to be focused that way.

The results speak well. There have been nearly 760,000 net new jobs, 90% of them full-time, since the height of the great recession. We have received international praise for our policies and the trend of our economy by the OECD and the IMF, among others. All three major credit rating agencies, Moody's, Fitch and Standard and Poor's, have reaffirmed our top credit rating. There are no issues in that regard, unlike other countries in the world.

Of course, we recognize that more can be done. There is an opportunity to do even more. There are Canadians who are still unemployed. We also recognize statistics from last year. There were some 250,000 unfilled jobs in Canada. We clearly have a need to connect Canadians to labour force realities here in Canada, even within their own labour markets. That is why we need greater efficiency with the employment insurance program.

We still have challenges to face with respect to improving our productivity and innovation. We are in a competition in the 21st century for not only global capital investment but for the most talented minds, those with the talent and skills sets from around the world, if we are going to persist in having a first world economy and first world standard of living by extension.

Now that we have passed the budget, it is important that we pass the implementation act to implement our far-reaching economic action plan 2012. We need to pass it now, not weeks or months from now. It is important that we pass it now.

By way of process, budgets are long-ranging in terms of their consultation. We started consulting extensively last fall. The budget itself was tabled some four months ago. We have had all kinds of debate about the direction of the country.

We have had lengthy debate already in the House of Commons. A full committee and an additional subcommittee conducted hearings with respect to the various aspects of this implementation act. I was able to participate in part of that. I spoke with the Retail Council of Canada, the Canadian Auto Workers Union and others.

I think the NDP members themselves probably agree we do not need any more debate on that. After all, yesterday they voted against sitting until midnight, so clearly they are not interested in debate any longer.

It is also important to pass the bill now because there are threats to the global economy still looming. In the United States unemployment is up recently. The eurozone woes are extremely well known. We do not want to delay implementing the budget and getting on with growing our economy.

There is context for the current budget implementation bill. Budget 2012 builds on previous budgets. There is a real logic to what the government has been doing through the economic action plan in 2009, the subsequent low-tax plan for jobs and growth. One could even go back further.

At the end of this month it will be eight years that I have been here and have been privileged to be the hon. member of Parliament for Essex.

• (1605)

In 2007 we brought in a budget and laid out a vision document called Advantage Canada. We tackled four major challenges: high Liberal taxes on business investment; low business investment, particularly in equipment and machinery technology; a skills shortage; and the forecasted rapid decline of the population over the coming decades.

We proposed five major advantages. First, a tax advantage, or as we like to think, a low-tax advantage. We have reduced all kinds of taxes and we continue to do that. Second, a fiscal advantage. Third, an entrepreneurial advantage, cutting red tape, which is a key move for ensuring our businesses move forward. Fourth, a knowledge advantage, so we could have the best educated, most skilled and most flexible workforce in the world. Fifth, an infrastructure advantage.

We brought in the Building Canada plan, which was an extensive seven-year, comprehensive infrastructure plan with many components to it. It has been helping to renovate and modernize our infrastructure not just for quality of life issues, but also to suit our economy moving forward. We are committed to that.

We brought in the borders and gateways fund as well. We have been acting consistently. Economic action plan 2012 continues to follow in that direction.

We need to pass Bill C-38 now for another reason that is a little more local for me and the Windsor Essex economy. There is a 9.9% unemployment rate, although that is down from well over 15% at the height of the great recession.

There is room for improvement. We need further economic development and diversification. We need to connect those who are unemployed with available jobs in the local workforce. The

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proposed EI changes, for example, become very clear. We need to give more job information to those individuals who are on EI claims, many of whom think they are faithfully pursuing their responsibilities by looking at job banks. Job banks show only a fraction of the jobs that are available to them.

We are connecting the temporary foreign worker program to the EI program so that permits for foreign workers are not given until local workers have an opportunity to connect to that. That is important. I look at the greenhouse industry in my district and the high tech industry. The high tech industry provides good paying jobs, yet there may be people who are not aware that jobs are available in that sector.

We are proposing sensible reforms.

There is also responsible resource development. The opposition is positive that resource development is not a good thing for the Ontario economy. Nothing could be further from the truth. I look at a company like Southwestern Manufacturing that made its exclusive fame at the time in the auto industry until tough times came to the auto industry. What has it done? The company has diversified. It has gone to the mining industry and the oil and gas industry. It does heavy machining, which is an easily transferrable skill from the auto sector to the needs of the economy. Half a trillion dollars in responsible resource development: that is a huge amount of investment potential in resource projects in the next 10 years. Mining is one of the fastest growing sectors in Canada. It provides good paying jobs for Canadians.

There is a responsible and balanced way to do this. How do we do responsible development? These measures are important for my region as well.

Innovation is important. I believe it was a former Chrysler executive who once said that the future of the auto industry was the six inches between our ears. When other countries are pulling back in a mode of austerity on innovation, this government is doubling down on that investment, doubling IRAP and focusing on commercialization. These are all important measures because innovation will drive high paying jobs for the future not just for my region, but right across this country.

I urge the opposition to reconsider and support Bill C-38.

• (1610)

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Madam Speaker, an article from the *National Post* states:

The sight of oil oozing into an Alberta river from a leaky pipeline is a visual the Conservatives could have done without, as their omnibus budget bill reached Parliament for a final vote. They must be praying no one finds any oil-covered ducks.

The bill, among other things, makes it easier to gain approval to build pipelines under rivers, similar to the Plains Midstream Canada pipeline currently spilling oil into the Red Deer River.

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I want to ask the member how this bill would help monitor and enforce pipeline security to avoid oil spills in—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Essex.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Madam Speaker, that is from a member of a party that wants a moratorium on oil sands expansions. The NDP members have said that long and clear. They would rather not have the investment. They would rather not have the job growth there. So they use environmentalism as a means of saying that we should not have any responsible resource development. However, instead this implementation act proposes a balanced way forward. It would strengthen regulation because it would ensure that the government would not have to worry about small-scale projects, the minor everyday projects, and instead could focus its efforts on the types of enhancements and oversight.

I was at the oil sands a number of years ago with the environment committee. I have seen it. We have enhanced the monitoring of water quality and other things in the region. This is a government that looks out for the environment. We can do it in a way that is smart enough to move this economy forward. That is why those members need to support this particular bill.

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, how does the hon. member square the circle? The Conservatives have had two on the books already that had to go back to the drawing board, but in their throne speech they said they were going to bring in a new Fisheries Act. Then they took these fisheries provisions and jammed them into this bill. How do they square that circle?

Mr. Jeff Watson: Madam Speaker, the Fisheries Act is very important to my region as well. We keep hearing “coast to coast to coast”. There is a fourth coast in this country and that is the Great Lakes, Ontario's entire southern border being water based. We have a commercial fishery in the western basin of Lake Erie that is extremely valuable as an important breeding ground. What we need is DFO officials worried about that type of body of water, not a ravine or ditch that might get a bit of water at some point so somebody can float a kayak down there every six months or every few years. Yet that is where they are spending an enormous amount of time. Our changes to the Fisheries Act would focus our efforts on bodies of water and on the commercial fishery realities and not—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I would like to give an opportunity for a last question.

The hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona, a very brief last comment.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is hard to be brief on this. I sat with the hon. member for a while on the environment committee. I am a little stunned at the tally of jobs that he reiterated that the Conservatives created. Could the hon. member tell the House if the Conservatives are also keeping a running tally of the science jobs they would kill through their budget and budget implementation bill on fisheries; environmental protection; environmental assessment; reclamation; in government, in industry and in the private sector; and at universities?

Mr. Jeff Watson: Madam Speaker, I will only counter by saying that this implementation act would allow us to strengthen our oversight, whether of the environment or of fisheries, but to do it in a sensible way. It would allow us to do responsible resource development and all of these things in a way that allow sustainable

development. We can grow the economy and that is a good thing, not using environmentalism as a means of trying to slow or eliminate development.

The opposition members opposed this immediately when we brought the budget out. It is no wonder they opposed the implementation act. We are not surprised. That is why we need to get on and have a vote on this.

• (1615)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a real pleasure to be able to join the debate on Bill C-38, the budget implementation act, our government's plan to keep Canada on course toward long-term growth and prosperity. I want to emphasize to my opposition colleagues in the NDP, the Liberal Party and others in this place that, through the measures that they have undertaken to delay this budget, they are in fact indicating that their concern is not with everyday Canadians who want to see long-term economic growth and prosperity in this country.

At a time when the global economy remains fragile, our government is focused and will remain focused on those Canadians hardest hit by the economic downturn by helping create and protect jobs.

When it comes to creating a job market that is strong and efficient, our government continues to take strong and responsible action. We talk a lot in this place about jobs. We talk about the importance of providing opportunity for everyday Canadians. How does a government do that? Clearly, a government does not hire each and every person who is looking for a job. We create an environment that attracts investment and opportunity and provides that opportunity to Canadians. So far, by any measure, this government's actions are clearly providing results for everyday Canadians.

Since 2009, I know that this number has been said many times in this place, employment has increased by over 760,000 net new jobs. We have said many times that it is the strongest job growth in the entire G7, but that is actually understating it. It is the strongest job performance in the G7 by a very wide margin. It is in no small part due to the measures in Canada's economic action plan dating back to January 2009. I was pleased to participate in the creation of the budget. I think frankly Canadians, generations from now, will look back and say that it was an incredible plan and an incredible document, and that the government of the day should be celebrated for its foresight. More than nine in ten jobs created since July 2009 have been full-time positions, and close to 80% of them are in high-wage industries in the private sector.

When we listen to what Moody's, a respected global credit rating agency, had to say about Canada we should all be encouraged as Canadians. It stated:

In the view of Moody's sovereign analysts, the Government of Canada's Aaa ratings are based on the country's very high degree of economic resiliency, its high government financial strength and its low susceptibility to event risk....The outlook for Canada's ratings is stable. The country was affected less than most other advanced economies by the global credit crisis and recession, and its government financial position remains comfortable.

However, we cannot rest on this success.

I just heard my hon. colleague from Essex speak a few moments ago. I know he is passionate about the southwestern Ontario economy and creating opportunity in that economy. His economy is not so different from mine. The foundational strength of my economy, originally founded locally, was in settling the land and in agriculture, but later grew. Along with the Canadian Pacific Railway, we grew a manufacturing base in Peterborough and in our region that has supported families and economic growth for generations.

However, we want not just to preserve that but to create growth in that sector. In Peterborough we have seen significant growth in our manufacturing sector, contrary to what members may hear. Through the Kawartha manufacturing initiatives, the Tri-Association Manufacturers Initiative, we have been able to create a significant number of jobs. We have done it with skills, with skills training, with innovation, all supported by this government and its economic action plan. That is how the next generation of manufacturing and the people who will manufacture those goods will find success in this country. We will do it by focusing on innovation and by investing with these companies and supporting them.

• (1620)

My colleague talked about the auto sector, but it is obviously much further and much broader reaching than just the auto sector, but we will also open markets.

So much of what we are working to do, not just in this document, but every day, and when we are focused on the economy, we are focused on opening up markets, providing opportunities and creating jobs right at home.

I want to go through a few measures in our economic action plan 2012. As I said, it reinforces the government's commitment to move toward an immigration system, which is focused on the economy as well, with the following three key steps, and this is also something that is very important in my region.

First, we will return applications and refund up to \$130 million in fees to certain federal skilled worker applicants. This measure will improve responsiveness of Canada's immigration system by more immediately directing our efforts toward addressing modern labour market realities.

Second, we will work with the provinces and territories and other stakeholders to support further improvements of foreign credential recognition and to identify the next set of target occupations beyond 2012.

Third, we will continue to consider additional measures to strengthen and improve the temporary foreign worker program and

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we will help support economic recovery and growth by better aligning the program with labour market demands.

This is all part and parcel with our larger plan to ensure that we do not just create jobs, but that we have the skilled people we need and, frankly, the raw people power to support the growth of our economy. When our economy grows, it benefits all of us. It provides all of the funding for so many things that so many people in this place care about, whether it is health care, or education, or transfers to the provinces, or support for our foreign embassies and the many good activities that Canada undertakes through CIDA and other agencies, all of these things, all of the strengths that the federal government has is based on a strong economy, a strong labour market, a strong natural resources sector. It is critical.

It never ceases to amaze me that when we come forward with a plan like our economic action plan 2012, the opposition will find things that they claim for that reason and that reason alone they will vote against the entire document. I would argue that there are so many strong and important measures in this document. I do not see how members can vote against it.

When Canadians look at the government's overall approach toward providing and protecting the economy, toward creating long-term economic growth and prosperity, they will receive this budget as good news. They will support it. In the future, members in the House will be held accountable for how they voted on this very important document.

As I said, we have made great progress such as 760,000 net new jobs created and the growth in our GDP leads the G8. We continue to outperform comparable industrial economies. The focus of this government is to back the promise we made to Canadians.

There is one more sector that I want to address. It is agriculture. It seems often it gets lost among the debate in this place. It does not get mentioned as much as it should and it is so critically important to the well-being of our overall economy.

I have heard many people talk about the Fisheries Act and the changes to it. Farmers in my riding have come forward many times on these amendments and have said that they do not understand why, having farmed areas for generations, they would be harassed for regulations that do not make any sense. That is why we are making these changes. That is why I am proud to support them.

I am proud to support this budget. It contains important measures for the people of Peterborough and, indeed, for the people of Canada.

• (1625)

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague's comments. I was struck with the notion that there is this and that so therefore we should support it.

Conservatives cannot get their head around the fact that Canadians are quite upset and outraged right now at the way this is being done. It is about separating the bill. It is about what one MP once said should be done in the House. He said, referencing another omnibus bill:

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Dividing the bill into several components would allow members to represent views of their constituents on each of the different components in the bill. The bill contains many distinct proposals and principles and asking members to provide simple answers to such complex questions is in contradiction to the conventions and practices of the House.

That was the Prime Minister, and he was making a very salient argument. It was about taking a bill, which was smaller than this one, and asking members of Parliament to make decisions on things of which they did not know the consequences because they had not done their homework was irresponsible and undemocratic.

Why does the member stand and not reference what is a very cogent argument, that we should simply separate the bills and do our job respectfully, smartly and listen to Canadians?

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Madam Speaker, I am surprised by what I am hearing in this debate, which is not being heard, for example, in the Ontario legislature. I know the member is aware of the current budget bill that is being passed in the province of Ontario with the support of Andrea Horwath of the Ontario NDP. That is also comprehensive legislation. In fact, I believe the overall document is only about 20 pages shorter than our budget document. It is very comparable in size. I think the Government of Ontario recognizes, as we do, that there is a need for speed.

Government must be focused on the economy. These are not normal times that we live in and we must preserve Canada's advantages. We must continue to push forward, creating opportunity for long-term growth, economic prosperity and jobs in our country.

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member talked about holding people accountable and members being accountable for their actions. I am wondering when the member is going to be held accountable and table the documents which he referred to in a newspaper article on Saturday. We are still waiting for those documents. He has a chance to be accountable. When is he going to let us know when he is going to do that?

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Madam Speaker, we are having a conversation about the budget, but I will answer the member's question. As I said, all of the expenditures that were incurred by my campaign and, indeed, by my association are fully reflected in all of my filings with Elections Canada. I will be providing all documentation to support that in due course.

The member has indicated that he will vote against this budget. In fact, he has not supported any of the measures that we have undertaken in support of Newfoundland and Labrador, whether it was Muskrat Falls, the new ships for Marine Atlantic, sealers or the tradition of seal hunting. People know they cannot count on the Liberal Party in Newfoundland and Labrador, but they can count on the Conservative Party of Canada to support them, as we have in the past.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Madam Speaker, I congratulate the MP for Peterborough, who is one of the best MPs that Peterborough has ever had. He is hard working. He put things forward and explains the importance of the budget to his constituents.

Could he comment on the ideology about playing "silly buggers" with all of these amendments, as the *Toronto Sun* said? No matter what we do, the NDP will vote against it. This budget is about jobs. We are trying to create jobs. The leader of the NDP called jobs a

disease. Could my colleague comment on the silliness of this and ideology behind it. Does he have any explanations for the silliness?

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Madam Speaker, since I have been elected, we have always referred to spring, which has been joyfully acknowledged by those in the press and others, as silly season. This is just an extra silly season.

I have heard members of the opposition opine about democracy. It just occurred to me that we will have an awful lot more democracy this spring than we have had in other years. We are going to vote an awful lot more. I will be here exercising my democratic right and that of my constituents, standing up for jobs, economic growth and long-term prosperity. I do not care how many votes there are.

• (1630)

The Deputy Speaker: 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 St. John's East, Search and Rescue; the hon. member for St. Paul's, 41st General Election.

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is with a rather heavy heart that I rise in the House to speak to Bill C-38.

Not only do I oppose the content of this bill, but I also strongly oppose how the government has gone about getting it through the House.

I was very idealistic when I arrived in the House of Commons barely a year ago. I truly believed in the goodwill of this government, which had just been elected to do politics differently. I realize that the reality is altogether different and that the government wants to push through bills of this magnitude without consultation or consideration by committees and the House.

I oppose this bill because I believe it will have serious consequences not just on jobs, but also on growth and long-term prosperity. In fact, this government is not investing in the economy of the future, but rather in the economy of the past.

In my opinion, this bill is not in the best interest of Canadians and does not reflect the fact that the government must work for the common good.

Canada must foster economic development in a way that respects the principle of sustainable development and promotes the development of our communities and our environment.

It is with this in mind that the NDP has been calling on the government for several years now to reform and modernize the Investment Canada Act, one of the main components of our economic regulatory system. I am talking about it today because this bill includes changes to the Investment Canada Act.

Although the NDP has been calling for an overhaul of the Investment Canada Act for several years, and although a motion was unanimously adopted by the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology to review the Investment Canada Act—I am on that committee, so I should know—this has not been done. Instead, the government continues to hide certain changes to that act within this omnibus bill.

Thus, with so many things going on, the government is modifying the Investment Canada Act bit by bit and without really carefully studying the consequences this will have on jobs, growth and long-term prosperity.

The government promised to tighten up the Investment Canada Act a long time ago, but I am disappointed that it has decided to include these changes in the budget implementation bill, instead of going ahead with the consultations it had promised.

The act will now enable the government to disclose the reasons why it would oppose a foreign acquisition, but the act already sets out some exceptions. The government will first have to consult the company in question and refrain from disclosing the reasons why it opposes the purchase if it would cause prejudice to the company. The changes included in Bill C-38 will also allow a penalty in the form of a security, and not just money, to be imposed on firms found to violate a country's legislation.

The government's proposed amendments to the Investment Canada Act are only minor corrections, when we consider the scope of the challenges.

● (1635)

The biggest amendment made to the act by the government was not made through Bill C-38 but through the regulations. So it is appropriate that I mention it in the context of this speech, given that the government continues to make amendments to the act without going through Parliament or the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology, which would be the appropriate forum.

When foreign investors are buying a Canadian company, an assessment is conducted under the Investment Canada Act. The assessment threshold is currently \$300 million, depending on the value of the company's assets. On May 25, 2012, the Minister of Industry announced that, in four years, the threshold would increase to \$1 billion, depending on the value of the business. This new measure was based on the recommendations of a committee that submitted a report in June 2008 entitled "Compete to Win". I note that it was not the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology that made these recommendations or a committee of parliamentarians, but an ad hoc committee, if I may call it that.

This announcement will have fairly significant consequences on the possibility of keeping Canadian companies, especially the medium-sized or larger companies, because there will be no review under the Investment Canada Act.

The *Globe and Mail* recently published an in-depth report on the disappearance of Canada's medium-sized businesses. Canada has many small businesses, but we seem to be losing more and more of our medium-sized businesses, particularly in the manufacturing sector.

These announcements and changes to the Investment Canada Act were made—I repeat—without MPs' approval and with no real discussion by the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology. They will have negative consequences on several sectors of our economy and on Canada's ability to help medium-sized businesses thrive and to keep them in our economy.

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Long-term prosperity means long-term jobs. Helping our manufacturing sector to flourish, particularly medium-sized businesses in that sector, is in Canada's best interest. These industries take root in their communities and become active partners in the regions. They will provide long-term jobs, which lead to long-term growth and prosperity.

This is troubling. The government keeps talking about 750,000 new jobs. But let us take a closer look at that number. Those 750,000 jobs have been created since the lowest point of the recession following the loss of 430,000 jobs during the recession. That means we have about 320,000 net new jobs since the beginning of the recession. Yet the number of people in the job market grew by approximately 600,000 during that period. That is why our unemployment rate is still much higher than it was before the recession. It is currently 7.3%.

● (1640)

We are not currently creating enough jobs to keep pace with growth.

I could go on at length about how this bill will have negative consequences on jobs, growth and long-term prosperity.

[English]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened to my colleague's speech. It seems she is so far off track about what the world needs and what Canada needs. We are trying to focus on job creation.

I would like to quote from the *Toronto Sun* to illustrate the point:

As Europe stands poised on the brink of a disastrous economic wildfire that could blacken the world, the [NDP leader's] hypocrisy and self-obsession is in full flame...vowing to delay the passing of [economic action plan 2012] by playing silly buggers...with amendments and procedure....This is nothing but grandstanding....This is a budget designed to create jobs and inspire economic growth, and it comes to the House of Commons at a moment that can only be described as the 11th hour of a global economic conflagration....Right now, there is only one enemy in our fight to protect Canada from the repercussions of Europe's burning. And it's...[the NDP leader]. This is inarguable.

This is an important piece of legislation to get through.

I am curious. Have any of the NDP members actually run a business before? Have any of them had to meet payroll? Can any of them actually show that they understand what job creation is? Could those members stand now? I do not see any of them standing right now.

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc: Madam Speaker, I am standing up to denounce that source, that media source.

But we know that the *Globe and Mail* did a story that points exactly to what I have said, that we are about to lose a major sector of our economy. A strong economy is based on a resource sector, a manufacturing sector, a service sector, as well as investments in the knowledge economy.

This bill denies those realities. This bill denies science. It reduces grants for fundamental scientific research. It is destroying our manufacturing sector. I have said enough.

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[English]

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague on her speech. It was very informative. It is great to hear the NDP talking about the economy and jobs, and starting to show more concern for that very area.

The government keeps talking about all of these jobs that it creates, but from all the numbers I can see certainly in the province of Ontario, a lot of those jobs are part-time jobs. When the government talks about 700,000 jobs, it is probably 700,000 part-time jobs. It is certainly not 700,000 full-time jobs. Maybe the government is only looking out west and not at the rest of Canada.

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc: Madam Speaker, I think there is something very important that we need to do. We have to look to the future. We have to look ahead to tomorrow's economy. There are all sorts of new jobs that we can create in an economy that takes environmental protection into account, meaning that we can take advantage of the challenge of protecting the environment and of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to innovate and promote technologies that will make it possible to have attractive and well-paid jobs across Canada, from sea to sea. There are some very interesting and exciting opportunities.

This government is not interested in looking to the future. It is interested in looking back at the past and continuing in a flawed economy.

• (1645)

[English]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Labour, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to have this opportunity to speak in support of Bill C-38.

Jobs, growth and long-term prosperity are at the heart of this bill, which comes as Canada is emerging from the global economic downturn and facing increased competition in the global marketplace. Fortunately, we are facing these challenges from a position of strength.

Our government pledged in the Speech from the Throne that we would promote a stable low-tax environment, develop a highly skilled and flexible workforce, support innovation, and expand access to markets abroad. Bill C-38 is the next step in delivering on those promises to Canadians.

The Government of Canada's priorities are also the priorities of the labour program. The labour program is cutting red tape. It is modernizing and streamlining its operations, as well as consolidating some programs and activities. The cost-saving measures within the labour portfolio will result in savings of \$16.7 million. At the same time, we are continuing to fulfill our mandate to promote a fair, safe, productive workplace, and facilitate co-operative labour relations in federally regulated private industries.

I will begin by describing what Bill C-38 will mean for the federal labour portfolio. When businesses go bankrupt, many people suffer, but some of the most unfortunate are those former employees who were entitled to long-term disability pensions and indeed were receiving long-term disability pensions. Bankruptcies can lead to the reduction or even complete loss of long-term disability benefits

when there are insufficient funds to cover the outstanding claims. Economic action plan 2012 proposes to require that going forward, federally regulated private sector employers insure on a go-forward basis, as I said, any long-term disability plans for employees. This will provide additional financial security to these individuals and their families when they need it most.

The new provisions for long-term disability plans complement the support our government already gives workers through the wage earner protection plan, WEPP. The WEPP was introduced in 2008 to provide timely compensation to workers in federally regulated industries for unpaid wages and vacation pay they had earned in the six months preceding their employer's bankruptcy or receivership.

We expanded the WEPP in 2009 to protect severance and termination pay, and again in 2011 to cover workers whose employers had to restructure without success. The recent expansion is estimated to provide an additional \$4.5 million annually in support to workers affected by the bankruptcy or receivership of their employer. Through economic action plan 2012, we are proposing to add \$1.4 million annually in operating funds to ensure that WEPP applicants receive the benefits they are entitled to when they need them.

I would also like to briefly mention some other economic action plan 2012 measures that will increase efficiency and get better value for Canadians. Among the changes, the federal contractors program will be redesigned, and that will streamline the program requirements. The initiative is part of the Government of Canada's deficit reduction action plan, and it will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of government operations and programs to ensure value for taxpayers.

The obligation for employers to meet employment equity goals will now be placed directly in the contract as a mandatory clause, and failure to meet the obligations shall constitute a breach of the contract. As such, federal contractors that wish to contract with the Government of Canada will be required to meet employment equity obligations. Modernizing the federal contractors program will reduce the administrative burden on contractors. That, of course, was a key recommendation of the Red Tape Reduction Commission.

We also propose to amend the Status of the Artist Act to transfer the function of the Canadian Artists and Producers Professional Relations Tribunal, or CAPPRT, to the Canadian Industrial Relations Board. The CAPPRT currently supports constructive labour relations between federally regulated producers and self-employed artists, but there has been a considerable decline in CAPPRT's case activity over the past five years. Indeed, each year since 2006-07, the tribunal has only received slightly more than one new application, and averaged fewer than one day of hearings.

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• (1650)

As a consequence, the government has decided to transfer CAPPRT's powers, duties and functions to the CIRB. With this amendment, the existing framework for labour relations in the federal cultural sector would remain in place, with the CIRB continuing the work of the tribunal and promoting and supporting professional relations between artists and producers.

By transferring CAPPRT's powers, duties and functions to the CIRB, the government is ensuring that an experienced and competent body remains to oversee the relationship between artists and producers in the federal jurisdiction, but it would do so while generating cost savings and improvements to administrative efficiency. We fully expect that this transfer would result in both improved services and reduced delays in resolving cases, while not directly impacting the artists themselves.

We are also proposing to modify the Government Employees Compensation Act to streamline and improve administration of third party claims and to enhance efficiency in the federal public sector. Workers' benefits would be unaffected by this adjustment but the amendment would allow crown corporations to pursue third party claims under the act and that would reduce overall labour program administration costs for third party claims.

Finally, we are also planning to repeal the outdated Fair Wages and Hours of Labour Act, which was enacted in 1935 at a time when very few regulations existed to protect workers. At one point in time, it did serve a useful purpose, but today it no longer plays a significant role in protecting workers. The reality is that federal construction contracts today account for only 2% of non-residential construction work in Canada compared to 1955 when it was 11%. As well, the provinces and territories already regulate wages and working conditions in the construction sector. In many respects, the Fair Wages and Hours of Labour Act duplicate existing provincial labour legislation.

Today, like all other workers in Canada, construction workers are protected by comprehensive provincial and territorial employment standards. They are also protected by human rights and by occupational health and safety laws of the provinces and territories. Therefore, repealing the Fair Wages and Hours of Labour Act supports our commitment to create jobs and fosters economic growth by eliminating red tape and duplication. It is part of our deficit reduction action plan and we seek to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of government operations and programs to ensure value for the taxpayer.

With respect to temporary foreign workers, prevailing wage rates are already set by HRSDC and Service Canada, and repealing the act will not change this.

In conclusion, the Government of Canada's priorities continue to be jobs and growth, and these are also the priorities of the labour program. Through Bill C-38, our government is looking to move forward on our commitment to make effective and efficient use of our resources in ways that respond to real needs.

I urge this House to support Bill C-38.

[Translation]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP):

Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the minister whether Canadians will really be able to share in this growth. A number of constituents in my riding are losing tens of thousands of dollars from their pension funds because of lax federal laws.

[English]

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Madam Speaker, our long-term vision within the Conservative government is exactly that, for jobs and growth. As we have heard many times today, we have posted over 760,000 new jobs and they are high-quality good jobs, not part-time jobs that the opposition alleges. I would invite the opposition members to look at the facts on this and get them straight.

We know that the economic action plans of the past have worked and we are very excited and proud of economic action plan 2012 because it takes that long-term look, which is the look that is needed for my constituents in Halton, as well as for my family.

• (1655)

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I acknowledge with appreciation the changes in the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act that would help out those who are on long-term disability. The Liberal Party asked 100 questions if not more on that very issue. I am pleased to see that the government has listened to the voices on this side of the House and made those changes.

These changes were an important part of the changes that needed to happen to better protect both those who are disabled and those working for companies that go bankrupt and leave them with no protection. I appreciate the changes that the government has put in the budget bill.

On the issue of federal contractors, and there are over 1,000 of them and, it is my understanding that they would not have ministerial accountability or oversight. A federal contractor would have a contract with its employees, but how would the government ensure that the contract is being followed?

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for her comments about our efforts to help the most vulnerable and those who are suffering because of a bankruptcy in a company.

With respect to the federal contractors program, the way it works right now is that federal contractors supply to the labour program a plan of action with respect to employment equity and how they intend to ensure that the employment equity standards of the government will be followed. However, there is no follow-up with the contractors as to whether they are implementing it. We rely upon a complaints based system and that would not change. We would still have a complaints based system but this time we would have real teeth because it would be about the voiding of the contract by implementing it and putting it directly in the contract. The onus would be on the contractors at that point to be aware of and understand the Employment Equity Act and we would expect them to abide by it. We also expect them to have a plan of action but we do not ask them to provide and submit plans and bog down the process. We want them to contractually oblige themselves to it and we will follow up in terms of complaints and prosecute as warranted.

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Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Madam Speaker, I first want to take the opportunity to thank the minister. As she knows, I am from Oshawa. A few weeks ago she took a very courageous position in regard to the rail challenges that we faced. Manufacturing and just in time delivery is very important to my community and I am happy to say that last month, in May, we actually increased the economy with 36,400 manufacturing jobs.

We are giving a very strong signal to the economy. We just have to compare this to socialist Europe and the problems that Europe is undergoing right now.

Could the minister tell us why is it important to continue on a program of jobs and growth, cutting red tape, decreasing taxes and working co-operatively with labour so that we have strong jobs as opposed to the outdated policies that the NDP is bringing forward, such as high taxes, increased regulation—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I must give the hon. minister an opportunity to respond.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Madam Speaker, as we have indicated, the economic action plan is the forward look about ensuring that we continue to grow and prosper through the creation of jobs and the growth of the economy. However, as the Conservatives and this government believe, we should put the tools in the hands of the businesses to create the jobs, which is why it is important to have that low tax environment and to have a reduction of red tape. Those are the kinds of things that we are doing within the labour program. We are also supporting productive labour relations because innovation, quite simply, happens when there is a safe, productive and healthy workplace.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is with legitimate indignation that I rise today to denounce the infamous Bill C-38, the budget implementation bill.

With this bill, we get the feeling that the Conservatives decided that Parliament was an open bar and attacked social programs, government, workers and families. It is a catch-all bill, a bulldozer bill, a Trojan Horse. Finally, this is an anti-worker, anti-environment and anti-family bill that does not respect our democratic institutions, that attacks key rights, and that attacks the least fortunate and lowest-income seniors in our society.

It is a catch-all bill. We feel that the Conservatives are taking a shot at everything that works and are taking advantage of the fact that they have a majority to destroy things that have been working well in our society. Based on where they are heading, everything will go to the private sector. Assessing environmental impact is not important. As long as there is development, everything is fine, and future generations will pick up the pieces. They will have to carry this economic debt, as well as this environmental debt on their shoulders.

This is unprecedented in Canadian political history. Officially, this is a budget implementation bill, but it changes no fewer than 70 existing pieces of legislation. The Conservatives are taking a shot at everything that moves.

In addition, the Conservatives imposed a gag order—in fact, it was the 23rd or 24th gag order. Members are not even being given much time to discuss this bill. The government is refusing to split up this bill, which is creating a completely absurd situation.

The NDP proposed having five bills instead of one single mammoth, gigantic and unmanageable bill, which was reasonable. For example, since this is officially a budget implementation bill, but it changes standards for protecting fish habitats, it is the members of the Standing Committee on Finance who are required to study the changes to the regulations on protecting fish habitats. Has anyone ever heard of anything so ludicrous or absurd?

Every decision made in this bill probably deserves days of study. The list of things that the government wants to change is impressive. The bill is supposedly for implementing the budget, but it is being used to destroy and attack a bunch of things that help workers and Canadian families. I am going to try to explain why.

Bill C-38 increases the age of eligibility for old age security and guaranteed income supplement benefits from 65 to 67. We remember that the Prime Minister took advantage of a trip to Davos, Switzerland, to announce these changes in front of his billionaire friends. But one year earlier, he had not even told Canadians that he was going to attack our seniors' old age pensions.

Bill C-38 repeals the Kyoto Protocol Implementation Act, weakens the environmental assessment regimes, eliminates the Auditor General's oversight authority for a certain number of agencies and amends the Employment Equity Act so that it no longer applies to federal contracts. In addition, it dissolves the Public Appointments Commission, reduces transparency with respect to the assessment of major pipeline projects and puts more power in the hands of a single minister. Bill C-38 also dissolves the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy, which was working well. Lastly, it eliminates the First Nations Statistical Institute.

So we can see the extent of what is in this mammoth bill, this Trojan Horse bill.

There is one more important matter that I would like to address. The Fair Wages and Hours of Labour Act has also been amended. That act guaranteed minimum salaries, base salaries for workers on federal construction sites. Let me give you some examples. In Vancouver, an electrician could not be paid less than \$26.20 per hour; a carpenter, \$25.19 per hour. In Calgary, an electrician was paid at least \$30 per hour and a steel assembler \$24.12 per hour. It guaranteed working conditions, and therefore acceptable living conditions, for workers on those sites. The Conservatives are taking the act, tearing it up and telling employers that, from now on, they can pay their employees what they want. There are no more base salaries, no more minimums.

● (1700)

This very ideological and right-leaning Conservative government is constantly making decisions that put downward pressure on salaries. How are the Conservatives going to get the economy going again? By cutting salaries. This is a race to the bottom. This is how they want to build the future, to build a society that is fairer, more just, more united and more decent, a society in which people can live a good life.

When my father bought his house, it was worth twice his annual salary, the only salary. Today, houses cost 10 or 15 times an annual salary. The purchasing power of workers has either stagnated since the late 1970s or become worse. These Conservative and neo-Liberal policies are putting pressure on the salaries of workers, who still have to pay the bills and whose standard of living is not rising.

A family today cannot live on one salary alone. How is it possible that, in a society like ours, people working for minimum wage are below the poverty line? Is that really the kind of society we want to live in? It certainly is the kind of society that the Conservatives want to live in. On the Island of Montreal alone, the number of people asking for food assistance because they lack the means to put bread on the table has increased more than 40% since 2008.

The Conservatives may laugh, but in real life, it matters. In my constituency, 2,000 people are on the waiting list for social housing. What does Bill C-38 say about social housing? Nothing. Zero. Nada. There is nothing in this budget about helping people who are having difficulty paying their rent. When rent takes 50% of people's income, we have a problem. A problem that keeps people in poverty.

It is interesting that the word poverty does not appear in the nearly 300-page budget that the Minister of Finance tabled. That is one of the Conservatives' tricks. If they do not talk about it, then it does not really exist. I am sorry, but that is not how things work. There is no magic wand that makes poverty disappear just because we do not talk about it. There is nothing in this budget, in Bill C-38, to help fight poverty, on the contrary.

I now want to address the issue of temporary foreign workers. That is another example. I have talked about the Fair Wages and Hours of Labour Act. What is in Bill C-38 for temporary foreign workers? Under this bill, temporary foreign workers can be paid 15% less than other workers for the same work. This is just more of the same Conservative policy to put downward pressure on the incomes of Canadians and Quebecers.

Eugénie Depatie-Pelletier, the coordinator of a branch of CERIUM, the centre for international studies and research at Université de Montréal, said:

Temporary foreign workers, whose employment contracts are already being violated because of administrative restrictions on their fundamental freedoms, will now be subject to a new discriminatory measure.

According to the administrative directive posted online on April 25, 2012, by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada for temporary foreign workers in Canada with "high-skill" occupations, wages that are up to 15% below the average wage for an occupation in a specific region will be accepted. Various observers have said that this federal measure will ultimately contribute to an overall reduction in wages in Canada...

The constitutionality of this new federal Conservative measure will inevitably be challenged sooner or later in court. This measure is a concrete example of the

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government violating the right of a historically disadvantaged group—immigrant workers in this case—to be free from discrimination.

Furthermore, André Jacob, coordinator of the Observatoire international sur le racisme et les discriminations and an associate professor at the UQAM school of social work, said:

The argument that the local labour force does not want to do the work for which employers use foreign labour is a false premise. In fact, Canadians do not want to comply with the conditions imposed by companies that favour temporary foreign workers [because they work in horrible conditions]. Businesses want to be able to count on a low-cost workforce that is available at all times, submissive, non-unionized and [basically] without rights.

...The temporary foreign workforce is not a cargo of exotic products that can be purchased and sold with only profit in mind. These are human beings with rights. It should not be up to private businesses to protect the rights of all workers; it is the responsibility of the state.

We see the same thing with employment insurance reform. The government is pushing wages down and wants to force seasonal workers to accept jobs with wages 30% lower than what they earned before. The NDP will fight this Conservative government because we want people to be able to live with dignity.

● (1705)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we have expressed, time and time again over the last days and weeks, the concern we have in regard to Bill C-38 and how critically important it is that it be amended. The bill is severely flawed and it sets precedents in terms of budget bills. Many have accused it as being a Trojan Horse in terms of the manner in which the government is bringing in legislation that is completely irrelevant to the whole budget process and that we should be breaking this bill into a number of different bills and stick to the budget debate itself.

In response to the bill, the Liberal Party has brought forward a series of different amendments on which we will voting. I look to the member and I suspect the NDP will support our amendments. How does the member feel about the sheer number of pieces of legislation that this bill will have a very profound impact on, if it were to pass?

● (1710)

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Winnipeg North for his question.

The NDP shares his concerns. Together with our House leader, we tried to split Bill C-38 into five separate parts so that we could take the time to study them and do our work as parliamentarians in a responsible way. We also submitted hundreds of amendments. We will see whether the Conservative government is willing to listen in order to improve this bill.

However, it is difficult to improve such a gigantic catch-all bill. This bill tackles a lot of issues and important rights: working conditions, environmental protection, seasonal workers. We think this is awful. We do not want to start punishing people because their industry operates for just a few months a year.

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[English]

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Madam Speaker, going back to my friend's comments about the fisheries and comments from all the members opposite, the hyperbole is simply overwhelming and one wonders if they have even read the act. Therefore, I will help them with what our new amended act would actually say.

Regarding the habitat provisions, section 35(1) says:

No person shall carry on any work, undertaking or activity that results in serious harm to fish that are part of a commercial, recreational or Aboriginal fishery, or to fish that support such a fishery.

Again, "serious harm", which was not defined in the previous act is now defined as, "For the purposes of this Act, serious harm to fish is the death of fish or any permanent alteration to, or destruction of, fish habitat".

Has the member actually read the new act and does he not—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I must give the hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie an opportunity to respond.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Madam Speaker, I would like to ask my hon. colleague why he thinks the Standing Committee on Finance should study changes to fish habitat protection.

The Conservatives seem to think that it is no big deal for fish to swim in oil and that there is no problem until the fish are belly-up dead. They think it is okay to have three-eyed fish swimming around.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague on his speech about the Conservatives' plan to attack the middle class, environmental standards and especially seniors' needs.

[English]

Why do the Conservatives have to put all this in a budget bill when they are attacking senior citizens?

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Madam Speaker, I would like to commend the hon. member on his excellent French.

Indeed, people who are working today will be able to retire and receive their old age security cheques two years later. That means that people who do not have the money to invest in RRSPs and who do not have a supplemental plan will have to work two years longer.

This is yet another attack on society's poorest and lowest-paid workers.

[English]

Hon. Lynne Yelich (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to take part in the debate on Bill C-38, the jobs, growth and long-term prosperity act, an act that the NDP and the opposition are attempting to delay and defeat.

From the start, let me be clear. The NDP and the opposition parties want to stop today's bill because of their ideological opposition to the natural resources sector and its growth. As a western Canadian and

member of Parliament from Saskatchewan, I cannot allow these attacks from the NDP go unchallenged. That is why today I would like to focus on the Conservative government's plan for responsible resource development, a critical part of our economic action plan 2012. It is a forward-looking initiative. It is an initiative that would help ensure that all Canadians would reap the benefits of our wealth of natural resources.

Our government's top priority has always been to support jobs and growth in Canada's economy and we are on the right track with Canada's economic action plan. Indeed, since July 2009, employment has increased by almost 760,000 jobs, the strongest job growth among all of the G7 countries. We all want that job growth to continue and there is no question that the resource sector will play a significant role in Canada's future job growth and prosperity.

A few countries are not as blessed with natural resources as Canada. Natural resources have helped to shape Canada's character and identity. They have been the lifeblood of communities for generations and have helped to give Canadians a quality of life that is second to none in the world. The importance of the resource sectors to Canada's economy cannot be overstated. Natural resources are driving economic growth right across the country.

Today, Canada's natural resource sectors employ nearly 800,000 Canadians and these economic engines of prosperity account for more than 10% of Canada's gross domestic product. They generate billions of dollars worth of tax revenues and royalties that help pay for government programs and services for Canadians. With over \$500 billion in potential resource projects over the next 10 years, we have a tremendous opportunity to create jobs and economic growth right across the country. These jobs will be created in virtually every sector of our economy, from manufacturing, mining, science and technology right to the services sector.

To take advantage of this opportunity and to ensure Canada's prosperity, our government is committed to making this nation of the best places in the world to invest. We have put many key ingredients in place, ingredients such as competitive taxes, new trade agreements and non-discriminatory policies.

However, we cannot take this opportunity for granted. Canada is not the only country in the world with rich mineral and energy resources and other countries have made it clear that they are ready to act and act quickly to supply emerging markets around the world. The bottom line is that Canada is competing with other resource-rich countries for these investment dollars. That is why it is so important that Canada creates the right conditions to attract global investment.

One of the ways that we are creating a favourable climate for investment is by taking the guesswork out of the review process for major development projects, and that is the idea behind our plan for responsible resource development. In a nutshell, here is what this new legislation would achieve. First, it would make project reviews more predictable and timely. Second, it would reduce duplication of project reviews. Third, it would strengthen environmental protection. Fourth, it would enhance consultations with aboriginal peoples. We want to put in place a new system of one project-one review that operates with a clearly defined time period.

In the words of the Saskatchewan Mining Association:

The federal government heard that message, and included the 'one project, one assessment' concept. If you were putting an addition on your house and needed a building permit, you don't require both a municipal and provincial permit. It is just common sense that one review that meets common objectives is sufficient.

• (1715)

Our new plan would also place enforceable, beginning-to-end time limits on assessments of no longer than two years, without compromising the thoroughness of the review. The plan would eliminate duplication by allowing provincial environmental assessments to replace rather than overlay assessments by the federal government, where they meet federal requirements.

Saskatchewan Deputy Premier and Minister of Finance Ken Krawetz declared, and I quote:

If...we are doing duplicate assessments in the environmental field and...there is no need to do a duplicate assessment and one assessment will suffice we are encouraged by that.

He went on to say that an improved system could "reduce government inefficiencies" and ensure that we will have continued due diligence.

Furthermore, Bill C-38 includes new mechanisms that would make consultation with aboriginal people and communities an integral part of the new review process, with additional funding to support aboriginal participation in the process. However, let me be clear: our new plan would strengthen environmental safeguards and it would raise our already high standards.

Bill C-38 would ensure that we stop reviewing projects with little or no environmental effects, and it would focus our efforts on projects that have potential for significant environmental and economic impacts. Right now we know that too many projects are getting caught in the regulatory net. We are wasting our time reviewing projects like blueberry washing facilities, parking lots and hockey rinks, projects that have little to no adverse effect on our environment. Quite frankly, it is time to stop the tangled web of rules that are wasting everyone's time and putting major development projects at risk.

Under Bill C-38, the Minister of the Environment would retain the authority to order environmental assessments on projects deemed necessary. To further protect the environment, Bill C-38 introduces enforceable environmental assessment decision statements to ensure that proponents of resource projects comply with required mitigation measures to protect the environment.

In addition, Bill C-38 proposes to provide federal inspectors under the Canadian environmental assessment act with all the authority

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they need to examine whether or not companies are fulfilling the conditions specified in decision statements. It introduces penalties ranging from \$100,000 to \$400,000 for contraventions of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. Our proposed changes would strengthen environmental safeguards and create greater certainty for investors.

In today's global economy, we simply cannot afford to have one hand tied behind our backs with a review process that is full of delays, jurisdictional overlaps and unpredictable timelines. Simply put, it is time to bring our review process into the 21st century. That is what responsible resource development is all about.

As the western premiers unanimously declared in a statement at the end of the recent conference, and I quote:

One project, one assessment, one decision increases timeliness and certainty, and reduces the bureaucratic overlap without compromising environmental rigour.

Clearly, today's act is about putting Canada's natural resources to work for all Canadians. I will always stand up for the natural resources sector and the Canadians it employs.

• (1720)

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have here in front of me a letter that was written to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans from Mr. Stu Wells, mayor of Osoyoos and chair of the Okanagan Basin Water Board. I will not read the whole letter, but I just want some comments on a couple of lines, if I may.

I quote:

We are concerned with Bill C-38's proposed weakening of the language for fish habitat protection and other environmental laws, with the unintended consequence of weakening the protection that they offer to healthy water, whether for fish or human drinking water.

We agree that Canada's environmental legislation needs to be updated.... However....

They are concerned about the process, and they say that the current process seems needlessly rushed.

I am wondering if my hon. colleague could comment on this letter, please.

Hon. Lynne Yelich: Madam Speaker, I wonder why the mayor thinks it is needlessly rushed. There has been a lot of consultation. That is how some of the regulations have come to be part of the budget.

I am just looking at what the Premier of B.C. said:

The NDP likes to talk about how they're going to fund health care and education, they're going to expand on social programs. But then on the other hand they say, "We don't like all this economic development, we don't like all this growth." You can't have it both ways.

The point I would like to make is this. If the member actually sat down with the mayor, I would be sure he could explain that the mayor should have no worries whatsoever. This is why we are putting this in the budget: it is to make sure there is due diligence in the process, and that there is not a lot of overlap, which is something that all levels of government will appreciate. He will find that his economy and—

Private Members' Business

● (1725)

The Deputy Speaker: I regret to interrupt the hon. minister, but many people are rising for questions and I would like to hear a few more. The hon. member for Malpeque.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I found it quite amazing how the minister can talk about cutting pretty near every environmental review there is and giving ultimate authority to cabinet to overrule anything and everything, and how that is really improving the environmental measures in the country.

My question really relates to her portfolio of regional development. She is Minister of State for Western Economic Diversification. I am wondering if she is doing the same thing with western economic diversification that the ACOA minister is doing with ACOA, and that is cutting every regional development organization out there? Those organizations do the good work, use business people on the ground, volunteers. Each of those organizations has an executive, but it is the volunteers who make the system work, who know the community.

What is the minister doing with western economic diversification in that regard? Is she cutting them, too?

Hon. Lynne Yelich: Madam Speaker, I do not have enough time to tell the member the positive things that I am doing with western economic diversification.

What I will tell him is that one of the areas we went over, when we went through our strategic review, was trying to cut the overlap on audits. Together, I asked my department to see how many audits it does per year. It amounts to about 84. I have four pages of audits. I will just go through some of them. I will not tell the member how frequent they are, the number of reports or the total.

However, these are reports: audit and evaluation, corporate administration, and they include audit reports, chief audit executive annual report, chief audit executive overview report, departmental audit committee agenda and minutes, evaluation reports, five-year evaluation plan, follow-up on outstanding audit recommendations, report on disclosure of wrongdoing, risk based audit plans, Access to Information Act annual report to Parliament, annual hazardous occurrence report, business continuity plan questionnaire.

These are reports that my department has had to fill out. These people are the ones who are serving the department. They are writing reports for capital and repair expenditures, for capital expenditure survey, for Communications Security Establishment Canada signing authority, comprehensive land claims agreements contracting obligations report, departmental performance report green procurement, infosome, management accountability framework, Privacy Act annual report to Parliament, proactive disclosure, proactive disclosure grants and contributions, proactive disclosure travel and hospitality, procurement annual report, procurement strategy for aboriginal business, purchasing activity report, report on plans and priorities—

The Deputy Speaker: I must interrupt the hon. member as her time has elapsed. Resuming debate, the hon. member for Newton—North Delta.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to say it is a pleasure to rise and speak

today. However, I am rising here today with a great deal of trepidation and concern, concern that my constituents are feeling as well, because I have discussed this matter with them over the last little while.

I just want to hold up Bill C-38 as a lesson aid, and being a teacher, I appreciate lesson aids. This is how thick it is. It is actually thicker than the telephone directory for the town I have spent many years in, Nanaimo, on Vancouver Island.

I want to assure the House that it is double-sided. Not only is it double-sided, but the writing is so tiny that I would need a microscope to read it. Even putting on my reading glasses, I have to struggle and hold it away from me a little.

It shows the density, in more ways than one, of the legislation that is being debated here at report stage before this House. It is not only the density and the number of pages and the number of clauses, but the fact is that this is not a budget bill. This is masquerading. That is what the government has done, masquerading this as the budget bill.

What it has really done in here is put in changes to more than 70-plus laws and regulations that go way beyond, and have very little to do with a budget document.

● (1730)

The Deputy Speaker: I regret to interrupt the hon. member. I should have mentioned it at the beginning, but it being 5:30 p.m., the House must now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper. The hon. member will have eight minutes when this bill returns on the order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[Translation]

AN ACT TO AMEND THE CORRECTIONS AND CONDITIONAL RELEASE ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-293, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (vexatious complainants), as reported (with amendment) from the committee.

The Deputy 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.

Ms. Roxanne James (Scarborough Centre, CPC) moved that Bill C-293, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (vexatious complainants), be concurred in.

Private Members' Business

Some hon. members: Nay.

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 98, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, June 13, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

[*For continuation of proceedings see part B*]

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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, June 12, 2012
(Part B)

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, June 12, 2012

[Continuation of proceedings from part A]

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1730)

[English]

JOBS, GROWTH AND LONG-TERM PROSPERITY ACT

The House resumed consideration of Bill C-38, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 29, 2012 and other measures, as reported (without amendment) from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Madam Speaker, I was saying that what we are facing here is not simply a budget bill. What we are facing here is a double-sided telephone directory of items and issues that go way beyond the budget. Not only that, but as a parliamentarian, I and many of my colleagues feel that we have been denied the opportunity to debate this so-called telephone directory of a bill, Bill C-38, in any meaningful way.

Members on all sides of the House were elected to come here. We run to be MPs because we believe in parliamentary democracy. The role of government in a parliamentary democracy is to propose, and the role of the opposition is to hold the government accountable, as it is for some of the MPs sitting on the other side, as well. There is nothing stopping them from getting up to ask questions if they need clarification.

In a parliamentary democracy, we do not have a dictatorship, we do not have a republic, we do not have the power to veto. Therefore, it behooves even majority governments to allow the parliamentary process to play out, because only then can the people of Canada have full confidence in the workings of this House.

The Conservatives are not used to having a majority. I have been hoping they would learn that they do not have to use time allocation, that they do not always have to smack the opposition on the side of the head and say that we are not going to be given time to debate. I was hoping that after they had used time allocation a few times it would have occurred to them that they do not have to do that. They have a majority. They could let the debate take place and let the Canadian public see what they are trying to do.

They say they have so much pride in what is in the bill. If they have so much pride in this thick document, they should be willing for us to have those discussions right here in this Parliament.

I heard a colleague say that we have had three months. There has not been three months of debate on this bill in this House. If there has been, it must have happened in a different reality in which only the government lives, because it certainly has not happened on this side of the House.

As a result of, I could call it arrogance or the fumes of power which have invaded certain heads, it absolutely boggles my mind that over and over the Conservatives keep using time allocation. We had a vote earlier today once again to limit the debate on this bill which is thicker than many of our communities' phone books. It is a great concern and we really have to pay attention to that.

Let us take a look at what is buried in the bill. There is a whole lot buried in the bill that will have a huge impact upon the world we leave for our children.

I hear a lot of rhetoric about protecting our environment, but when I see the kinds of attacks in this bill on environmental assessments and environmental protections, it causes me a great deal of concern.

Some will say who cares if I am concerned. I am an elected MP. A riding of constituents voted for me and sent me here in good faith.

However, I am not the only one who is raising concerns. People in the larger community are talking about environment issues.

• (1735)

For example, Jessica Clogg, executive director and senior counsel at West Coast Environmental Law states:

By gutting Canada's long-standing environmental laws, the budget bill gives big oil and gas companies what they've been asking for—fewer environmental safeguards so they can push through resource megaprojects with little regard to environmental damage. It is Canadians and our children who will pay the cost.

I do not want my children, my grandchildren, my great-grandchildren or myself to have to pay the cost, nor do I want the rest of our youth to have to pay the cost.

Ten minutes goes by very quickly, especially when there is an interruption, but I will move on to another area. The changes to OAS are totally unnecessary, as all kinds have experts have said.

Government Orders

I will focus for a couple of minutes on the changes to immigration. Some people will wonder why changes to immigration are buried in the budget bill. The government is planning to hit the delete button for thousands of skilled workers who have been waiting very patiently to come to Canada. Out of the blue the government arbitrarily decided that anybody who applied for the skilled workers program before 2008 is gone. It will hit the delete button and their applications will no longer be valid. I know the government is saying that it will send the processing fee back to them, but the government made a commitment. These people played by the rules made by the Canadian government. Not only did they play by the rules, but they waited patiently. They did not do anything illegal to try to circumvent the system. As they were waiting patiently, they saw a new face of Canada that the Conservative government is showing to the world, that is, that Canada lacks compassion and has no respect for people who play by the rules.

The government will give them their money back, but who will give them back their hopes and aspirations? Who will give back to the family in China who, based on a promise made to them by the Canadian government because they were in a lineup to come here, sold their property. They gave their child an education so that the child would do better here. Now they cannot afford to buy back their house because the cost of living has gone up so much. I have hundreds of stories like that one.

People are demonstrating against us, against the Canadian government, in Beijing, in Manila, in New Delhi, in Chandigarh and in Hong Kong. Why? Because we as Canadians broke our promise. What are we going to do to give these people back their hopes, aspirations and dreams? Why is the government determined to damage Canada's reputation worldwide?

• (1740)

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was listening to the speech of the member opposite. It was excitable and hyperbole was used. I kind of wondered, here we have 760,000 new jobs in this country and when we look at what Canadians want, they want a job. They want to be able to raise their families. They want to be able to grow and prosper in this country.

There is an economic meltdown all around the world right now and this country has been safeguarded in a very practical way. We have the budget.

How can the member opposite deny the fact that 760,000 new jobs are out there, people are working and our country is prospering? That is why the member should support this bill.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, my colleague and I went to Taiwan together and got to know each other really well. I have a great deal of respect for my colleague across the aisle.

What we are debating today is the budget implementation bill and the process that is being used, and what is being thrown into the budget bill that goes way beyond what should be in a normal budget implementation bill.

According to the OECD's "Best Practices for Budget Transparency", the government's draft budgets should be submitted to Parliament no less than three months prior to the start of the fiscal year. It also noted that the budget should include a detailed

commentary on each revenue and expenditure program, and that comparative information on actual revenue and expenditure during the past year and an updated forecast for the current year should be provided for each program.

None of these practices are currently followed in Canada. It is very hard for us to support a budget that is smoke and mirrors.

[Translation]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Newton—North Delta for her speech. She has identified a number of very important and troubling aspects of the government's actions.

I would like to go back to the absolutely incredible solution being put forward by the government. It will shorten waiting lists for immigrants by eliminating the list and refunding the processing fees. I just cannot understand why the government would do that. My colleague explained what people have to go through to immigrate to Canada. For many candidates, the process lasts several years.

I would like my colleague to tell us more about that.

• (1745)

[English]

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, there are different ways people get into the country. The skilled workers class is an independent class. People have to qualify based on their education and profession, that type of criteria. The people whose files are being deleted qualified before 2008. The backlog, as it is being referred to, is not really a backlog because the minister himself gets to decide how many people from each category are going to be allowed into the country.

Over the last number of years we have seen a huge growth in the number of temporary foreign workers. Also, a lot of the skilled workers who applied before 2008 have been left out. Their hopes, dreams and aspirations have been based on the idea that they are going to come to Canada. These are the professionals we want. There was an article in the news the day before yesterday that people in Alberta are asking why the government is doing this, because these are the people that are needed.

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today in support of Bill C-38 and to explain the necessary changes to the old age security program.

I appreciate as well the opportunity to stand in the House against the NDP and the opposition's tired tactics of delaying, which only serve to threaten Canadian jobs, growth and long-term prosperity.

The changes proposed to the OAS program in Bill C-38 would secure the retirement benefits of future generations, making the program sustainable for the long term.

When these changes were first announced in economic action plan 2012, the *Calgary Herald* recognized the importance of these measures as part of our government's broader plan to protect Canada's fiscal future, saying:

It's a budget item that seems both responsible fiscally.... The firm-but-reasonable OAS strategy is in fact representative of the budget's overall tone.... Canada has shown great economic strength relative to world powers in Europe and the Americas since the fall of 2008, and continued leadership on that front is important.

The numbers tell us that we have to confront our fiscal and demographic realities to serve the best interests of all Canadians, both now and into the future.

The recent census confirmed that Canada has more seniors than ever before. My riding of Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound has one of the larger concentrations of seniors, and it is going to continue to grow as a retirement area.

The population of Canadian seniors is expected to keep growing in the coming years. By 2030, less than 20 years from now, almost one in four Canadians will be 65 years of age or older, compared to one in seven today. The number of OAS recipients is expected to almost double over the next 20 years, from about 4.9 million in 2011 to 9.3 million by 2030, when the last of the baby boomers reaches 65.

The annual cost of the old age security program is projected to increase from approximately \$38 billion in 2011 to over \$108 billion in 2030. OAS is the largest single social program of the Government of Canada, and it is 100% funded by tax revenues. Today 13¢ of every federal tax dollar is spent on old age security. If no changes are made, in about 20 years that will grow to 21¢, or one-fifth of all federal tax dollars spent.

At the same time, Canadians are living longer and healthier lives. With the growing number of seniors who will be collecting OAS for longer periods of time, the total cost of benefits will become increasingly difficult to afford for tomorrow's workers and taxpayers.

We cannot stand idly by. We will not stand idly by. We cannot allow the old age security program to continue on its current path. That is why we are taking action: because we want to ensure that future generations have an OAS program they can count on in their older years.

Before I talk about the proposed changes, it is important to clarify that those seniors who currently receive OAS will not lose a cent and will not be affected.

The most important change we are proposing is to increase the eligibility age for the OAS pension and GIS from 65 to 67 by 2029, with a gradual increase starting on April 1, 2023. In essence, it will be phased in over six years.

We are giving advance notification and a long phase-in period to allow Canadians ample time to adapt their retirement income plans and to smooth the transition to the new age of eligibility. We think our phased-in approach is both fair and reasonable.

Two other changes to the OAS are being proposed: proactive enrolment and voluntary deferral.

Starting in 2013, we plan to begin proactive enrolment of OAS benefits to eliminate the need for some eligible seniors to apply for their OAS pension and the GIS. This measure will be implemented over a four-year period and will reduce the application burden on many seniors as well as the government's administrative costs.

Government Orders

On July 1, 2013, we also plan to allow for a voluntary deferral of the OAS pension. This would let people delay receiving their OAS pension by up to five years, up to age 70, in exchange for an enhanced monthly pension, similar to what is happening in CPP.

● (1750)

This new measure will provide people with more flexibility as they plan their transition from work to retirement. Not only will it increase flexibility for older workers, but the option to defer has also been welcomed by small business owners across the country.

Ben Brunnen, chief economist with the Calgary Chamber of Commerce, has been clear that this represents a win for Canadian business by saying:

The OAS changes help remove disincentives and create choice for older workers to stay in the workforce, which can have a big impact on the labour market—especially for a smaller company.

Let me return to the age of eligibility and be absolutely clear about the timeline: current OAS pensioners will not be affected by this change, nor will people who are close to the current OAS age of eligibility. People aged 54 or older as of March 31, 2012—in other words, those born on or before March 31, 1958—would be eligible to apply for the OAS pension and the GIS at the age of 65.

We will ensure that certain federal income support programs that end at age 65 are aligned with changes to the OAS program. This would include programs for veterans and low-income first nation seniors on reserve. This will ensure that individuals receiving benefits from these programs would not face a gap in income at ages 65 and 66.

We will also consider the situation of people between 65 and 67 who receive disability or survivor benefits from the Canada pension plan. These benefits typically stop or are reduced at age 65, when the recipient becomes eligible for old age security. This will be discussed with the ministers of finance of the provinces and territories, who are joint stewards of the CPP, during the next regular review of the program.

Our government has been clear that the proposed changes would not affect the Canada pension plan, as the CPP and OAS are two separate programs. The Chief Actuary has confirmed that CPP is financially sound and fully sustainable for generations to come.

Government Orders

The OAS program cannot continue in its present form. Once again, as we have said, it is becoming unaffordable and needs to reflect demographic realities, and that is why we are changing it now. If we refuse to acknowledge these realities and simply sit back and do nothing, the OAS program would become unsustainable, as it would if the opposition parties had their way.

Conservatives are convinced that the only just and practical way to relieve the cost pressures on OAS is to increase the age of eligibility. As the Government of Canada, it is our obligation to make responsible and prudent decisions for Canadians of all ages over the coming decades. Not only is it our obligation to make responsible and prudent decisions, some of them tough decisions, but we are up to the task. Through our actions, that is exactly what we are doing.

Back when OAS was first put in place, the average age of a male was 67 to 68 years old and the average age of a female was 69 to 71 years old, depending upon which figures one looked at. However, today those ages are 80 and 83. We are living longer, and that is a good thing, but programs like this need to be looked at and changed from time to time.

Many countries in the world have already made these changes or are looking at making these changes. I think it is high time that Canada did the same thing. This policy would put us in good shape for seniors down the road. My sons, when it is their time, will have a healthy OAS there for them.

However, if we do not deal with it, I fear they will be looking at something that is reduced or gone altogether.

I will leave it at that. I look forward to any questions.

• (1755)

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the good news, I hope, is that in 2023 the Conservatives will not be in government. They probably will not be there in 2015. That is the good news.

With regard to the old age pension, people working in big plants where they have good pension plans can decide to retire at the age of 60 or maybe 55. However, the problem is that the people who would be affected have low wages, are not in a union and have no pension plan.

I just do not see how, for example, people in a fish plant can work until the age of 67. People down home call my office and tell me that they have a hard time working until 60 in the fish plant with the hard work that they have to do. How are they going to be able to stay until the age of 67?

My question to the member is this: who will pay that cost? Would it be the provinces? Would we put people on welfare instead?

Also, with reference to other countries, France is reducing the age from 65 to 60. They are reducing it, not putting it up. I would like to hear what the member has to say on this point.

Mr. Larry Miller: Mr. Speaker, to my hon. colleague's first comment, which I will not get back into, my mom used to say when I was a kid that every little boy should have a dream.

However, in terms of the question about who is going to pay for this, the member talked about the age of 67. It is always the NDP way to fearmonger and present 67 as that terrible age. My father is 79 years old, and he can still outwork a lot of men 20 years younger. On this issue that we cannot work at 67, it is a reality and a fact out there today that there are members in this House who work 15 hours a day and are older than 67. It does not matter what profession people are in; to use that as an argument does not cut it with me.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound's remarks. I did not hear anything about the United Nations in there. I figured he might be talking about the United Nations and whether there is money allocated there. He is on that wavelength a bit.

However, the member's arguments on the OAS sound good. The problem is they have no substance in fact at all. The OAS is sustainable as is, according to nearly every economist. If people want to work to age 69, 70 and 75, they can do so, but what about those who cannot work beyond 65? This bill really means that those people who are poor and in the lower income bracket would have to go on provincial welfare. As it comes into place, this is a plan to transfer costs to the provinces and cover up for the bad fiscal management of the Conservative government.

Mr. Larry Miller: Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate the member for Malpeque's support of my comments on the UN, so I thank him for that.

To get back to OAS, it is obvious that the NDP members do not have a monopoly on fearmongering. We just heard a classic example there. However, we are fixing this OAS so that when he leaves this place in three years, he will be able to draw on it too.

• (1800)

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend my colleague for having content in his speech, because we have heard the opposition members talk a lot about how thick and big this bill is, and I ask my colleague to comment on this. Why is it that if there is not enough time for debate, the opposition members are taking a huge percentage of their total time talking about how big this bill is instead of talking about content?

Also, I believe it was the member for Burnaby—New Westminster who spoke for enough time to allow 50 of his party's members to speak to the bill. Then the members complain that there is not enough debate time, in spite of the fact that we have had the most debate time ever on a budget implementation bill. I would like my colleague to comment on that.

Mr. Larry Miller: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from my good friend and colleague from Wainwright. I would never call anybody a hypocrite in this place, but certainly some actions are hypocritical, and the member touched on that.

In government we hear comments like the one from the member for Malpeque, who talked about fiscal management. It is known around the world in international circuits that the state of finances in Canada stands second to no one. We are leaders in that, and here is another example in which we fix something for the long-term good of Canada and Canadians.

[Translation]

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will take us from the United Nations and old age security to the environment.

Allow me to delve into Canadian history and go back to the dawn of the great nation of Canada, to 1867, the year of Confederation. At that time, the Fathers of Confederation decided on the division of powers and the jurisdictions of the federal and provincial governments.

At the time, there were two major industries in Canada: fur trading and fishing. The fishery was of vital importance and played a predominant role in the Canadian economy. Of course, it is still a very important industry, especially in the maritime provinces and on the west coast. However, it has a lesser role in the Canadian economy than it did back then.

At that time, it was decided, with respect to the division of power, that the fishery would be a federal jurisdiction.

Today, this power is very important when it comes to environmental protection because it gives the federal government a large say not only with respect to the health of fish stocks and the fishery, but also the quality and quantity of freshwater in Canada.

It is true that water is a natural resource and therefore a provincial jurisdiction. However, in some places it falls under joint jurisdiction, especially in the Great Lakes and the boundary waters that are subject to an international treaty. The federal government has a say in how those waters are managed. Apart from that, in Canada, water is a natural resource that falls under provincial jurisdiction. However, under the Fisheries Act, the federal government has a say in order to protect the quality and quantity of freshwater in this country.

In 1868, one year after Confederation, the government passed the Fisheries Act. In 1977, more than 100 years later, in light of the data we had gathered since Confederation and advances in science, we came to understand the importance of fish habitat to the health of the fish, but also as a sign of water quality. Damaged habitat has an impact on the health of the fish—the fish might be deformed, for example—but it is also a sign that the quality of the water leaves something to be desired.

It is not just pollution that can harm or damage fish habitat. Lower water flow can damage or destroy fish habitat. With the changing climate, we see that the flow of some of our country's great rivers is decreasing. I am thinking about the Athabasca River in particular. That is a threat to fish habitat. The flow of the Athabasca River is decreasing because of climate change, but also because of water removal by the agricultural sector and the oil sands industry.

● (1805)

If we want to protect fish habitat, perhaps we need to establish a critical flow threshold for the river below which water removal must be stopped temporarily.

If fish habitat in the Athabasca River is not protected by the Fisheries Act, it will not be illegal to remove too much water, and the water level will drop and fish habitat will be damaged. The government is removing fish habitat protection, which opens the door to all kinds of water removal.

Government Orders

For instance, let us suppose that, in the summertime, a municipality experiences a water shortage but, for political reasons, decides not to prohibit people from watering their lawns in the middle of the afternoon, which is what many municipalities usually do in the summer. Suddenly the water level in the watershed in which the municipality is located drops, and this damages fish habitat.

Fish habitat is very important, because many fish that travel from one end of a river to another rest and feed there. Damaging fish habitat is harmful to fish and to the river, and can even harm the ocean.

If this habitat is not protected by the Fisheries Act, this opens the door to all kinds of potential abuses of our freshwater resource.

This bill means major changes that will affect the future of our freshwater resource and the health of our environment and our aquatic ecosystems. This poses a real problem.

I would also point out that the government is using a false argument to justify its changes to the Fisheries Act to weaken fish habitat protections.

[English]

It is like with the gun control bill. The government likes to invoke farmers and hunters to make everyone feel that its objectives are noble. It is doing the same thing in trying to justify its weakening of the Fisheries Act with regard to habitat protection. It invokes farmers. The government says that it needs to do this to make life easier and to protect farmers and farming. The government knows that is a powerful argument.

I will read an article that appeared in the Saskatoon *Star Phoenix* on June 8, by a farmer, Mr. Jan Slomp, who owns a 65-cow dairy farm. It reads:

[The] Agriculture Minister...and [the] Fisheries Minister...seem to be using farmers as bait to get the public to swallow the changes to the Fisheries Act included in Bill C-38, the omnibus Budget Implementation Act.

By suggesting that the government is abandoning protection of fish habitat so that farmers don't have to deal with red tape when they maintain their irrigation ditches, the ministers have stretched credibility to the breaking point. Like me, many farmers resent the implication that we aren't interested in being good stewards of the water, which is essential for healthy livestock and wholesome crops, on the land we manage.

Here we have a farmer who is calling into question the government's public relations strategy of invoking farmers to justify changing the Fisheries Act and weaken protections for Canada's environment, water and aquatic ecosystems in particular.

Government Orders

• (1810)

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I should remind my friend that this is the Fisheries Act, not the water act. What we are doing with the Fisheries Act is making it a true Fisheries Act by making the habitat provisions apply to fisheries of human interest, commercial, recreational and aboriginal fisheries, so it is a true fisheries population habitat protection bill.

In terms of agriculture, the budget committee hearing that I was at, Mr. Ron Bonnett, who is the president of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, not just one producer but who represents most of Canadian farmers, was very much in favour of what we are doing with the Fisheries Act. Could my hon. friend explain the difference?

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, I respect the hon. member's comments and his expertise. I know he has much expertise in the area of biology and, therefore, his comments carry a lot of weight. However, the Fisheries Act is meant to protect fish and fish habitat but the reality is that the fish are the canary in the coal mine. If the fish are not healthy and the fish habitat is damaged, it is a sign that all is not well in the ecosystem in the watershed and, ultimately, the watershed benefits human life. Therefore, it is a very important lever in terms of protecting our water.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted that my colleague mentioned the Slomp family, who I know personally. This is a farm family that runs an organic dairy farm and are proud protectors of the environment, and I can speak to that personally.

The member has raised a very important point. I would like him to respond to a very famous case in Alberta, the Friends of the Oldman River Society case, where Supreme Court Justice La Forest held that the federal government shares responsibility for the protection of the environment. Part of that decision was based on the fact that the federal government has unilateral responsibility for the protection of the fisheries under the Constitution.

Does the member think that the government is using an underhanded method of amending the Constitution by altering the federal Fisheries Act so that it has less power to protect fisheries?

• (1815)

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, I have to agree that the government is being surreptitious on this. It is using an omnibus bill to essentially undermine environmental regulations in the country. Any change to the Fisheries Act should be studied in-depth by the fisheries committee and calling on expert witnesses to speak to that.

I do believe that the budget is being used to undermine water policy in the country, not only by amending the Fisheries Act but by casting aside the world renowned Experimental Lakes Area program.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I guess the biggest problem is the fact that the government has lumped so much into the bill. It has made some good changes. With EI, the best 14 weeks is a good change, as is working while on a claim. They were Liberal pilot projects that the government has adopted and they were good changes. However, when it went past that, rather than having a fulsome debate on the whole issue, it brought through the injurious provisions that are really going to be

like pulling a fire alarm in rural Canada when people start leaving rural Canada because of the approach the government has taken.

It is similar to water and DFO. Would it not have been better to proceed in a majority situation, like the government finds itself in? It ran on the promise to bring forward a new Fisheries Act in 2008 and in the last campaign. It had not done it and it is sneaking it into this budget. I would like my colleague's comments on that.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, this is a scientific issue. A lot of people think that environmental activism is all about public relations stunts and so forth and that it is a kind of soft area. However, it is not. It is one of the most scientifically involved areas of public policy.

There are some very good minds on the finance committee who know a lot about the financial ecosystems and the economic ecosystems, but I do not know if the finance committee has the expertise needed to explore the complexities of aquatic ecosystems.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I want to point out to hon. members that we have several hours this evening on this bill. A number of members have been getting up on questions and comments. I know it would be appreciated by hon. members if members kept their questions and responses succinct. Then more members will have the opportunity to question other hon. members in the House.

Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what a time to be addressing Canada's economic action plan. As we look around the world, the cradles of civilization in Europe are now overwhelmed with devastating public debt crises. South of the border, millions of people are chronically unemployed and the U.S. government has more debt than the entire U.S. economy has output.

Here in Canada we are strong. We are strong because our Prime Minister and his Minister of Finance have enacted responsible, low tax, low debt, low spending economic policies that respect taxpayers and preserve the long-term sustainability of the government.

I started with Europe because the crisis is probably most acute there. Countries across that continent are faced with the prospect of debt defaults. Greece has a debt to GDP ratio of 165%. That means that for every dollar in output in the Greek economy, there is \$1.65 in government debt. In Italy it is \$1.20. In Portugal and Ireland, it is about \$1.08.

Any government that has more debt than its economy has output is truly in a debt crisis situation. We know that the solution for a debt crisis is not more debt.

Right now the European Union and the IMF are working to try to deal with this crisis. The IMF has accumulated about \$400 billion U.S. in its account to deal with crises like this one. It is seeking another \$420 billion U.S. next week at the G20 meeting in Mexico. The European Union for its part has already committed \$200 billion to Portugal, Ireland and Greece. It has set up another firewall fund worth half a trillion dollars.

At least nine euro currency countries have been downgraded. Greek and Portuguese debt is now considered by all rating agencies to be junk status. The NDP and the Liberals have both suggested that Canada should use tax dollars from this country to bail out governments in that continent. Before we start shovelling Canadian tax dollars into a foreign debt crisis, let us consider the situation in its entirety.

For these countries to require a Canadian assisted bailout, they would have had to have taxed every available dollar out of their own economy, borrowed every single dollar that anyone in the world would lend to them, and used every single dollar in the existing IMF and EU bailout contingency funds.

I would suggest that any country that exhausts all of those sources of funds in order to pay for its spending and its debt obligations is probably not the safest entity to which one would want to lend money.

This government is interested in protecting Canadian tax dollars. As such, we will not lend them to a foreign debt crisis before the countries whose policies created said crisis have a plan to deal with it.

Across the way they feel very differently. We talked about Canada Europe free trade. When we say that, they think it is something very different. They mean exporting Canadian tax dollars to euro debtor nations and importing failed European welfare state ideas to Canada. That is the kind of trade they propose.

• (1820)

The NDP and the Liberals both propose policies that are nearly identical to the ones that put Greece, Portugal and the other nations into trouble. For one, they propose allowing anyone who has been in the country for as little as three years to collect old age security. They have proposed a 45-day work year. That would allow people to pay into EI for 45 days and then collect employment insurance for the rest of the year. This would be an enormous cost to working families and small businesses. Now they are proposing to take Canadian tax dollars and spend them on euro debt bailouts before those countries have even written a plan to deal with their own crisis.

On this side of the House we understand that the best thing we can do to protect Canada from the debt crisis is to ensure that we do not repeat the mistakes that led to it in the first place.

That is why we have a firm plan to balance the budget by 2015-16, just three years from now. That will make us the first country in the entire G8 to balance its budget without a tax increase. What

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better way to protect ourselves against a debt crisis than to pay off debt?

How would we do this? To start with, we have initiated a plan to reduce the cost of government by \$5.2 billion over the next three years. We have announced savings in department after department and we have been able to secure these savings without affecting front line services for the Canadian people.

Second, we are making our social programs sustainable. If old age security is not affordable to taxpayers, then it is not sustainable to seniors. That is why we are making it affordable and sustainable all at once. The demographic and cost pressures are evident. Over the next 20 years the number of people collecting OAS will double. The cost of OAS will triple. The number of taxpayers for each retired OAS recipient will fall by half. This is partly due to the demographic baby boom bubble. It is also due to the fact that we are living longer.

The average life expectancy grows by 47 days every single year. When old age security was created over half a century ago, life expectancy was 69 years and eligibility was 70, meaning that most people did not get any OAS at all. Now the age eligibility is 65 and life expectancy is 82, meaning there is now 17 years of eligibility. Twenty years from now it will be roughly 84, meaning people would collect OAS for almost two decades. That is not what the program was intended to do. Over a gradual period we would raise the age of eligibility by two years in a way that would not affect existing or soon-to-be recipients of OAS.

At the same time, as we render these programs more sustainable, we are growing the private sector by allowing tax-free savings accounts. Already, 6.2 million Canadians have opened accounts. That means for decades to come they will grow their savings without the hand of government interfering with their returns.

We are allowing small businesses to pool their resources to create employer pension plans for their employees to help the majority of Canadians who do not have an employer pension plan now.

We are removing regulatory obstacles so that there is one approval for every one project so that we can unlock the half a trillion dollars in resource wealth that sits beneath our feet across this country.

We are signing free trade agreements with countries all around the world. Europe and India are the next two agreements on our to-do list.

The goal here is to contain the cost of government and grow the success of the wealth-generating private sector so that we can have jobs, growth and long-term prosperity.

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• (1825)

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, just a few months ago, the member treated us to a lovely speech about the magic of the free market. Unfortunately, the magic my colleague was talking about does not seem to have done anything for the Cinderellas and Snow Whites in his fairy tale.

He talked briefly about changes to the age of eligibility for old age security. I would like him to tell us if he supports that decision wholeheartedly even though he can likely foresee the consequences.

Surely our colleague can answer a few questions. For example, how will this affect seniors who cannot work any longer, seniors who have been laid off and cannot find another job to fill the gap until they turn 67?

How will these changes affect them?

[English]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, she talks about fairy tales. Her party would bring the nightmare that we are witnessing every day on the news. All we have to do to see the NDP's vision for economic policy is turn on the Greek news to find out what happens when we expand government into every aspect of people's lives.

We have to look at what has happened right across Europe, with the European countries that have endorsed and implemented the exact policies that the NDP is proposing to implement here in Canada. We reject those policies. That is why, under the best finance minister in the world, we have succeeded.

• (1830)

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on that same point, around old age security, it is a good news story. People are living longer. That is good news. People are enjoying life more. With our good quality health care, they are able to enjoy being fit and with vigour.

I want to ask my colleague a question regarding some of the other initiatives we have taken that he did not get a chance to mention because his time was limited. We have raised the personal exemption several times, so seniors benefit from that. We have raised the age exemption several times, so seniors benefit from that. We have introduced pension splitting for seniors, so they benefit from that. We have enriched the GIS, so seniors benefit from that.

Does he feel, in balance with the OAS initiatives that we are taking, that seniors are better off now after six years of Conservative government?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, we have implemented the tax-free savings accounts. We have implemented pension splitting for seniors. We have targeted an increase in benefits to the poorest and most in need seniors across this country. Clearly, we have an agenda of delivering for Canada's seniors.

However, what the opposition fails to realize is that all of the pension funds that it claims it wants to protect are deeply invested in the stock market. All of them. In the Canada Post pension plan, for example, all five of its top holdings are banks and oil companies. The only two oil companies, by the way, are both oil sands companies that the opposition leader says is a disease.

The NDP wants to increase taxes on the businesses that are in the pension plans of our seniors. A tax on those businesses would be a tax on pensions and a tax on seniors.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague and I are going to have to disagree on just how beneficial the changes to the OAS would be. Some of the changes they have made, as some of the government members have indicated, have benefited some Canadians.

With regard to income splitting, the key part is that people have to have an income before they can split it.

With regard to the OAS, it would be those low-income families and people with disabilities who are going to hurt most. Having spoken with people with disabilities, they look forward to reaching the age of 65 so that they can get OAS and the guaranteed income supplement. They are richer than they ever have been before, and that is a fact.

The question for my colleague is, why did the government not carve out a special provision for persons with disabilities, on the OAS? Why did it not do that, at least?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, we have done more to protect and advance the interests of disabled persons than any government in Canadian history. The Minister of Finance, under his leadership in a previous budget, implemented the registered disability savings plan. This plan allows families to put aside the resources to ensure that after the parents are gone, the dependent disabled person has a future and has hope.

We want to empower families to take care of themselves and neighbours and friends and community to take care of each other. That is the Conservative way. That is the Canadian way.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the late Jack Layton was very public in his commitment that the New Democrat official opposition would continue to seek constructive dialogue with the government on the development and reform of federal law and policy. We have been steadfast in our dedication to that commitment. We have persisted in seeking more robust dialogues with Canadians and opportunities for debate among the duly elected members of Parliament.

Sadly, the Conservative government has reneged on its own promises of a more open, transparent and participatory government. Bill C-38 and the process for its passage in one budget bill amending 70 laws is clear evidence of the opposite direction and reneging of those undertakings.

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My final remarks today on Bill C-38 will be delivered with great despair, great despair for the expedited undemocratic process for enacting Bill C-38 and changes to 70 laws, despair for the deliberate undermining of more than four decades of collaborative efforts of previous governments to work with ecologists, limnologists, first nations, environmental organizations, fisheries officers, environmental inspectors, justice officials and prosecutors to develop and implement strong federal laws for the protection of the environment, despair that Canada's environmental laws are being shredded at the admission of the Minister of Natural Resources because one Chinese official purportedly queried why Canada's pipeline review process was taking so long and several farmers apparently complaining to the Minister of Fisheries about measures to protect fisheries.

I despair that Canadians were once lauded at international forums for our progressive environmental laws and democratic processes to engage Canadians in their making and application. Bill C-38 has been roundly criticized by highly respected and experienced Canadians, with decades of experience in environmental law, science and governance, including four former fisheries ministers, two former Progressive Conservative ministers, one of whom was a former Speaker.

Canada's foremost scientists have decried the actions of the government to undermine the federal Fisheries Act and the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, absent any reasonable consultations on credible ways to expedite and coordinate project approvals, while still preventing environmental damage through effective application of these laws.

Bill C-38 is wrong in substance and in its process. I will speak first to the process.

The Canadian Environmental Assessment Act was forged through a series of open, transparent and inclusive consultation processes starting several years before the law was even enacted, a process I was privileged to contribute to over many decades. Provisions of the bill were openly discussed and debated in advance of its enactment, in fact, in advance of it ever being tabled in this place. Parallel discussions were held with a broad array of persons on the regulations that would be promulgated under this yet to be enacted law, a very wise and constructive way of coming forward with legislation. A discussion was held with the public about the umbrella act and consultations were also held directly with scientists, engineers, industry, biologists, limnologists on how the law was to be implemented.

A regulatory advisory committee known as the RAC was established including representatives from industry, environmental groups, farmers and both levels of government. This constructive rule-making process ensured that the laws were practicable and legally and scientifically sound.

Now we have the Conservative government's non-process on bringing forward substantial changes to laws that have withstood time.

The regulatory advisory committee has not met once since the government seized the reins of power. The so-called responsible resource development act was tabled with zero advance consultation. Is this a responsible process? There has been no parallel process to

discuss the regulations that will be needed to give substance to this proposed law.

We and regulated industry are left with great legal uncertainty. Members of Parliament are being required to vote on substantial legal reforms to long-standing laws in a complete vacuum. A predictable result will be a highly contested and widely litigated process, which we heard today in a press conference of leading environmental lawyers across the country.

• (1835)

What happened to the open, transparent, participatory government that the Conservatives promised? That promise has been shredded along with a once robust federal environmental regulatory regime. The government has violated its commitments under article 3 of the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation, and that requirement is to provide advance notice and opportunity for anyone in Canada to comment on any proposed environmental law or policy.

Let us recall the origin of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. In the 1980s and the early 1990s, because of the failure of the federal government to enforce its duties to assess impacts of major projects, a number of cases were brought before the courts. Most noteworthy was the celebrated 1992 decision by the Supreme Court of Canada in the *Friends of the Oldman River Society* case. The court ruled that the powers and therefore responsibilities of the federal government to protect the environment were shared with the provinces, that there was no conflict between the federal and provincial governments and that they both had responsibilities under the Constitution. In coming forward with that finding, the Supreme Court justice cited a once roundly referred to report of the National Task Force on Environment and Economy, a report that I would highly recommend government members read.

Way back then governments were actually bringing together industry and environmentalists in recognizing that we had to have environment and economy together.

One concrete result was the enactment in the 1990s of the fulsome federal environmental assessment regime. The key rationale for the enactment of that law was to provide greater legal certainty through an open, transparent, scientifically-founded, credible project review process. The new regime, which will be brought into effect should Bill C-38 become law, erases that certainty and replaces it with a system rife with political influence and discretion. Federal reviews can be replaced by provincial processes without proof of equivalency or the need to even ensure cumulative impact assessment, the very opposite of a sound, sustainable, credible energy resource regulatory regime which the government keeps promising.

The proposed new environmental assessment regime will substantially reduce the rights of concerned communities to participate in major project review processes. It will also severely limit the potential for reviews at all and on terms which will be politically driven.

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The federal Fisheries Act would also be substantially amended through Bill C-38, absent any credible consultation. These reforms to the Fisheries Act would erase the most powerful environmental protection law, the key measure which has triggered the majority of previous major environmental assessments and as a result stronger environmental reviews. The effect, as I have mentioned, would be the diminishment of the unilateral constitutional federal power to protect Canada's fisheries. As was the case with CEAA, where there were consultations over many decades, previous governments had intense consultations.

However, it is not just federal laws that are being undermined. The measures in the bill and the budget would undermine the very foundations of good science that should be the basis of our laws.

In implementing this law, the government is violating its trade agreement with the United States of America and Mexico. The Conservatives committed under NAFTA that they would strengthen the development and enforcement of environmental laws and regulations and strive to continually improve them.

Under the NAFTA investment chapter, it specifies it is inappropriate to encourage investment by relaxing domestic health, safety or environmental measures. That is exactly what the Conservative government intends to do through Bill C-38, and we can anticipate that the citizens of Canada may incur the cost of actions brought under NAFTA.

• (1840)

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague's speech and I have listened to NDP members present themselves as a potential Canadian government. I have also listened to those members advocate their policies.

One of our government's priorities is to keep Canadians healthy so they can avoid disease. That member's leader has actually said that jobs in the resource sector are diseases. Is there some type of connection with NDP policies? We work on research, development and inoculation in an attempt to prevent diseases. That member's boss thinks jobs are diseases and NDP policies seem to try to prevent jobs. We have high taxes. We have major regulation.

Does the member agree with her leader that jobs are diseases and they should be avoided like the common cold?

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I will give a far more respectful and informed response than the hon. member across the way delivered in the form of a question to me.

At no time, Mr. Speaker, as you are well aware, and any member of the House who has taken the time to actually sit down and read some of the reports that talk about how the Dutch disease may be impacting Canadian industry would know that in fact what he has said is a complete falsehood and certainly a falsehood to what the hon. leader of the official opposition has said.

The member raised the issue of health. One of the main reasons why we need to have protections of our fishery and why we need to have thorough environmental impact assessments is so we can identify early on the prevention of impacts that contaminate our fishery, which many first nation communities still rely on and is their

constitutional right, and it is very necessary to identify in advance any impacts of major projects that might harm human health.

I would encourage the member to give more attention in that regard.

• (1845)

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague, which I think would be helpful in our overall discussion about the process that has gone on here.

I think it is fair to say that the consensus in the House is, even among some backbenchers in the government, that the bill should have been divided into pieces and that there should have been proper consideration given to the regulatory changes.

For example, we know, in the wake of this week's oil spill in Alberta, that the Government of Canada's regulatory standards right now for pipelines do not distinguish between diluted bitumen and conventional oil. We know that diluted bitumen is more problematic to ship, more toxic, more corrosive, more abrasive and is more likely to lead to more pipeline ruptures.

Could she address how that kind of issue specifically would have benefited from a proper multi-stakeholder process, either through Canada's National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy, which was just killed, or perhaps even at a special legislative committee?

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's question is very complex and I will try to give a succinct a response.

The example that the hon. member has raised, though, is a really important one to give us a context for looking at Bill C-38. One of the strongest reasons for maintaining a strong federal Fisheries Act and a strong Canadian Environmental Assessment Act is to ensure that we have full reviews of major projects that may actually impact the environment or human health.

Given the recent incidents that have occurred in this week period, we have had two breaks in pipelines in my province of Alberta, not detected by the pipeline owner or operator, not detected by either federal or provincial officers, but detected by first nations people or by farmers.

We should have a proper review of this critical federal legislation, if we plan to change it, and we should revert to the very thorough robust processes that were in place before the government took the reins of power.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to highlight some key measures in Bill C-38, our government's plan to keep this country on a course toward long-term growth and prosperity. Bill C-38 would unleash the potential of Canadian business and entrepreneurs to innovate and thrive in the modern economy.

However, unlike members opposite, our Conservative government recognizes that Canada's resource sector is an asset that will bring greater prosperity to all Canadians and not a point of division.

In fact, I represent a rural natural resource constituency and I am very proud to do so. I have farmers, ranchers, loggers, tourist operators and a burgeoning energy industry in my constituency. My constituency also happens to be the number one producer of canola in the country, which is something else I am very proud of. The people in my constituency and in my communities live with natural resources harvesting and natural resources conservation every day.

I would make the point that, in terms of the Fisheries Act, the amendments we are making are strongly supported by rural municipalities in my constituency and right across the country. Many of my municipalities have very small budgets. They are not very wealthy. The draconian enforcement of the old, ineffective Fisheries Act put an incredible strain on local ratepayers, with zero environmental gain. Therefore, the changes that we are making to the Fisheries Act are welcomed by rural communities across the country.

It is for that reason that I am so disappointed that the opposition has chosen to proceed with these costly delay tactics.

Major resource development projects create jobs and spur development across the country. In 2011 alone, the natural resources sector employed an incredible 790,000 workers in communities right across the country. It is predicted that in the next 10 years more than 500 major projects, representing \$500 billion in new investments, are planned across the country. An increasing global demand, especially from emerging markets, bodes very well for Canada. We will reap even greater benefits from our natural resources by encouraging greater private sector investment.

However, currently, Canadian businesses in the natural resources sector that wish to undertake major economic development projects must navigate a complex and unwieldy maze of regulatory requirements and processes. The poster child for bad environmental process is the Mackenzie Valley pipeline, a project I have some familiarity with having done some of the early environmental work up there myself back in the 1970s. It was proven decades ago that the Mackenzie Valley pipeline could have been built in a very environmentally sound way.

The process was repeated in the 1990s, completely unnecessarily. Eventually, the project was shelved due to low natural gas prices.

The 34 years of environmental processes resulted in no project and dozens of aboriginal communities in the Mackenzie Valley impoverished for the foreseeable future because, with the low natural gas prices these days, I think there is a big question mark over the building of the Mackenzie Valley pipeline.

These approval processes are long and unpredictable and actually contribute very little to environmental improvement. Delays and red tape often plague projects that pose few environmental risks. Thousands of small projects have been caught up in this unwieldy process.

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Testifying before the House subcommittee, which engaged in an in-depth study of this legislation, Dave Collyer, president of the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, told MPs:

The current regulatory process has often led to project delays and cost escalation, which both defer and reduce the employment and revenue benefits accruing to Canadians from these investments. In some cases, projects have unfortunately been cancelled or deferred for many years without any discernible improvement in environmental performance or outcomes.

The Mackenzie Valley pipeline is a perfect example of what Mr. Collyer was talking about.

By forcing these thousands of low-risk projects to go through the review process, the existing system draws resources away from projects that are very large. This approach is not economically sound or environmentally beneficial.

One of the mistakes my friends opposite make is that they think an environmental process is the same as an environmental outcome. This government is focused on environmental outcomes. On our watch, since 2006, most of Canada's environmental indicators have improved. I would recommend that members opposite actually look at what is going on in the environment before they go on and on at length about environmental processes.

• (1850)

Right now, in the federal government alone, accountability for assessments rests with dozens of departments and agencies, leading to duplication and needlessly wastes resources. The starting point in federal environmental assessments can also be unpredictable, which cause lengthy delays. This leads to delays in investment and job creation and some plans are even abandoned because of this lengthy environmental process.

It is no wonder that the members for Edmonton—Strathcona and Newton—North Delta both cited environmental lawyers. Environmental lawyers get rich under this process and so it is understandable that environmental lawyers would be very upset by what we are doing to make the environmental process more efficient. One less day of an environmental process means one less day of fees for environmental lawyers.

This is why our Conservative government has worked hard since 2006 to streamline and improve the regulatory process. However, much more needs to be done. A modern regulatory system should support progress on economically viable, major economic projects and sustain Canada's reputation as an attractive place to invest while contributing to better environmental outcomes. There is that word "outcomes", meaning results. That is what this government is focused on.

Today's bill would help modernize the federal regulatory system by establishing clear timelines, reducing duplication and regulatory burdens and focusing resources on large projects. The bill includes a number of initiatives to meet this objective. Our legislation would implement system-wide improvements to achieve the goal of one project, one review in clearly defined time periods. It is not that well-known but a number of years ago, under a Liberal government, the Yukon imposed timelines on environmental assessment reviews and it is working very well.

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In addition, we will invest \$54 million over two years to support more effective project approvals through the major projects management office initiative. This initiative has helped to transform the approvals process for major natural resource projects by shortening average review timelines from 4 years to just 22 months, with no change in environmental outcomes. Environmental outcomes still continue to improve because that is what happens in western free market democracies. Environmental outcomes always continue to improve as we expend the resources that we have earned through our economic development on better and better environmental technology.

It is through measures like these and our government's efficient, responsible approach that we are supporting responsible resource development, creating jobs while protecting the environment. A significant element of this economic boost is represented by Canada's unique oil sands industry which employs over 130,000 people while generating wealth that benefits all of our citizens.

I had the honour in the winter of 2009-10 to do environmental work myself in the oil sands. What I saw there made me very proud to be a citizen of this country. I saw not only responsible resource development in action, but the incredible skill level of oil sands workers from all across the country who were contributing to this wealth creation juggernaut that benefits everybody.

Over the next 25 years, the Canadian Energy Research Institute estimates that oil sands growth will support, on average, 480,000 jobs per year in Canada and add an incredible \$2.3 trillion to our GDP. At the same time, a strong Alberta economy generates significant benefits for Canada as a whole.

As members of the House can see, our government remains committed to making Canada a great place to create and expand businesses and develop our incredible natural resource endowment, from tax relief to the responsible regulatory program we are putting in, to things like the flow-through shares as part of the mineral exploration tax credit. I could go on and on.

In my allotted time today, I have only had an opportunity to touch on a few of the very important measures in the jobs, growth and long-term prosperity act. Given that, I would strongly encourage all members of the House to actually read the legislation and give it the support it deserves.

• (1855)

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of serving with my colleague on the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development.

The member must know that when he cited the Mackenzie Valley pipeline, it was actually a proponent who stopped the clock and made the process longer. When the member cites that example, maybe he should explain the reasons for why that process took as long as it did. It was not because of the consultations.

The member also talked about resource development. We know that in this budget the government has cut the Experimental Lakes Area, has cut research tools and instruments and has cut major resources support programs. We know that these decisions are being taken without adequate sufficient scientific expertise.

Why does the member opposite think that these decisions should be political decisions and not decisions to be taken by scientists after having been well-informed and after having collected sufficient scientific data?

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Speaker, in terms of the decision to suspend the Mackenzie Valley pipeline, I should remind my hon. friend that companies are always looking at the economic environment that they are working in. Time is money. When delays occur, the market will change. If that pipeline had been built back in the late 1970s, it would have been able to withstand low natural gas prices and continue to provide economic benefits for the communities. However, the process itself rendered that project unfeasible.

• (1900)

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would just like to pick up on something the member raised during his remarks. He cited the case of Yukon.

Yukon has its own environmental assessment process, agreed to by the federal government. It took several years to develop. The good news about the Yukon process is that when it was being developed there was extensive consultation with industry, with the labour movement, with environmental NGOs who were not described as radical or accused of laundering money, and with different groups working with the government. When the final process was brought into play in Yukon, everyone agreed to it and signed off on it. It is a very interesting model for us to be learning from.

Why does the government not follow the good advice and the good system that was put in place under the previous Liberal governments that actually arrived at a system that improved the system, with everybody agreeing with the actual changes?

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Speaker, I must say that I do respect the hon. member's long and distinguished career in environmental policy-making.

In terms of Yukon, it is a model act and it was a good piece of legislation. However, I would remind my friend and others opposite that I do sit on the environment committee and we had an extensive review of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. We heard much testimony about the failures of that act and how it could be made better. That testimony, from a wide variety of individuals and groups from across the country, certainly informed the decisions we finally made as a government.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the member could just expand briefly on the pipeline.

The member spoke about the pipelines and the importance that we get to those markets, the LNG markets in Asia and other oil markets other than those in the United States. What is the hindering that? Why is it so important that we take advantage of this great resource, the gas, the shale gas and, of course, the oil that we have in Alberta?

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Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Speaker, there are two world oil prices: Brent gas prices and West Texas gas prices. The West Texas price is, I gather, always the lower price. Because we are a captive supplier to the United States, we are forced to take a lower price, the West Texas price. Whereas, if we had another outlet for our energy resources, like on the west coast, we could avail ourselves of the true world price, which would bring in millions of dollars.

Also, from a competitive standpoint, it is very important to have more than one customer. That is why the pipeline to the west coast is so very important. With the current technology, it can be built in a very environmentally sound way.

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we on this side think there is still a lot of work to do in order to make certain parts of our economy sustainable for the environment.

I wish I could rise tonight in this House and speak to a budget bill that was good for Canada and for Canadians. Sadly, I cannot. Instead, I rise to talk about the work of a Conservative government that hid its agenda from Canadians in the last federal election, that is about to pass legislation that would be harmful to Canadians and to our great country both at home and abroad. I rise to talk about a government that is again in contempt of Parliament and, as such, is demonstrating contempt for Canadians and their families.

Over the past few weeks, parliamentarians have been invited to look into this 420-page-plus brick of a so-called budget bill. However, this is not a budget bill. It is really a bill designed to implement many provisions of the Conservatives' hidden agenda, an agenda largely kept secret from the Canadian people during that last election. This bill is about sneaking in major changes to legislation that governs the fabric of Canadian society. In reality, it is a Trojan Horse waiting to get past the walls before unleashing havoc. Once passed, this bill would set changes which Canadians at this time can only guess about.

Bill C-38 has all sorts of provisions that would have an impact on everything from old age security, food inspection and health care transfers right on through to immigration. Of course, one-third of this Trojan Horse bill includes significant proposed changes to environmental protection regulations. This bill would dismantle the measures that were put in place to protect our environment and tackle climate change. They are changes that, rather than bringing us stronger protections, would try to turn back the clock and cancel international accountability measures on climate change. This bill would also repeal the current Canadian Environmental Assessment Act and, as a result, would allow the Conservatives to considerably weaken the assessment system. We would likely see federal environmental assessments plummet from roughly 6,000 a year to only a few dozen. I say quite categorically that the overhaul of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act does not belong in a budget bill. Under the guise of cutting red tape, the Conservatives would repeal the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act that Canadians have known for generations and replace it with a polluter-friendly Canadian environmental assessment act, circa 2012.

The official opposition contends that this proposed legislative change did not belong in the finance committee, that the environment committee is where the debate and study belonged,

and that the committee should have been given the appropriate time to study the changes. This is political expediency at its worst.

Bill C-38 also sets out proposed time limits for the completion of reviews. The minister, and not anyone else, would have the power to shut down a review panel if he or she thought it would not finish on time. Of course, we all know there is not a one-size-fits-all kind of box. Different environmental assessments require different periods of time. Some, because of unforeseen circumstances, might need to be lengthened. The Conservative government would slap a time limit on an assessment and if did not meet that, then too bad. The minister would have the power to change things and to cancel an assessment. Proper assessment is key to ensuring the benefit to and protection of Canadians. That type of decision needs due diligence supplied by comprehensive reviews by experts, not by a minister and also not through five-minute rounds of questions in the finance committee. However, this is just one example of the profound changes that this bill would make.

Many of the proposed changes in this brick of a budget bill have nothing to do with budget implementation. It is over 400 pages long, would amend 60 different pieces of legislation, rescinding half a dozen and adding three more. Again, I add that these proposed changes would be made with almost no input from Parliament or from Canadians. The disrespect for democracy is shameful.

The short title of this bill, the jobs, growth and long-term prosperity act, does not in any way reflect its content. It reminds me of the kind of doublespeak that was prevalent during the time of the Mike Harris government in Ontario, with bills like the poison pill Tenant Protection Act which stripped tenants of protections like rent control. However, I cannot say I am completely surprised. That government was fond of omnibus bills. The Minister of Finance, Minister of Foreign Affairs and President of the Treasury Board in the current government were also all part of those dark days.

• (1905)

I think the Speaker of the day said it best when he called it an "ominous bill", and that is what we have here. Much of this ominous Trojan Horse bill has nothing to do with the budget. This budget is about austerity for austerity's sake and the Conservative's hidden agenda.

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The Parliamentary Budget Officer has confirmed that public sector job cuts would be in the order of almost 27,000 over the next three years. In addition, about 6,000 contract positions would also be cut. The government refused to detail where many of these cuts would be made, but many of the services and programs that Canadians rely upon would be diminished or eliminated. In fact, the refusal of the government to provide information about the actual number of public sector jobs it is about to axe, information it has but will not share with Parliament, is the very basis for our charge of contempt of Parliament currently being considered by the Speaker.

Make no mistake, the current Conservative government has no respect for Parliament. We have seen that very clearly over the past year now that the Conservatives have their majority based on the support of 39% of the population. They believe that gives them carte blanche to do whatever they want without oversight and without answering to Parliament or to the Canadian people.

I think the polls very clearly illustrate that Canadians are indeed watching. More and more of them are not liking what they see. I know that people in my riding are watching and I have been hearing from my constituents loud and clear.

From Ms. Cleveland in Scarborough, "I'm angered but not surprised with the PC budget. When they stopped using 'Progressive' in their name, they should have change it to the Regressive Conservatives. Stephen Harper promised jobs growth but delivered reckless cuts. There is nothing on jobs, nothing on inequality and nothing to strengthen our front-line health services....Also, the fact that he is using billions of dollars for military jets and warships but slashes funding for environmental issues which affect Canadians in every way, we are supposed to be a peacekeeping nation but he is slowly pushing us to become a fighting nation like the States. Of course, the big question surrounding Mr. Harper—" My apologies.

• (1910)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I would remind the hon. member, but I think he recognizes that the rule applies if the name of another hon. member appears in a quotation, for example.

The hon. member for Scarborough Southwest.

Mr. Dan Harris: Mr. Speaker, when reading quotes it is quite difficult to make that change on the fly. I apologize. I will continue the quote from Ms. Cleveland, "The Prime Minister and his majority status that allowed him to put on this ridiculous budget is from a false majority."

From Ms. Hamilton in Scarborough, "The budget also ignores the needs of youth, especially for increased jobs, training opportunities and lower tuition fees. It disregarded the environment by imposing time limits on environmental studies and resource projects and providing zero leadership on environmental issues. It is dropping responsibility for providing leadership in health care, failing to address the fast-growing gap between rich and poor, and cutting funding to the arts by strategically attacking groups that take a critical perspective on the status quo; organizations like the CBC, NFB and Telefilm."

From Mr. Murphy in Scarborough, "As a hard-working Canadian, I was dismayed when I found out that the current Tory regime was going to increase the age of retirement to 67. I work beside a man,

and while I do not begrudge him anything because he is hard working, I do have a problem him being able to retire at 65 while I have to wait the extra two years. It's incredulous that because he was born six months before me that I have to remain in the workforce an extra two years. I'll have paid more taxes, more CPP, more EI premiums, but he will get more than I will. I think, however, what galls me even more is that the Prime Minister could retire tomorrow with a substantial pension. That's not right and something has to be done. It is no wonder why people are ambivalent about the democratic process."

From a Ms. D. McLaren, "OAS cuts are a big mistake. It won't be long before there will be means testing and only the very poorest will get anything at all. One more nail in the coffin of universality. Although, I know that OAS does get clawed back at a high level of income, but that's different. We need a national housing program now. Our cities are now unaffordable for people coming up, i.e., younger people, immigrants and such."

I would also like to point out that recently, new statistics were released that show that nearly one-quarter of all people who live in Toronto are living in poverty. It is shameful, but the Conservative government and its neglect would make the situation worse.

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as all hon. members know, we are sent here not to read our correspondence to the House but to develop policies for the Government of Canada and the people of Canada. We are expected to present those policies as much on this side as on the other side.

My question for the hon. member is the following. Does his party have a budgetary policy for Canada's economy or can we look forward over the coming years to a series of recited tweets and emails, a jumble of views that do not even come close to a responsible approach to government? Also, does the hon. member opposite understand that his party's real policy on this budget is one of delay? In spite of the longest budget debate in 70 years, twice as long in committee as under the previous Liberal government, if they had their way we would not be passing this bill until the fall, which would affect market confidence and be unprecedented in Canada's recent history. Does he understand those things?

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Mr. Dan Harris: What I understand, Mr. Speaker, is that if the government had done the responsible thing and put the legislation where it belongs, where it can be studied in all of the appropriate committees, where changes to the Investment Canada Act would go to the industry committee and not the minister, where the environmental changes would go to the environment committee and not the finance committee, where changes to health care would go to the health committee where they belong, if the government had done the responsible thing, we would not be delaying the budget. This is an abomination and it deserves to be opposed.

• (1915)

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to pick up on the comments made by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence. I would like to remind the parliamentary secretary of something and put a question to my colleague at the same time.

The more I hear the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister speak, the more I am reminded of my great-grandparents who used to work for a well-established, old lumber baron from the Ottawa Valley. It sounds like the government is pursuing a 19th century strategy of hewing wood and drawing water instead of focusing on what this country needs and what this budget should be reflecting. We do not have an innovation strategy, our venture capital money is fleeing the country, and there is an energy efficiency race on around the world and we do not even have our sneakers on yet. Professor Porter from Harvard tells us that better environmental performance is absolutely consistent with enhanced competitiveness. The changes that are being brought in this budget would actually erode those standards and our competitiveness.

Could my colleague comment on that?

Mr. Dan Harris: I would absolutely love to, Mr. Speaker. The analogy of going back to a 19th century economy is apt.

In 1999, among all of Canada's exports, 60% were finished products. In just the last decade, we have gone from exporting 60% finished products to only exporting 33% finished products. The other 66% is now unfinished or partially processed products. We are hindering the value-added sectors of our economy with this unbalanced approach that the Conservative government is taking. It is absolutely the wrong way to go.

With respect to innovation, we are looking at the Jenkins report and nothing as of yet is being implemented. There now are massive changes to the Investment Canada Act, where three times the previous limit is now going to be subject to review. All of the incubator companies and industries, the real innovators and productive companies, are now going to get gobbled up by large foreign companies. We are going to lose the benefits from them.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on the issue of RADARSAT, the government has not responded. There is a very important satellite investment decision that is going to take place within the next few months on whether we are going to have it or not. Could the member comment on that? It is important for all of Canada, our security and investment.

Mr. Dan Harris: Mr. Speaker, this was raised in the industry committee and was blocked by the Conservatives, like just about everything else.

RADARSAT is one of the crown jewels of Canada's innovation and science and technology companies. RADARSAT has a multi-mission that is very diverse. It will monitor icebergs on the east coast and oil pipelines. I would like to hear the government's answer about oil pipelines right now. It will monitor potential spills on the west coast, as well as Arctic sovereignty. The funding for this program is running out. I would absolutely love to hear what the delay is, what the timelines are and when the government is going to stop passing the buck and fund RADARSAT.

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in the House to speak about the bill to implement our budget, because it is a great bill. It is a plan that has not only the economic present at heart, but also our economic future and the future strength of the Canadian economy for generations to come.

Before starting on my substantive remarks, I would like to address some of the comments that were made by the previous speaker and some of the previous questioners.

We would not be doing our job here as parliamentarians if we did not present facts. The Jenkins report was mentioned. The previous speaker claimed that it has not been implemented in any way in this budget. As Canadians well know, members of the Jenkins commission have already acknowledged that the government has gone a long way toward adopting and implementing important conclusions from that report and that this is absolutely vital to the future of innovation and productivity in the country.

Second, the member in the corner, representing one of the ridings in our nation's capital, mentioned hewers of wood and drawers of water. I do not think that term was even fairly applied to the Ottawa of 19th century in a country that was leading the world in the production of timber and lumber. He, with his family background, should know that.

We were already at the cutting edge of productivity, at the cutting edge of the export market for this valuable commodity in the 19th century. To term even the workers of that time as hewers of wood and drawers of water, to use that Biblical language referring to them, is absolutely insulting. It represents the irrelevance of his party to economic debate in Canada at the moment.

This is a country that is leading the world in high-quality research and development, in the creation of new enterprises, in attracting new investment for manufacturing, for high technology, for the creation of jobs across the board. We are leading the world in resources, as well as leading at the very highest level of technological innovation and productivity, and the member opposite knows that.

My remarks will focus on three aspects of the budget and the implementation bill. The measures contained in it are complex but absolutely necessary and predictable, given our government's stated objectives in our platform on the budget earlier this spring, the goals of driving forward jobs, growth and long-term prosperity for the country.

The first point I would like to touch on relates to the whole issue of debt.

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We are living in exceptional times. They are times of great opportunity globally, and not just for Canada but for the whole world. The global economy now represents, depending on whose statistics one believes, about \$61 trillion. Estimates go as high as \$70 trillion.

Canada's part in that is less than \$2 trillion. Our estimated GDP for 2012 is \$1.7 trillion, \$1.8 trillion, but we need to keep in mind what kind of growth that represents. In only 1990, as the Cold War was ending, as the Berlin Wall had just fallen, as the Soviet Union was about to break up, global GDP was \$27.5 trillion. Therefore, we have seen more than a doubling, maybe a tripling, of growth in global GDP in that time.

Why? It is because almost all the countries of the world, including large countries like Russia and Brazil, those that are among the leading emerging economies today, have adopted a set of rules based on market discipline and democracy. That has driven a phase of growth that is in many ways unrivalled. I think the only period that compares with this period is the 1950-1970 period, when recovery from the terrible Second World War was taking place, but in spite of the great recession we have had in recent years, this period in some ways surpasses that earlier period of absolutely stunning growth for the world.

However, this growth has been characterized by financial crises. Let us not forget that this week, of all times, when we are debating Greece and the Leader of the Opposition is calling for Canada to throw good money after bad into a cause that is neither ours nor historically a role that Canada has played, given the internal dynamic of the European Union and the European community.

• (1920)

This whole period over the last 20 years has been characterized by successive financial crises beyond our borders. We had a Scandinavian banking crisis in the early 1990s. We had a crisis in the European exchange rate mechanism in the early 1990s. We had Mexico in the mid-1990s. We had Southeast Asia and massive devaluations of currencies in the late 1990s. We had a Russian financial crisis, which I saw first-hand as an official in our Department of Foreign Affairs at the time in 1998. Then there was Turkey, Argentina, the dot com bubble, followed by the granddaddy of them all, the financial crisis in 2007, and the sovereign debt crisis in Europe, which we have seen since 2010 and which remains unsolved.

We in Canada have had to protect ourselves from these crises. We have had to keep our economic fundamentals strong in spite of the pressures for indiscipline, the pressures for spending our way out of trouble in a way completely unjustified by common sense or prudence, and on the whole we have succeeded. We have the strongest record of currency stability and price stability among advanced nations. We have one of the lowest rates of debt. Members know the story: for our economic fundamentals, we are in many ways the envy of the world.

However, in recent times it has become harder than ever to maintain this record, to pursue fiscal consolidation and deficit reduction, in spite of the absolutely manifest evidence of some of our closest partners and allies going in other directions, often at great cost to their own economic fundamentals.

It is our view on this side of the House that one of the great achievements of this budget is to continue the course of setting an example, not just for Europe but for the whole world: an example of what moderation represents, an example of commitment to spending on an even keel and an example of spending not beyond one's means.

It has been harder, but we are managing it. We feel, along with many on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, that this is the best role that Canada can play.

There are examples in Europe itself of what, on a smaller scale, Canada has been doing. Sweden has implemented fiscal consolidation on a grand scale. I think the members opposite would be surprised to know that with its social democratic tradition, Sweden, with a right-of-centre government, recently has consolidated its finances and won the highest praise from the IMF, independent analysts and experts around the world for its fiscal record in the past few years. It has gone down the same path as Canada.

The same goes for the small country of Latvia, buffeted terribly by the financial crises of 2007, 2008 and 2009, but now, thanks to a 15% cut in terms of its budgetary spending in relation to GDP over several years, it has put itself back on course.

Nothing so dramatic is required in Canada's case, but we have done what is necessary to continue that record, which is exemplary and which is going to be a lodestone for many of those in Europe and Asia who are struggling to find a course forward.

The second point that we have accepted on this side, and that the other side has clearly not, is that more efficient, more effective government is the order of the day. I myself, as a former public servant, am the first to subscribe to the view that government can always be done better. Government must keep itself productive. It must keep itself modern. It must stay up to date with current practices, with technology, with innovations in management and organization.

That is exactly what this budget sets out to do by reforming environmental review, by focusing the Fisheries Act on the fisheries and by making labour market reforms through immigration and through employment insurance policies that will actually help Canadians—new and old Canadians—to get the jobs they want and for which they are increasingly qualified.

We are living in extraordinary times. Canada has an opportunity. We have an economic plan.

I often find myself asking myself and others what the NDP would have done in earlier phases of our history. When this country was being established as a series of colonies of European powers, would the NDP have considered the fur trade and the fishery in the 16th and 17th centuries as diseases? Was that what natural resources were to the NDP, even at that stage?

• (1925)

Would the timber and lumber industries, engines of our growth in the 19th century, have been cancelled by the NDP, had it been in power, because private enterprise was essential to their development, because they relied on natural resources?

I like to think they would not have, but reading the NDP constitution, listening to the Leader of the Opposition and listening to the members and critics opposite, I am afraid I am skeptical on that point.

[Translation]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to my colleague opposite.

He wants to know what the NDP would have done in the past. In my opinion, the members opposite are completely out of touch with reality.

I listened carefully as he praised Canada. As a Canadian, I too am very proud of Canada and its international reputation. However, I am skeptical when my colleague talks about modernization and being at the cutting edge of research.

Bill C-38 trims the Auditor General's oversight powers, eliminating mandatory audits of the financial statements of a dozen agencies, including the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, the Canadian Transportation Accident Investigation and Safety Board and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

I would like to know what my colleague opposite has to say about these issues.

● (1930)

Mr. Chris Alexander: Mr. Speaker, I think that the hon. member opposite knows very well that most of the changes to the role of Auditor General proposed in this bill are there at the request of the Auditor General himself.

Let our statements in the House be sincere and precise. We are strengthening this government's reputation when it comes to transparency.

With regard to the hon. member's comments on the NDP's point of view, in the past, on our natural resources, my skepticism was related to the preamble of the NDP constitution. The preamble states that production should be directed to meeting the social and individual needs of people and not to the making of a profit.

According to the preamble of its constitution, the NDP does not accept profit, private ownership, in the true sense of the word. That means—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member, but time is limited.

The hon. member for Ottawa South.

[English]

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will pick up on my colleague's comments and recap for a second.

Let us see where we have come from.

In 1995, Canada balanced its budget. For 10 years, we had 10 consecutive years of surpluses. In 2006, the Conservative government was elected with a \$13 billion surplus. Even before the recession hit, which the government denied, the government increased spending by 19%, the single largest increase in spending in Canadian history, making it the biggest-spending and biggest-borrowing government in Canadian history. The Minister of Finance

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rejected a bailout of the car industry, but had to because a pistol was put to his head by the Premier of Ontario and the President of the United States.

The record now is we see two sets of books on the F-35 and the PBO cannot get members to actually disclose the facts. We certainly have had the biggest billboards in Canadian history, with \$30 million spent on 9,000 billboards across the country to advertise the budget. Now we are left with a \$128 billion increase in debt.

It is the same old same old. These republican reformers are the same. They cut taxes, they increase spending, they borrow the money and they compromise public services.

Mr. Chris Alexander: Madam Speaker, the effrontery of the member opposite reaches new heights.

First, I did not think it was appropriate here or anywhere else to suggest that premiers should be wielding pistols in making policy, either literally or metaphorically. Second, it is absolutely clear to everyone outside of that member's immediate personal space that Canada has the best debt record of the G7, that it has the most stable financial sector in the world, that it is the best place to invest, as rated by a myriad of agencies, and that it is moving faster than its peers to reduce the deficit and address the debt, unlike the Premier of Ontario, of whom the member has a passing knowledge, and certainly unlike his interim leader, who put Ontario's economy into the ditch for a generation.

● (1935)

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is very interesting to listen to the debate tonight in the House of Commons on Bill C-38 and to hear our Conservative colleagues tell us that Canada is the best of the best as they reel off their speaking points.

I want to begin my remarks tonight on Bill C-38 by pointing out what needs to be said, which is that the real threat of the budget bill is how it would contribute to income inequality in this country.

There is no question that over the last two decades we have seen a widening gap between wealth and poverty in this country. It is mainly because of public policies that we have seen a drain on things like affordable housing, eligibility for employment insurance, high day care costs and the cost of education. When we look at the record of the Conservative government, it is a terrible record of the growing inequality in this country.

What I find offensive about the bill is that it is completely out of balance. On the one hand, it does nothing to redress things like corporate tax cuts. The government has now given I think it is more than \$60 billion to corporations that were profitable and actually did not need a break. On the other hand, the government has been cutting away at the bare essentials that Canadians need.

In a riding like mine, Vancouver East, we have a very low-income community. People struggle day by day to make ends meet. When we look at the bill, we should ask one simple question: What is in the bill that they could hope for that would improve their quality of life?

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When we go through this massive budget bill, into which the government has thrown everything but the kitchen sink, and examine it clause by clause, issue by issue, it is very bad news for low-income and middle-income Canadians. On employment insurance, people cannot even get their phone calls returned, and those who are eligible cannot get on EI simply because the services are not being provided.

I do not fault the front-line workers at Service Canada for that. They are struggling to keep up with the call demand. I fault the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and the federal government who have deliberately arranged the services so that they are now so difficult to access it makes it almost impossible to have a query answered or to get onto employment insurance. This is something we hear about in my community office every day as people phone in.

One only has to look at pensions. I recently held a pension forum in my riding of Vancouver East. People are very worried. It is not just the older folks who might be approaching the age for OAS who are worried, but also the younger generation of Canadians who understand that the government will be cutting out their income security in the future. These people do not rely on RRSPs. They do not rely on the pooled registered pension plan that we have debated in this House. These people have paid into the Canada pension plan and need old age security. These are the people who will be hurt.

One of things that I find to be the most offensive in this budget is that it does absolutely nothing to address one of the fundamental crises we face in this country, which is the lack of affordable housing.

In metro Vancouver, which is the whole of the Lower Mainland, there is an organization called the Rental Housing Supply Coalition. The coalition includes renters, co-ops, social housing, rental apartment owners and managers, building owners and managers, as well as metro Vancouver officials. It is a very unusual coalition of people who do not often work together, but they have come together because they are so concerned about what is going on in metro Vancouver. There are approximately 31,000 households, which represent probably close to 100,000 people, spending so much on rent that they are just one cheque away from homelessness.

Unfortunately, we know about homelessness in our city, but this crisis is affecting working people now. It is affecting people who will never be able to afford a home. They are struggling to find an affordable place to live and are spending 40% to 60% of their income on rent.

Recently, the City of Vancouver issued a report which shows that homelessness has doubled in the last year. This is a city council that has put enormous energy, effort and investment into dealing with homelessness in our city. What has it received from the federal government? Zip, zero.

• (1940)

I feel angry that this budget which has been touted by the Conservative government is widening the gap and leaving so many people behind.

I will give another example in housing. There are over 600,000 households in Canada that are assisted under federal housing programs. There is a long record of social housing and co-op

housing in this country. However, we are facing another crisis in that many of the long-term operating agreements are going to expire. We know that the number of assisted households has dropped by about 22,000 since 2007 and it is predicted that another 63,000 households will be affected by 2015. I have to point out that this is existing, stable, affordable social housing that we are at risk of losing because the Conservative government has been completely blind to organizations like the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the big-city mayors and housing organizations which have drawn to the Conservatives' attention that unless we—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Libby Davies: I hear them laughing, Madam Speaker. I guess that homelessness and housing is a laughing matter for the Conservative members. How outrageous and how insulting that is to the 1.5 million Canadians who are struggling to meet their housing costs. I find it reprehensible that the Conservatives cannot even listen respectfully to a debate that is based on bringing forward the real experience of people who are having difficulties in their local communities.

Whether it is housing, pensions, EI, or even something like the Coast Guard in Vancouver, this budget is disappointing. Recently, I was very happy that two of our members, the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam and the member for St. John's East, came to Vancouver and held a very successful forum regarding the cutting of the Kitsilano Coast Guard station. There is an uproar in our city about why this cut has to take place. There are attacks on environmental organizations. In British Columbia, environmental assessments and proper reviews are really important. People take them very seriously. One only has to look at the hearings that are taking place for the northern gateway pipeline to know that people are very concerned about how our environment would be placed at risk. What would this bill do? In one fell swoop it would completely gut our environmental assessment process, after years of developing it into a legitimate process.

No matter which way we look at this bill, when the Conservatives put out the line that somehow Canadians are going to benefit, really what are they thinking about? Are they so blind to what is actually taking place? They do not have to take our word for it. They can talk to any organization, whether it is the Canadian Association of Retired Persons, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, or environmental groups. Any organization will point out how this bill would have such a deep impact on people in this country.

I have not even spoken about the process we have gone through, but I will end by saying that besides the substance of the bill, the process has been completely appalling. Imagine a bill that is over 400 pages long. Imagine a bill that would change over 70 pieces of legislation. Imagine a bill that was rushed through one committee and a subcommittee. Even the Senate has five committees studying this bill right now, before the bill has even been sent to the Senate, assuming it is going to pass here after the Conservatives ram it through. Even the Senate has taken more time to consider Bill C-38.

In this place, the Conservative government only has one agenda. The Conservatives do not care about what anybody has to say. They are hell-bent on getting this bill through. It is a crying shame that we are at this point.

More and more Canadians are waking up to this. The Conservatives may laugh today. They may say they do not really care what people think, but I think they have a surprise coming. I think that people who maybe even voted for local Conservative members of Parliament, people who are living on pensions and people who are struggling are very upset about this bill and how it would impact them.

● (1945)

Tonight we are debating this bill. We are going to go to the very end and use all the energy we can to show that the amendments we have brought forward on this bill are a reflection of the opposition that Canadians have to it. We are going to do that as much as we can.

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Madam Speaker, we will, of course, continue to listen to those who are interested in actually discussing the provisions of the bill.

What is extraordinary about the hon. member's comments is that there was not a single reference to jobs and how they are created. That is what a budget does in advanced economies, in any economy. It sets the framework for economic activity that employs people and creates growth. The hon. member also did not care to mention that over six years we have built, thanks to a generous and necessary stimulus package, more social housing than any Canadian government in history. We are laughing at her inability to cite facts.

Will the hon. member acknowledge that in the housing sector, including affordable housing for low-income Canadians, one of the primary drivers of success is going to be the private sector, private ownership, private initiative, the construction industry? What does she have in mind to support those sectors of this country's economy, which, in her community, my community and all communities across the country, are absolutely essential to jobs, growth and long-term prosperity?

Ms. Libby Davies: Madam Speaker, jobs are very important. I cannot think of a better way to stimulate the economy, produce a good investment and societal benefit than to build affordable housing in terms of creating good jobs, being good for the environment and using our own Canadian resources.

The fact is, if the member took the time to look at the metro Vancouver housing coalition, he would see that there are apartment owners and managers in that coalition. They are very concerned about the lack of attention and leadership by the federal government on this issue in our city. It is now a crisis. As I said at the beginning, it is a very unusual coalition of people who do not usually work together, but they have come together because they are so concerned.

To hear the member say that the government has built more social housing than any government in Canada is simply untrue. The government has been cutting social housing. Thousands and thousands of operating agreements are now at risk. There is a risk of losing existing social housing, and unfortunately, it is going to happen unless the government reverses its course.

[Translation]

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member a question about the change in the age of eligibility for retirement from 65 to 67.

This decision affects our health care programs. We know that, right now, health care programs in the provinces are really stretched to the limit. Some are running deficits and having problems. We are talking about an increase in the age of eligibility for retirement from 65 to 67. People will have to work longer. This can result in workplace accidents and more claims being filed with insurance companies.

I would like the hon. member to elaborate a little more on the impact that these decisions will have on the economy.

[English]

Ms. Libby Davies: Madam Speaker, first I should point out that the old age security system is absolutely not in jeopardy. Many independent reports show that it is entirely sustainable. This manufactured crisis that is being put forward by the government simply does not exist.

Raising the age of eligibility will have an impact. It will impact individuals who, if they have low incomes and cannot collect OAS for another two years, possibly will be forced onto the welfare rolls. It also has a direct impact on provincial costs. People are just beginning to realize this.

I would point out that Susan Eng, the vice-president of the Canadian Association of Retired Persons, put it very well. She stated, "Rather than selfishly guarding their own interests, as has been suggested, CARP members and other older Canadians are defending an important part of the social safety net and do not want to see it torn up for their children and grandchildren".

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to speak tonight to our budget implementation bill, Bill C-38. I have been listening to most of the speakers today, as I have been here on duty. Speakers on our side have been talking about the substance of the bill and different aspects of the bill that are of interest to those individual speakers. On the opposite side, we have heard a lot about process and why members opposite are upset about it, so I am happy to speak about process this evening.

I want to make sure those tuning in at home and those in the House who have not been here for many years understand the actual process of how we get here.

Every year, the finance committee meets and starts a pre-budget consultation. In the fall of the year it goes across the country, meeting with different individuals and groups to get input on what should be in the budget. The Minister of Finance does the same. Our ministers do the same, and I am assuming some opposition members also do some consultation.

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Our Minister of Finance has been very gracious in asking for input from all sides of the House on the development of the budget, and this year it was developed and presented in late March. It was a very large budget. It had lots in it. There are lots of changes in the budget, and that is a policy document. The budget is really the policy aspect of where we would like to see the country go, based on the financial aspects put out in the budget, not specifics but policy direction.

Members should know that, under the current law, there is actually no law requiring the government to present a budget at any particular time during the year. Finance ministers in Canadian history have presented a budget in the spring, and we continue that process, but that is not a legal requirement.

If we look at what has happened south of the border in the United States, it has been two or three years since a budget has been presented. They are having a tremendous amount of financial difficulties, as we all know, and part of their problem is that they cannot get their act together in terms of putting their country on the right financial footing from the government's perspective. Having a budget that could pass both Houses is part of the issue.

Here we have a budget that has come forward. It has been passed by this House and by the Senate. The budget we pass, we pass it in principle. From the budget, there are implementation bills. There are actually two, one in the spring, which we are debating tonight, and one in the fall, because it is difficult or almost impossible for the bureaucratic staff to go through every change and policy direction that is in the budget and turn it into actions. That is what an implementation budget is. It is turning what was said in the budget into actual actions, and of course it will require changes to different laws and to different aspects. This budget does exactly the same.

There has been some indication that what happened in the budget, which was passed, all of a sudden is showing up in this implementation bill, coming from nowhere. I want to point out some of the items, and I only have time to do four or five, that were actually in the budget, which this House passed and which are in the implementation bill. Some of it the opposition considers controversial. I do not know how controversial it is when it has been there.

Let us start with a simple one. In Part 2, on the sales and excise tax measures, which changes the GST and HST treatment of some medical devices, assistive devices and medical treatments, we have zeroed them out. Basically we had to pay GST on them before. In the implementation bill, we do not.

If we look at the jobs, growth and prosperity budget, which was passed by the House, and we turn to page 167, it talks about health related tax measures. It talks about the economic action plan 2012, which proposes expanded health-related tax relief under the GST and HST. It is right there in black and white. It is in the budget book. It was passed by this House.

The bureaucrats take what was in the budget and turn it into action, from policy to action in the implementation bill. It is there. We cannot argue that there is something new that we have not seen before that has not been discussed. It is right there.

• (1950)

Let us move on. One area that has been very controversial is what is happening with the natural resources area. In chapter 3 we have

responsible resource development from pages 88 to 100 of the budget bill, "Modernizing the Regulatory System for Project Reviews". That is almost 20 pages on what the policy changes should be to make our system more efficient and effective with respect to regulatory reviews, environmental assessments and improving projects. The issue is not, as we are hearing about, that we are making changes. Those changes are clear, if members read the budget bill, which they got on March 29, which is the day it was presented. We have had it for a couple of months. We know what changes there will be. All this budget implementation bill does is take what was said in the budget, what was passed by the House, and implement it. Of course it requires some changes to legislation. The policy is there and we are implementing that policy.

Here is another small one that I think is important. If we look at Part 4, Division 3, there is a section in the implementation bill about PPP Canada, the public-private partnership program we have. If members look at page 156 of the budget, imagine that, it talks about infrastructure money and that we will work with the municipalities to provide support for infrastructure development in this country. Part of that policy discussion was to enhance the role of the PPP to make that happen, to get the private sector involved with the public sector to make a difference in the infrastructure in this country. It is in the budget.

There are no surprises. The implementation bill did not come out of the blue with something that was not there before. It is on page 156. It is not exactly that, because it is policy. The budget document is policy, which we have to implement. That is what this act does.

We have a really simple one. Part 4, Division 16, talks about the Currency Act, and in the budget, on page 217, it talks about the elimination of the penny and why we are doing it. It is a policy decision. It is in the budget passed by this House and the Senate. In principle, we agreed to it. What do we have to do? We have to implement the change. It is in the implementation bill that is before us on page 217. It comes as no surprise to anyone that we are getting rid of the penny. It is in this bill. There are no changes and no issue with process.

Another piece, which I have heard today, which really surprises me, is about Part 4, Division 17, amending the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act and the Canada Health Act. It is at page 190, and it goes on for a number of pages. There was one speaker on the opposite side who said we were cutting back money to the provinces in terms of the federal transfer for health, which is absolutely inaccurate. If we look in the budget book, we see it talks about what we are doing in terms of the plan we have to extend the 6% all the way to 2016-2017, which inaccurately was portrayed that we were cutting back. In fact, during the election we promised one year less, I believe, maybe even two years less that we would extend that 6% and then we would review it. The Minister of Finance stated in his budget book, in his policies, that we were extending that for an additional two years on top of what we had already committed to and that we would have a 3% accelerator after that. Therefore, it was clear that was what we were doing.

Guess what? What is in the implementation portion of this bill is implementing what was in that policy document. There are no surprises. It was there in black and white, supported by the House. It was not supported by every party, do not get me wrong, but it was passed, so if it is passed by the House I think we should implement it. Instead of just passing something and not doing anything about it, we are actually doing something about it.

● (1955)

This implementation bill is big, but so was the budget. The Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister had the leadership foresight to say we need to continue to do things to make it so we do not fall behind, like other countries around the world—

● (2000)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member's time has elapsed. Questions and comments. The hon. member for Trinity—Spadina.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Madam Speaker, 800 archives and other heritage institutions across the country are supported by the national archival development program, but the budget cuts to Library and Archives Canada eliminate the program.

This means that Library and Archives Canada will not be able to meet its legislative mandate to support the development of the library and archival communities of Canada. Given that it is eliminating all its support, it will have a devastating impact on Canadians' ability to access their own heritage and learn their own history.

What is the justification for this steep cut of \$1.7 million to the archival program?

Mr. Mike Wallace: Madam Speaker, it is an excellent question because I have an excellent answer.

I was at committee just last week when not the chief archivist but a member from the financial area came in and said they were cutting a certain number of jobs and activities. Absolutely. It was because it was part of the archives' leadership management plan long before DRAP, long before we cut.

The NDP asked for the number or percentage of that change, in terms of how they operate, that is due to DRAP or the economic action plan changes that we are implementing. It was 3% or 4%, exactly what other departments are doing.

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That person is making a managerial change because technology has changed and they can operate differently from the way they have in the past. Those changes would have happened regardless—

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments. The hon. member for Edmonton—Leduc.

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Madam Speaker, I used to serve with my colleague on the finance committee. We do miss him. He is perhaps the foremost expert in this Parliament on estimates.

I do appreciate his going through the whole pre-budget process, linking that in to the budget and then into the budget implementation bills, the first one in the spring and the second one in the fall.

I just want to point out some of the measures that are in here, in terms of amending the medical expense tax credit, changing the registered disability savings plan, extending the temporary mineral exploration tax credit and limiting the period to a year for which a tax shelter identification number is valid. I will also go to part 4, the last one, amending the First Nations Land Management Act and changes to labour and skilled workers.

These were all recommendations in our pre-budget report, which was tabled in Parliament in December. I want the member to comment on the link, again, between the pre-budget report, the budget, the budget implementation acts and how the policy thread goes between all those various documents,

Mr. Mike Wallace: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the chair of the finance committee who has done an excellent job as the chair in making sure that exactly what Canadians are telling the finance committee in its pre-budget consultations is understood and the issues are researched and brought forward in a report that goes to the Minister of Finance about what could be implemented through the policy document of the budget, and in this case was implemented based on the solid advice of the finance committee, and then turns into an implementation bill.

I want to thank the member for having his committee sit for 50 hours to discuss this particular bill. I thank the—

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments. A last brief question, the hon. member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member talks about consultation and the process.

I am just wondering which provinces the government consulted with. Can the member table the results of the consultation done in northern Ontario? Can he explain the consultation process done with senior citizens about the changes to OAS and table that report?

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I notice the member for Sault Ste. Marie is sitting beside him, and I know that the seniors in Sault Ste. Marie have been writing letters to the editors and are not supportive of the changes to OAS.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Madam Speaker, what happens, so the member knows, is that all members of the finance committee get together and make a decision about which province, which city, to which area they will go. They try to change it every year.

When I was on finance, we were in northern Canada one fall for a number of times. We have been to other provinces. In fact, as a member of Parliament, I have been on finance for five years and I have been in every province and territory in the country. The committee does a thorough job of consulting all Canadians regardless of their age or their—

• (2005)

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Etobicoke North.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, over the last three decades, high profile events and reports focused the world's attention on the global environment and its needs and the international action necessary to improve the situation: the 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future report; the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer; the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro and its Agenda 21; the 2000 Millennium Summit in New York and its millennium development goals; the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg; and the 2005 Kyoto protocol to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, just to name a few.

Thirty years ago sustainable development was defined as development which met the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It was commonly understood that we did not inherit the earth from our ancestors; we borrowed it from our children.

Twenty years ago more than 178 governments signed Agenda 21, which reads:

Humanity stands at a defining moment in history. We are confronted with...the continuing deterioration of the ecosystems on which we depend for our well-being. However, integration of environment and development concerns and greater attention to them will lead to the fulfilment of basic needs, improved living standards for all, better protected and managed ecosystems and a safer, more prosperous future. No nation can achieve this on its own; but together we can - in a global partnership for sustainable development.

With one fell swoop, through Bill C-38, Canada is abandoning sustainable development and returning to the 1950s way of thinking and acting, namely fast tracking development at any cost. Canada is also abandoning its fair share for a global partnership for sustainable development, particularly through walking away from Kyoto.

For 25 years, I fought for an improved environment, consulted to Environment Canada and served on the intergovernmental panel on climate change. Like millions of Canadians, I am devastated by the government abandoning the environment, sustainable development and its international responsibility, muzzling scientists and silencing the voices of its critics.

Last week more than 500 organizations across Canada, for example, the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, David Suzuki Foundation, the Pembina Institute spoke out for

democracy and the environment in Canada. The Black Out Speak Out website states, "Our land, water and climate are all threatened by the latest federal budget. Proposed changes will weaken environmental laws and silence the voices of those who seek to defend them. Silence is not an option".

While the government claims a balanced approach to protecting the environment and promoting economic growth, its actions are in direct opposition. Bill C-38 repeals the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act and the Kyoto Protocol Implementation Act. It weakens several environmental laws, including protection for species at risk in water, and nearly eliminates fish habitat in the Fisheries Act. It gives the federal cabinet authority to overrule the decision by the National Energy Board and eliminates the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy.

We have environmental legislation to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. For example, the pea soup sulphur dioxide fog that killed 4,000 people in London, England in 1952; minamata disease that poisoned thousands of Japanese with methyl mercury, beginning in 1956; and the oil slick and debris river that caught fire in Cleveland, Ohio in 1969.

During the subcommittee's review of part 3 of Bill C-38, Ms. Rachel Forbes, staff council, West Coast Environmental Law, said that she did not believe the proposed amendments in the new legislation as currently drafted would accomplish any of the government's four pillars, namely: more predictable and timely reviews; less duplication in reviewing projects; strong environmental protection; and enhanced consultation with aboriginal peoples and may actually hinder them.

• (2010)

The hon. Thomas Siddon has repeatedly voiced concerns regarding Bill C-38 saying, "They are totally watering down and emasculating the Fisheries Act...they are making a Swiss cheese out of [it]. At the subcommittee he reported:

The bottom line...to take your time and do it right. To bundle all of this into a budget bill, with all its other facets, is not becoming of a Conservative government, period.

Mr. Stephen Hazell, senior counsel, Ecovision Law, agreed:

My recommendation is that this subcommittee remove the proposed CEAA 2012 from Bill C-38, and propose to the overall finance committee that it be referred to the House of Commons environment and sustainable development committee for its review

The environment sections of Bill C-38 should be removed, presented as a stand-alone bill and be sent to a legislative committee for clause-by-clause study.

The government should also ensure that any change to existing environmental laws and regulations be made in a manner that respects aboriginal peoples and treaty rights of aboriginal peoples in Canada that are recognized and affirmed in the Constitution.

National Chief Shawn Atleo reported during subcommittee hearings:

To date, first nations have not been engaged or consulted on any of the changes to the environmental and resource development regime proposed within Bill C-38...In its current form, Part 3 of C-38 clearly represents a derogation of established and asserted first nations rights.

The Union of BC Indian Chiefs voiced similar concerns in an open letter:

The federal government's unilateral and draconian approach to amending the environmental assessment process is not being quietly accepted by First Nations, environmental organizations, or the general Canadian public.

Canadians should know that after a mere 16 hours of study of what the environment commissioner calls some of the most significant policy developments in 30 to 40 years, the subcommittee is left with many questions regarding the legislation. In light of these, the government should, for example, table in the House of Commons: what types of projects will be included or excluded under the proposed changes to CEAA, and specifically, the proportion and types of current assessments that will no longer receive federal oversight; assessments of the environmental assessment process in each province and territory, how the government will define whether or not a provincial process is equivalent to the federal process and how assessment of cumulative impacts will be undertaken; and the projected cost of changes to the CEAA for each province and territory.

Governments worldwide are concerned with making the shift to the green economy, to stimulate growth, create new jobs, eradicate poverty and limit humanity's ecological footprint. One of Canada's reforms must be a shift to the green economy. It is therefore extremely unfortunate that the bill pits the economy against the environment and that the debate is so polarized. Canadians deserve a real discussion.

Going forward, the government should recognize that it does not face a choice between saving our economy and saving our environment, but rather between being a producer and a consumer in the old economy and being a leader in the new economy. It should initiate discussions with provinces, territories, municipalities, labour organizations, industry sectors, first nations and others to develop a green economy strategy for Canada, with goals for 2015, 2020, 2025 and 2030. It should ensure that its development strategy includes skills development, training programs, certification courses and transitional policies for workers and communities.

Finally, the government is waging an unprecedented war on science and on the environment with uncertain consequences for nature and society. As in the baseball adage, "It's the top of the ninth", the government has been hitting nature hard, but nature always bats last.

• (2015)

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Madam Speaker, I enjoy serving with the hon. member on environment committee. I always welcome her comments and expertise.

I would like to talk about something that has not been talked about much and that is the environment itself.

Is the member aware that the Canadian environmental sustainability indicators program assessed water quality in 157 countries? Canada came in 9th out of 157 countries. We are ahead of countries

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like Japan, France, Russia, Italy, UK, Germany, U.S.A. and Australia. This was a 2010 report done under the Conservative government's watch.

Similarly, the 2011 national pollutant release inventory report showed again, under the government's watch, that SO₂ emissions were 2000 kilotons in 2006 and they went down below 1500 kilotons in 2009. These are clear and specific environmental results of the government.

Does the member think looking at the environment itself and what is going on out there is important as opposed to just focusing on process?

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Absolutely, Madam Speaker. I also enjoy serving with my colleague. That is why I am so concerned about the cuts to science.

Last summer, there were cuts of 700 to Environment Canada. This budget announces another 200 cuts. We have to keep monitoring. We need those scientists. We cannot muzzle them, because worst case scenarios do happen and prevention is the best line of defence.

We have only to think back to May 2000, when 2,300 people fell ill after E. coli bacteria contaminated the water supply of Walkerton, Ontario. Sweeping Conservative cutbacks to the Ontario Ministry of the Environment contributed to the tragedy. It was the most serious case of water contamination in Canadian history.

In 1989, the oil tanker *Exxon Valdez* struck Bligh Reef in Prince William Sound.

We simply cannot afford economic development with reduced environmental consideration, as we risk environmental disaster and cleanup costs, which we may pass on to our children.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Madam Speaker, it was an honour to sit on the subcommittee with the hon. member. During that hearing, we talked about the basic surface hydrography and how each water course fed into another water course and how the whole health of the system depended upon first order streams.

Could the hon. member outline the changes to the Fisheries Act and other elements in the bill that would affect biodiversity in Canada and reduce biodiversity in our water systems?

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Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Madam Speaker, the government should protect fish and fish habitat, not erode 144 years of history. The department should develop new Fisheries Act policies and regulations in collaboration with all stakeholders. The government should define which fish would fall under aboriginal, commercial and recreational fisheries and identify the criteria that would be used. The government should table in the House of Commons the projected costs to each province and territory resulting from the downloading of responsibilities from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague about the international trend toward energy efficiency.

We have known for decades that better environmental performance, both in a company and in a nation state, is absolutely consistent with enhanced competitiveness for that company and the country involved.

Could she help us understand how important it is for Canada to get into the energy efficiency race to be able to compete properly?

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Madam Speaker, Canada has missed opportunities. When we had the economic stimulus, it could have been a green stimulus. Canada invested \$3 billion, the United States invested \$112 billion and China invested \$221 billion. Who got the jobs? It was not Canada. We need a green economy strategy. We need a national sustainable energy strategy. Energy efficiency has to be part of it.

Business understands that when we reduce our inputs, we reduce our waste, we save on the bottom line.

• (2020)

Mr. Jay Aspin (Nipissing—Timiskaming, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to have the chance to join in this debate and rise in support of Bill C-38, the jobs, growth and long-term prosperity act. However, I must express my disappointment that the opposition has chosen delay tactics over responsible governance, threatening the passage of this legislation by obstructing crucial measures to promote jobs and economic growth in Canada.

Our Conservative government has been very clear that jobs and economic growth are our top priorities. It is the same today as when we were first elected in 2006. In fact, nearly 760,000 net new jobs have been created since July 2009, and 90% of them full-time. This is reflected in our most recent budget.

Members should listen to the words of Canadian Chamber of Commerce president, Perrin Beatty, who stated:

We have urged the government to focus on where Canada needs to be five or 10 years from now, even if it means taking tough decisions now. The government has acted.... The result will be a stronger economy and more jobs.

That is what the budget implementation legislation before us today is all about. It is about ensuring that our economy continues to create dependable jobs and a high quality of life today and for the future.

Several of my hon. colleagues have spoken very eloquently to the legislation as a whole and to the importance of taking responsible action now to sustain our economy while keeping taxes low and returning to balanced budgets. I will spend my time discussing the

components of Bill C-38 that pertain to matters of public safety and security, in particular our border with the United States.

In addition to strengthening our economy and building our government's strong track record of job creation, Bill C-38 contains some very important provisions that would further enhance our ability to keep the border safe while also improving the way government operates.

I am very proud to note that this legislation contain a provision that would help us crack down on organized crime groups, gang members and other thugs who often earn a major portion of their illegal income by smuggling contraband goods, such as guns and drugs, or by smuggling illegal migrants across our border with the United States.

The relevant provisions would implement the Canada-United States Framework Agreement on Integrated Cross-Border Maritime Law Enforcement Operations and, as a key feature of those operations, authorize specially trained and designated Canadian and U.S. law enforcement officers to work together to enforce the law on both sides of our shared border. They would involve specially trained and appointed Canadian and United States law enforcement officers working in integrated teams, transiting back and forth across the border to deal with cross-border criminality, while still respecting the sovereignty of both Canada and the United States.

In layman's terms, the proposed legislation would regularize the practice of allowing law enforcement vessels, jointly crewed by designated U.S. coast guard and Canadian RCMP officers, to enforce the law on both sides of the international boundary line. In Canadian territory, these teams, known as shiprider teams, would enforce Canadian law and, in the U.S. territory, would enforce U.S. law while under the direction and control of a designated officer from the host country. What that means is that organized crime would no longer be able to exploit the border to evade arrest and prosecution. Instead, law enforcement would be able to continue to pursue and arrest criminals regardless of which side of the border they are on. This is good news for everyone.

I should point out that this practice has already been occurring on a pilot basis since 2005 for certain high-profile events, such as the 2006 Super Bowl in Detroit and the 2010 Olympic Winter Games in Vancouver. We know that this shared approach is effective when it comes to cracking down on cross-border crime.

• (2025)

I will take a moment to read some testimony heard by the finance committee during its extensive consideration of Bill C-38 which details the experience of the RCMP during its 2007 piloting of this important program.

With respect to the 2007 pilot projects that were the longer term pilots, two of them were concurrent, one on the west coast and one on the St. Lawrence seaway in the area of Cornwall. Chief superintendent, Joe Oliver, told the members of the finance committee:

The Shiprider teams were involved in a number of interdictions and arrests. They were involved in six direct arrests, and they contributed to 40-some other arrests. They were involved in the seizure of contraband cigarettes and marijuana, the confiscation of proceeds of crime—vessels that were used for cross-border smuggling and modified for those purposes—as well as conveyances on land. They contributed.

[...] In one case, in Cornwall, there was a complaint of a child abduction that was in the border zone and a vessel had been used. The Shiprider team had the operational flexibility to cross back and forth checking marinas along the Canada-U.S. border, on both sides of the border, which then helped them quickly identify where the vessel had landed and helped identify the vehicle, which ultimately led to the safe return of a child. They were seen as contributing to that investigation as well.

These highlight some of the successes that we've seen with the deployment of Shiprider along our shared waterways with our American counterparts.

Those are the kinds of results that Bill C-38 would deliver to Canadians.

When it comes to public safety, the legislation contained in the bill would ensure that law enforcement has the tools it requires to keep Canadian families safe and our borders secure.

I will now speak to an additional measure contained in the bill that would similarly promote economic benefits by protecting the border and cracking down on the smuggling of contraband.

Amendments to the Customs Act would provide urgent legal authority for the border officers currently operating at the Cornwall border crossing to stop incoming traffic. These amendments would authorize the Minister of Public Safety to designate a “mixed traffic corridor” when operations of the custom office are interrupted due to extenuating circumstances and impose new obligations on all travellers using such a corridor to stop and report to border guards.

I must emphasize that this new designation authority is only intended to be used in extenuating circumstances, for example, in case of flooding, fire damage, or other situations that render an existing customs office unusable or inaccessible so that it can be quickly relocated nearby rather than having to be closed altogether. This would ensure the ongoing operation of Cornwall's port of entry and the trade that it supports between Canada and the United States.

Both of the measures I have spoken about today are critical to the safety and security of all Canadians and would ensure that our government delivers on its commitments in a fiscally prudent manner.

I, therefore, urge all hon. members to support the bill and to stand up to the divisive delay tactics the opposition has relied on to defeat this critical piece of legislation that would bring jobs, growth and long-term economic prosperity to all Canadians.

[Translation]

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Madam Speaker, I know my colleague well. I was in his riding on the weekend to meet with women from the Union culturelle des Franco-Ontariennes. We started seeing cuts and the elimination of a number of programs in 2006, and this is still happening under this government with this omnibus bill. I can say that these women are very concerned.

The cuts have had a number of consequences: the elimination of the notion of equality in the mandate of Status of Women Canada; the elimination of the court challenges program; the abolition of

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federal funding partnerships for child care; cuts to funding for rights organizations; cuts to research, particularly to the women's health network; the repeal of the Pay Equity Act; the elimination of the long form census; and a lack of action on violence against women.

Furthermore, this bill will have a huge impact on women because of the changes to old age security and employment insurance and the new cuts to public services.

What does my colleague have to say about the cuts to women's programs that are setting us back instead of moving us forward? We used to be in first place, and now we are in 19th place.

● (2030)

[English]

Mr. Jay Aspin: Madam Speaker, I do not know whether I was at the same meeting the hon. member was at, but the women I met were the REAL women. I have met with the group on three different occasions and it is a very supportive group. Yes, its members have their concerns but on balance they support this legislation and they want it to go forward because they know this is the legislation that we need for Canada to have jobs, improve the economy and give us long-term prosperity.

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his very insightful speech in terms of border safety and guards and all the issues within the budget that are so helpful to the Canadian economy.

There have been 760,000 jobs created in this country. There are a lot of women's issues and a lot of small business issues. Women actually are the search engine of small business. There are more women in small business than any other population in Canada.

I would like the member to talk about why it so important for the opposition parties to pass this bill in a speedy manner to keep the economy on balance and so people can continue to have their jobs here in this country.

Mr. Jay Aspin: Madam Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member for her work on the smuggling issue. She is a fine example of what can be accomplished in this House.

The hon. member is quite right. Women form more than half of the economy these days in terms of what they do for the economy and they, too, want to move forward. They want to have the type of environment created where we can move ahead and create jobs. We have created 760,000 net new jobs. We have all kinds of accolades from the IMF. Clearly, whether it be for women or men, this budget, this tactic and this strategy of what this government is doing is right on the money.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I miss Anthony Rota more and more. I must admit that it is disturbing to hear this kind of speech, which shows just how out of touch the member is with the regions and with seasonal workers, even though he represents them.

What does he have to say to seasonal workers who will have to leave because their government did not do what it had to do to protect them?

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[English]

Mr. Jay Aspin: Madam Speaker, the member may be missing Mr. Rota more and more but I can tell the House that members of my community are not missing him. We have created a record number of jobs in our community since our election. I have personally been involved in many solid projects and the creation of much more investment in the community and I am proud of my record. I am looking forward to creating more opportunities in the three and a half years—

• (2035)

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate. The hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord.

[Translation]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Madam Speaker, the Conservative government introduced Bill C-38, which is supposed to be a budget bill focused on creating good jobs in Canada and which could help both urban centres and rural regions develop economically.

My colleagues and I analyzed this budget and came to the conclusion that the government has failed and that this is a rather pathetic attempt. The changes to employment insurance in this budget appear to be a direct attack on workers. This does not surprise me, because in recent weeks, the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development called seasonal workers lazy.

In a region like mine, Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, seasonal work is a reality for workers. For those who are not familiar with my region, it is known for its forestry workers. Tourism and agriculture are also important in this region.

These three sectors of economic activity are very important pillars of Canada's economy. Workers have no choice but to apply for employment insurance from Service Canada for a few weeks or months, between seasons and job losses. These people will suffer from the cuts. In light of the fact that we are barely out of an economic recession, the situation is extremely precarious. I would like the unemployment rate to be lower than it is in my region, but the reality is that the rate is rather high. This Conservative budget must help develop the economy.

For example, I did not find anything in this budget bill that would help the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean economy, such as increasing the gas tax transfer to municipalities. There is a large city in my region, Saguenay, but there are also eight smaller cities and small towns with 500 to 6,000 residents each. For small municipalities like these, infrastructure costs call for significant financial resources. Infrastructure needs include waste water treatment systems, paving and even drinking water systems. Unfortunately, the government is more or less leaving small municipalities to their own devices. That is why I am pleased with the NDP's proposal to double the gas tax transfer to municipalities and to index it yearly. This measure shows that, unlike the Conservative government, the NDP really cares about helping small municipalities make progress.

It is important for the federal government to invest in rural infrastructure, but it is just as important to develop the economy. A development project has been proposed for my riding. Even the defeated Conservative candidate supported it. The proposal is to set

up a customs office in Bagotville. Because the community does not currently offer that service, it cannot welcome foreign visitors, such as Europeans with a lot of money to spend, directly. Unfortunately, because the community lacks a customs office, it is losing a lot of those people because the process is complicated. Those people have to go through customs in Quebec City or Montreal, and when they are on vacation, they are not interested in driving four hours to get to the Saguenay.

This proposal is sound. The community has submitted its request to the Canada Border Services Agency several times, but unfortunately, it has met with rejection each time. Even the region's MP, the member for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean and Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, has done nothing. He made it clear that the project is not a high priority for him. I find that deplorable because it is, after all, an economic measure that even the Conservative candidate supported during the last election campaign a year ago. Unfortunately, the Conservatives are kind of breaking their promise.

Other measures could help Canadian families and families in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean. For instance, I would like to propose a refundable tax credit for family caregivers. I am a member of the Standing Committee on Health, along with other colleagues of mine in the NDP. We realize that people who need to take care of a family member or loved one and who must take on a new role—and might even have to quit their job to do so—are not receiving a refundable tax credit.

• (2040)

This is the real kicker, because these people are already losing income by quitting their jobs. Since their income has decreased, they often do not pay taxes. On top of the huge sacrifice they are making to take care of their loved one, their income also goes down. Since they no longer pay income tax and the tax credit is not refundable, they cannot access the money that could have helped them get out of poverty. We have a great deal of poverty in Canada, even though it is not always obvious.

If the Conservative government would invest just \$700 million to improve the guaranteed income supplement, this would lift 250,000 Canadian seniors out of poverty. We in the NDP care deeply about this. It is very important to us that Canadian seniors get out of poverty, especially since these are the people who dedicated their lives to building their communities. They have made sacrifices in order to build this beautiful country of ours, and the Conservative government is leaving them destitute.

It would be so easy. It would cost \$700 million, which is not much for the Government of Canada, to lift seniors out of poverty. Unfortunately, we know where Conservative members' interests lie. All they want to do is lower taxes for large corporations.

In the NDP, we are not against lowering taxes, not at all. However, lowering taxes on businesses has to be done wisely. That is why we are proposing to give a 2% tax cut to small and medium-sized businesses, because they are the ones creating the most new jobs in Canada, more than the corporations are.

I will come back to my region again. Over the past few decades, there have been plant closures and many families in Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean have lost their income. What is more, with the forestry industry faltering right now, it is very hard for a region like mine to develop economically.

With a 2% tax credit, small businesses would see their tax rate go from 11% to 9%. That would give some flexibility to the employers who employ people from their communities. This credit might allow them to have higher profits at the end of the year, expand their business and hire more workers.

I think that is quite reasonable. I am pleased that my party is taking this position.

I also want to condemn the fact that, in its budget, this Conservative government is abolishing funding for the National Council of Welfare. It is an independent, federal group that advises the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development on poverty. Its annual budget is only \$1.1 million. That is peanuts for the Government of Canada.

In recent years, the National Council on Welfare has done fantastic studies that have helped both the government, because the studies are submitted to the minister, and non-profit organizations and the provinces, which help people escape poverty.

The government chose not to listen and has eliminated funding for the National Council of Welfare. Unfortunately, this organization is irreplaceable. We will lose a great deal of expertise on the fight against poverty.

I would also like to talk about another item that I did not see in the Conservative budget and that could help the economy. All members know how the Canada summer jobs program helps communities hire young people and gives them summer jobs. It could be that first job that provides the first work experience. It can also give young people experience working in their field in the summer. Unfortunately, the budget has been frozen for several years.

The minimum wage is increasing; the program is becoming increasingly popular; and more and more organizations are submitting applications. However, every year, the program becomes less and less generous. It is really unfortunate because everyone here knows how much it helps our communities. So that is a suggestion that I am making to the Conservative government.

● (2045)

I know that the Conservatives like tax credits. Why not give a refundable tax credit for adult physical fitness.

There is an obesity problem in Canada. I am a member of the Standing Committee on Health, and we talk a lot about prevention. We need to give Canadians a bit of a nudge to help them take charge of their health because, in the end, this is going to cost money.

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened with great interest to the hon. member's speech. The conditions that exist in his riding are very similar to those that exist in mine, particularly with regard to the forestry industry.

I am very concerned about the seasonal workers in my riding. I am also very concerned about the exodus of workers from the rural

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regions to the cities. The regions will be empty because of the measures contained in the budget.

Does the hon. member share my concerns?

Mr. Dany Morin: Madam Speaker, I agree completely with my NDP colleague.

In fact, for the past several years, Saguenay has seen an exodus of its population—especially the youth population—for many reasons. Ultimately, the main reason for the exodus is employment. People are moving to urban centres like Quebec City and Montreal, which is causing a demographic imbalance in my riding.

The budget proposes changes to employment insurance. Yet seasonal workers are good workers. For instance, people who take care of snow removal cannot simply look for another job in the summer, because there is no snow. People who work in the forestry sector and those who plant trees or do landscaping cannot be guaranteed work in the winter.

In order to win more votes, the government decided to focus all its efforts on urban centres, and now the regions are paying the price. This will be terrible for Atlantic Canada. It is a slap in the face to the people of the Atlantic provinces, Quebec and rural areas across Canada.

What I would like to tell the government is simply to be reasonable and govern for all Canadians, instead of discriminating against some Canadians.

[English]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the previous question and answer was related to seasonal workers, and I agree with the member's answer.

However, there is another side to the equation, and that is the seasonal industries. In my province agriculture, tourism and fisheries are all seasonal industries. Those are our main industries, and if they do not have that seasonal supply of workers, the businesses themselves are going to be in trouble.

I wonder if the member could comment on the impact the draconian employment insurance changes in this bill will have on businesses in those regions.

[Translation]

Mr. Dany Morin: Madam Speaker, I agree completely with the Liberal member.

As I mentioned a little earlier, my region of Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean is a beautiful region and tourism is very important there. As my Liberal colleague mentioned, every year, the tourism industry needs workers to keep the regional economy going.

What poses a problem is the fact that these people, who periodically need to turn to employment insurance, will be penalized outside of the tourist season. They will be forced to accept a job outside the riding or the region, otherwise their EI benefits will be cut off. This will put people in a very difficult position, because they may be forced to leave the seasonal tourism industry.

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Indeed, the regional tourism industry is very strong, in both winter and summer, but as we all know, two different companies will not hire the same people. Once again, we see that the Conservative budget was poorly conceived and that the government is abandoning the regions.

Clearly the height of hypocrisy, the Conservatives' slogan during the election campaign was "our region in power".

• (2050)

[English]

Mr. Bryan Hayes (Sault Ste. Marie, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to rise in the House this evening to outline the positive impact that the implementation of budget 2012-13, our government's plan for jobs, growth and long-term prosperity, would have on my riding of Sault Ste. Marie specifically and Canada as a whole.

First, I would be remiss if I did not rectify some of the misinformation that is coming from the opposition benches with regard to this budget. I would like to address an opposition day motion that claimed this government has failed to learn the painful lessons of Walkerton, which prove that cuts to essential government services, protecting the health and safety of Canadians, are reckless and can cause Canadians to lose their lives. This was speaking to food inspections and was an unfounded claim based on political fearmongering and not on the facts. These are the facts: 70% of all savings identified were found by increasing operational efficiency. Our government has maintained federal meat inspections and we have even hired 733 new food inspectors since 2005, 170 of whom were meat inspectors.

Our Conservative government refuses to follow in the footsteps of past governments to balance the budget by massively cutting health transfers to the provinces. Instead, we have embarked on a plan that continues to keep Canadians safe while maintaining a constant vigilance over governmental efficiencies.

It is in fact the opposition members who threaten the safety of Canadians by continually opposing our safe streets and communities act. They claim that the price is too high and that increasing spending on the justice system is not worth it. In response I can say only this: a Conservative government will not shy away from protecting Canadians from criminals.

That being said, these so-called cost increases have not occurred. The opposition erroneously claimed that we would have to build new prisons to house the sure influx of criminals at a tremendous cost to taxpayers. In fact, we have just announced the closure of two outdated prisons, and there are no new prisons planned because they are not required.

Another accusation put forward by the opposition is that while we may be working toward a balanced budget, we are doing it on the backs of Canadian seniors. Of course, they will not discuss, nor vote in favour of, all the great things the government has done for seniors, including lowering the GST twice, increasing the age credit amount by \$2,000, introducing pension income splitting, doubling the pension income credit to \$2,000, introducing the largest GIS increase in over 25 years, not to mention establishing the tax free savings account, which is particularly beneficial to seniors as they plan for their future.

We are also introducing the new pooled registered pension plans to better help workers save and build their retirement income. To suggest this government does not respect our seniors is preposterous. Our government has removed over 380,000 seniors from the tax rolls.

The opposition instead attacks the need to increase OAS from 65 to 67 years to ensure the sustainability of OAS for future seniors, including my children. To simply do nothing, which is exactly what the opposition wants to do, would be irresponsible. Canadians are living longer and healthier lives. This is not the 1970s when life expectancies were 69 for men and 76 for women. They are now 81 and 86 respectively. Longer lives are a blessing, but they come with the responsibility for government to ensure the pension system is available for future generations. If the OAS program stays on its present course, it will become unsustainable. Currently four people are working to support every senior at a cost to the system of \$38 billion per year. Twenty years from now, two people will be working to support every senior, and the cost to support OAS at that time will be \$108 billion, due to more seniors accessing OAS. This is the simple math.

The opposition parties would have none of this, though. They are more interested in political pandering than the future of Canada. They would rather buy votes with unsustainable programs than face the realities of an aging population.

I, however, have more faith in Canadians. I believe that they have looked to the future and they want a government that will take action to protect that future. We have not forced this policy on our senior citizens without adequate notice. Current seniors will not be impacted at all, nor will anybody who is now over the age of 54. The change in OAS will not begin to take effect until 2023 and will be phased in over a six year period until 2029.

• (2055)

This Conservative government has taken a proactive step to ensure that OAS is available to future generations. We have done it with an eye to the future to ensure the long-term prosperity of all Canadians. We are working, and will continue to work, in order to build a better future for all Canadians. This is not just a government of today but a government of and for the future.

As the representative for Sault Ste. Marie, and having travelled extensively throughout northern Ontario, one of the largest concerns is skilled labour shortages. Even with a higher than average unemployment rate, our businesses still struggle to find skilled labour. I am proud of the reforms that Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism is bringing to our immigration system. These policy initiatives will allow foreign skilled workers to have streamlined access to our immigration system to help alleviate the skilled labour shortage and enable our businesses to prosper to the benefit of all Canadians.

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As I campaigned in my riding of Sault Ste. Marie soliciting feedback on the next budget, the number one concern of two of my major manufacturing employers was the lack of skilled labour. I brought these concerns forward to the best Minister of Finance in the world. I am proud to say he listened. This is innovative thinking on the part of our government to deal with the problems of today. An effective immigration policy is a vital part of this government's overall plan to see the Canadian economy not only grow but thrive. If we keep on the present course, we will thrive and prosper.

Canada has weathered the storm of the economic recession better than any other G7 country with the creation of 760,000 net new jobs since 2009. We must not allow these facts to fill us with false pride. While we are strong, the world economy is still extremely fragile. In this global economy, we must continue to diversify and create wealth and stability by taking responsible steps to grow the economy without sacrificing the environment and the health and safety of Canadians. Budget 2012-13 does just that.

I am proud of the job that this government has done and is doing. I am especially proud of the fact that we will act upon constructive criticism, as demonstrated by our response to the Jenkins report in October 2011, which spoke to innovation being the wealth creator in the new economic order. I completely agree with Mr. Jenkins. Canadians live in a country rich in natural resources, but this alone will not simulate growth without innovation. It was innovation that gave Albertans, and by extension Canada, access to the wealth of the oil sands. It is innovation that will create hundreds of thousands of jobs in the mining sector. It will be innovation that creates wealth for future generations. With the importance of innovation being brought to light by the finding of the Jenkins report, this Conservative government took action. Within a few short months we organized a comprehensive strategy to invest \$1.1 billion in research and development and made available \$500 million for venture capital to leverage additional funds by the private sector.

Also in support of innovation in science and technology, our government is investing \$37 million annually in Canada's granting councils, \$110 million per year in the National Research Council to double support to small business through the industrial research assistance program, \$95 million per year over three years and \$40 million per year ongoing to make the Canadian innovation commercialization program permanent. There is more. There is \$14 million provided to expand the industrial research and development internship program in order to place more PhD students into practical research and business.

I have seen the impact of government resources allocated to innovation in my local community. Algoma University has an entire department dedicated to the advancement and implementation of human knowledge. In Sault Ste. Marie we have made a concerted effort to invest in diversifying our economy through investment and R and D. The community, in partnership with FedNor, has supported an organization called the Sault Ste. Marie Innovation Centre. This program has attracted over \$20 million to the local economy in projects, programs and investments. It has created 500 jobs in the private sector, developed research positions on health information and invasive species, and created an internationally awarded Community Geomatics Centre that now employs 20 staff and licenses technology to provide private sector companies—

• (2100)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. member for Pontiac.

[Translation]

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Madam Speaker, in my riding, industries are shutting down and it is very hard for people to find good jobs in the region they grew up in.

Communities are losing their young people, and now there are employment insurance measures in Bill C-38 that will make it even harder for people to stay in their home regions and find seasonal work.

What does the member have to say to those people?

[English]

Mr. Bryan Hayes: Madam Speaker, in my community, industries are not closing. This government is investing in low corporate tax policies which are allowing our businesses to be competitive in the global environment. Believe me, two of our major employers, Essar Steel Algoma which has 3,200 employees and Tenaris Tubes which has 700 employees, are supportive of our government's low-tax policies for job creation. That is what is important. This government is focusing on job creation and innovation. That is in fact what this budget focuses on: job creation and innovation and moving this great country forward.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I believe Algoma Steel is where it is today as a result of the guy who happens to be our interim leader, whom that party over there loves to attack. In a different time, it was that individual who saved the plant.

I happened to be in Sault Ste. Marie a couple of weeks ago, and there is not satisfaction up there about Bill C-38. They are very concerned about it, and they are concerned about it in their seasonal industries.

However, the point I want to make relates to the member's comments on seniors, where he is absolutely wrong. For people who are 54 years old and saving two cents on a cup of coffee with the GST cuts so they lose their pension of \$30,000 over two years, if they are in a low-income group and have to go on provincial welfare, is that doing something for future seniors? I do not think so, and the reason the government is making that—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie.

Mr. Bryan Hayes: Madam Speaker, it is so nice to respond to the member opposite when he is not yelling at us across the room during question period. He is absolutely one of the loudest members I have ever heard.

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In terms of seniors in Sault Ste. Marie, I held public consultations prior to this budget. I went throughout my riding in Goulais River, Echo Bay and Bruce Mines. I presented in front of city council in Sault Ste. Marie. I offered opportunities for all members of my riding, including seniors, to have input on the budget. That input was brought forward to the Minister of Finance and it was listened to. I am very proud of our government, and I am just so proud to be a Conservative.

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a couple of questions for my hon. friend from Sault Ste. Marie.

We listened across the way just a short while ago about how huge this budget is and the tremendous size. The member was holding up a book and said it was bigger than a telephone book. I wonder if the member might make a comment on that.

Also, I wonder if he could tell us a bit more about the innovation centres and the tremendous investment that this government, through this budget, would make and has made in the past through research and development, the engine that will drive this economy well into the future.

• (2105)

Mr. Bryan Hayes: Mr. Speaker, the budget we are dealing with now is, I believe, 495 pages of which I have read every page. I am a CGA by trade and I kind of like numbers. However, this is small in comparison.

Budget 2011, Bill 1, the royal assent version had 880 pages. Bill C-13 in 2011, Bill 2, the royal assent version had 644 pages. Bill C-10, budget 2009, the royal assent version—

Mr. Dan Harris: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I apologize, but I believe the record needs to be clear. I am not sure what 495-page document the member is speaking of, but the budget implementation bill has 425 pages.

The Speaker: I am sure the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie appreciates that, but clearing the record is usually not considered a point of order.

The hon. member is out of time for questions and comments, so we will move on. Resuming debate, the hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today, I want to express the opposition of the people of Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert to the Conservatives' Trojan Horse bill.

Since the budget and this bill were introduced, I have received dozens, if not hundreds, of messages opposing Bill C-38 and asking me to pass along their messages. I had the opportunity to participate in consultations organized by the official opposition in Ottawa and Regina, where I heard from many groups, including the Canadian Medical Association, the Fédération interprofessionnelle de la santé du Québec, researchers, university professors and citizens, who are opposed to both the form and substance of the bill.

Let us talk about the form of Bill C-38. This bill is supposed to be a budget implementation bill. But it includes a number of reforms that were never mentioned in the latest budget. The government is

using the budget implementation as a pretext for implementing its ill-advised reforms, for which it was never elected.

Many of my colleagues have pointed out that increasing the age of eligibility for old age security from 65 to 67 was not proposed to Canadians during the last election campaign. This government even promised not to touch pensions.

When the Minister of Finance said today that old age security and pensions are different, he was getting into semantics. Canadians did not have the opportunity to debate this issue during the election campaign, even though there were discussions between the minister and the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development before the last Parliament was dissolved. As such, this situation is an affront to democracy.

The other problem with this bill is its omnibus form. Including so many reforms that affect the environment and the fisheries and that will have such a great impact on communities without consulting those communities or experts is dangerous. Quickly throwing together an employment insurance reform is also problematic, particularly when the minister cannot name a single person or group that she consulted. These actions all constitute a significant abuse of democracy.

This bill will also affect women. The first thing that comes to mind is that women will be especially affected by the increase in the age of eligibility for old age security. Women depend on this program more than men, and this measure condemns thousands of seniors to a life of poverty.

It is estimated that this measure will triple the poverty rate among female seniors. This bill also amends the Employment Equity Act so that it no longer applies to federal contracts, which will affect a number of groups, including women. I will never understand the logic behind this measure. Do I understand correctly that profit is now more important than equality?

Such reasoning is shameful. We need to put people first. That is what motivates me to question the cuts that will have an impact on food safety. This bill will make a number of changes, including decreasing the number of food inspector positions to the same level as before the listeriosis crisis in 2008. What is more, this bill also amends the Seeds Act to give the president of the Canada Food Inspection Agency the power to issue licences to persons authorizing them to perform activities related to controlling or assuring the quality of seeds or seed crops.

• (2110)

Again, this part of the bill is problematic.

These changes were made without any studies and without any serious consultation. Food inspection and food safety for Canadians should be a sector where public interest comes first.

The statistics and the many witnesses who appeared before the Standing Committee on Health are clear: countless diseases and deaths are linked to food. Sometimes, they result from direct poisoning—salmonella, for example—but it is mostly because of what the food contains.

Bill C-38 also includes changes whereby the nutritional value listed on the labels will no longer be verified. The government is not giving Canadians the tools and ability to make informed choices in terms of health.

Health is another theme of this bill. One of the aspects of the budget that has people talking—and that also shocked the provincial and territorial governments—is the unilateral decision by the federal government to reduce health transfers starting in 2016. The Prime Minister himself had promised, during the leaders debate, not to reduce health transfers below the current 6% level.

After 50 years of public health insurance, our system is facing a number of challenges. Now we have to deal with an epidemic of chronic illnesses and conditions that require follow-up. We have to ensure that our health care system meets the public's needs today.

The government's decision is equivalent to eliminating the deficit at the expense of the provinces and depriving them of \$31 billion, according to the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

What is more, this government is being inconsistent. On one hand, it is saying that we have to control health costs. On the other hand, it is refusing to legislate to reduce the level of sodium and trans fats in food and it is cutting food inspection and monitoring. Those are decisions that are going to cost our health care system billions of dollars in the long run.

Let us be serious and let us be consistent. We do not have to penalize the public and the patients in order to reduce health care expenses. Let us work on prevention. Let us regulate the amount of sodium and trans fats in food, in order to make it easier for people to get healthy food. Let us work with the provincial and territorial governments to make home care available and to make prescription drugs accessible for everyone. If we want to control health care costs, we must also ensure that the money is well managed and well spent.

That is why I am surprised that this government has decided that the Auditor General should no longer have the authority to audit the spending of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. We collectively invest a billion dollars every year in research, through the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. That is a significant amount of money that the Auditor General should look at if he deems it necessary.

Lastly, increasing the age of eligibility for old age security will have consequences for health care. Dr. John Haggie, president of the Canadian Medical Association, said:

We are greatly concerned about the move to raise the age of eligibility for Old Age Security. Many seniors have low incomes and delaying this relatively modest payment by two years is certain to have a negative impact...Gnawing away at Canada's social safety net will no doubt force hard choices on some of tomorrow's seniors... the choice between whether to buy groceries or to buy their medicine... People who skip their meds, or lack a nutritious diet or enough heat in their homes, will be sicker. In the end, this will put a greater burden on our health care system.

● (2115)

This is a bad bill. It implements a budget that is bad for the Canadian economy and workers. It is bad for women. It is bad for democracy. It is mediocre for the health of Canadians and for the public health care system.

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That is why I am going to vote against this bill. That is why it should have been split and examined more carefully.

[English]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to challenge my colleague on some of the facts in her speech.

She talked about health care “cuts” in the budget. The fact is that when we started, we transferred \$19 billion to the provinces. With the agreements we have in place, that will be going up to \$40 billion. According to something called mathematics, when a program is continually added to and augmented, that is not called a “cut”. I would like to ask her if she realizes that the 2004 accord does end in 2014, that each year there is going to be more and more money given to the provinces for their health care needs and that we have continued it with a minimum of 3% each year after that until the end of the agreement.

I would like her to explain to the House of Commons how this NDP math works. Clearly there is an augmentation every single year, and she is able to call that a “cut”. Could she explain that to the Canadian people?

[Translation]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague opposite for the question.

We work together on the Standing Committee on Health. He knows very well that, starting in 2016, his government's increase will not be applied in the same way it is today.

As for the math, I would say to him that the Conservatives did the calculations and are not giving the real figures. Afterwards, there will be a difference because transfers will be based on GDP.

We know that our health care system is already fragile. If we factor in Canadians' longevity, the burden will be even greater. The government should think about that now instead of making cuts.

[English]

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I recently attended an inaugural CARP meeting in Etobicoke, where over 300 people attended who were worried about OAS and health issues.

I would like to ask the member this: if the government really believes our aging population is a problem, why does it not recognize, for example, that dementia is an increasing concern in terms of health care and health economics? In 25 years, we will be looking at costs of \$153 billion and someone being diagnosed once every two minutes. The reason for not acting, I think, is that developing and implementing a nationwide dementia plan would be a cost.

Does the government want to save money on the backs of Canadians to break its record deficit?

● (2120)

[Translation]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah: Mr. Speaker, I thank my Liberal colleague.

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I had the opportunity to work with her on the Standing Committee on Health and I noticed that we have the same concerns about Canadians' health. I will repeat what she said at the end of her question.

Everyone knows that living longer leads to many problems, including dementia, as my colleague mentioned. Unfortunately, our colleagues opposite do not trust scientists or statistics. They simply apply their ideology.

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my NDP colleague a question.

At the end of the year, the Minister of Finance decided, without the consensus of the provincial premiers, to radically change how health transfers are made. Federal transfers to the provinces will decrease. In fact, last year, the federal government paid 20% and the provinces paid 80% of every health care bill.

If we look at the figures, we clearly see that the federal contribution is dropping from 6% to 3%. In the end, the provinces will have to spend more on health care and, in some cases, people will have to pay, which will create a two-tier system in Canada. Personally, I like my free universal health care system.

I would like to know what my colleague thinks of that.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert has only 30 seconds remaining.

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague, who is also a member of the Standing Committee on Health, for his question. I really appreciate it.

His question demonstrates that the NDP is very concerned about the unilateral decision taken by the government without consulting the provinces and territories. As he said, our health care system is already in critical condition. It is on life support. The government's decision to reduce transfers could put the whole system in a coma—

The Speaker: I have to interrupt the hon. member because her time is up. Resuming debate. The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour.

[*English*]

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be here to discuss some of the highlights of Bill C-38, the jobs, growth and long-term prosperity act, and to speak against the NDP and other opposition amendments that are focused on delaying the passage of the bill.

As our economic record shows, Canada has performed well in the face of global economic uncertainty. Both the IMF and the OECD forecast that we will have among the strongest economic growth in the G7 over this year and the next.

This resilient performance did not happen by accident. It is the fruit of hard labour, solid economic principles, and consistent implementation of a plan that works: Canada's economic action plan.

Economic action plan 2012 sets out a comprehensive agenda to bolster Canada's fundamental strengths and addresses the important challenges confronting the economy over the long term. Our economy's strength provides an opportunity for our government to

take significant actions today that will position Canada for a secure and prosperous future.

So far, Canada has had every reason to be proud of its successes. Since our government introduced the economic action plan in 2009 to respond to the global economic recession, Canada has created nearly 760,000 net new jobs, which is the best record in the G7.

Nevertheless, the global economy remains fragile, especially in Europe, and too many Canadians are still looking for work. That is why, in this uncertain economic climate, our government is staying focused on our low-tax plan for jobs and growth, a plan that is focused and works toward serving Canadians well. To this end, economic action plan 2012 focuses on the drivers of growth and job creation, innovation, investment, education skills and communities.

Through my remarks today, I would like to highlight some of the measures our government is proposing to keep the labour market healthy and prosperous.

My first point today will focus on employment insurance. EI is Canada's single largest labour market program. It provides temporary income replacement to help individuals and their families, as well as training and other labour market supports to help Canadians return to employment.

Bill C-38 makes targeted changes to make EI a more efficient program that promotes job creation, removes disincentives to work, supports unemployed Canadians and quickly connects Canadians to jobs that improve their quality of life and Canada's economy.

To outline these important measures, I will break this down into some details.

Our government is committed to helping Canadians who are looking for work. That is why our government will invest \$74 million in a new national EI pilot project to ensure claimants are not discouraged from accepting work while still receiving EI benefits. This new pilot project, the working while on claim pilot project, will cut the current earnings clawback in half, to 50% of earnings, and apply it to all earnings while on claim. This will ensure EI claimants always benefit from accepting work by allowing them to keep more of what they earn while still on employment insurance.

Second, matching workers with available jobs is critical to supporting economic growth and productivity. Economic action plan 2012 will invest \$21 million to enhance the content and timeliness of job and labour market information that is provided to Canadians looking for work. Along with providing relevant and timely job information, we will strengthen and clarify what is required of claimants who are receiving regular EI benefits and looking for work.

Third, our government recognizes that Canadians want stable and predictable EI premium rates and a transparent rate-setting mechanism. Our government would ensure predictability and stability in the EI premium rate. Over the next few years, we will limit annual rate increases to 5¢ until the EI operating account is balanced. Once the account has been returned to balance, the EI premium rate will be set annually on a seven year break-even rate to ensure that EI premiums are no higher than needed to pay for the EI program. After the seven year rate is set, annual adjustments to the rate will also be limited to 5¢.

Overall, these changes to employment insurance have been widely welcomed, especially from small business.

Indeed, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business said:

Since the recession, skills and labour shortages have re-emerged as a major concern for Canada's small business community. We believe the changes to defining suitable employment, based on how frequently EI is claimed, will help to remove disincentives to work and hopefully make it easier for small firms to find the people they need.

Another way we propose to help meet Canadian labour market needs is to solidify our immigration system. Economic action plan 2012 helps set the stage for strengthening our immigration system into one that is targeted, fast and efficient, and can sustain Canada's economic growth and deliver prosperity for the future. Canada needs immigrants who are ready, willing and able to fully integrate into Canada's labour market, particularly when there are essential skills shortages.

• (2125)

Economic action plan 2012 reinforces the government's commitment to move toward a more economically focused immigration system with the following three measures.

First, we will improve the responsiveness of Canada's immigration system by immediately directing our efforts toward addressing modern labour market realities.

Second, we will work with the provinces, territories and stakeholders to support further improvements to foreign credential recognition and to identify the next stages of target occupations beyond 2012. This will help more highly skilled newcomers find work related to their training, allowing them to quickly contribute to Canada's economy.

Third, we will continue to consider additional measures to strengthen and improve the temporary foreign workers program. This will help support our economic recovery and growth by better aligning the program with labour market demands.

Reaction to these changes has been very positive. In the words of the Canadian Construction Association:

The reforms promised by the budget to...immigration will ensure the country is well placed to take advantage of the more than \$500 billion in major economic projects expected in Canada over the next ten years.

When it comes to creating a labour market that is strong and efficient, our government continues to take responsible action that meets our changing circumstances. Canadians gave us a strong mandate to stay focused on the economy and that is exactly what we have done and continue to do. We have a record to prove it.

Government Orders

Since July 2009, employment has increased by nearly 760,000 net new jobs, the strongest job growth among G7 countries over the economic recovery. More than 90% of these jobs created since July 2009 have been full-time positions and 80% are in high wage industries and in the private sector. While these are positive signs, Canada cannot rest on its record of success. We need to keep focused on the economy and on creating high quality jobs.

That is why I urge members of the House to pass Bill C-38 without delay because it will help create jobs for Canadians, and that is the right thing to do.

• (2130)

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and it astounded me that not once did she mention anything about affordable housing. That is because there is nothing in the bill about affordable housing, which is really quite shocking.

I wonder if the parliamentary secretary is aware that one-third of existing social housing units are at risk of the expiry under the federal social housing operating agreement, which is a potential loss of 200,000 social housing units in Canada. As a result of her government's inaction and the fact that there is nothing in the budget about affordable housing or social housing, existing social housing is now at risk. Why did she not comment on that in her budget speech? Why is the government so blind to the whole question of housing and what is at risk?

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, this government has invested significantly in social housing and in ensuring that vulnerable Canadians have a roof over their heads. Over 615,000 individuals in this country have benefited from the economic action plan of this government.

I will be clear. We have taken action. We are providing housing and support for vulnerable people. The NDP vote against these initiatives every time.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge the fact that the working while on claim project is a worthwhile initiative and it is something we have supported. It was first announced in February 2005 by the then minister, Lucienne Robillard, and the Conservative government has increased the amount.

The member says that it is a new program. Could she outline the differences between the program that was announced in 2005 and this current program?

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, the working while on claim program is now a national program. The intent behind this program, as I mentioned in my speech, is to decrease the amount of clawback on employment insurance so that individuals who take a part-time job and are still able to claim EI are encouraged to continue to work. A number of individuals who take on part-time work then transfer into a full-time job. This is a way of creating the attachment of individual Canadians to the labour market. It is a great program. We are moving forward with it. I am delighted that it is in the budget.

Government Orders

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask my colleague a question about certain Conservative ideology, a horrible Conservative radical idea that I mentioned earlier, called mathematics. We have been hearing the NDP members speak this evening to the cuts in the budget to health care.

I know the member is a very well-known surgeon and physician and is very supportive of our health care system. She works hard to promote the ideals that we as Canadians really do appreciate.

I know the member knows that the NDP's approach is to throw an indefinite amount of money at the health care system. However, we have a different approach. I am talking about accountability, sustainability and things like that. I wonder if the member could take a few moments to discuss the differences in the NDP, Liberal and our approach. As well, could the member throw something in about mathematics to explain that to the opposition members?

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Oshawa for his great work on the health committee. I have had the opportunity to be at the health committee a few times.

The very simple math is that the Government of Canada has put forward, in previous budgets and in this budget, an escalator of 6%, which means that each year it is a cumulative effect. It is an increase each successive year. Following that, we will have a base of 3%, if not higher, to GDP. It is very simple math. It is just adding simple numbers. I would encourage the NDP to do just that.

The other thing that the government is doing that particularly benefits the health care field and something that I feel very strongly about is our support for innovation, science and technology. Whether it be the \$37 million more for granting councils or the \$60 million for high-class research at Genome Canada, these things are extremely important to ensuring we have the next set of great discoveries so that they can benefit Canadian patients.

• (2135)

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to rise in the House today in support of Bill C-38 at report stage.

I must begin by expressing disappointment at the opposition's delay tactics which threaten the important measures contained in the bill. Instead of debating the issues that really matter to Canadians opposition members choose to engage in dire prophecies of doom and gloom and temper tantrums similar to ones by toddlers on a supermarket floor. Fortunately, Canadians can see past the opposition's melodrama.

As we heard again and again during the lengthiest consideration of a budget bill in more than 20 years, the legislation before us today focuses on what Canadians want. It would strengthen our economy, promote jobs and growth and ensure Canada's long-term prosperity. It would ensure the sustainability of programs not only for today, but also for future generations to come. For example, the changes to old age security would ensure that these benefits would remain sustainable and would be there when retired Canadians need them. The changes to employment insurance would make it easier for unemployed Canadians to get back to work in a more timely manner. Of course, we are also making changes to ensure balance when it

comes to environmental regulations. Canadians want a government that balances the environment with our responsibility to promote jobs, growth and long-term prosperity.

Crucial to a sound economy is law and order. In that regard, our government committed to getting tough with criminals when we were first elected. We have backed up that commitment with concrete actions. We have listened to the needs of victims, police officers and ordinary Canadians, all of whom told us that the time has come to take strong measures to deal with gangs and violent crimes.

We have taken steps to give law enforcement officials the resources and legislation they need to address crime and help ensure that law-abiding citizens are not afraid to walk down the streets. We have strengthened and modernized the Criminal Code. We have introduced measures to make sure that people convicted of a serious crime are dealt with appropriately.

Bill C-38 contains important measures which would help us do even more, specifically to combat guns, drugs and other contraband goods that often find their way onto our streets and into our school grounds due to smuggling operations by gangs and organized groups. It is those measures that I would like to speak about today.

In some cases these criminals use land ports of entry. In others, our shared waterways with the U.S. often provide a ready-made channel for criminals to smuggle these illegal products into Canada, threatening our homes, our families and our neighbours.

Many of us have heard the stories of high-powered boats skipping across the St. Lawrence or Great Lakes waterways with law enforcement agents in hot pursuit. The good news is that in some cases these criminals are stopped in their tracks, but the bad news is that in many cases they manage to get away. The criminals who smuggle illegal goods across our border with the U.S. can sometimes avoid capture and prosecution in one country by slipping across the international boundary. Law enforcement officials from the U.S. and Canada have to call off the chase at the border due to jurisdictional limitations, which means that illegal and dangerous goods can and do sometimes make their way into the hands of gangs, thugs and dangerous criminals.

Bill C-38 would help put an end to that. It would give law enforcement officials on both sides of the border the tools they need to do their jobs effectively, which is something our government has continued to do here in Canada since we were first elected in 2006.

The legislation before us today contains important measures that would ratify an agreement which our government signed with the U.S. to allow specially trained and designated Canadian and U.S. officers to work together on jointly crewed marine vessels, known as shiprider teams, in order to enforce the law on both sides of the international boundary line.

It spells out how these joint operations would be carried out, while also proposing amendments to the Customs Act, the Criminal Code, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act.

● (2140)

The measures in Bill C-38 stipulate that all shiprider operations would be conducted in a manner respecting the rights and freedoms protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and domestic privacy protections. They would also be done in a way that respects the domestic sovereignty of both nations and in accordance with the rule of law.

For example, in Canadian waters, operations would be subject to Canadian laws and procedures and conducted under the direction and control of Canadian law enforcement officers. The opposite would apply when ships are operating in U.S. waters.

The bottom line is this: By being able to enforce the law on both sides of the border, Canadian and U.S. law enforcement officers would no longer be faced with jurisdictional challenges associated with cross-border policing that are often exploited with criminal organizations. Shiprider officers would now be able to continue pursuit of criminals trying to evade arrest and prosecution by ducking across the border.

In addition, these operations would allow Canadian and U.S. law enforcement agencies to maximize existing border law enforcement resources. Instead of mirroring operations on either side of the border, this integrated approach would allow resources to be deployed most strategically along the border and leverage enforcement capacity, range and capability.

This is just one way in which Bill C-38 would help reduce cross-border crime while protecting our economy by cracking down on the smuggling of illegal contraband.

Criminals who smuggle illegal guns and drugs across our borders will have to face the consequences of their actions. They will be caught and they will be prosecuted.

In practical terms, we know from direct experience that shiprider is an effective border law enforcement tool. In 2007, operations in the Cornwall-Massena region in the east, and British Columbia-Washington border region in the west netted a large quantity of marijuana, over one million contraband cigarettes, six vessels and a huge amount of cash. However, it is some of the images that really tell the story and I will give a few examples.

Several years ago, the United States Coast Guard took a photo of a smuggler on the Great Lakes gesturing in contempt as he crossed the maritime border. The smuggler knew that the Coast Guard could do nothing to respond as he had managed to make it into Canadian waters with the help of a hand-held GPS. The Coast Guard could only monitor the situation. What a sad story.

Fast forward to 2007, and this time the Coast Guard, working with an RCMP officer aboard a shiprider vessel, set off in pursuit of a speedboat suspected of carrying drugs from the United States to Canada. When the pilot crossed the international boundary, he kept on going, knowing that officers could arrest him on either side of the border. The officers did not catch the boat on the water, but with the assistance of local police, they were able to intercept the perpetrator on shore yielding a haul of marijuana, more than one million cigarettes and a car.

Government Orders

In another instance, a fleeing boat stopped after it had crossed the Canadian border only to be approached by shiprider personnel. While no contraband was found on the vessel, the boat itself tested positive for cocaine residue and was promptly seized.

That same year, local police asked for shiprider assistance in a suspected case of child abduction. Because law enforcement officials on both sides of the border were able to co-operate, the abduction was averted and the child was returned unharmed.

The presence of shiprider operations in the area also helped to displace a considerable amount of smuggling to border ports of entry. The Canada Border Services Agency noted that there was a marked increase in arrests at land-based border crossings as a result of the shiprider program.

Considering all of the examples I gave, I urge my colleagues on the other side to support the bill so that we can implement these important measures.

● (2145)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, shiprider is an interesting program that actually came through the Senate, the unelected chamber, in terms of its analysis, and now it has been altered significantly in the budget bill. There was a lot of evidence of problems with the shiprider program and the problems it creates for tourism and trade.

I want to focus on why the government is cutting the Canada Border Services Agency inspections officers down to 1,100 officers. In fact the government is getting rid of one-quarter of the sniffer dog teams that are directly linked to eliminating gang operations as well as drug smuggling and gun operations. It is eliminating them through the budget. How does the government square the circle that the shiprider program can do those things?

I would invite my colleague to talk about the fact that in the United States there were a couple of interesting cases where U.S. customs officers actually killed American citizens. There was also the case in Niagara Falls four years ago where an American law enforcement agent pursued an American vehicle into Canada, killing a single mother on the streets of Niagara Falls.

Maybe my colleague could talk about those cases. It would be interesting to square the circle as to how the government will have accountability for those issues in this agreement.

Mr. Devinder Shory: Mr. Speaker, the shiprider program has been operating on a pilot basis since 2005. As I mentioned in my speech, we have seen the positive outcomes. I gave the example of a child who was abducted and because of the shiprider program, the child was reunited with his parents.

This will promote economic benefits by protecting the border and cracking down on the smuggling of contraband.

As I mentioned, more than one million contraband cigarettes were confiscated in one year, and marijuana also. The target for all these drugs and contraband cigarettes ultimately is our youth, the young children in our schools.

Government Orders

I would ask my colleague to help us to implement these rules so that we can protect our youth from all these smugglers.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is with regard to EI. My colleague is on the human resources and skills development committee and is certainly well aware of any of the concerns that I have been able to express with regard to the changes to the EI legislation in the bill.

The minister has said a couple of times that we need more teeth in the legislation, more teeth in the regulations. It is tough to get teeth when we are sending everybody home. We are losing a lot of sets of teeth. Six hundred people have been sent home from the EI processing centres. That is 600 sets of teeth that are being taken out of the mix.

There are more intrusive regulations coming forward, such as shaking down 58-year-old chambermaids as to whether or not they would take a job within an hour's drive and whether it is a suitable job.

The minister has not really overwhelmed anybody with her ability to handle the department.

Is my colleague confident that these new regulations can actually serve any real purpose? Is there enough bodies left in HRDC to actually carry out—

• (2150)

The Speaker: I will stop the hon. member there. There are only 30 seconds left for the member for Calgary Northeast.

Mr. Devinder Shory: Mr. Speaker, let me tell my colleague my view about EI. I strongly believe that the EI program was created for the people who lose their jobs, unfortunately, and are unable to find a suitable job to replace the lost job. It is not for the people who simply qualify for the program and then use the program as an entitlement, without looking for a replacement job or a reasonably suitable job. That is what I would suggest to my colleague.

To answer the other part of his question, this government believes in effectiveness. We believe that the single largest labour market program should be effective when we send more and more people back to work, not having more and more people sitting and waiting for a cheque from the government.

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin on a general note, for Canadians who might be watching or following this debate, to try to perhaps slow down the pace of the detail being presented on all sides of the House and remind Canadians what is at stake here.

What are we talking about this evening? Why have so many amendments been produced and presented for voting very shortly? Why is all this kerfuffle happening about this budget bill?

For everyday Canadians who are busy leading just-in-time lives, raising their kids, paying their mortgages or rent and looking after loved ones, this is very complicated, but there are some simple facts that are worthy of communication for them this evening.

First, this budget document is 425 pages in length, has 753 clauses and is changing or doing away with 70 different laws that exist today in Canada. Here are a few of the things it would do in unprecedented fashion, because it is not an economic document and it is certainly

not an economic transformative plan, as the minister would have us believe.

It would rewrite Canada's environmental laws, 40 years in the making. In this draft budget, they are gone.

It would break the Conservative government's election promise by raising the age to qualify for the old age supplement from 65 to 67 years of age. Does any Canadian remember hearing that in the last election campaign? Did the government run on that platform?

It would create uncertainty for our seasonal industries with changes to employment insurance, something I will come back to momentarily.

It would hurt Canada's international brand by tearing up 100,000 immigration applications with the stroke of a pen. The 100,000 human beings waiting for their immigration applications to be processed would now be out of luck.

It would impose the Conservatives' unilateral decision to reduce health care transfer payments to the provinces and territories. Did they run on that platform? No. Did they consult or negotiate with the provinces? No.

In this bill they are targeting charities that they disagree with. Did they run on that in their platform?

They are eliminating groups such as the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy, Rights and Democracy and the National Council of Welfare, all groups the Conservatives disagree with. Did they run on those promises? No.

They would be reducing the Auditor General's oversight on a number of government agencies, including the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and the Northern Pipeline Agency. How can that be a good thing?

It is reducing democratic oversight of our spy agency, CSIS, by abolishing the Office of the Inspector General.

It would repeal the Kyoto Protocol Implementation Act, eliminate a number of the government's reporting requirements on climate change and public service jobs and make changes to parole hearings. Every expert who testified warned that changes to parole hearings are unconstitutional.

In short, it is anti-democratic. They are using a single omnibus budget bill to limit debate and ram these unrelated measures through Parliament. That is what this debate is about, for Canadians who are watching.

However, it is no surprise for those of us who lived through the first incarnation of the republican government in Ontario, which has ended up here. That is because the technique that was perfected in Ontario to create omnibus bills began under former premier Mike Harris and was perfected by our present-day Minister of Finance.

Let us focus on the old age supplement as an important issue for a moment. The Conservatives are breaking their election promise, as I said, by raising the age for OAS from 65 to 67. They are ignoring the advice of the OECD, Canada's chief actuarial officer, the Parliamentary Budget Officer and even the government's own experts, who have all agreed and all testified that change is not necessary because our OAS program is already sustainable. This would hurt rural Canadians, and single women in particular, who disproportionately depend on OAS and GIS.

● (2155)

It also hurts our physical labourers who cannot continue working. Forty percent of our OAS recipients earn less than \$20,000 a year, and more than half earn less than \$25,000 a year. In my riding of Ottawa South, it is no different.

This change would hurt Canada's most vulnerable seniors the hardest. It is just not right; our seniors, who have invested so much in our country, need our support now more than ever.

Let us turn to the changes under employment insurance. What have we heard? We did not hear how these changes will help solve skilled labour shortages. We did not hear how many of the current 250,000 job openings would be filled because of these changes. We did not hear how these changes will assist the 1.4 million Canadians who are out of work. We did not hear that Canadians had been consulted about these changes. We did not hear how they will help communities and workers who only have seasonal industries to foster more full-time industries.

These changes brand those who require EI during recurring periods of no-fault job loss as “repeat offenders”, in the government's language. Can members imagine that if people are on in EI in Canada, they are repeat offenders?

Those people had better watch out. The changes would force them to take a 30% pay cut in a lower-skill job outside of their area of training. The changes would force people to take jobs further away from home, thereby incurring higher costs for a low-skill job that pays less. Boy, that makes sense in the 21st century.

It is policy created on the fly. The Conservatives did not have a plan or a rationale for the changes. They had no information, no facts, no analysis, just a belief that EI claimants are lazy and abuse the system.

They have a desire to penalize seasonal workers and industries. It is reminiscent of the member for Ottawa West—Nepean's press conference in Ontario several years ago, when as a minister in the Harris regime he took a box of syringes, dumped them onto the floor in front of the cameras and went on to explain that the reason the government was pushing Workfare so hard was that all welfare recipients in Ontario were shooting their cheques up their arms. That is the kind of character at play here, a character that is still there.

If members do not take my word for it, let us listen to what the media has to say about the budget.

The Globe and Mail said, “The budget bill contains too much for adequate consideration by Parliament.”

Government Orders

The *Halifax Chronicle Herald* called it “a steamroller of sweeping change, from the streamlining of environmental regulations to the reform of old age security and EI”, and called it “anti-democratic”. The paper stated that “the monster budget bill introduced last week is an omnibus bill on steroids” and went on to say, “It's also nonsense to pretend one debate, one committee review and one vote will allow Parliament to competently examine this legal spaghetti.”

The Toronto Star said, “This reeks of hypocrisy.” It also stated:

This is political sleight-of-hand and message control, and it appears to be an accelerating trend. These shabby tactics keep Parliament in the dark, swamp MPs with so much legislation that they can't absorb it all, and hobble scrutiny. This is not good, accountable, transparent government. It is not what [the Prime Minister] promised to deliver.

The *Montreal Gazette* stated, in speaking of Bill C-38, “If more Canadians understood it, they would be horrified by the lack of time allotted to its consideration.”

The Winnipeg Free Press stated:

Under the...Conservatives, however, parliamentary committees, like Parliament itself, are mere toys of the party in power, routinely gagged the moment an opposition MP moves a motion.

We have certainly seen that behaviour.

The *Ottawa Citizen* asked this simple question: “What's the rush?”

It goes on and on.

The *National Post* stated:

As you remove the outer layers of the bill, you discover potentially far-reaching policy shifts that have no business being in any budget, far less being scrutinized by the finance committee.

● (2200)

Perhaps to close, my favourite, published just some hours ago at 6:20 p.m. this afternoon, from *Postmedia*:

Their primary justification for the omnibus bill—that all its measures together form an integrated, coherent vision and plan of economic transformation—is demonstrably nonsense.... How can reforms to the Parks Canada Agencies Act, the Corrections and Conditional Release Act and the elimination of the office of the inspector general for the Canadian Security Intelligence Service possibly be interpreted as economic?

It goes on to conclude, asking this question:

Why bother wasting time with the bothersome business of committee review and public debate? ...It would be far more efficient, certainly cheaper, for the prime minister to rule by decree.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the member for Ottawa South's speech was very comprehensive and important.

I am unhappy with the fact that this bill is continually described as though it will do great things for jobs and the economy, while we have failed as parliamentarians to examine the ways in which Bill C-38 is a threat to jobs and our economy.

Government Orders

I am taken by the fact that many Conservative members have spoken tonight about the importance of competitiveness, research and development, and innovation, yet all the best studies in the world on competitiveness—I mentioned, for example, Michael Porter at Harvard University—have said that when the rigour of environmental regulations is reduced, the result is less competitiveness and fewer innovations.

This is the one area where Canada is really lagging, R and D and innovation. Would my hon. friend comment on whether he agrees with me that this so-called budget implementation bill will actually undermine Canada's competitiveness and reduce our ability to come up with the research and innovation to stay ahead?

Mr. David McGuinty: Mr. Speaker, the member's question is spot on.

In the 21st century, we should not be racing to compete with jurisdictions that can dig up minerals, cut forests, harvest fish and move into the natural resources industry that Canada used to excel at in the early 20th century. This is not Canada's role for the future.

Where is the investment and venture capital? Why are we discussing new start-ups for Canada? Why is the Sustainable Development Technology foundation being robbed of capital to capitalize and partner with our private sector to give rise to new green technologies?

The race is on for energy efficiency all over the planet. Every jurisdiction knows this. Canada should be leading this race, but unfortunately I do not think the Prime Minister has a pair of running shoes.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member gave a very good speech about this terrible budget bill.

I do not know about the member's community, but in my community I know there is a growing sense that this budget bill creates an even bigger divide in our country. It increases the gap of inequality.

I have been focusing some of my remarks tonight on housing, because this bill does not mention housing anywhere. We have a housing crisis, whether it is in Ottawa, Toronto or Vancouver. Many communities are facing this housing crisis.

I would like to ask the member if he could reflect on that and whether he too is dealing with some of the critical issues around affordable housing here in the city of Ottawa?

● (2205)

Mr. David McGuinty: Mr. Speaker, yes, we are, right here in this jurisdiction, in the shadow of the Peace Tower.

There is a desperate need for housing. It is interesting to reflect back and remember that one of the first acts of the government, upon forming a minority government, was to do away with our housing department. It did away with it with one stroke of a pen.

Now where are we? Is there a national housing strategy? Are we dealing with some of the homelessness crises? Are we connecting the dots between homelessness and mental health issues and challenges? Are we connecting the dots with substance abuse? No, we are not.

This is a step back for Canada. This is a focus on harvesting the low-hanging fruit of natural resources as quickly as we can and sell as much fossil fuel as we can and as much mineral as we can.

We are not opposed to those extractive industries—do not get me wrong—but it is a race to sell as much as we can and make as much money as we can. In my estimation, the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister can stand up in three years' time and say, "Canadians, we know we have undermined the 21st century economy, but have we got a tax cut for you."

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in the House this evening to talk to such an important bill, a bill that I believe will transform our country into greater prosperity and greater things to come for years and years ahead.

The first topic I will discuss this evening is on the proposed changes to the Fisheries Act through the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, specifically what is relevant to rural Canada, in my case rural Ontario, and a long-outstanding issue, long before I was elected to the House. The issue deals with municipal drains and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans' responsibility and actions inside that area.

There could be as many people watching CPAC tonight as there are members in the House. It could be a limited audience, but we will just imagine we are getting big ratings tonight.

The issue regarding municipal drains arises when farmers want to drain an area. It could be a low lying area that is wet and they need to drain this to get a higher yield for their crop production. They will work with the municipality and with a group of farmers and they will create a municipal drain of an appropriate length to connect into a stream or river or whatever will work to get the water into the waterway. It never was a fish habitat, it never had been a fish habitat. However, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans deems it to be a fish habitat. Not only that, believe it or not, Transport Canada at one time deemed it to be, in addition to a fish habitat, a navigable water. This has posed tremendous issues, not only for getting it built but, as time moves on, these municipal drains need to be dug out and cleaned out to ensure they operate in a proper manner and format.

Therefore, the proposed changes to the Fisheries Act in this budget bill will really solve a lot of problems for rural Canadians and especially rural Canadians who are farmers. This will be a tremendous benefit. We have all heard stories in the media about how this act has been applied incorrectly time and time again at a direct cost to the farmer.

In my riding, there is a number of large rivers that flow through into Lake Huron. There are the Saugeen River north of where I live, the Maitland River and the Bayfield River. What many people may not understand is that years ago the Department of Fisheries and Oceans made an agreement with the conservation authorities that basically allowed them to do about 95% of the work and, on rare occasions, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans was actually brought in. The changes that the opposition members are so concerned and fearful about are, by and large in most areas of Canada, being conducted. At the very end, the biologists from DFO will come in and take a look at the project and carry on. When the project is completed, they will sign off.

Some of the issues around this specifically, where this was inefficient and caused tremendous delays, concerned the biologists not being from the area and not having knowledge of the particular river, creek or farm the way somebody from the conservation authority would have. Someone who lives and works in the area knows the farmers, the people who work for the municipality and knows the engineering firms and makes it all happen. This will be a tremendous improvement.

Then, when we consider the fact that there is also the issue around where the province comes in, the Ministry of Natural Resources, and how it deals with species at risk. Is it terrestrial, meaning is it on land or is it on water? Once we have that, we have multiple jurisdictions dealing with an issue that these conservation authorities can handle quite aptly. Therefore, that will be a great change.

● (2210)

Ray Orb is the vice-president of Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities. I am from Ontario but to get a different flavour from western Canada, I thought I would bring his comments in. This is from the May 28 subcommittee meeting. The association represents 296 rural municipalities in Saskatchewan and acts as the common voice. Members do not have to think it is just him, this is the voice of 296 different municipalities that are not too far different than my own.

Mr. Orb applauded the federal government for the changes to the Fisheries Act that were announced in April by federal Minister of Fisheries, Keith Ashfield. He said, "The changes to the act provide the long-awaited distinction between—

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a small but not unimportant point of order. I believe the hon. member misspoke when he named the current Minister of Fisheries by name.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Mr. Speaker, I was quoting somebody else's statement, but I digress.

The Speaker: I did not catch it but I would remind the hon. member for Huron—Bruce that even when quoting from other documents or articles, members are still not supposed to use proper names.

I will give the floor back to the hon. member for Huron—Bruce.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Mr. Speaker, I want to make sure the member for Avalon is paying attention.

To continue with what Mr. Orb said:

—vital Canadian waterways that support fish populations and smaller bodies of water that do not house fish. It is our understanding that the amendments to the Fisheries Act will focus protection rules on significant threats to fish and will set clear standards for routine projects concerning smaller fish-free water bodies.

In addition he said:

Currently the Fisheries Act applies the same protection to rivers and streams as municipal drains and farmers' irrigation canals. This adds unnecessary costs and extended timelines to routine municipal road construction projects....For example, in 2011, in my municipality, we were involved with a culvert replacement project in a non-fish-bearing area. DFO required us to attain a permit, which caused a time delay, and the overall cost was increased significantly.

I can attest to this personally. My father-in-law works for a municipality as a road foreman and he says that when it is time to do a culvert, he pulls out a book about five inches thick. That is the first thing he does before he starts to go through the process of replacing

a municipal culvert that may not even have any water in it or ever had any water in it.

This is a change. I know the Liberals have a hard time understanding this change because they no longer have any rural members. They had 13 years to get it right, but they continuously got it wrong. We are here to ensure we get it right for all Canadians.

Another important issue—

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There are three rural members from the Liberal Party right here. How could the member even say that?

● (2215)

Mr. Ben Lobb: Mr. Speaker, I see the member for Malpeque is paying attention. He has passed the test.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I just think the member for Malpeque should get a life.

The Speaker: Order, please. I did not hear that. There is quite a lot of noise going back and forth. It would be easy for the Speaker to pick up on these things if there was less of that.

I will give the floor back to the hon. member for Huron—Bruce who has two minutes left to conclude his remarks.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Mr. Speaker, I could talk for hours on the benefits of the bill.

One other area I would like to touch on briefly while I do have time is competitiveness and the opportunities for Ontarians in the budget. One example I would like to read to the House comes from Terry Toner, who represents the Canadian Electricity Association. He said, "Currently projects are stuck in a system with 40 federal departments and agencies involved". He also said, "regulatory approval processes, combined with construction periods, have totalled more than 10 years from project initiation to grid connection".

What does that mean? For Ontarians, yes we have agriculture, but we also have manufacturing and a great industrial base still. Time and time again we hear at auto caucus from members of Ford, GM, whoever, that we are not competitive on electricity.

I will give credit to Dalton McGuinty. In eight years he has raised our electricity rates to astronomical levels that now no longer make us competitive. If that was his goal, he has succeeded. However, as far as creating jobs and being competitive, he has failed. Part of the reason is that we have to become more competitive with our electricity rates because we are really missing the boat. I believe, once again, it is the federal government helping Ontario out, as we always are good friends and neighbours to the province of Ontario.

I have plenty of quotes, too many to get them all through in a minute or two. I wish I had more time. They deal with the environmental assessment, especially when we look at the opportunities in northern Ontario with the ring of fire. It will become vitally important that we get these assessments done right and on time.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member across about part 3, responsible resource development.

Government Orders

The object in section 4(f) is to ensure that an environmental assessment is completed in a timely manner. Section 5(c) is with respect to aboriginal peoples. Under section 14(4), there are four federal authorities. Under section 24, the public is provided with the opportunity to participate. However, the thing that interests me the most and the conflict that I see here in the future is that under section 38, the review plan, there is a time limit of 24 months and we see that time limit in other parts of part 3.

How will the government deal with section 35 of the Constitution and the time limits that are proposed? How will it deal with the stake of the honour of the Crown in section 35 of the Constitution Act?

Mr. Ben Lobb: Mr. Speaker, let me tell members what Scott Vaughan, the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, said when he talked about environmental screenings. He said that 99% of environmental assessments were screening levels and agreed that allocating resources to larger environmental projects would be a good use of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act's resources.

In addition, here is what Denise Carpenter from the Canadian Nuclear Association said, and I should add that Bruce Power is in my riding. She said, "reduced overlap and duplication will strengthen the environmental protection. Limiting one project to one review is not only more efficient, it's more cost-effective".

I know the NDP and the Liberals have a hard time understanding cost-efficient and effective, but believe me, they work.

• (2220)

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member a question. He talked about all the fisheries policies that this budget entailed. One of the things that he forgot to mention was the number of fisheries jobs that the government was taking out of Newfoundland and Labrador and out of St. John's and moving them to Fredericton, of all places.

An hon. member: Where?

Mr. Scott Andrews: To Fredericton, the minister's riding. I have a simple question for the member. Could the member can tell me how many wharves and fisheries offices are in Fredericton? How many wharves are in Fredericton?

Mr. Ben Lobb: Mr. Speaker, the member's question shows the difference between the way we look at it, in the Conservative Party, and the glass half empty attitude they have in the Liberal Party.

One of my best friends is from his province of Newfoundland and Labrador. I can tell him that there are so many opportunities for jobs in Newfoundland. If he would get on board—

Mr. Scott Andrews: How many ports?

Mr. Ben Lobb: The member has been talking over there. Let me talk now.

The member should come along with us and let us work with the environmental assessments and get some people from Newfoundland working. There are great mining jobs. There are great opportunities. All he has to do is get onboard and he can go back to his riding and tell his constituents what he is doing.

The Speaker: Order, please. I will just ask for a bit of order. I know it is late at night, but we should still try to allow the members answering the question to do so in a bit of peace and quiet.

The hon. member for Chatham-Kent—Essex.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to the member. He is right on target. I can tell he has done his homework. I know what message he is trying to bring. I know oftentimes it does not seem to click with the other side.

I want to ask him another question. This is something I think is vitally important when we talk about these environmental assessments, the importance of the reserves we have of gas and oil in our country and why it is so important for us to develop those important resources.

Why would those regulations make a difference as to how our country could grow and how we could generate wealth in those areas?

Mr. Ben Lobb: Mr. Speaker, he is probably one of the best small businessman in the House today.

I mention again competitiveness because I know the other side does not get it. We are competing with countries like Australia and Brazil, countries that are making environmental assessments happen in six months' time. Every minute that we cannot compete with these other countries, capital will leave our country, go elsewhere and never return.

It is more important now than ever before that we get it done one time and get it done right. Let us get the investments to Canada. Let us make it happen in Avalon.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-38 is so huge that the media have called it a mammoth bill. For those who may never have seen one, because you cannot just go to a zoo and see a mammoth, elephants are descended from mammoths, but mammoths are larger. So when the media called this a mammoth bill, the analogy was clear. As my former colleague from Montcalm would say, this is a thick document.

To further educate everyone, I should explain that mammoths have disappeared. We would like Bill C-38 to do the same. Unfortunately, we are stuck with this bill because the government has a majority. But this is not the first time the Conservative government has handed us a poison pill in one of its implementation bills. It did that even when it had a minority.

We all remember the crisis that erupted when the government made the not-so-subtle decision to eliminate funding for political parties in an implementation bill, thinking that the measure would slip through unnoticed. It also decided to start messing around with pay equity and remove the right to strike from certain officers and public servants. That did not happen because the majority, which was the opposition, decided that it was ready to topple the government and trigger an election.

Government Orders

Refusing to back down, and playing cheap partisan politics, the Conservative government decided to prorogue Parliament to prevent an election. That is how it operates. That is how it does business. When things are not going its way, it behaves utterly undemocratically. That is what it did once. Other times, it decided to trigger elections even though the House had passed a law to set fixed election dates.

A whole bunch of measures were included in this bill. The Conservatives are taking advantage of their majority, since they know they can pass the bill despite challenges by the opposition and the public. The government wants to muzzle not only the opposition, but also all organizations and all individuals who might be affected by Bill C-38. The government put things in this bill that were not previously announced. I heard some other members earlier giving a list of these things. For instance, Bill C-38 includes a complete overhaul of employment insurance.

Everyone was surprised, because never, ever—not in the election campaign or since coming to power in 2006—had the government even suggested that it would make any such changes that would penalize the regions in particular. I know that Quebec and the Atlantic provinces will be especially hard hit by this reform. Many seasonal workers back home will of course suffer as a result of this new reform, which this government should have presented in a separate bill.

That is also what the government should have done for many other measures that were included in this bill without any forewarning. Another example is adding two years to the retirement age for seniors. I heard a Conservative member rhyming off a bunch of quotations. Well, I have some quotations of my own, including one from the Fédération de l'Âge d'Or du Québec, which said that this government is behaving like a dictator and abandoning seniors with this decision to increase the retirement age in Bill C-38. I quote:

Not only is there a complete lack of measures to improve the quality of life of seniors, but the government is restructuring programs in a way that will jeopardize the future for generations of seniors to come.

That is what we heard in response to this change, which the Conservatives also had not announced during the election campaign. They also want to change the Bank Act. We have heard about this. The Bloc Québécois has raised this issue here in the House. We are not the only ones. This also caused a stir in Quebec City, when the finance minister unilaterally decided to disregard Quebec's Consumer Protection Act, saying that banks fall under federal jurisdiction.

However, he forgot to mention that contracts fall under Quebec's jurisdiction, as does the province's Consumer Protection Act. That is simply telling the banks that they can now do whatever they want in the province and there is no longer any legislation that applies. The Quebec justice minister, Mr. Fournier, even wrote a letter to the Minister of Finance of Canada, in which he said:

...we wish to inform you of our concerns with respect to your proposal. The federal Parliament cannot decide in a peremptory manner that provincial laws do not apply to a given sector.

● (2225)

The rejection of Mr. Fournier's arguments will undoubtedly make him want to push a little harder for a sovereign Quebec, given that he himself said that he no longer saw himself as part of today's Canada as a result of the Conservative government's decisions.

We do not want to achieve our own country in this way, because we want to build a country with honour and enthusiasm, as someone already said, and not because the government knocks us on the head. Nevertheless, more and more people are thinking about it because this government is sweeping away all Quebec's values.

The same principle applies to food inspection. The budget implementation bill contains changes to food inspection. This government does not seem to have learned any lessons from the listeriosis crisis. I was a member of the agriculture sub-committee established to identify the problems that unfortunately caused the death of 22 people at the time. Even today, the government is knowingly playing with people's health and safety, which defies all logic.

What the government wants to do is limit debate as much as possible; all these time allocations have made that clear. It is the same for Bill C-38.

Although the general public has been warned by the opposition parties in the House, it does not change the fact that we are continuing to discover many new measures in this document, which is over 400 pages long. These measures are going to affect the public, perhaps not right away in some cases, but certainly within a short enough period that the government will hear a lot about it during the next election.

Although the government did not want to talk about the measures it was going to insidiously add to Bill C-38, I am certain that it is going to get an earful about them from Canadians between now and 2015, when the next election is held. Some aspects of this bill are completely unacceptable, particularly those that affect the environment.

For instance, we know that division 1 of part 3 enacts a whole new piece of legislation on environmental protection, whose purpose is to expedite the approval of large projects, particularly those involving oil sands exploitation. The same is true of division 2 of part 3, which amends the National Energy Board Act in order to allow the Governor in Council, or cabinet, to decide whether a certificate should be issued for any large pipeline projects.

What the government wants now is clear: it wants as few environmental assessments as possible in order to fast-track these large projects, which are often harmful to the environment, as much as possible.

These projects can be implemented but things must be done right. An assessment must be conducted using the strictest possible standards. If the project meets those standards, then it can be implemented.

Finally, the government wants to help the large oil companies—as though they need any more help—and the gas companies by approving all their projects as quickly as possible.

Government Orders

This example pertains to the environment. I do not need to reiterate—it has been said often enough—that this bill puts an end to the Kyoto protocol once and for all. I am wondering what this is doing in a budget implementation bill.

However, we have been asked many times, during questions and comments, what is good about the budget implementation bill.

The government listened to the Bloc Québécois when it asked that the Governor General be required to pay income tax, just like all Canadians and Quebecers, except the Governor General's salary was doubled by the Conservative government. That is rather ironic.

I have not done the exact calculations. It is not easy, because in addition to his salary, he receives other compensation, but at the end of the day, he will earn more money after being taxed than if we had kept things as is. That is rather ironic on the part of the Conservative government. I imagine they gave this gift to the Governor General in celebration of the Queen's jubilee.

Nevertheless, it is a symbolic gain: The Governor General of Canada will finally pay taxes.

It is no surprise that for these reasons, the Bloc Québécois will vote against Bill C-38. We will obviously be here tomorrow to try to make this government listen to reason, to make it pass certain amendments that would shorten this mammoth bill a bit. Nevertheless, what will remain is a massive, unacceptable bill.

● (2230)

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Quebec for his speech.

In my riding, a number of seniors must cut some of their essential needs, such as medication and food, to be able to pay for housing. We also know that because of this Conservative government, some seniors living in poverty will have to wait another two years for the provincial program that gives benefits to the poor.

I would like to hear what the hon. member thinks about how this government is downloading program costs onto the provinces, including Quebec, for example with respect to prisons.

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is quite right. That is exactly what is happening with the increase in the age of retirement eligibility. Those who are most vulnerable will be affected. What will happen to these people when they are not entitled to receive their old age pension or guaranteed income supplement for an extra two years? They will have to turn to social assistance. Clearly, this is downloading once again.

Personally, I think it is appalling not only that Quebec and the provinces will be stuck footing the bill, but also that seniors will be the ones most affected by these measures, while this government is spending millions of dollars. For instance, it has spent millions of dollars this year to celebrate the monarchy and to commemorate the War of 1812, which no one remembers or cares about. It has spent huge amounts of money. Maybe those millions of dollars are symbolic.

This government's political priorities are rather surprising. Consider, for example, the purchase of fighter jets at a cost of billions of dollars. We will probably never see them fly. At least I hope not, because that aircraft's communication system looks really

complicated and it seems as though it is really hard to find a plane that meets Canada's needs. So it amounts to utterly useless spending compared to all the cuts this government is making, particularly at the expense of our most vulnerable seniors.

● (2235)

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent speech. It is too bad he is a sovereignist, but I guess we all have our faults.

He represents a riding that has a lot of agriculture. One important point about a catch-all bill like this one is that many things are happening at once. Members have talked about employment insurance and food inspection.

I would like my colleague to use this opportunity to talk about what is happening in his riding and what the implementation of this bill really means for his region.

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Bourassa for his question.

It is not the first time he has heard sovereignists make very good speeches in this place, nor will it be the last time. The next election is pretty far off, and I will leave it at that.

As I mentioned in my speech, in ridings such as mine, all these changes to employment insurance will surely affect a number of industries. In my riding, as in several regions of Quebec and Canada, the tourist season lasts a certain amount of time. Specialized workers hold down seasonal jobs, and they will be harmed by the government's decision to change employment insurance.

With regard to agriculture, the changes to employment insurance will create other problems. For example, in my riding, there are many cranberry operations. Producers hire many foreign workers. The government has asked that employers hire as few foreign workers as possible and instead hire more local people to work on the cranberry farms. However, it will be very difficult to find workers with the necessary skills. We can already sense that farmers will have problems.

This is also the case for produce growers in my riding and throughout Quebec. They are already very worried about losing their workers and having to train people who, in any event, will probably quickly look for work elsewhere. In many cases, it will be difficult to harvest the crops.

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak in favour of Bill C-38, jobs, growth and long-term prosperity act and against the NDP and opposition attempts to delay it with their multiple amendments to defeat it. While the NDP and Liberals want to engage in partisan games to delay Bill C-38, I know as an eastern Canadian the importance of economic action plan 2012 and its commitment to responsible resource development.

Government Orders

I am proud of the work that has been done by our Conservative government to better and more effectively contribute to our economic growth and job creation in a sustainable, responsible way now and for future generations.

In today's economy, it is paramount to ensure that Canada's great natural resources, including the fisheries, be proactively managed to ensure that we are globally competitive and that we remain competitive for years to come. I would like to focus on the fisheries modernizations contained in the bill and dispel some of the concerns raised by the opposition to delay today's act. It is time to bring Canada's fisheries protection into the 21st century. We are proposing changes to the Fisheries Act that would enable us to make real tangible strides toward managing threats to Canada's recreational, commercial and aboriginal fisheries for the benefit of all Canadians.

The changes to the Fisheries Act would protect the productivity of Canada's fisheries while providing much needed clarity to Canadians by, first, focusing the government's protection efforts on commercial, recreational and aboriginal fisheries; second, drawing a distinction between the vital waterways that support Canada's fisheries and unproductive bodies of water; and third, identifying and managing real threats to the fisheries, including direct impacts to fish habitat destruction and aquatic invasive species.

Many have welcomed these amendments to the Fisheries Act and our larger commitment to responsible resource development. In my own riding of Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, the mayor of Colchester recently wrote me supporting the changes we are making to this act so that they can better support different development projects within the riding, such as main culverts, road creation and managing the fisheries resources within that municipality. They are strong supporters of this legislation.

I would like to take the time to address the positive changes in today's act related to the Fisheries Act in more detail.

First, the proposed changes to the Fisheries Act include a suite of tools that would help protect Canada's fisheries. However, like all great ideas, the opposition has chosen to ignore these. These include the establishment of ecologically sensitive areas, such as critical spawning habitat for salmon and other species. If any activities are proposed within these areas, proponents would be required to submit plans for review. The minister could then specify the protection requirements for these areas.

Other tools to protect fisheries include enhanced compliance and enforcement tools such as enforceable conditions of authorizations, the obligation for proponents to notify government officials in the event of serious harm to fisheries and significant penalties that are aligned with the Environmental Enforcement Act.

With respect to the word "habitat", there is a new prohibition in the legislation which states that it is prohibited for any person to undertake works, undertakings, or activities that result in serious harm to fish that are part of the commercial, recreational or aboriginal fisheries or to fish that support these fisheries. "Serious harm" would be defined as the "death of fish or any permanent alteration to or destruction of fish habitat".

Our government recognizes that healthy and productive fish habitat is essential in order to sustain fish that contribute to or are a

part of a commercial, recreational or aboriginal fishery. We are serious about focusing our resources on managing the threats to these important fisheries which includes fish habitat.

Protecting commercial, recreational and aboriginal fisheries requires protecting their habitat over a large geographic scale. Our focus is to manage threats to commercial, recreational and aboriginal fisheries to ensure that they are available for future generations of Canadians, looking at today and years down the road, something the opposition's "living for today" mindset is unfamiliar with.

It is also important to note that the prohibition also refers to protecting the fish that support these fisheries so that many other fish species would remain protected.

Conservation groups have also indicated that we are currently using our resources ineffectively and that there are better ways to protect important wetlands, rivers, lakes and oceans.

The message we received from them was that the laws are indiscriminate and mean that all bodies of water, whether fish live there or not, are subject to the same rules and evaluation, regardless of size, environment or contribution to a fishery.

● (2240)

The proposed changes to the Fisheries Act address these issues by focusing our efforts on fisheries of commercial, recreational and aboriginal importance. Over the course of the next few months, we will be engaging key partners and stakeholders to develop the regulatory and policy framework to support the new and focused direction set out by these proposed changes to the Fisheries Act.

Through these changes, Fisheries and Oceans Canada would be better able to focus on its core mandate of protecting Canada's commercial, recreation and aboriginal fisheries, and also would ensure their sustainability and ongoing productivity. We would also reduce duplication and overlap.

We want to move the federal government out of the business of reviewing every activity in every body of water, regardless of the impact, to focusing on activities that pose a significant threat to the sustainability and productivity of the commercial, recreation or aboriginal fisheries. We want to adopt a common sense approach to managing real and significant threats to fisheries and the habitat that supports them, while minimizing the restrictions on routine and everyday activities that have little or no impact on the productivity of Canada's fisheries.

Government Orders

However, we cannot do this alone. The Fisheries Act amendments would allow us to effectively partner with the provinces and territories, aboriginal groups, conservation organizations and other stakeholders for the protection of Canada's fisheries. Under the revised Fisheries Act, the government would be able to enter into productive partnerships with provinces, industry and conservation groups to enable them to use their expertise to protect, monitor and conserve Canada's fisheries. This would allow the federal government to maximize its ability to collaborate with agencies and organizations that care about protecting the fisheries.

The new act would give the minister the authority to declare that if a provincial regulation made under the Fisheries Act met or exceeded the federal government standards, only the provincial regulations would apply where provinces have significant protection standards already in place. The federal government would not need to intervene in these situations.

Unlike the NDP and the Liberals, our government supports economic development in this country, while also ensuring the sustainability and ongoing productivity of commercial, recreational and aboriginal fisheries for future generations of Canadians.

The proposed changes in the Fisheries Act would help us achieve that goal. We ask the opposition members to get behind the bill and support it.

• (2245)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member kept referring to common sense. I remember, under a lot of these ministers, the common sense revolution from that side of the House that used to be at the provincial level in Ontario. We know how detrimental that was to Ontarians. I worked for the public service at the time.

I want to just touch on some of the environmental piece that my colleague was speaking of, and it is not common sense. There is a difference between streamlining and gutting. When we are talking about gutting, there is a lot of concern. We just have to look at the Plains Midstream Canada pipeline spill that has just happened in Red Deer River and the concerns that are being raised there.

We have concerns about what is happening in Ontario because we have the Ring of Fire that is about to be developed. The lax environmental laws are extremely concerning to fishermen, hunters, first nations and all of our communities. What kind of legislation will the Conservatives put in place as protection? We can see that they are gutting it and there will not be any protection for our wildlife and there will not be any protection against draining our lakes.

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite likes to talk about common sense, but what we hear from the NDP members never makes common sense. There is no resource development program they would support. There is no tax they would not increase, and there is absolutely no other country they would not want to send Canadian tax dollars to.

What does not make sense is for us to supply a \$20 billion bailout to European banks, which is what their leader wants to do. A \$20 billion bailout of hard-working Canadian taxpayers' money, sent to another country, sent to another continent. That is the type of

common sense we hear from the other side. I will take the common sense we hear from this Minister of Finance any day.

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I am quite distressed. I am a terrestrial ecologist. I am not as expert as some of the members in the House here about what is under the water, but I know enough to know that it is ecosystems that matter. It is not just the fish that are fished by humans that matter. It is all fish, and beyond that it is all ecosystems.

Some of us know, but not all Canadians know, so let us share it with them one more time, that the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act is basically repealed in this omnibus bill. One of the things that is repealed is the definition of environment. The definition was written way back in 1993 under a previous Conservative government, I will add, a more sophisticated and knowledgeable government. That definition included the land, the water and the air, including all layers of the atmosphere, all organic and inorganic matter and living organisms and the interacting natural systems that include components referred to, et cetera.

I would like to ask the Conservatives why they simply do not care about ecosystems any more. Why, whether it is critters or fish, do they only care about the ones that are taken for human needs?

• (2250)

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Mr. Speaker, I served on the environment committee. Our government is definitely committed to sustainable development. However, we do not believe it should be unbalanced, where we are just on one side of the issue or the other. We believe that we have to support the economy because without a sound, robust economy we cannot protect our environment. We need to have a balance.

That is what the bill is all about. It provides protection for fish habitat and it brings common sense solutions. No longer are we going to punish farmers who happen to have a pool form in their field and have to do ominous environmental assessments for the federal government for something that is standing water, basically. Now they will only have to do an environmental assessment when it actually affects the commercial fishery, the aboriginal fishery or the recreational fishery. It will be a fisheries act that actually protects the fishery. That is common sense.

[Translation]

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House this evening to speak to Bill C-38, this massive bill that I would like to put into the recycle bin, but cannot. That is why I am here. I am representing the people of Berthier—Maskinongé.

The 2012 budget contains reckless cuts to services including the old-age security program, health care, transfers to the provinces and environmental assessments.

Government Orders

Bill C-38 is the budget implementation bill, but this bill is unlike any other. This 425-page document includes not only the measures described in the budget, but also some changes that were not previously announced to the public. What a surprise. As a result, there is less transparency and more secrecy surrounding the government. That is just great.

This aspect worries me quite a bit. As elected members, we have a duty to defend the interests of our constituents. Beyond partisanship are the voters. That is why we are here. Those voters put their trust in us and we must be as transparent as possible. I am not seeing that across the way. With this bill the government is not being transparent with the public.

This bill is even preventing us, my colleagues and me, from doing our jobs. How can we study such a document in detail in such a short amount of time? The very essence of Parliament is being undermined because MPs are prevented from being well-informed about the content of the bill and its repercussions.

I am very worried and so are the people in my riding. They are worried about their jobs and, as I speak, I still have not received a clear answer from this government about the future of the Shawinigan tax centre. They are worried about their jobs. They are worried about the environment.

Every day, I receive letters from people who are worried about the government's cuts and the 2012 budget. These people feel that they have been taken hostage by the government and they are looking for a way to have their voices heard.

I thought I would share with you a letter from one of my constituents who wrote to me about the environment and said:

Ms. Brosseau,

I am writing to express my indignation and shame about the cuts the Conservative government is making to Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Environment Canada and Parks Canada.

Through these cuts and Bill C-38, the Conservative government is destroying the entire environmental protection structure, created over a number of years, to benefit the polluting and destructive industries.

Need I remind you that the environment and human health are closely linked? By cutting environmental protection measures, this government is endangering the public, and particularly the least fortunate who are usually more exposed to environmental stressors.

Need I also remind you that a number of economic sectors depend on a healthy environment? For example, by removing some fish habitats from the Fisheries Act, this government is showing its blatant lack of knowledge of environmental dynamics. Contamination knows no borders, and it can cause irreparable damage to the fragile balances within ecosystems.

Ms. Brosseau, can you remind this government that it serves Canadians and not the other way around? Can you also remind the government that it must not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their needs, and that it must especially not compromise the health of current citizens.

Charles de Grandpré

The public is concerned and informed. These people see what the government is trying to do with this Trojan Horse bill.

I am here to share their concerns. These people have a right to be heard.

• (2255)

I think the government should listen to them.

Canadians are worried about creating high-quality jobs, protecting our environment and improving retirement security.

What is this government doing? It is driving up the unemployment rate. The Parliamentary Budget Officer estimates that this budget will result in the loss of 43,000 jobs in Canada. The government is withdrawing Canada from the Kyoto protocol and weakening environmental protection regulations, while attacking environmental protection groups. By withdrawing from Kyoto, the Conservatives are making Canada the laughingstock of the world. The Conservatives are slashing old age security, despite the fact that the Parliamentary Budget Officer has confirmed that the old age security system is viable. Yet the Conservatives still want to balance their budget at the expense of our seniors.

I would now like to quote some of my constituents who have written to me recently about the budget. "Bill C-38 worries us and we oppose the idea behind this bill, especially when it comes to EI reforms." Another citizen said, "Dignity has no age or social status." Another wrote the following, "Yes, old age security at age 67 is discouraging, and employment insurance requires far too many hours to qualify." Lastly, another person said, "I worked my entire life, and now, at age 65, I am starving and very sick."

These are just a few of the comments that I received. They clearly show that people are concerned, and not just in my riding.

In closing, I would like to talk about the changes to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Several parts of the agency are about to be privatized. These cuts to food inspection are a step backward, since we know that the listeriosis crisis in 2008 was caused by a lack of inspectors.

I would like to read a quote by Bob Kingston, president of the union that represents Canadian food inspectors. On April 24, 2012, he said:

These cuts and changes were planned behind closed doors and without the benefit of public input or the perspective of those who work on the front lines.

[...]

We will be doing all we can to make sure politicians and the public understand the impact of these cuts and hopefully the government will live up to its promise that food safety will not be compromised.

Bill C-38 also amends the Seeds Act to give the president of the CFIA the power to issue licences to persons authorizing them to perform activities related to controlling or assuring the quality of seeds or seed crops. This is found in division 26 of part 4. This amendment opens the door to having private companies do food inspection related work. This also sends worrisome signals about the growing likelihood of privatization of some parts of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

These changes scare me and I know that I am not the only one who feels this way.

How can the government make \$56.1 million in cuts to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and still assure Canadians that they will be safe?

Government Orders

Canadians need transparency. People are not going to have confidence in this government if it quietly passes measures that will have a significant impact on the entire population. Why do the Conservatives want to pass this bill, which contains so many cuts, so quickly? Who stands to gain from them? The people in my riding? Canadians? I do not know. These are questions that I am asking myself as a member of Parliament, a citizen and a mother.

• (2300)

[English]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in her remarks, the member talked a fair bit about the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. I know she is a member of the Standing Committee on Agriculture. In fact, we did a tour of the supply management industry a week ago in the Casselman area.

The member also talked a fair bit about what Mr. Kingston had to say. Does she know the implications on our food safety system as a result of some of these measures that are being proposed in this particular bill?

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed the trip with the member when we visited the pullet farms. With the committee, I also had the chance to visit Cargill in Guelph, which was quite the experience. It was memorable and something I will never forget. I learned a lot.

However, it really scares me when I think that these businesses will have more control to inspect food. It scares me and the people in my riding. It makes me worry about my son eating meat or salad. Businesses have no right to inspect their own foods. It needs to be up to the government. The privatization scares me.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the cuts to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency are particularly unusual in that there is one portion of the budget, as opposed to being in Bill C-38, where funds will be provided to a number of agencies to deal with the results of Weatherill report, which dealt with listeriosis at the Maple Leaf plant, whereas the Canadian Food Inspection Agency bears the whole brunt of a \$50 million cut. At the same time, the budget says that we will take food labels off some food products and tell consumers that they can look on the Internet for information. Coincidentally, the Conservatives are also cutting access to the Internet, the CAP sites in rural areas.

As one mom speaking to another mom, could the member tell me what consumers or moms are supposed to do when the information they might want can be found on the Internet but not on the product?

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Mr. Speaker, in my rural riding, having access to the Internet does not always happen. It is very expensive. I heard that it is about \$150 in some places and it is not even high speed. To say that Canadians have to go online to check what is in their foods is absolutely absurd. It is not right. It is 2012 but we are not there yet. It seems to have a snowball effect. We will have another tragedy and lives will be lost. What is it going to take? How many lives have to be lost?

[Translation]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my NDP colleague a question.

As the mother of a young boy, what does she think of the fact that there is a children's fitness tax credit, but that it is non-refundable?

The way I see the problem, middle-class, upper-class and wealthy families can afford equipment for their kids so that they can participate in a physical activity, but poorer parents will not benefit from this.

What does she think of that?

• (2305)

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

As a single parent, I know that it is really hard to make ends meet. I had my son when I was 17, and it is not easy. At times, I had two jobs. Sometimes paying for sports and music lessons is just not possible. When people have to choose whether to pay for housing, electricity or food, it costs too much. Tax credits for sports and activities are of no use to people with little money.

[English]

Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a delight to be able to participate in this debate on Bill C-38, the jobs, growth and long-term prosperity act. Like my colleague, the member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, I want to address the changes proposed in Bill C-38 to the Fisheries Act, in particular.

Let me begin by telling the House how I approach legislation, and not just this legislation but all legislation that I see. I ask myself a couple of key questions. The first one is, "What problem is this legislation attempting to solve?" Of course a related question is, "Is there a problem at all, or are we happy enough with the status quo?" I think that is a key question to ask. The second key question is, "Does this legislation solve that problem in the best way possible?" In the end, my comments about these changes to the Fisheries Act are going to answer those questions.

The focus of the original Fisheries Act was to regulate fishing and activities that directly impact fishing. However, over the years the Fisheries Act has grown to include powers and authorities aimed at conservation and protection of fish and fish habitat. On its own, that may not have been a bad thing.

The problem is due to direction, some of it coming from the courts. We now no longer effectively discriminate how we regulate small-scale impacts and low-value fisheries, like stream crossings on farmland, and projects that are larger scale with those large impacts and more valuable fisheries, like a hydroelectric development or sockeye salmon.

Government Orders

The government has been talking with stakeholders over a number of years. I have been connected to Fisheries and Oceans now for several years and have been part of this. We know that people care about fisheries protection and proponents that undertake development activities in and around fisheries waters. They talk to us about their challenges.

Based on their knowledge and the issues they have raised, we have determined that we need to do at least three things to solve this problem. We need to streamline our process and reduce overlap and duplication. Second, we need to reinforce our commitment to protect Canada's commercial, recreational and aboriginal fisheries. We need to be more discriminating as to where and how we apply our mandate to protect fisheries.

We could add a fourth, and that is that we need to create an enabling environment to be able to partner with others, whether they be provinces or conservation groups and others.

In a nutshell, I think we need to move the federal government out of the business of reviewing every activity on every body of water, regardless of the impact, to focusing on activities that pose a significant threat to the sustainability and productivity of commercial, recreational or aboriginal fisheries.

We want to adopt a common sense approach to managing real and significant threats to fisheries and the habitat that supports them while minimizing the restrictions on routine, everyday activities that have little or no impact on the productivity of Canada's fisheries.

We recognize the importance of Canada's fisheries across the country, and our government is introducing changes that would focus our fish and fish habitat protection measures on Canada's commercial, recreational and aboriginal fisheries.

The new changes would protect the productivity of Canada's fisheries while providing much-needed clarity to Canadians by, first of all, focusing the government's protection efforts on those three fisheries; second, drawing a distinction between vital waterways that support Canada's fisheries and unproductive bodies of water, like man-made reservoirs, drainage ditches in some cases and irrigation channels; and third, identifying and managing real threats to the fisheries, including direct impacts to fish, habitat destruction and aquatic invasive species.

To help focus limited resources on projects and areas that are significant in scope and in impact, the act would enable the exemption of certain types of lower risk and routine activities or waters, like digging farm ditches or draining flooded fields, from the prohibition.

• (2310)

Under the revised Fisheries Act, the government would be able to enter into productive partnerships with provinces, industry and conservation groups to enable them to use their expertise to protect, monitor and conserve Canada's fisheries. This would allow the federal government to maximize its ability to collaborate with agencies and organizations that care about protecting fisheries. Enhanced partnering opportunities with organizations would help support the conservation of fisheries. Collaboration would also be streamlined by enhanced abilities to enter into legal agreements for the effective protection of fisheries.

Better partnerships with other government agencies are also key to reducing duplication and overlap. We are proposing to achieve this through new authorities that would allow other federal departments, such as the National Energy Board or the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, for example, or provinces, to issue authorizations under the Fisheries Act.

The new act would also give the minister the authority to declare that, if a provincial regulation made under the Fisheries Act meets or beats the federal government standards, only the provincial regulation would need apply. If the province has strong protection in place, the federal government would not need to intervene.

Let me say this, because this has been the subject of some question. There is a new prohibition in the act, a new section 35. This new section would replace text that had become outdated and no longer reflected today's reality. The prohibition states that it is prohibited for any person to undertake any works, undertakings or activities that result in serious harm to fish that are part of a commercial, recreational or aboriginal fishery or a fish that supports these fisheries. It also defines in the act what that serious harm is. It is the death of fish or permanent alteration to or destruction of fish habitat. Fish habitat is defined in the act as spawning grounds and any other areas, including nursery, rearing, food supply and migration areas on which fish depend directly or indirectly in order to carry out their life processes.

The amended Fisheries Act also includes tools to enable greater protection of ecologically significant areas such as spawning grounds for sockeye salmon, which is important of course in British Columbia where I come from. These amendments would make it easier to clearly identify and therefore to better protect these zones. Other tools to protect fisheries include enhanced compliance and enforcement tools, such as enforceable conditions, the obligation for proponents to notify government officials in the event of serious harm to fisheries, and penalties that are aligned with the Environmental Enforcement Act.

The amendments to the Fisheries Act would also provide for greater transparency in decision-making. Under the existing law the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans does not have to take any specific factors into consideration when he is making decisions. In the new Fisheries Act, factors that the minister would need to take into account when making certain decisions and exercising certain powers would add clarity and transparency to decisions. The minister would have to show that he has considered key factors before he can make regulatory decisions related to, for example, the new prohibition, regulations and authorizations. The minister would also need to consider these factors when he is exercising powers related to fish passage, exclusions and authorizations and designating ecologically significant areas, just to name a few. They are listed in the act, and I encourage my colleagues to go and look at them in more detail.

Government Orders

In addition, the minister would prepare and present to Parliament a report on the administration of agreements and equivalency, if any agreements are entered into with the provinces, and enforcement of the provisions relating to fisheries protection and pollution protection after the end of each fiscal year.

The new act would recognize that this is where protection is needed, not in farmers' fields, not in irrigation ditches, not where there are no fisheries; it would recognize that we cannot do this alone and allow us to effectively partner with the provinces and territories, aboriginal groups, conservation organizations and other stakeholders for the protection of Canada's fisheries.

Now I will get back to those questions. Is there a problem? I think there is, and I think many Canadians do as well.

• (2315)

Does this legislation address these problems in an effective way? I think it does. It is not perfect; no legislation is, but it goes a long way to addressing these problems. We are going to have sustainability and productivity of commercial, recreational and aboriginal fisheries for future generations of Canadians, and that is what we need.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I just love it when government members answer their own questions, in the affirmative of course. We have some more questions to ask as well. There are many issues in the budget implementation bill, too many to raise, unfortunately. A few of them have been raised tonight.

One issue that I have been focusing on is why there is nothing in the bill to deal with the crisis that faces many Canadians around affordable housing. In my community of Metro Vancouver, we are now facing a difficult situation where thousands of households are paying 40%, 50%, 60% of their income in rent.

I would like the hon. member to explain why his government has been completely oblivious to this issue. Why has it not dealt with it in the budget? The government has not invested a single cent for affordable housing in the budget or the budget implementation bill. I do not know if it is an issue in that member's local community, but it certainly is elsewhere in Canada. Why has the government ignored this problem so it is now of crisis proportion?

Mr. Randy Kamp: Mr. Speaker, if the member is implying that, because a particular measure is not included in this particular budget, we have somehow quit funding housing and affordable housing, then she is mistaken. She should know better than that. On an ongoing basis, that has shown up in previous budgets. We have put billions of dollars into affordable housing and various programs and we will continue to do that.

We acknowledge that this budget is a complex document. It is about jobs and growth and long-term prosperity. It provides a template; it provides a way forward in order to achieve that. That is the focus of this. If the member waits for future budgets, perhaps she will see something else along the lines she is looking for.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have had the pleasure of working for a number of years on the fisheries and oceans committee with the parliamentary secretary. I know him to be an honest and honourable member of Parliament, and I will ask him this question knowing that full well.

While the current Minister of Fisheries was at ACOA there were some questionable hirings and those hirings are now under investigation by the Public Service Commission. Defeated Tory candidates were being put into the public service. That is the longest running investigation ever undertaken by the Public Service Commission.

Now employees are being transferred from St. John's, which was always the regional fishing financial hub of Atlantic Canada, to Fredericton, while the government had long-term leases in St. John's. The government has to acquire new lease space in Fredericton, a city that does not have a wharf. That city just happens to be in the minister's constituency. Employees are being moved from Moncton as well, where the government owns a building with two empty floors.

Does my colleague see that as a good financial move without any politics involved at all? Does he see that as a wise financial investment?

Mr. Randy Kamp: Mr. Speaker, I really hope my colleague from Cape Breton—Canso is not questioning the integrity of the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans because that would be really beneath him.

We have responded to this in the House a number of times. Fisheries and Oceans Canada has six locations now where it undertakes administrative tasks, largely accounting and procurement tasks. It does not make sense to us to have that happen in six places. It makes reporting relationships more difficult. We think that should be in one place. I could be wrong about this, but my understanding is that an individual does not need a view of the water to be able to do those functions.

It would be helpful if we could find a place with low overhead values, four universities, a highly trained workforce and a lot of bilingual speakers. That is the place we are looking for. That is the place where we are moving this centre of excellence.

• (2320)

[Translation]

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to condemn the Conservatives' mammoth bill, which some have called a Trojan Horse.

When preparing my speech today, I did not know where to begin. That is exactly the problem. The government is giving Canadians a 425-page bill so that they get discouraged and decide not to read it because it is not worth the trouble. In short, this bill is too long.

That has been the government's goal all along. It wants Canadians and Quebecers to get so discouraged about democracy that they stop participating. That is the message the government is sending, and I am very worried about it.

We have tried to split this bill so that Canadians have a chance to study each part individually. We tried to be reasonable with the government, but unfortunately, it rejected our request to split the bill. Despite all that, the government says that we are the ones delaying the process.

I am sorry, but 425 pages amending over 70 different acts deserve a lot more time for debate. The government is refusing to let the House study this bill the right way, and that is why we are trying to have this debate.

I want to point something else out as well. This government says that it is very important to pass this bill quickly, because it is a job creation plan. Excuse me, but there is no job creation plan in this budget.

The Conservatives are too concerned about giving gifts to their friends and making the most vulnerable suffer, including seniors by increasing the OAS eligibility age from 65 to 67.

The government is attacking seasonal workers who need employment insurance. Whether we like it or not, here in Canada we have seasons. We have winter. Agricultural workers cannot work in the winter. I do not know why this government does not understand the climate in which we live.

The government is far too concerned about these things to create any jobs. This bill includes amendments, such as that to old age security, which will not be in effect until 2023. Why can we not debate this bill a few hours longer, especially when we know that these changes will not come into effect until 2023?

I hope that we will be in power in 2023 and that these changes will not take place. Nonetheless, in the meantime we could debate the matter a little longer.

We know that this bill has no job creation plan and has more cuts than investments. That is a problem. We know what is not in this bill. However, I would like to talk about what is in this bill.

As the NDP critic for digital issues, I would like to draw my colleagues' attention to a change, found in two or three of the 425 pages of this bill, that will allow foreign telecommunications companies to do business in Canada for the first time. This is found within these 425 pages.

I am sure that the majority of Canadians are not even aware that such a change is on the books because it is hidden. The government is trying to push this bill through quickly in the hope that Canadians will forget about this change, but this change will have real repercussions on the viability of telecommunications companies in Canada. We have to weigh this change and its repercussions and take the necessary time to study it.

What is more, the voices of scientists and academics here in Canada will no longer be heard. They will be completely muzzled.

• (2325)

I participated in the budget consultations that were held across Canada. One scientist in particular told us that she was afraid of working in the environmental field. She said that she was afraid of losing her job because she speaks her mind and she speaks out for science. I am really shocked by these comments. Things are in a bad way when a scientist says that they are afraid to voice their opinion. I believe that is a problem. However, it seems that this government could not care less about scientists. The opinion of Conservative ministers is much more important.

Government Orders

The government will also be eliminating environmental assessments. It will muzzle the people who have a real interest in these matters and who are worried about having a pipeline in their riding or close to their homes and who are worried about environmental hazards. We have seen that environmentally significant sites may be destroyed as a result of what has happened in Alberta. There are people, such as scientists, who are right to have questions and who should be allowed to participate in public consultations. Unfortunately, they will no longer be able to do so. Once again, it does not appear to warrant debate.

As the digital issues critic, I would once again like to speak about cuts to the community access program. At the same time, huge cuts have been made to public services and the public sector. These are direct services to citizens. What are people told to do? They are told to check the Internet, where all the services they need are available. Except there is a problem in rural areas. There are small communities and some people may not have enough money to pay for Internet access at home. They used to go to the library to use the Internet services, but that program has been cut.

These people, who now have less access to social services because of cuts to the public sector, many not even have access to the Internet at the library. These cuts really are illogical and irresponsible and they have been made without any consultation.

I would also like to talk a bit about the fact that we have withdrawn from the Kyoto protocol, which has embarrassed us internationally. That is really something.

The Conservatives claim to be the advocates for job creation and of the economy. However, I would like to say that there is a company in Boisbriand, which is not in my riding but in the neighbouring riding of Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, that lost a contract because Canada withdrew from the Kyoto protocol. The purchaser did not want to deal with a country that is not responsible and does not think about the environment; it did not want to have anything to do with a country like that. That is significant.

So, when the Conservatives say that the economy is the most important thing, they need to realize that the economy and the environment go together. How can we invest in long-term prosperity, as it says in the title of this budget, when we do not have an acceptable environment? We are leaving a huge ecological debt for future generations, and that is something of great concern to me. I hope that all the Conservatives are concerned about it too.

Since I do not have much time left, I would like to close with a quote from our former leader, Ed Broadbent, who said, "This federal budget should provoke a public debate about the kind of Canada we want."

Not only do I not want that kind of Canada, but we did not even have the opportunity to have the debate.

• (2330)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for the very interesting speech.

[*English*]

I will be very brief as I know time is running out on this debate.

Government Orders

Today, over 120 environmental lawyers from across Canada issued a statement warning that the destruction of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act through Bill C-38 would cause more delays, more uncertainty, and more court challenges.

I want to draw the attention of members to what good environmental assessment has done over the years. The fact is it is a tool for planning.

If it had not been for an environmental assessment that allowed the cumulative effects of the Honshu Paper-Mitsubishi plant in northern Alberta called Alpac to be studied, that huge multinational factory would not have decided on its own to offer to improve its environmental regime during the process. The same thing happened with Louisiana Pacific in Saskatchewan with its oriented strandboard plant.

With this current bill, we will have more pollution, more environmental devastation. We will lack the tools to plan and prepare for projects that mitigate their environmental effects.

[Translation]

Ms. Charmaine Borg: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her remarks.

When it comes right down to it, yes, we need this information, this knowledge and these data. How are we supposed to plan and make responsible decisions when we do not have any data or expertise in the field? If we want to plan for the future, if we want to have a prosperous economy in the future, we need such expertise and data.

Mr. Tarik Brahmī (Saint-Jean, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

She spoke about something we often hear in the House. The government often tells people that they just have to use the Internet. She mentioned that a lot of people do not have access to Internet, but there is something else that she did not have time to mention: some people are not comfortable on the Internet. We all have constituents who come to our offices asking us to do Service Canada's job because they do not understand. When they call, they do not get an answer, and when they go online, things are not always clear.

I would like my colleague to tell us to what extent, in her day-to-day work, she can see how reductions in services and cuts to Service Canada are having a direct impact on the public.

Ms. Charmaine Borg: Mr. Speaker, the impact of the cuts is clear.

In my riding office, before December, there were just two files involving constituents dealing with employment insurance problems. Now everyone who walks into my office comes for that reason. These people have nothing. They have absolutely nothing left and they have to wait for months and months, three or even four months in some cases. That is not even a remotely reasonable wait time.

[English]

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in relation to the comment from the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, I do not doubt that environmental lawyers are upset because when we are streamlining processes, that is a direct hit at their incomes. It is obvious why they are protesting.

In terms of the economic illiteracy displayed by the NDP, if our country went in the direction the NDP wanted us to go, we would end up like Greece and the other failing economies of Europe. This government, this party, simply will not go there.

Does my hon. friend have a clue how jobs are created and wealth is created in our country? Jobs and wealth are the first things required before we can spend money on social programs.

• (2335)

[Translation]

Ms. Charmaine Borg: Mr. Speaker, I certainly do know how to create jobs: by investing in the green economy.

Where is the government's plan for the green economy? Nowhere, because it does not exist. Economy and environment go together. There is no need to choose one or the other because they go hand in hand.

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of privilege. As someone who has been an environmental lawyer before becoming a member of Parliament, I was not a signatory to that letter, but I would ask the hon. member for Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette to withdraw the quite dismaying insinuation that the only reason environmental lawyers would seek to raise a concern about this is if they make money. Those people in environmental law—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I think we are really talking about a matter of debate with respect to the facts that hon. members have said. The hon. member will know that members are given a great degree of freedom in terms of the ideas they wish to express in the House. I did not hear anything that was unparliamentary in that respect.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Pickering—Scarborough East.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak in the House tonight on behalf of my constituents of Pickering—Scarborough East to Bill C-38, the jobs, growth and long-term prosperity act, and against the NDP and Liberal opposition attempts to delay and defeat it.

I fully support the bill as it logically provides the very foundation, which I can appreciate as an engineer, for building Canada's future economic strength for many years to come in order to maintain our country as the best place in the world to live, raise a family and do business.

I have two professions, the profession of arms and professional engineering. This bill focuses like a laser on the well-being of Canada. That is true. Bill C-38, as members may know, includes vital measures contained in Canada's economic action plan 2012 first introduced in this chamber nearly four months ago. It will help set the stage for the next wave of job creation and economic growth and position Canada for a secure and prosperous future.

Before continuing, I will note one great measure in economic action plan 2012 that my constituents in Pickering—Scarborough East are very excited about.

As we all know, national parks are very popular in Canada—

Mr. Phil McColeman: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order, I think you are observing, as well as others in the House, the unparliamentary behaviour of the opposition members in the NDP making physical motions and gestures that are very disrespectful to the person delivering the speech right now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I thank the hon. member for his intervention. Members will know that, as is usually the case when another member is speaking, members keep their comments and discussions very low so that it does not interrupt other hon. members.

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. I would like to reassure my hon. colleague that on this side of the House I do, indeed, want to hear the comments of his hon. colleague and would very much like to continue to listen.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Mr. Speaker, I would like to apologize for making gestures. I have seen hon. members in all parts of the House reading newspapers during speeches and debates and I regret that my behaviour has stooped to the level of members of all parties in the House that I have observed over the past year.

• (2340)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We have had sufficient interventions. I would ask that members keep their comments to themselves. If they wish to carry on conversations with their colleagues, I would ask them to please take it out to the lobby. The House is where we are presenting speeches, asking questions and making comments for other hon. members who wish to listen.

The hon. member for Pickering—Scarborough East.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we all know, national parks are very popular in Canada, attracting many visitors with their natural beauty. Unfortunately, too many Canadians, especially in large cities, do not have easy access to our national parks. I am happy that our Conservative government is helping to change that and would hope that opposition MPs would have supported it instead of voting against it.

As noted in economic action plan 2012, we committed to create Canada's first national urban park in the Rouge Valley, proudly located in my riding. This initiative will provide opportunities for local residents and visitors to enjoy, discover and learn about the Rouge Valley's rich, natural and cultural heritage.

This announcement has been greeted with much support and excitement throughout the GTA and across Canada. An opinion poll conducted in 2010 indicated that 88% of respondents supported this initiative. It is fantastic to see this park create such excitement in not just the GTA but across Canada. This park will allow citizens from all over our great nation to experience the natural beauty of—

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I hate to be picky about this but there is absolutely nothing about the Rouge Valley National Park in Bill C-38. I just want to ask about relevance.

Government Orders

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Members are given a great degree of liberty in terms of the ideas that they may wish to express in their remarks, and yes, the hon. member is right, that they would eventually bring those ideas back around to their pertinence to the question that is before the House. However, one generally gives the member time to connect those dots and bring forth ideas. I am sure the hon. member for Pickering—Scarborough East is getting around to the point.

The hon. member for Pickering—Scarborough East.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, this park will allow our citizens from all over our great nation to experience the natural beauty of Pickering—Scarborough East as well as easy access to more than 30% of the Canadian population which is in its close proximity.

Alan Wells, chair of the Rouge Park Alliance has declared, “This is the best news I have heard. I'm glad it is quickly moving forward”. Toronto city councillor, Glenn De Baeremaeker, said, “To see the prime minister...saying loudly and clearly that they'll protect this land is a dream come true for us”. Jim Robb, general manager of Friends of the Rouge Watershed added, “It's wonderful the federal government is going to create a national park that's accessible by transit”. Finally, the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society said that this “will help safeguard and restore the Rouge Valley's important ecological values, and enable millions of Canadians to develop a greater appreciation for nature”. I hope all Canadians will one day have the opportunity to visit this beautiful national park and share that excitement.

As I said before, today's act is very important for the Canadian economy. Our Conservative government's top focus is just that, creating jobs, promoting economic growth and ensuring long-term prosperity. We know what matters to Canadians and their families and we are getting results for them on that front with nearly 760,000 net new jobs created since July 2009, 90% full-time and over 80% private sector.

However, the global economy is fragile and challenges remain as we see with events in European countries like Spain and Greece. We all know that Canada is not immune to these global challenges and we need to be on guard. That is why we are working hard to implement economic action plan 2012 and why we, along with many Canadians, are so disappointed in the NDP and Liberals for refusing to put Canadians ahead of their own partisan agenda by delaying these important measures to help Canada's economy to keep its good momentum.

Indeed, I will again reiterate the main observations repeated several times by now but worth being emphasized by its accurate and pointed analysis from a recent editorial in the *Toronto Sun*. It reads:

As Europe stands poised on the brink of a disastrous economic wildfire that could blacken the world, [the] NDP leader[s] hypocrisy and self-obsession is in full flame.

...vowing to delay the passing of [economic action plan 2012]... playing...with amendments and procedure.... This is nothing but grandstanding.

This is a budget designed to create jobs and inspire economic growth, and it comes to the House of Commons at a moment that can only be described as the 11th hour of a global economic conflagration....

Government Orders

Right now, there is only one enemy in our fight to protect Canada from the repercussions of Europe's burning. And it's [the NDP leader]...

This is inarguable.

I agree, and would hope the NDP will listen to the words of that *Toronto Sun* editorial and many other Canadians.

As I have mentioned, economic action plan 2012 will unleash the potential of Canadian businesses and entrepreneurs to innovate and thrive in the modern global economy through targeted measures that support business investment, invest in Canadian workers and support families.

However, economic action plan 2012 does not do that heedlessly at the expense of the Canadian taxpayer. In fact, all of our efforts will be supported by responsible fiscal management. That has meant a careful review of how we spend money to ensure we are getting the best for our buck, much like most Canadian families would at the dinner table with their household budget.

It is a prudent approach that will see Canada return to budgetary balance in the coming short years, and that is important for many reasons, like freeing up tax dollars otherwise absorbed by interest payments, ensuring we can afford programs over the long run, and ensuring we can keep taxes low and much more.

Although this was a comprehensive review of government spending, it was targeted and effective, including eliminating the penny and getting rid of plastic SIN cards. The reductions reflect changes to refocus government and programs, make it easier for Canadians and businesses to deal with their government and modernize and reduce the back office.

● (2345)

In the words of a recent *Ottawa Citizen* editorial on our Conservative government spending review:

The overall attitude...has been that every dollar must prove its worth. The answer that "we've always done it that way" isn't good enough...The small and simple cuts have a significance beyond their individual dollar figures. They suggest the government is willing to turn out the couch cushions and come up with change. Good. The elimination of the penny, for example, is not a new idea. But it took a government to decide that now is the time. It's only \$11 million a year, but \$11 million saved is \$11 million the government doesn't have to take from taxpayers or cut from services. The same is true...of the \$1.5 million a year the government will save by simply telling us what our Social Insurance Numbers are, rather than issuing cards we never use and aren't supposed to carry with us. These little cuts are sensible...they're conservative in the sense of being fiscally prudent.

The measures I have highlighted today are significant examples of this government's commitment to a strong economy and responsible management in the name of all Canadians. The commitment represents our longer-term view of how we can become more efficient and more prudent with taxpayers' hard-earned money.

As our Conservative government has said all along, the global economic recovery remains fragile. That makes responsible management to return to balanced budgets even more important, and that is why it is the focus of Canada's economic action plan 2012. The steps we take today will give us the ability to withstand the global challenges from Europe and beyond. That is why our Conservative government's main focus has been and will remain the economy, including implementing Canada's economic action plan 2012, and why I do not support the NDP and opposition attempts to delay and defeat it.

● (2350)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's comments, but I want to correct him on something. He talked about the penny. We are glad the government is doing that, but it was an NDP initiative a few years ago.

Also, he mentioned the national park. I see that we got the rhetoric on the other side, but these were the guys who were complaining a little while ago. However, on the environment piece, we talked about the national park. With the gutting of the environmental legislation, I think members need to be concerned about that.

Let us see what the *National Post* had to say today.

The bill...makes it easier to gain approval to build pipelines under rivers, similar to the Plains Midstream Canada pipeline currently spilling oil into the Red Deer River. Under the existing legislation, there is prohibition on "the harmful alteration, disruption or destruction of fish habitat".....

That is not the case under this bill.

Grassy Narrows and White Dog have been suffering from mercury poisoning for many years, as there was no strict environmental enforcement and protection. What will happen? Will we have more Grassy Narrows and White Dog situations coming forward?

We have asked the question, but would you eat fish from Grassy Narrows?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I remind hon. members to direct questions and comments through the chair.

The hon. member for Pickering—Scarborough East.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: Mr. Speaker, I am a working person and I know how important the environmental assessment is. However, environmental assessment must not be a bargain to do the job.

We have very strong standards in this country. However, I would remind the member that there are provincial and federal standards, and these standards must be harmonized. If we are living in the same country and the same province, then we should not have two standards, we should only have one.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Pickering—Scarborough East would not be the first Conservative to try and reinvent history.

Just for the record, the member should know that the Conservative government took a surplus, blew it and created a deficit. The Conservatives, in terms of the budget and their programs over the last number of years, are increasing the gap between the rich and the poor. In fact, they are increasing poverty in the country. That is the reality. That is not fiscal management for the good of the country.

My question really relates to the member's point on parks—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, order. Order. I am certain that the hon. member for Pickering—Scarborough East would like to hear the question from the member for Malpeque. There is too much noise in the chamber.

The hon. member for Malpeque has the floor.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I am glad you tuned up the other side.

I am pleased that the member is happy about the Rouge Valley national park, but government policy on existing parks is destroying them. In my province, at the Prince Edward Island National Park, it has contracted out, laid off workers and have made full-time workers into seasonal workers. That is what is happening there.

That is not the way to build a national park system. In Bill C-38, why is the government eliminating the requirement for Parks Canada to table an annual corporate plan and financial report? What does it have to hide in terms of—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. The hon. member for Pickering—Scarborough East.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: Mr. Speaker, I just want to tell the member one thing. We are managing the economy, clearly. We are managing it well and we are saving money. We are cutting red tape. If the member is looking at the parks, we are managing the parks. We are managing them well.

Maybe the hon. member does not agree with the good management by our government.

• (2355)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before I call on the member for Trinity—Spadina, I will let her know that I will need to interrupt her at the 12 o'clock mark, this being the end of the time allocated for debate for today.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my speech will describe the winners and the losers in this budget. Tonight I only have time to talk about the losers. To hear about the winners, members will have to wait until tomorrow after question period.

What does a job mean to an average Canadian? It means earning a salary to put food on the table, pay rent or meet the mortgage on time, buy Christmas presents and have money for pizza day at school for the kids. When a person loses a job, it is devastating. For some people it means losing their self-esteem, self-confidence, friends, and their community of work colleagues.

In the Conservative budget we are debating tonight, we are really talking about the lives of 43,000 Canadians who will lose their jobs directly because of this budget, and there are a lot more than 43,000 Canadians who are going to lose their jobs indirectly.

However, 43,000 Canadian workers will no longer have the money to contribute to the economy. They will suffer the humiliation of being laid off. Some will lose their house. Others will suffer depression. A few may not even recover from being unemployed or ever be able to find a job again.

Government Orders

Some lives will be destroyed. Those 43,000 Canadians are casualties of this terrible budget. The number of 43,000 was the number quoted by the Parliamentary Budget Officer in his analysis of this budget on April 26. He confirmed that this budget would slow the economy down. He confirmed that when combined with prior cuts, there will be a total of 103,000 jobs lost.

An hon. member: From where?

Ms. Olivia Chow: About a third of them are from the public sector, to answer the questions about where. The rest will be from the private sector.

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Where? Which country? What are you talking about?

Mr. Peter Julian: Let her speak. Let her speak.

Mr. Brian Masse: Why does the Minister of Finance want to heckle?

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Because she is making up numbers.

Ms. Olivia Chow: The PBO's number points to the fact that this budget will create—

Mr. Brian Masse: Why does the Minister of Finance want to heckle?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order—

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Because she is making up numbers. That is why your party is a joke.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, order. Order. I can be patient with hon. members as well. We only have about a minute and a half left. The hon. member for Trinity—Spadina has the floor. Again I would ask members who wish to carry on conversations to take it outside.

The hon. member for Trinity—Spadina.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, we are talking about the lives of more than 100,000 workers. This budget actually plans for unemployment to rise. It does nothing to train Canadians. It does little to create jobs. It is a job-cutting budget. It is a job-reduction budget. It is a job-loss budget. Who said more than 100,000 workers? Again, it was the Parliamentary Budget Officer on April 26.

If the Minister of Finance chooses not to listen, it is the same kind of behaviour as saying, "The F-35 is only \$15 billion. Actually, it is \$25 billion." It is that same kind of math. This budget would lose 100,000 jobs. That is the problem with this budget.

• (2400)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. The hon. member for Trinity—Spadina will have six minutes remaining for her speech and five minutes for questions and comments when the House next resumes debate on the question.

*Adjournment Proceedings***ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS**

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

[English]

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it being 12 o'clock at night, this is the very late show. This is a question I raised on March 12 this year regarding the adequacy of search and rescue services in Canada. The question at the end was this. When will the Conservatives finally make search and rescue a real priority in this country?

It is after 12 o'clock at night, but there are ships at sea on the west coast of Canada, on the Great Lakes, in the St. Lawrence River and the Gulf of St. Lawrence. There are ships at sea off the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador. There are fishermen fishing as we speak off the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador. There are approximately 600 workers working on oil platforms and drilling rigs off the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador as we speak. Not only at this hour of the night but 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, there is a need for search and rescue services in Canada.

What we have seen from the government in recent times, including in this budget, are changes to Coast Guard search and rescue services, for example, in my home city of St. John's, Newfoundland, in Quebec City and in Vancouver harbour. We have seen the cancellation of a search and rescue coordinating centre in St. John's and one in Quebec City, and we have seen direct front-line search and rescue services in the port of Vancouver cancelled by the government. What kind of priority is search and rescue receiving?

We had a motion before the House. It has not been voted on yet, but the motion for the House to vote on tomorrow, at least in theory, is to bring Canada's search and rescue response time standard up to international standards. The method chosen was a 30-minute response standard from tasking to getting airborne. It is known as "wheels up". Every indication is that the Conservatives will vote against that. In their speeches they said they would vote against it, but nowhere in their speeches was there any rationale as to why we could not have the same standard of 30 minutes wheels up for helicopters and fixed-wing search and rescue as the United States or Australia do, not even the 15-minute one that Norway, Ireland and England have for the majority of the day.

The only response we received from members opposite was that Canada is different, is unique, and we should have our own standard, our standard being 30 minutes from 8:00 to 4:00 on weekdays and two hours thereafter, and that is at the time when 83% of the taskings occur, outside this window of 30 minutes. However, there was no explanation given as to why they could not support that.

We have an inadequacy of helicopters for the Trenton area. They were supposedly temporarily put there in 2005. They are still there. We have an inability to work in the Arctic and gain access to the Arctic fast. We have a fixed-wing SAR program, which is based on developing airplanes to meet the status quo with no improvement in service expected, and that has been criticized by the government.

Therefore, we do have an inadequacy of priority. The question is this. When will that be changed? Is the government serious at all about search and rescue in Canada?

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member opposite for this important question and for giving me the opportunity to set the record straight on search and rescue response times.

The Minister of National Defence has already been very clear on this issue. Canadians are fortunate to have one of the most effective search and rescue systems in the world. A vast network operates across the country to ensure that appropriate resources are available to respond to incidents that may arise anywhere within our 18 million square kilometre area of responsibility, an area of land and sea greater than the size of continental Europe.

Search and rescue crews react as quickly as possible. Each search and rescue operation is complex and the victim's survival depends on many factors. The Canadian Forces continually assess their search and rescue capabilities.

Search and rescue crews respond immediately after being tasked, becoming airborne much sooner than the mandated times required. For example, in 2010, 103 Squadron based in Gander averaged a 19.5 minute reaction time during the 30-minute posture in the daytime and 50.7 minutes during the 2-hour posture in the evening.

Although many incidents are reported to the joint rescue coordination centres, the reporting of an incident does not necessarily mean that search and rescue resources, including Canadian Forces assistance, will be required.

In 2008, the Canadian Forces conducted a study to determine the level of effort required to achieve a continuous 30-minute search and rescue readiness posture and determined the response posture was an optimal one.

The Department of national Defence and the Canadian Forces continue to work with our search and rescue partners at the federal, provincial and municipal levels to improve collective search and rescue efforts and promote education and training to prevent search and rescue incidents from occurring.

Importantly, the Canadian Forces sponsors the Civil Air Search and Rescue Association, which makes available more than 300 private aircraft with volunteer crews to assist in aerial search and homing of emergency radio beacons.

As well, virtually all Canadian Forces aircraft and crews may be called upon as appropriate to respond to search and rescue tasks.

The Canadian Forces will continue to evaluate its processes and capacity following search and rescue responses and incidents to ensure that our resources and posture are best suited to meet the needs of Canadians across this great country.

● (2405)

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, the fact is that the government has cut in half the number of rescue coordinators available in the area of responsibility for the joint rescue coordinating centre in Halifax from six to three, plus it has eliminated the three person on duty search and rescue crew in Kitsilano Beach. In fact, the department's policy has been criticized for a lack of policy, being no standard of service by which performance is getting measured. As quickly as possible is not a standard of service.

The problem is that the actual performance is based on the availability of assets, not on a standard that is determined to be met. To say blandly that we have a most effective service is to ignore the fact that we lag far behind international standards and we have not given it the priority that it requires.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Actually, Mr. Speaker, the fact is that the NDP has voted against each and every one of our budgets to increase the capacity of our Canadian Forces and the search and rescue crews.

The primary mandate of the Canadian Forces is to conduct aeronautical and maritime search and rescue. Provinces and territories have the primary responsibility for ground search and rescue.

Adjournment Proceedings

The Canadian Forces support the provinces and territories in the ground search and rescue efforts where and when able, when balancing assets to ensure that the Canadian Forces primary search and rescue mandate, maritime and aeronautical search and rescue is not compromised.

The current search and rescue fleet of Buffalo and legacy Hercules aircraft are approaching the end of their service life and our government recognizes that quick and efficient search and rescue service is critical to many Canadians.

We are moving forward with responsible management of the procurement of a new fleet of fixed-wing search and rescue aircraft through close consultation with industry. This process will result in the best outcomes for search and rescue and maximize benefits for Canadians. I hope this time around the NDP might support that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for St. Paul's is not present to raise the matter for which adjournment notice had been given. Accordingly the notice is deemed withdrawn.

The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until later this day at 2 p.m., pursuant to an order made on Monday, June 11 and Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 12:10 a.m.)

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