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Monday, March 15, 2010

—
Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, March 15, 2010

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1105)

[*Translation*]

INCOME TAX ACT

Hon. Albina Guarnieri (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.) moved that Bill C-470, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (revocation of registration), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Deputy Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the point of order raised by the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, concerning the requirement for a ways and means motion for Bill C-470, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (revocation of registration), standing in the name of the hon. member for Mississauga East—Cooksville.

[*English*]

I would like to thank the hon. parliamentary secretary for having raised this matter, as well as the hon. member for Mississauga East—Cooksville, the hon. member for Mississauga South, the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, the hon. member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, the hon. member for Eglinton—Lawrence, and the hon. member for Brampton West for their comments.

The parliamentary secretary pointed out in his remarks that the purpose of Bill C-470 is to allow for the revocation of the registration of a charitable organization, public foundation or private foundation, if it provides annual compensation in excess of \$250,000 to any of its executives or employees. On this point, he and the member for Mississauga East—Cooksville agreed.

Beyond that, however, the parliamentary secretary contended that such a revocation would extend the incidence of a tax to organizations which are not currently subject to it. Specifically, he noted that such organizations, on losing their registration, would be subject to the revocation tax imposed by subsection 188(1.1) of the Income Tax Act, since the revocation tax is a tax imposed on a

charitable organization which loses its official registration under the act.

[*Translation*]

He further characterized the effect of the bill as follows in the House of Commons Debates of December 1, 2009, at pages 7410 and 7411:

Upon deregistration of an entity in the circumstances proposed by Bill C-470, that entity loses its tax exempt status as a registered charity and, assuming it remains a charity, it will not be able to benefit from the other exemptions from tax provided for in subsection 149.1.

In other words, Bill C-470 would result in an extension of the incidence of a tax by including entities that are not already paying the revocation tax, or potentially, a tax on their income.

[*English*]

Finally, the parliamentary secretary noted that the issue of ways and means is one which the Chair takes very seriously. He referred to a November 28, 2007, Speaker's ruling regarding the case of Bill C-418, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (deductibility of remuneration), introduced in the second session of the 39th Parliament. That bill had the effect of removing an existing deduction, and hence of increasing the amount of tax payable by certain corporations. It was clear that the bill, in removing a tax exemption, effectively increased the tax payable and therefore required that it be preceded by a notice of ways and means.

In her submission, the member for Mississauga East—Cooksville, in *Debates* of December 1, 2009, page 7,458, contended that the purpose of Bill C-470 is simply to add another reason that would allow the minister to revoke the registration of a charitable organization.

[*Translation*]

Bills involving provisions of the Income Tax Act can be complex and confusing. However, after careful examination of Bill C-470, as well as the authorities cited and the provisions of the Income Tax Act referred to by the parliamentary secretary, I have found the following reference from *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, 2nd edition, page 900, particularly relevant. It states:

The House must first adopt a ways and means motion before a bill which imposes a tax or other charge on the taxpayer can be introduced. Charges on the people, in this context, refer to new taxes, the continuation of an expiring tax, an increase in the rate of an existing tax, or an extension of a tax to a new class of taxpayers.

[*English*]

It seems clear to the Chair that Bill C-470 does not propose a new tax, nor does it seek the continuation of an expiring tax, nor does it attempt to increase the rate of an existing tax.

Private Members' Business

The question which remains to be asked is the following: Does the bill extend a tax to a new class of taxpayer?

A close examination of the provisions of Bill C-470 indicates that the bill targets all registered charitable organizations, public foundations and private foundations, and seeks to introduce consequences for those within that class which pay to a single executive or employee annual compensation that exceeds \$250,000.

I have difficulty in regarding organizations finding themselves in that situation as constituting unto themselves a "class of taxpayer".

In the Chair's view, class of taxpayer refers in this case to registered charitable organizations, public foundations and private foundations, and Bill C-470 does not seek to alter that class.

It seems to me that the bill instead seeks to provide a new criterion that would allow the minister to determine into which existing class of taxpayer an organization falls. The existing tax regimes and the existing tax rates are not affected.

Accordingly, I rule that Bill C-470 does not extend the incidence of a tax to a new class of taxpayer and therefore need not be preceded by a ways and means motion.

[Translation]

I thank the House for its attention.

[English]

Hon. Albina Guarnieri: Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking the Speaker for his charitable ruling. I would also like to thank the member for Newton—North Delta for seconding Bill C-470, an act to bring more transparency and charity to our nation's charities.

Every year, Canadians dig deep into their pockets to contribute billions of dollars to some 85,000 registered charities. That is one charity for every 300 Canadians. Most of the donors are far from millionaire philanthropists. They choose to make a financial sacrifice for what they hope is a worthy cause. They choose to save less for their retirement, their own children's education or some other personal investment or expenditure because they believe their dollars will be put to a higher purpose: helping sick children, aiding the poor and curing disease.

It is the goodwill and trust of these donors that must be a priority for this Parliament. However, the donors are not alone in putting their trust in charities. In the most recent year, the taxpayers of Canada contributed almost \$3 billion in federal tax credits, so every Canadian has an interest in how this money is spent.

Last year, the *Toronto Star* shocked donors and taxpayers with the revelation that the head of one of Canada's largest charities, the SickKids Foundation, took home \$2.7 million in salary and severance in a single year. Money intended for sick children was instead building a private fortune because of the lack of legislation. However, he is not alone in making charity pay. Others of the same charity reported making \$430,000 and \$290,000. In fact, one out of every dozen staff members was making over \$160,000 U.S. to raise funds by asking others to sacrifice.

I refer to U.S. dollars because the only reason this information is public is because the United States is years ahead in transparency

and this charity was registered in the United States as well as in Canada. Canadian laws keep donors in the dark about where their money is going. We know that 2,147 individuals earn more than \$120,000 a year at charities. We do not know how much more. We can suspect that it might be a lot. We can suspect that because the average salary at charities is \$71,000 compared to only \$51,000 in private business.

It might be that people working in call centres are making \$70,000 a year. However, it is more likely that they are making near-minimum wage while executives are earning many hundreds of thousands and driving up the average. Why should we not know? Why should donors not know? Why should taxpayers not know?

Six years ago, the United States recognized that it too had a significant problem with salaries at charities. At that time, the internal revenue service announced a new enforcement effort to identify and halt abuses by tax-exempt organizations that pay excessive compensation and benefits to their officers and other insiders. At the time, the IRS said:

We are concerned that some charities and private foundations are abusing their tax-exempt status by paying exorbitant compensation to their officers and others.

That was 2004. Where are we in Canada? The Library of Parliament has to scrape together bits and pieces to get any picture at all as to how executives at charities are spending money and, particularly, how much they take home for themselves.

• (1110)

I will read to the House some of what little we know. Some of our charities spend money on dining club memberships, golf memberships, fitness memberships, business-class travel, so-called flexible expense account provisions and even scholarship programs for their own kids. It is reported that of those who receive benefits, there is an average of \$6,000 in retirement benefits, \$4,000 in fringe benefits, \$4,000 in auto benefits and another \$4,000 in health benefits.

That is what we know from only one charity in one thousand responding to a survey. It is also far beyond what most donors could even hope for themselves.

The Province of Ontario requires charities that receive direct money from the province to disclose salaries above \$100,000. Even in this small category, the top salary was more than half a million dollars.

Private Members' Business

We know that Canadians and taxpayers are contributing billions every year. We hope that most of it is spent with frugality and purpose. We know that some of it is spent on luxury rather than on charity.

I believe that the Minister of National Revenue has the moral imperative to ensure that donors know exactly how their dollars are spent. Bill C-470 is a basic first step.

Years behind the United States, Bill C-470 would not deal with many of the practices that have grabbed attention in recent years. From fundraising organizations that get a \$180 commission for signing up a donor, regardless of the amount contributed, or to other high-class fundraising techniques that cost more than 30¢ of every \$1, all that is left up to the minister to explore.

Bill C-470 would require charities to disclose the salaries of its five highest paid employees. In addition, a charity could be deregistered by the Minister of National Revenue if it pays any employee more than \$250,000 in a single year. The threshold of \$250,000 is more than a minister or a deputy minister earns to run a federal department. More important, it is about five times what the average donor earns.

At present, the revocation of a charity that violates the requirements of the Income Tax Act is at the discretion of the minister. Bill C-470 would not reduce that ministerial discretion. It would simply add to the existing grounds available to the minister.

An effective date of 2011 is included in the legislation so that charities would have time to adjust.

Bill C-470 would give the minister a much needed additional tool in the interests of the millions of Canadians who donate billions of dollars to charities every year.

Bill C-470 would also give charities a powerful incentive to maintain the trust of their donors while giving the minister the responsibility, the capacity and the discretion to respond to breaches of that trust.

I will respond to some of the usual resistance we can expect from those who do not wish to disclose and others who may want to maintain the luxury to which they have become accustomed.

First, on disclosure. Governments across Canada are forcing disclosure of top salaries of all those who rely on the taxpayer for their income. It does not matter whether one is the chief executive of a crown corporation or a transit worker with a lot of overtime, the person could find his or her name and income published. The principle is clear. If people take home taxpayer money, they cannot hide how much. As Canadian charities distribute almost \$3 billion a year in tax credits, taxpayers have every right to know whether the salaries they are subsidizing are excessive.

●(1115)

Even more important, however, is the individual sacrifice of the donor. Publicly-traded corporations need to disclose their top salaries to the public. Why should donors not be told how much the top five employees at their chosen charity make? What is the excuse for that secrecy?

Perhaps a donor may decide that his or her money is better spent on charities that take less home for themselves. Charities that are really in it for the cause would benefit at the expense of charities that operate like a business, marketing a cause like it was a COLA, and being richly rewarded for every dime that comes in.

We all know people who have visited the offices of some charities and looked at the marble and grandeur and said that they do not need our money. All Canadians should have the same right to compare and direct their generosity to where it is most frugally managed.

One can only expect a hail of complaints and cries of impending doom from charities that pay more than \$.25 million. They will say they need that money to attract top fundraising talent, people who know how to market a charitable cause.

I would submit that they will not because all 85,000 Canadian charities will be under the same rules competing for the same donor dollar. Therefore, charities would not need to keep upping the ante to keep the top people from going down the street because the charity down the street would have the same cap. The result would be that more money would end up where the donor actually intended it to go, not in the paycheques of executives but in the programs that the charity is there to serve.

Filings in the United States indicate that some very large Canadian charities are run by people earning very reasonable salaries. The CNIB, United Way and World Vision all reported top salaries far less than the \$250,000 limit proposed in Bill C-470. Clearly, it is not necessary to pay people exorbitant sums to attract talent. However, we have an obligation to assure Canadian donors that whenever they donate to charity their dollars are not siphoned into luxury lifestyles.

This bill also aims to replace doubt and cynicism about the management of charities with the confidence that the personal financial sacrifice of donors is managed by people who are paid well but no so well as to make a mockery of the concept of charity.

Bill C-470 is about charity, transparency and respect for the generosity and sacrifice of millions of Canadian donors.

●(1120)

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great intent to my colleague and I thank her for bringing this important debate before the House of Commons. I have a couple of questions and concerns about her speech.

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She mentioned that by setting this bar, the competition within Canada to attract these fundraising people would create an equal playing field. That is fine for an equal playing field within Canada but can she speak to whether it is an equal playing field within North America? Does her bill propose to harmonize closely to what is happening in the rest of the fundraising world, in the wealthy countries of the world. If she could enlighten the House in that regard, I would be very appreciative.

Hon. Albina Guarnieri: Mr. Speaker, I look forward to delving into those very issues more fully in the standing committee. In the moments we have today, perhaps I can share how our counterparts in the United States are reacting to the million dollar salaries.

Last week, Senator Chuck Grassley of Iowa, the top Republican on the finance committee, said, "The question is whether or not a very top-heavy organization might be siphoning off federal dollars that should be going to help kids...". He was reacting to a \$1 million payout package to the head of the Boys & Girls Clubs. He knew that was how much was paid because it is not a secret like it is in Canada.

The bill we are debating today would add and bring some transparency north of the border and give the minister the power to revoke any charity where \$250,000 is not a big enough paycheque. I would say that would put us in sync with our neighbours south of the border.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member on her bill, Bill C-470. She has described it as disclosure requirements for the five highest employees with a threshold of \$250,000. She mentioned that the Province of Ontario requires disclosure of salaries over \$100,000 for the top earners.

I would point out that in Manitoba for the last 15 or 20 years we have something called the public sector compensation act that lists all employees working for the government whose salaries exceed \$50,000.

Does the member have any comments on whether this could be added into the bill at committee so that we would have more than just the top five salaries, that we would have a list of everyone earning beyond a threshold of \$50,000, \$75,000 or \$100,000?

• (1125)

Hon. Albina Guarnieri: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member makes the point that I made in my speech. Many of the provinces are ahead of the federal government when it comes to disclosure of how charities are dealt with. I welcome any suggestions from the hon. member and I encourage him to bring his comments forward in committee so they can be more fully explored.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I have just one more question, Mr. Speaker, which I forgot to ask the first time I stood.

I think most Canadians, when they choose to make a donation to a charity, are busy people and do not have a lot of time. They are consumed with their daily lives but they also want to do something good. They have a few seconds to make a quick decision as to whether or not they want to choose to support a charity.

Could the member enlighten the House on any of the research she has done? Would it be helpful to have in legislation that during a fundraising ad, on a fundraising leaflet or on any advertising on television that top executive salaries should be displayed for the

purpose of the people who are about to make those donations? Should that be listed and does she think that we should go that way?

Hon. Albina Guarnieri: Mr. Speaker, the member made a suggestion and I welcome all suggestions, but what I wanted to bring forward in the debate today is that members have a clear choice. They can choose transparency or secrecy. They can choose frugality or support excess.

We have been thwarted on this road before in Parliament and now we are behind the rest of the world and we are playing catch-up.

I implore all members to support this legislation. It is straightforward and it is about transparency. It would give the minister a much needed tool to deal with charities.

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to address today's proposal by the member for Mississauga East—Cooksville, in the form of Bill C-470. I am sure it will stimulate some very interesting debate. It is very timely and I congratulate the member for getting her private member's bill on the floor of the House. That is an accomplishment for any member of this House. As I say, it will provide an interesting discussion of charitable organizations and the compensation given to those employed by such organizations, a discussion that is certainly worth having.

Before addressing the specifics of today's proposal, let us look at the overall role and contribution of charities and the charitable sector in Canada.

As all members of this chamber would agree, charities are a very important part of the fabric of any country. Of course, that holds true for Canada as well. The Canadian Centre for Philanthropy has labelled charities and the larger voluntary sector as the vital third pillar of Canada's civil society. Indeed, there are approximately 85,000 highly diverse registered charities in Canada. These charities operate in a wide variety of areas, such as local services, health, the churches, arts and culture, education and research. I am a member of the world's largest service organization, the Lions Clubs International, and have been involved in many fundraising events all across this country.

What is more, according to Imagine Canada:

The nonprofit and voluntary sector is a significant economic force in Canada. When the value of volunteer effort is included, this sector contributes 8.5% to Canada's GDP and is almost as large an employer as the country's entire manufacturing industry.

Some of the smallest entities are run entirely by volunteers, with very limited budgets. At the other end of the spectrum are hospitals and universities and colleges, which are large organizations, both in terms of their budgets and in the number of people they employ.

Private Members' Business

Accordingly, the revenue base of these charities is equally diverse. Some depend primarily on donations they receive from the public, some raise considerable income from fees, while others operate related businesses. Still others depend highly on revenues from the federal and provincial governments.

There are three types of registered charities in Canada: charitable organizations, public foundations, and private foundations. The designation a charity receives depends on its structure, its sources of funding and its mode of operation.

The first category, charitable organizations, includes the majority of registered charities here in Canada. A charitable organization primarily carries on its own activities. It has a board of directors that is made up mostly or entirely of individuals who operate at arm's length from one another. Finally, it generally receives its funding from a variety of donors.

The second type of registered charity is a public foundation. Local community foundations or hospital foundations are typically structured this way. A public foundation is similar to a charitable organization in that it also receives its funding from a variety of arm's-length donors, and also has a board of directors that is made up primarily of persons who are at arm's length from one another. However, a public foundation primarily exists to help finance one or more charitable organizations. It may deliver some of its own programs, but most of its activities generally involve helping charitable organizations to run their programs.

Finally, the third type of registered charity is a private foundation. A private foundation differs from a charitable organization and a public foundation in that its funding often comes from one person or a group of related persons. This is often the case with a family foundation. A private foundation may fund other charities or it may operate its own programs.

• (1130)

The diversity of the charitable sector in Canada is especially noticeable in the size of its operations. Over half of the registered charities in Canada have total annual revenues of less than \$100,000. At the other end of the spectrum, about 10% of charities have annual revenues that exceed \$1 million. Again, as mentioned earlier, while charities have numerous sources of revenues and volunteer support, the generous donations of individual Canadians continue to be one of the principal sources. According to the recent "Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating":

In 2007, Canadians donated a total of \$10 billion, an increase of 12% or \$1.1 billion since 2004, and volunteered 2.1 billion hours, a 4.2% increase. The average donation increased to \$437 from \$400 in 2004.

In some of the larger charities, such as hospitals, health care institutions, universities and colleges, executives are responsible for overseeing the spending of millions of dollars in resources. They manage hundreds of employees. These charities are often involved in carrying out highly complex work. Because of the responsibilities placed on the shoulders of the leaders of large charities, such charities offer compensation for their executives. Today's proposal surrounds that issue of compensation.

Let us briefly turn to the regulation of charities in Canada and provide the chamber an overview of the measures currently in place

to deal with just that issue and other issues related to today's proposal.

The Canada Revenue Agency, or CRA, has various tools to monitor and report on compensation at charities. At the federal level, the CRA administers a system to register charities under the Income Tax Act. As the regulator of charities, the CRA's responsibilities include processing applications for registration, offering technical advice on operating a charity, handling audit and compliance activities and providing general information to the public. Regulation of the charitable sector by CRA is based on both common law and the provisions of the Income Tax Act.

The common law requirement that charities devote their resources to charitable activities is central to how CRA provides guidance to the sector and enforces the rules. For instance, recent legislative and administrative reforms have given CRA additional compliance tools to use in the regulation of the charitable sector. An example of these include intermediate sanctions in the form of taxes or penalties for charities that do not comply with the requirements of the Income Tax Act. Prior to this, the only sanction available to the CRA was revocation of registered charity status.

At the same time, the concept of undue personal benefit has been clarified in the Income Tax Act. As a result, in the case of excessive executive compensation, the CRA has the authority under the Income Tax Act to conduct an investigation to determine whether the charity is indeed fulfilling its charitable purposes. It also has the authority to determine whether there is undue personal benefit and to impose a range of penalties up to and including the suspension of receiving privileges.

There is also more public information available today on the activities of registered charities. This helps increase accountability in the sector by providing prospective donors with information to determine for themselves whether they would like to donate to a particular charity. Under the Income Tax Act, all registered charities are required to complete a registered charity information return. This in turn is published on the CRA website and includes information about compensation.

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What is more, our Conservative government recently made a key change to further improve the accountability surrounding charities. Up until 2008, charities were required to report on the compensation of the five highest paid employees and indicate their salary range, with the last threshold being \$119,000 and over. We have changed that. Starting in 2009, charities were required to report the 10 highest compensated positions. The annual compensation categories were also expanded, with the last threshold being \$350,000 and over.

The introduction of this new reporting on employee compensation has served as a key tool to help increase transparency in terms of how charitable resources are being used. Increased transparency is providing the generous Canadians who are donating their hard-earned money with even more information to help guide their giving decisions. Such concrete measures are examples of useful initiatives that our government has taken to address the broader accountability concerns.

• (1135)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today we are talking about Bill C-470, which would amend the Income Tax Act in order to create certain conditions under which a charitable organization's registration could be revoked.

I will start by saying that the Bloc Québécois is in favour of this bill and will support it at second reading. We will then be able to study it further in committee and amend it as needed.

I would like to discuss the various amendments that Bill C-470 would make to the Income Tax Act. I will then outline the reasons behind the Bloc Québécois' support as well as some of the reservations we have about this bill.

Bill C-470 would cap salaries and other compensation given to directors of charitable organizations and would, by preventing excess, ensure the overall credibility of these types of organizations. The bill would cap charitable organization directors' salaries at \$250,000.

Bill C-470 would also allow the minister to provide the public with a list of the five highest-paid employees in each registered charitable organization. This would make charitable organizations more transparent and would allow the public to trust them more.

The bill does not cover everything; it is a little bill. I would like to speak about the Bloc's stance regarding the two amendments to the Income Tax Act proposed in this bill.

We feel that this bill's goal is to create balance. On one hand, the ceiling for salaries cannot be too low because that would turn off the most qualified candidates. On the other hand, organizations have to maintain a certain level of credibility so that the public will trust them. We must strike a balance.

It is also important that this credibility and trust be maintained. More and more people in Quebec are making donations to charitable organizations.

According to Imagine Canada, from 2004 to 2007, Quebecers increased the value of their donations by 24%, giving \$1.17 billion of the \$12 billion donated annually in Canada. That is the biggest

increase in the country. There has also been an increase in major donations, that is, donations over \$500,000.

If we want this trend to continue, the public must have confidence that these donations are being put to good use, especially in the current context, and that they are not being used to pay excessive salaries. Also, scrupulousness and performance must be a key part of the commitment made by the directors of such organizations.

However, the Bloc Québécois believes that a thorough review of the compensation paid to directors is necessary, so that charitable organizations can continue recruiting qualified staff despite the \$250,000 salary cap.

As Peter Broder, a lawyer with an Edmonton foundation, stated:

—those salaries need to be seen in a broader context. That means a hard look at both the nature of the responsibilities of these individuals, given the mandate and scope of their charity's work, and better consideration of the salary structure within the sector as a whole...if we are to have a sector where people want to make a career, and a sector that attracts innovative and dynamic individuals, the other inadequacies of the current model need to be addressed.

A salary cap must be established in order to avoid excessive salary inflation. In recent years, the salaries of directors of charities have increased significantly. Last year in Canada alone, they went up 17%, and between 1999 and 2008, they went up 44%. That is a significant increase.

Since there are no guidelines or safeguards, many concerns have been raised regarding excessive salary inflation in the very near future, which has happened in the United States, where the median salary was \$410,000 U.S. in 2007. That is a lot of money.

When this bill is being studied in committee, we must consider adding a provision that will allow us to ensure that salary increases remain reasonable. This will act as a control mechanism.

• (1140)

In Quebec, with the average salary of organization directors being \$125,000, a \$250,000 ceiling leaves a lot of room to manoeuvre when it comes to salary increases. We know that it is more outside Quebec where somewhat higher salaries are paid to directors of charitable organizations. That is not the case in Quebec.

For greater transparency, people would also like to know how the money they donate to charitable organizations is spent. Some organizations have shown some reluctance to disclose the salaries of their directors, thereby fuelling a culture of secrecy that could hurt the image of other organizations.

The salaries of the directors could be disclosed without naming the people who earn these exorbitant salaries. We also feel that such a measure would contribute to making charitable organizations more transparent.

I believe it is necessary to look at a person's salary without that person being named in order to comply with the Privacy Act. The purpose of this initiative is to increase public trust in charitable organizations and make people more inclined to make donations. If there were more transparency, the public would be more inclined to make donations since people would see that their money is well spent and that directors are not too greedy when it comes to their salaries.

Nonetheless, we have to make sure this bill does not encroach on the private lives of the directors, as I was saying earlier, so that their lives are not paraded through the media. When this private member's bill is studied, we have to be careful of any possible invasion of privacy. That is why we are proposing that the requirement to publish the names, job titles and salaries of the five highest-paid employees of each organization be studied in committee and possibly amended to remove the name of the person whose salary will be published.

The publication of the salaries, as set out in Bill C-470, will allow comparisons to be made between the salaries of the directors of agencies of similar size and will help determine whether any stand out as being unjustifiably high.

In my opinion, that should be the objective. We cannot compare apples and oranges, that is, salaries paid by a large corporation and those paid by a small one. We must be fairly vigilant when it comes to employees of charitable organizations that we deal with. A public list would make it easier to establish an acceptable average based on data for the sector as a whole.

The Bloc Québécois is in favour of this bill, which should be studied in committee. We have a few minor reservations. However, the member who introduced the bill is willing to examine the reservations about this bill expressed by other parties.

If this bill is adopted at second reading, committee members will have the opportunity to sit down, discuss it and get the facts about a number of charitable organizations. I believe that the member who introduced this bill got it right and has identified a specific problem. For example, when a charitable organization pays \$500,000 to an executive, and that amount represents a significant percentage of the funds collected by the organization, the salary has to be justified.

As I was saying, that may not be the case for our charitable organizations in Quebec. I know that, in Canada, there are other ways of doing things and charitable organizations are on a different scale, as they have patrons and receive significant donations.

We must also examine the qualifications of the incumbents of these positions. We believe that it is very important to maintain this balance and to reassure the public about how charitable organizations spend their donations.

•(1145)

We will be following this matter with a great deal of interest. We hope that the committee will make amendments to ensure that transparency is the objective of this bill.

[*English*]

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to be able to join the debate and

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express my support for Bill C-470, a bill that I feel is of utmost importance in ensuring that Canadians retain faith in giving money to charitable organizations across the country.

The bill will provide Canadians with the knowledge that the presidents, CEOs and other executives of the thousands of registered charities throughout Canada are limited in the amount of compensation they are receiving. Therefore Canadians will feel more confident donating to charities without having to worry that the money they are providing is going to line someone's already-deep pockets.

With the current state of the economy, perhaps more than ever we need charities that act in the best interests of Canadians. We need food banks to ensure that people who find themselves fallen on hard times can eat properly. We need health and wellness charities to guarantee that we can adequately support the individuals and families of those who find themselves sick or injured.

To ensure Canadians feel confident in giving what they can to charities, we need to give them the benefit of the doubt that the money they provide is actually going to support their chosen cause.

The bill will put a much-needed cap on the amount of compensation executives of charities can receive. The bill will limit executives working for charitable organizations to a yearly compensation of a more-than-reasonable \$250,000, with compensation in this instance to include all salaries, bonuses, wages, commissions, fees and honoraria.

It seems only logical to place a limit on the amount of money executives of charitable organizations receive, both as a benefit of providing greater oversight into the inner workings of charitable organizations, and as a method of restoring and maintaining donor confidence in an industry that has been tested by scandal over the past few years.

Here is an example of why this bill is needed. Some members may be familiar with one of the more high profile scandals over the past year with regard to executive bonuses. It involved former SickKids Foundation president, Michael O'Mahoney. O'Mahoney reportedly received a salary of \$600,000 for the fiscal year of 2008-09. In addition to this, O'Mahoney also received a bonus of \$2.1 million upon leaving his post, a bonus that the SickKids Foundation referred to as an incentive payment for the work he did for the charity.

Most of us called it a golden parachute, the kind of excess we are all too used to in the corporate world but would not expect in a charity. Is it not a little ironic that the president of one of Canada's most highly regarded philanthropic organizations pulled in a yearly income that would rival that of all but the most lucrative corporate salaries? Is it not also ironic that O'Mahoney pulled in a far greater salary than Mary Jo Haddad, president and CEO of the Hospital for Sick Children, for whom the SickKids Foundation does its primary fundraising?

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To reiterate, this is not a slight against the SickKids Foundation or the Hospital for Sick Children. SickKids is one of this country's most beloved and well respected charitable organizations. They have done exceptional work to ensure that the Hospital for Sick Children is adequately funded and is provided with the latest in cutting-edge treatments and preventive care. The problem I have with a situation such as this is that the money provided to Mr. O'Mahoney would have been taken out of the coffers of the SickKids Foundation, thus undercutting the amount of money the charity could provide to the Hospital for Sick Children and damaging the reputation of the charity, which in turn hurt their donations. And that is exactly what happened.

When this story broke in the news media, the SickKids Foundation received a backlash from donors in the form of a reduction in donations. People were not willing to pad someone's golden parachute. They wanted to help their community. The end result was a 10% decrease in donations and a 38-staff layoff.

Why would we allow an individual to walk away from a post with \$2.7 million while the charity he was supposed to support lost vital donations, income and staff? Many will argue that paying these kinds of salaries and bonuses is the best way to attract the brightest talent, but these are charitable organizations and should not be the types of places for upper-tier executives to act in a manner that is comparable to Bay Street executives.

● (1150)

If the main focus for these executives is to line their pockets, I am certain there are many corporations that would love to hire them, but I cannot in good conscience sit and watch them play with funds that are designed to help people. At least with this bill, the minister will be able to exercise discretion to de-list charities whose executives see fit to claim massive salaries under the guise of charitable work.

The Canada Revenue Agency's charities directorate has the ability to audit roughly 1,000 charities per year. With approximately 100,000 registered charitable organizations in this country, that amounts to currently being able to perform an audit of a charity once every 100 years. Not only that, if the charities directorate actually digs up some form of unscrupulous dealings within a charity, it has very limited means to warn the public about such matters, as current tax laws keep the CRA from warning the public.

We need more stringent oversight into how charitable organizations do business. Many charities have been using commission-based incentives for employees, which can lead to aggressive, often-misleading tactics designed to lure people into donating to charities they might not wish to support otherwise. The use of such tactics is certainly frowned upon in the charity community. But with such lax oversight in this industry, it is almost impossible to discover who is using these methods.

It is not enough to simply expect charitable organizations to perform their duties in an honourable manner. I would assume most charities do operate nobly, but to simply assume they are is not enough. Take the example of the Wish Kids Foundation controversy of 2005. The fraudulent charity, which in name closely resembles the renowned Make-A-Wish Foundation of Canada, took \$900,000 from donors who thought they were helping to give terminally ill children their dying wish.

As it turns out, not a single dime of the money raised by the Wish Kids Foundation went to sick kids. Instead, the executive director of the foundation, and I use the term loosely, took the money, purchased a new car, funded flying lessons for his son and put a down payment on a private jet. Think of the good \$900,000 could have done for terminally ill children to enhance their quality of life, if only for one great day.

We need to work to ensure Canadian charities are acting in the best interests of the Canadian people. I am positive most are, but the few who are acting unethically tarnish the reputation of those looking to do some good for our country and the world at large.

If nothing else, limiting the amount of money executives earn within charitable organizations will provide much-needed oversight into how these organizations are run. It will allow us to more accurately see whose hands are in the till. People are cynical enough these days. We need to feel that institutions that stand for the name of good and charitable work are in fact delivering on their promise.

To summarize, given that there are so many charities out there, it is important that regulations are in place. We need to ensure that those dollars actually go to the right locations. I think the problem here is that we are seeing CEOs who are earning more than the Prime Minister, and he is running the country. If this were in place, I think we might end up seeing an increase in donations.

I would like to leave it at that. I certainly hope every member in this Parliament will support this bill.

● (1155)

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in support of the bill proposed by my colleague, the member for Mississauga East—Cooksville. We on this side of the House believe the charitable sector is extremely important and it is important for government to act to strengthen it and to increase the credibility of the charitable sector in the minds of Canadian donors.

My colleague's bill would do just that. It is particularly timely because the government recently has acted to undermine the credibility of the charitable sector in the eyes of Canadians. Therefore, my colleague's bill is particularly important in order to redress the imbalance caused by the government's behaviour.

The first example I will mention is this. On January 14, the government promised to match the donations of Canadians for earthquake ravaged Haiti through the Haiti earthquake relief fund. However, two months and one day later, news has broken that the government has not sent a single matched dollar down to Haiti. This is causing a certain amount of anger in the Haitian community and among those who have contributed to Haiti on the understanding that the government would expeditiously match their contributions dollar for dollar. That hurts the government's credibility. The next time there is a disaster and the government promises to provide matching funds Canadians, who will no doubt respond with generosity, may not be as likely to believe the government will act swiftly and with purpose.

The second example where the government has undermined the charitable sector concerns the finance committee and prebudget proposals, which would have had the effect of enhancing the ability of Canadians to make charitable contributions. I believe the finance committee unanimously endorsed the following:

[*Translation*]

The federal government examine incentives that would have the effect of increasing the level of charitable giving by businesses and individuals. In particular, the government should consider:

an increase in the charitable tax credit rate to 39% for incremental annual increases in giving, provided that annual giving is more than \$200 and less than \$10,000;

the creation of a corporate structure for not-for-profit organizations that would allow the issuance of share capital and other securities;

and the elimination of the capital gains tax on donations of real estate and land to public charities.

● (1200)

[*English*]

Unfortunately, the finance minister did not share the finance committee's enthusiasm for strengthening Canada's charitable sector in one or more of the three ways that I have just described. However, as we know, there was no mention of any of these recommendations in budget 2010.

My first point is that while we on this side believe it is important to strengthen the charitable sector and to strengthen the credibility of that sector in the minds of donors, the government first, by not following through expeditiously on its matching donations to Haiti, and second, by totally ignoring the proposals to improve the ability of Canadians to give to the charitable sector, particularly at a time of recession when those donations are needed more than ever and when Canadians are less able than normally to afford to give them, the government declined to do. Therefore, it is more important than usual that a bill like that of my colleague arrives in order to strengthen the credibility of the charitable sector.

In the United States, charities file the salaries of their CEO and other top executives with the IRS and they are publicly accessible for anyone who is thinking of donating to that charity. Canadians are not so lucky.

Last fall, one CEO departed a very well known charity, with a \$2.7 million incentive payment in cash for leaving that charitable organization before his contract was finished. This was on top of his annual \$600,000 salary.

The old saying is "It takes money to make money", and there is no doubt some truth to that. Some of Canada's largest charities obviously require some very good talent at the top if they are to raise the funds they need to provide services.

Even more important than this, however, is that Canadian donors can feel confident that the money they have worked hard for and donated to charity goes almost entirely toward the charitable purposes it was intended for and not toward very large executive compensation packages. Think about the example I just gave.

It takes a lot of donations from a lot of Canadians to pay someone \$2.7 million. To make this tangible, let us assume that someone signed up to give \$10 a month through automatic withdrawals to a charity. That is \$120 a year. It would take more than 22,000

Private Members' Business

Canadians, at this level of donations, just to donate enough money to pay the departing CEO of that charity. I would argue this could be enough to damage the confidence some Canadians have in our charitable sector.

Worse, news only emerged about this case because the amounts were discovered in publicly available IRS documents, as this charity operates on both sides of the border. Media reports indicated that Canadians were so outraged by the revelation that the charity had to set up a special phone line to deal with all the incoming calls.

Canadians had a right to be outraged. Canadians listening at home should know that my good colleague, the member for Mississauga East—Cooksville, has heard them, which is why we are debating Bill C-470 today.

What exactly would Bill C-470 do to help deter this kind of behaviour and restore the confidence of donors in the charitable sector?

First, it would limit the pay of a charity's CEO to \$250,000 per year. It would similarly limit the pay of other executives who work at a charity. The penalty for non-compliance would be that the charity would face revocation of its charitable status, quite a stiff penalty that I am sure every charity would want to avoid.

On the face of it, \$250,000 seems to be a reasonable pay threshold for 2010. Should the bill go to committee and it is discovered that a very large charity cannot hope to find a CEO for that amount, I would be amendable to amending the bill slightly.

However, as my colleague has pointed out, there is also a further safeguard in that the minister is not obliged to force the cap of a \$250,000 salary, so one cannot exclude the possibility that in some few cases there may be very large charities that, in order to be effective, may have to exceed that limit. The discretion would be in the hands of the minister to allow that and/or there could be amendments to permit it under certain circumstances.

Recent media reports have revealed that some of our larger charities, such as Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada and the United Way of Canada, would not run afoul of the law without current executive pay incentives. Therefore, on the surface, \$250,000 seems to be a good starting point for Bill C-470.

● (1205)

Once again, I would like to congratulate my colleague, the hon. member for Mississauga East—Cooksville, on her excellent work on behalf of Canadians. I have certainly heard from my constituents about the \$2.7 million example I mentioned earlier. I am sure that many of the members of the House have as well.

I hope all members will listen to those Canadians and vote to send Bill C-470 to committee.

Business of Supply

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to have the opportunity to comment on today's proposal brought forward by the member for Mississauga East—Cooksville, regarding registered charities and accountability.

Before discussing the proposal, let me stress that our Conservative government, and I hope all parliamentarians, recognize the invaluable role that charities play in communities across Canada.

Since forming government in 2006, we have taken measures to support charities and to make it a bit easier to support the great work that they do. Indeed, in our very first budget, budget 2006, our government took a key step when we completely exempted donations of publicly listed securities to public charities from capital gains tax. This gives charities a powerful tool for raising funds necessary to meet the needs of Canadians.

In the next year, in budget 2007, we further enhanced support for charities by extending this complete exemption to donations of publicly listed securities to private foundations. As a result of these measures, the rate of tax assistance is about 45% on cash donations and can range as high as 60% on donations of publicly listed securities to charities.

Both of these measures have resulted in a significant increase in donations to charities. Let me read from an article in the Saskatoon *StarPhoenix* newspaper. It states:

—this is already making a difference in charitable giving in Canada...For a charity such as the Saskatoon Community Foundation, there is a new path ahead for long-term growth, thanks to the tax change...Trevor Forrest, the executive director of the Saskatoon Community Foundation, says in less than two years the foundation's endowment has grown by several hundred thousand dollars through donated stock.

We built on that record recently in budget 2010 when our Conservative government proposed significant reforms to what is known as the disbursement quota.

The disbursement quota was originally intended as a means to track registered charity resources when introduced nearly three decades ago. However, since 1976 the government, through Canada Revenue Agency, now has more powerful legislative and administrative tools to track the fundraising of charities and other practices.

As stated in the budget, the new tools are widely viewed as more effective and a more direct way of tracking charities than the disbursement quota. What is more, many have observed that the present overlap caused by the disbursement quota has led to excessive duplication and a costly red tape burden on charities, particularly for small and rural charities.

The Deputy Speaker: Unfortunately, I will have to stop the hon. member there as he was forewarned he would not get his full time slot in. However, the good news is he will have seven and a half minutes to conclude his remarks the next time the bill is before the House.

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

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1210)

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.) moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should show leadership in reducing government waste by rolling-back its own expenditures on massive amounts of partisan, taxpayer-paid government advertising, ministerial use of government aircraft, the hiring of external "consultants", and the size of the Cabinet, the Prime Minister's Office and the Privy Council Office, which together could represent a saving to taxpayers of more than a billion dollars; and to show its own leadership in this regard, the House directs its Board of Internal Economy to take all necessary steps to end immediately the wasteful practice of Members sending mass mailings, known as "ten-percenters", into ridings other than their own, which could represent another saving to taxpayers of more than \$10 million.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am most pleased to move this motion. I will be splitting my time with the seconder of the motion, the member for Winnipeg South Centre.

I am most pleased to move this motion as it gives both the government and the House direction in a realistic way in a number of areas where substantial savings could be made. The first part of the motion deals with government waste and rolling back a lot of government expenditures that are paid for by taxpayers, everything from advertising and the size of the cabinet to the size of the Privy Council Office. The second part of the motion deals with what we call ten percenters. I will get to that in a moment.

Adoption of this motion and these expenditure reductions would make for better government, less propaganda and maybe even a little more honesty in what goes out to Canadians from this place. Let me start with the part of the motion that deals with reduced government waste by rolling back massive amounts of taxpayer-paid partisan government advertising.

I know I am not allowed to use props and I will not, but I have in my hand a full-page ad that was in Prince Edward Island's *Journal Pioneer* last Wednesday or Thursday, and Saturday's *The Guardian*. This ad has been in every paper across the country in the last few weeks.

Never in Canadian history, I believe, have we seen as much propaganda come from a government, no doubt straight out of the PMO, designed not so much to provide information as to leave the impression that the governing party is doing more than it really is but, worse, attempting to leave the impression that it is doing something it really is not.

All Canadians have seen the ad in the papers, on TV and on the Internet. I would love to go through the copy I have to point out the areas of error but I do not have time at the moment. It would be one thing if it were honest fact, but to a great extent this ad and others like it are a work of fiction, with some truths and a lot of half-truths thrown in. Taxpayers' money in the hundreds of millions of dollars has been used I believe to manipulate the public mind.

Let me mention a couple of points to show where this ad is misleading. The full-page ad talks about measures in the budget, such as lowering taxes. Nothing could be further from the truth. What about income trusts being taxed? What about payroll taxes going up an extraordinary amount to a point in 2011 where it is expected that that tax increase alone could cause the loss of 200,000 jobs? The ad leaves the impression that the government is lowering taxes.

My role is agriculture critic for the Liberal Party. The government is leaving the impression it is doing something when it comes to agriculture. Never have we seen such a record of failure. In the hog industry, there is the worst financial crisis ever in Canadian history. The beef industry is not far behind. There has been a \$9 billion increase in farm debt in the term of the Conservative government. Safety nets are paying out \$1 billion less and there is not one dime in the budget. It is mentioned in the ad to leave the impression that the government is doing something. I would love to go through them one by one, but time does not allow me to do that.

There is more waste with the huge increase in the size of the cabinet, as was mentioned in the motion. Everyone in the cabinet is a full cabinet minister with huge staffs, cars and drivers, research departments and heaven knows what else. One can only ask whether it is to have more people to push photo ops, publish propaganda, raise funds for the party or what? It is the first cabinet in our history in which all cabinet ministers have cars and all the paraphernalia. What a waste.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Is it any different from the way you were, Wayne? Is it different or what's your point?

Hon. Wayne Easter: I will say in the House that I believe it is designed that way so that they can get out there, do the photo ops—

• (1215)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I just want to assure all members that there will be a period for questions and comments. When the hon. member for Malpeque has finished his speech, those members interested in furthering other points can do so during the questions and comments period.

For now we will give the floor to the hon. member for Malpeque. I would like to hear his remarks.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, they react over there, but the truth hurts. They hate to hear the truth but the truth does hurt indeed.

Let us look at the PCO and the PMO. Wow, the expenditures there; that is where the big spending happens. That is a power centre controlled by the Prime Minister, which is interesting and sad at the same time. In that area spending is going up, a 21% increase, while

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everywhere else spending is frozen. Again, this is being used to propagandize the Canadian people.

Under the Conservatives, spending on transportation and communication has risen by \$820 million or 32% over its 2005-06 level. Spending on management consultants has gone up by \$355 million over the same period, an astounding 165% increase over the previous Liberal government. That is atrocious. That is an area where there can be spending control and it could make such a difference.

The second part of the motion deals with an area that this House could direct. I will read this part of the motion again:

...the House directs its Board of Internal Economy to take all necessary steps to end immediately the wasteful practice of Members sending mass mailings, known as "ten-percenters", into ridings other than their own, which could represent another saving to taxpayers of more than \$10 million.

I have here, Mr. Speaker, and I will keep it down so it is out of camera—

The Deputy Speaker: This is the second time the hon. member for Malpeque has held something up. If he is using something that is a legitimate tool to read off, that is one thing, but if he is holding things up to show the House, I would ask him to refrain from doing that, and to stick to his remarks.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I could fire these in the air. There is so many of them they would pollute this place with Conservative propaganda. Those are what come into my riding.

As far as I am concerned, it is just propaganda. I cannot say in how many instances when I have gone into a post office that about 50% of them have been thrown into the garbage can because constituents across Canada actually believe those ten percenters are nothing but a waste of money. It is not about providing information. It is about providing propaganda. The original intent was to provide information on government programs to constituents. Ten percenters have evolved into being little more than propaganda pieces for partisan purposes by all parties, but worst of all, the government party.

What comes into my riding is mostly misinformation, personal attacks on me and my leader. In some instances, it is nothing short of hate mail. Let me give an example. One that came in goes after my leader; I know I cannot name him in the House. It states that he has called himself (a) a samurai warrior, (b) a cosmopolitan or (c) horribly arrogant. It is full of lots of pictures.

This literature, this ten percenter, is designed to undermine an individual's credibility. It is certainly not designed to outline government policy. It attempts in subtle and not so subtle ways to demonize the leader of the official opposition or, in my own case, me. It undermines him as an individual. It personalizes the issue. It raises questions in people's minds on character. It raises suspicions. Is that good use of taxpayers' money?

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We all came here to debate issues. That is what we came here to do, instead now, it has become personalized and there are attacks on individuals. These ten percenters are part of the problem. They are a huge part of the problem. They are a waste of money. Millions of dollars are being wasted.

I would like to get into the one about me, the one the Conservatives sent about me which basically asks if I am here. It leaves the impression that I was not here for a vote, when actually I was here 100% to vote in the last Parliament.

The bottom line is that this kind of propaganda must stop. I encourage the House to vote against this propaganda, to stand up and stop these attacks.

• (1220)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I actually had to chuckle a few times during the member's speech because the hypocrisy was overwhelming. His motion refers to reducing government waste. I wonder whether he is able to tell this House and the Canadian people when he expects the \$150 million that was diverted to his friends in the Liberal Party will be returned to Canadian taxpayers.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, this is what we get into with the current government. Rather than accepting their responsibility as a government and dealing with the motion, the Conservatives go back to some of the misinformation that was provided when they were in opposition.

Let us deal with the real issues. Let us deal with these ten percenters going out to the ridings. Let us deal with the government waste.

The member must admit that this is the biggest full-size cabinet and there is waste there. He must admit that the Privy Council Office spending is going up. He must admit that the Conservatives have sent out something like 10 million pieces of literature, called ten percenters, that is nothing more than propaganda, hate mail and misinformation and that it has to stop.

I am asking the member to deal with the real issue and to help us stop this stuff from going out to Canadians and angering Canadians about the political process.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member has given some detail of the kinds of waste and massive propaganda that we have seen from the Conservative government.

I did want to make a comment about the second part of the motion having to do with what is called the ten percenters. This has been a very hot topic of debate. We often get emails from people saying that they do not like these kinds of mailings. We also get other emails and feedback from the public saying that these ten percenters or other mailings from their members can be very important.

I want to question the member on the way the motion is worded. As I understand it, the way it is put forward, it would basically eliminate all mailings from members other than in their own ridings. I would like him to clarify this point.

For example, at least in our party when one is a critic of a particular issue, perhaps agriculture or housing or foreign affairs, one

does mailings legitimately across the country. Is the member suggesting that those mailings be eliminated as part of this motion?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, this motion just deals with the ten percenter issue. There is other fora to get information out, such as the media.

The motion is talking about immediately ending sending mass mailings into ridings other than a member's own riding. A member is the representative of the people in his or her riding and the member should be able to inform them on government policy and provide feedback to those constituents. Leaders' offices in all parties have other means of getting information out. What we have been seeing is the practice where MPs, controlled to a great extent by their centres, are putting out information from the caucus that is often strictly for partisan purposes and is often misinformation. We all do it; I put out about four a month. However, I believe it has to stop.

• (1225)

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a quick question for the member about something he alluded to a second ago with respect to all ten percenters. I have one term in my head and that is "body bags". It was on one particularly disturbing ten percenter. I wonder if he is prepared to comment on that, as much as he has tried to impugn the information that other parties in this House have put out.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, if I were allowed to use as props the dozens that have come into my riding, I could show some pictures that are as bad as the body bags, such as farmers in handcuffs, their hands behind their backs. The pictures send a message. You have made my point, sir, in that that ten percenter should not have gone out. That is not a good use of taxpayers' money. It has to stop.

The Deputy Speaker: Before resuming debate, I would remind the member for Malpeque to address his comments through the Chair and not directly to his colleagues.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to following up on my colleague's comments and I am pleased to speak to this opposition day motion.

With a record \$56 billion deficit on the books, the Conservative government has indeed begun to preach restraint. We heard on February 17 the President of the Treasury Board set the stage for cuts, stating, "Just as Canadians have made significant sacrifices to maintain their own finances they expect their government to do the same".

On March 4 the Conservatives released their budget in which they announced that starting in 2011 the operating budgets of all departments would be frozen, except for National Defence, where spending growth will be slowed down. No indication was given as to how the freeze would affect programs and services that Canadians rely on. I want to note that there was no exemption made in this case for INAC, which has always been done in previous instances, and as we know, the demographics of the aboriginal population is increasing by leaps and bounds. We need to see a plan on how cuts would be made.

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As my colleague has said, there are several areas of government spending that have increased dramatically under this government that would be more appropriate for cuts than the civil service and the valuable programs it delivers. We have heard that under the Conservatives, spending on transportation and communication increased by \$820 million, or 32% over the 2005-06 levels. Spending on management consultants is up by \$355 million over the same period, an astounding 165% increase.

Although the government has announced a freeze on departmental spending, the Prime Minister's own department, the Privy Council Office, is getting a \$13 million boost for spending on "support and advise to the PMO", a 22% increase in advance of the freeze; public opinion research, up by \$5 million; and spending on the economic action plan advertising has skyrocketed to over \$100 million, money that might well have been spent on the stimulus funding, and I would say, it would have been better served in this country, benefiting women who have not been benefited by the stimulus plan. The expansion of the communication support services in the Prime Minister's Office has cost \$1.7 million and, as we have heard earlier, excessive spending on ten percenters is well over \$10 million. This is where I, too, want to focus my comments.

To my mind there are two issues around the use of ten percenters, one of principle and one of cost. Let me speak first to the matter itself. The use of ten percenters is one of those classic cases of what was once a good idea at one time gone totally awry. Intended originally for the members of Parliament to communicate with their constituents, the process has been corrupted and, I would say, it must be ended.

Members opposite frequently use them to provide information that does not affect the workings of government, but they are a deliberate effort to discredit opposition members holding the seat or discredit the leadership. They are also cynically used to collect data from that member's riding to thereby target further information through other means.

The Liberal Party called for a restraint on ten percenters last fall, requesting that they be limited to a member's own riding. The practice of ten percenter regroupings should be abolished, the name of the leader of the sending member's party should be included in any ten percenter, and the leader should explicitly endorse the content of the mailout.

I have chosen to focus my comments on the ten percenters because their use has been the object of contention in my riding. Most weeks when I arrive home at the end of a week here in Parliament, there are often two of these government ten percenters waiting for me in my mail, and often four. Many of the government's mailings contain vicious and misleading attacks on their opponents. Among other things they have suggested that the Bloc supports pedophiles, Liberals are anti-Semitic or unpatriotic.

In 2008 and 2009 the Conservatives were responsible for about 62% of the printing costs incurred by MPs, even though their members represented only about 45% of Canadian households.

• (1230)

I have been a target of the Conservative smear machine. As a Jewish MP who represents a large Jewish population, the

Conservative Party outrageously attempted to label me as anti-Semitic. I am portrayed as soft on crime, supportive of pedophiles, and not speaking up for the various issues valued by members opposite. Pictures that they have put into my riding have been digitally distorted. There is no apology forthcoming.

Government members operate under the mantra of the Prime Minister's former campaign director, Tom Flanagan, who said, "It doesn't have to be true. It just has to be plausible".

I would say that this kind of Karl Rove, Republican-style politics is not a Canadian value. Canadians want truth. They do not want spin. They do not want distortions. They want facts and they literally do not want trash in their mail to fill up the recycling bin.

There is smear after smear in these mailings, whether they misrepresent my views and values or that of my leader. Constituents continually call my constituency office, deeply concerned about the flagrant abuse of taxpayers' money precipitated by the Conservative mailings.

Many constituents have replied to members opposite, both by phone and by mail, to protest these mailings, and an outcome of these protests is to subsequently receive a franked letter from the chair of the Conservative caucus, reinforcing the negative message in the ten percenter and justifying it as necessary. As to the costs, why should the taxpayers be called upon, through printing or postage costs for parties, to take their partisan messages to constituencies that they do not represent?

I am told that some of the worst practices come from my home province of Manitoba. The member for Provencher, a former Treasury Board member, spent \$85,940 in printing costs in the last fiscal year, and the other cabinet minister from Manitoba, the member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, spent \$72,934 in printing costs in the last fiscal year. Many of these mailings, I should say, come into my own riding, and this does not even touch the postage costs.

I know that the minister from Charleswood has received many calls from residents in my riding asking, ironically, if he is suddenly representing the riding. In Manitoba, the Conservative members spend on printing, and not postage, over \$450,000, approaching half a million dollars, to get this message out in Manitoba and across the country.

The Conservatives have cut programs such as ecoEnergy for renewable power, funding for the Canadian Council on Learning, overseas development assistance and the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. Surely, creating clean energy jobs, supporting high quality education, showing leadership around the world and supporting shelters for aboriginal women have a higher spending priority than ten percenters, partisan advertisements and management consultants.

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The Liberal Party will protect the vital public services that Canadians depend upon. We do not believe that the Conservative record-setting deficit should be reduced on the backs of public servants or those more vulnerable Canadians. The government should lead by example, cut its own partisan, wasteful spending before it takes aim at important services for Canadians and the people who provide them.

• (1235)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's comments, but it occurs to me that there are two different issues.

There is the waste of money by the Government of Canada on advertising its programs, with its logo all over them, when those millions of dollars could actually be spent on real programs, including energy retrofitting, providing affordable housing and child care. I am 100% in favour of stopping the wastage in the spending on partisan advertising, but in the matter of the ten percenters, surely the member recognizes that it is possible to actually use that budget in a positive way, which I have endeavoured to do since I was elected.

Surely the member agrees that, at least in the case of the leaders of the parties, particularly the opposition, when they want to reach out to a much broader public than those in their constituencies on major policy issues, including the budget, it should be possible for the leaders to be using ten percenters to communicate to the broader public.

Hon. Anita Neville: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member's comments on the flagrant abuse of advertising. However, I do take exception with her view that leaders should use the ten percenters. There are many other avenues for leaders to make information available, whether it is advertising, franking or public processes. I do not believe they should be using it and sending it in to ridings other than their own for the information of constituents.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the comments of my colleague from Winnipeg.

If anybody needs any more proof of the waste of this practice, they should walk into the post offices of Boylston and Louisburg in my riding. If they look in the corner, they will see a three-inch pile of ten percenters shipped from one of the government members into that riding. They are taken out of the mailbox in a rural area and just thrown.

I am sure that is what has taken place in many households across this country. So that the people at home know, it is not a drop in the bucket. It is \$20 million a year that could be diverted to other worthwhile programs. As far as Canadians' perception of elected officials is concerned, this contributes to that race to the basement. If we are looking at the personal, vicious attacks on one another, we see what is going on through these ten percenters.

Points of privilege have arisen from this practice one after another in the House. The member has identified other members of Parliament who have been attacked by these ten percenters. Could she give us some examples of herself? I understand that the government flooded her riding with them as well.

Hon. Anita Neville: Mr. Speaker, indeed, many of my colleagues have been the targets of these ten percenters. As I speak, I am looking at my colleague from Mount Royal, whose case is well known in the House as a target of ten percenters.

However, I also want to pick up on my colleague's remarks about the postal workers. I have heard, as have many of my colleagues, the views of postal workers directly about these ten percenters and the impact they have on their work. Granted, it is their job. I do not know whether we have even calculated into the costs the additional costs of the House of Commons drivers and trucks that cart this stuff out for distribution. I have heard about this time and time again from the drivers in terms of the overtime that they accrue.

Nobody likes it. It is well recognized as a flagrant abuse. Well, somebody over there likes it, that speaks more to those members than it does to the issue here. As I said, it is a flagrant abuse of the privileges of members of the House and it should be stopped.

• (1240)

Hon. Stockwell Day (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we always appreciate suggestions on how to effectively control spending, ensure that taxpayer dollars are being utilized to their fullest standard of efficiency and look at how we can especially maintain a situation where the government stays out of deficit and moves toward a balanced budget.

The items mentioned by my friend who introduced the motion are certainly areas among a number of things that should be considered in terms of looking at restraint and at how we can maximize the spending of taxpayer dollars. In fairness, there seems to be some focus or, as some would say, possibly an inordinate amount of focus, on one tiny area of budgetary restraint.

I want to say from the outset that if somebody has a suggestion that even saves \$1,000, that is worth pursuing because every dollar that comes into the coffers of government is there as a result of a taxpayer somewhere working hard and having part of her or his paycheque taken away to support the government. We all understand that taxes are necessary but taxes can hit a level at which they become stifling and in which they service as a disincentive.

Last week I made an announcement about eliminating 245 government appointed positions, not public service positions but government appointed ones, and the savings were in the area of \$1.2 million. We had opposition members saying that it was just \$1.2 million. However, to me and to all of my constituents, \$1.2 million is a lot of money. These things add up over time. I am not in any way diminishing a particular initiative because its overall expenditure saving might be in the thousands or hundreds of thousands.

Business of Supply

I do not think most Canadians have a lot of focus on the so-called ten percenters. I think they like getting information that is clear and succinct as much as possible. However, I want to make something very clear right from the start. The so-called ten percenter program, which allows MPs to have the cost of a small brochure sent out either to their own riding or to other ridings around the country, is a common process in this country and has been going on for years. I know what it is like in my constituency to see a ten percenter that was not one that emanated from my office but in fact from another MP's office and one which was going after a program or certain policy of our party and going after it in a very vigorous way. I might not have liked or even agreed with the content of that particular ten percenter but it is a commonly accepted process and it emanates from all parties.

I realize I cannot wave items around but I have one here from a member from the Liberal Party showing a picture that looks like a cupboard. One little can of spam is in the cupboard and it reads, "They've spent the cupboard bare". Now is that a factual presentation of a budgetary item or is it something that is being used by the Liberal Party to cast doubts on a particular aspect of government spending? It does not say how that has happened. It just has the picture and the can. I do not want to be seen as talking about one particular brand of processed meat so I will not say the name, but there is a can there.

Does the Liberal member, who introduced, as part of this motion, that we should eliminate this practice of ten percenters, agree with his colleague sending out a picture of a cupboard with a little can of processed meat inside and saying that this represents the government's budget? If he does not have a problem with his own member doing that, then he cannot in all honesty raise issues about this side of the House doing it.

• (1245)

I believe we should always try to communicate honestly, fairly and transparently. That should always be a leading guidepost for us in our communications. We should use that part of the member's motion to guide us in being better communicators in terms of getting the truth, getting it straightforward, and getting it done in a transparent way and a way in which the element that we have introduced can be verified. Those are all things that our taxpayers would appreciate.

I have to believe that the broader picture of concern, and I have to take it at face value from my friends across the way, is about maintaining budgetary responsibility. I have not heard it articulated clearly but I hope they would agree that we should be moving toward a balanced budget. The essence of the budget tabled by the Minister of Finance is that we now have a road map to get toward a balanced situation. We are not projecting that as some kind of philosophical or ideological position. I will reflect on why we are actually doing that.

Broadly speaking, the budget itself contains three approaches to getting back to a balanced budget by about 2014-15. The broad approach covers three areas. The first area is that at the end of this year we will end what is commonly known as the government's stimulus package, a plan of introducing dollars into the economy,

even though we knew we would take on debt to do it and run into a deficit at the beginning of the global downturn.

We looked at the global downturn, as most other countries did, as an unprecedented downturn, a recession the nature of which we have not seen since 1929. We said that we would inject some stimulus into the economy for a short period of time but, as we said at the outset, it would be short-term because there needed to be a limit on how much debt a country should take on. We are in the second and final year of that stimulus package.

There are \$19 billion of stimulus spending that will go toward a variety of projects across the country for both infrastructure projects and projects of a nature that deal with programs for people. The \$19 billion in this budget will be gone at the end of this budget year. Most of us would agree that the budgetary deficit is at about \$53 billion right now but at the end of this year \$19 billion will come off that right away. That is the first element of the program. A very large chunk will be reduced.

The second area involved looking at our own spending as government. Classically, two approaches can be taken if we are trying to get rid of a deficit and move toward a balanced budget. We could follow the well-documented path chosen by the federal Liberals in the mid-1990s. One of the most significant things they did, and one of the biggest reductions in the deficit at that time, was slash the transfers to the provinces, especially in the areas of health and education. They do not even argue with the fact that those transfers were slashed significantly overnight.

I was involved in provincial government at the time and it was a horrendous shock to see overnight and virtually without warning, the health and education transfers to provinces slashed by upward of 30%. It was a huge impact on all provinces, many of which are still digging themselves out of the hole trying to recover that. In the subsequent years to the slashing of transfers, came the raising of taxes almost 70 different times in 70 different areas. That is one approach.

If we want to get rid of the deficit, we could cut the programs available to people and crank up taxes, which is an approach that is endorsed by an entire school of economic thought. It is largely Keynesian in its roots and it is a particular course of action that we do not endorse in terms of long-term action.

• (1250)

It is the same within our households where, from time to time, we will take on some debt for various reasons. However, for people trying to run their household finances or a small business, they can only continue to acquire debt for so long. Eventually that nasty little item called compound interest gets us.

I just said compound interest and there was a cry from the gallery. It was instinctive. Even a young child understands that compound interest and taking on debt in a non-stop fashion will eventually cause people to collapse. The same is true of governments.

Business of Supply

We have made a determination that we will stop that particular process, that long-term borrowing, and rein in our expenses of government. What we have said is that at the end of this budget year, 2010-11, we will freeze the operational portion of all budgets of all departments. That is an envelope of spending of about \$54 billion. We have said that this year, 2010-11, it will increase but that for the next two years after that we will put a freeze on it.

Government hiring and the increase in the public service over the last 10 years has been significant. We made a commitment to increase the size of our military and our public security, the RCMP, which we have done, and there are clerical positions that go with that. However, the public service has increased even beyond that for a lot of well-intended and good reasons.

We are simply saying that we need to put a lid on the growth and slow it down. The interesting part is that we will keep growing. Sometimes when we hear members opposite we think that this is the end of civilization as we know it, that all spending will cease and the bottom will drop out of everything the government does. In fact, we will keep growing but we will moderate that level of growth.

To set a positive example of that, we will be introducing legislation to freeze the salaries of members of Parliament, senators, ministers and the Prime Minister. Some people will say that freezing our salaries is just symbolic. Members should try telling people on the street that their salaries will be frozen and see how symbolic that is.

However, there is symbolism plus there is showing responsibility. We need to put certain things in check and show that we can do it, which is the second element of the plan. The first element is getting rid of the stimulus funding and the second is controlling our finances and not increasing the debt load.

Famously, when John Maynard Keynes, who advocated a process for most of his economic life of governments not worrying about increasing debt and deficit, especially in a time of downturn, was asked a question once, "Mr. Keynes, in the long run, isn't that eventually going to catch up to us if we just keep on piling up debt?", he famously replied, "In the long run, we'll all be dead".

That part is true. In the long run, we will all be dead. My grandkids and my kids, however, will not be dead. They will still be here long after I am gone and they should not need to carry, in an unnecessary way or an inappropriate way, the spending commitments that are tied to accumulating debt. We should be reining that in now.

Mr. Keynes did not have kids, which perhaps affected his thinking. I am not saying that at all in a pejorative sense, but maybe that was affecting his long-term thinking. However, we need to think long term in terms of the welfare of our country when we look at the area of just bringing on debt and letting it increase.

The third area that we are putting into play is overall service review, expenditure review and administration review of everything we do. As a matter of fact that has been going on for a few years already. Last year we looked at the spending of 20 different departments and asked them to look at their department and reprioritize. We asked them to take 5% of what they spend and show us what 5% would be the lowest priority. We told them that we

wanted to see spending move to a higher priority as we needed to begin to pick and choose because of the fiscal situation.

● (12:55)

That particular exercise yielded \$287 million. This year we will be doing that with a number of departments, boards and agencies. We expect to yield, and I am saying "expect" in that we hope to yield, at least \$1.3 billion out of the exercise this year. It may be a little more than that, or it may be a little less.

Nonetheless, year to year we expect that through this particular time of service review, we will see the cost of government continue to be moderated so that the debt and deficit will not continue to pile up.

Any program that government does, and certainly as a minister I have always put this question to administrations and I know my colleagues think the same way, we should always ask what works or does it work, whatever the program is.

I could stand up for quite a bit longer, and I am sure my colleagues would rejoice in that, and go on at great length about our government's good programs, but what really qualifies this is what other people outside of Canada are saying about the approach we have taken.

We could talk about the International Monetary Fund, the Economist Intelligence Unit, the OECD, and the Conference Board of Canada. All of their remarks indicate that this is the particular way to go. It has been remarked that Canada, among the G7 countries, was in the best position going into this recession and is in the best position coming out of it. That is the view of people who are fixed on government or public budgets around the world. They are pointing to Canada and the approach we are taking as showing leadership.

It is also interesting to note what other markets are doing. There was an article in one of last week's financial papers indicating that Russia as a country, and certainly it is having its own fiscal challenges, is planning to strengthen its own currency reserves. Guess which currency it is planning to buy more of? The Canadian dollar. It sees the strength there. There is strength in the dollar.

The largest bond fund manager in the world, whose fund is located in the United States, manages a fund of over \$1 trillion. I am not even going to try to paint what a \$1 trillion is because it starts to get over my head. However, that \$1 trillion fund is made up of institutional investors, pension funds, workers' funds and individuals who invest in this fund. The person who manages the fund announced that he is directing his large institutional investors and smaller individual investors to invest in Canadian bonds and the Canadian dollar because of the strength of the economy and the approach we are taking.

People know, whether they are sophisticated investment managers as with the person who controls this \$1 trillion fund or just workers whose funds are vested in a pension plan and know intuitively, that if debt goes too—

Mr. Jim Maloway: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I wonder if the Speaker would draw the member's attention to the actual motion for debate here and deal with the content of this motion.

Business of Supply

Hon. Stockwell Day: Mr. Speaker, I do not know if my friend just entered the assembly or if he just started reading, but we are talking about showing leadership on government spending. That is what the motion is all about.

I am sorry that my colleague who addressed this comes from a philosophical point of view that does not buy into this type of thing. His philosophical point of view is to raise taxes and not to worry about the crushing weight of debt.

I understand we have a difference of opinion on that, but he should not try to say we are not addressing the motion when in fact I am addressing it specifically here.

In closing, of course we want to look at all of these different ways of reducing government spending, but I would ask my hon. friend from Malpeque, and I am sure he could answer, even just by nodding his head or leaping to his feet to respond to the question, whether he basically agrees with our approach of reducing expenditures and reducing taxes. Or, is he more along the line of my hon. friend who just interjected and does not worry about debt and will let increased borrowing happen and will raise taxes?

We will have a lot of differences of opinion on smaller items, and that is good and we should have them. However, I would like know, broadly speaking, does the member endorse overall the approach we are taking, which has been endorsed by the International Monetary Fund, the OECD, the Conference Board of Canada, the Economist Intelligence Unit and people who manage funds worldwide? Broadly speaking, which approach does he favour?

I thank the Speaker for this opportunity to address this very worthwhile motion.

• (1300)

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the minister's comments, both in the chamber and outside. In fact, I listened to his entire remarks. It was probably the most interesting episode of revisionist history, certainly of economic history, I have heard in the House in my six short years here. I want to ask the minister a couple of pointed questions.

First, I would like to ask him to explain to the Canadian people why overall expenditures under the federal Conservative government increased by 19% in the government's first 36 months in office. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit, a source the minister has cited, that is the largest single increase in federal government spending by any government of any political persuasion in Canadian history, this at a time when the government inherited a \$13 billion surplus and drove this country to the verge of a deficit before the economic situation occurred.

Second, could the minister tell us exactly whether it has spent \$200 million or \$225 million so far on advertising the government's economic action plan?

Hon. Stockwell Day: Those are extensive questions, Mr. Speaker, and I am going to keep talking until you tell me that my time has run out because he has asked for some very broad discussion and I am happy to engage in that.

There were a number of areas in which we said at the beginning of our mandate that we were going to see some increased spending. We

looked at how the Department of National Defence had been ravaged through the Liberal years. Men and women were going to other countries in very significant and dangerous situations without equipment that could bolster what they were doing. They were literally embarrassed to be on a campaign in the field with the types of equipment they had, and when the numbers of our military, both regular and reserve, had dropped to precipitously low levels, we said we were going to increase funding significantly to the Department of National Defence, and we have done that.

As a matter of fact, in the years leading out to 2014, even though there is going to be a modification to the growth of defence spending, it is still going to grow. We are admitting that right up front. We do not apologize for that. That is a very significant part of the growth in expenditure that my hon. friend just raised.

We also looked at the public security situation across the country and listened carefully to provinces and municipalities, who were asking for the resources to build up, basically, the number of officers in uniform on the streets in our municipalities and towns across the country. We made a commitment to do that and we did. We make no apologies for that.

When we go to advertise government programs, it takes money to do that. For example, when the H1N1 situation was upon us and people were beginning to panic and wonder what we are doing with our vaccination program, it took money to advertise that type of program. That is one of many examples of the use of government advertising.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister spoke about the sectors where he was considering making cuts. I would like him to talk about the different solutions that the Bloc Québécois has suggested to the government.

Why does he not go after tax evasion by the banks, which represents \$2 billion? The government could bring in millions of dollars in taxes, which could be used to fight the deficit.

Why does he refuse to tax people who earn \$150,000 and \$250,000 and up in taxable income? That would be one way to bring in revenue and to distribute wealth more fairly.

Can he give us one good reason why his government systematically refuses these two proposals from the Bloc Québécois?

• (1305)

Hon. Stockwell Day: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her question.

The facts show that the government agrees with the Bloc on some policies. For example, the government provided money to the forestry industry, which is really struggling. The government provided this money to help forestry companies save jobs, particularly during this recession. The hon. member agrees with this approach.

The member and her colleagues always talk about the banks. They say that the government gives a lot of money to Canadian and provincial banks. But that is not the case. The government does not give a single cent to the banking system. Not to the caisses populaires in Quebec or to the Alberta Treasury Branches.

Business of Supply

[English]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am sure that the government would join Canadians in understanding the irony of a motion put forward by the Liberal Party that talks about government waste. The party that invented and perpetrated the sponsorship scandal on Canadians and who wrote the book on government waste, unfortunately, has had some pupils in the current government who have learned too well and too quickly about the notion of hypocrisy.

On the very day the finance minister stood in this House to ask Canadians to tighten their belts and bear down, he then jumped aboard a private charter flight for perhaps the country's most expensive double-double ever in going down to London, Ontario, when there were commercial flights available. Then the defense minister implored Canadians to spend nearly \$100,000 on another private charter to go the Paralympics, which he said was necessary, with no other way to do it until the New Democrats asked him not to do so and embarrassed him publicly. Then he found a commercial flight that was much cheaper for the taxpayer. We also found about out about \$1,000 door handles at Public Works that were being perpetrated on Canadians.

My question for the minister is this. When this happens and \$1,000 door handles and \$500 switches are billed to Canadians, my constituents want to know, does the government have any notion of pursuing in court the contractors who ripped off the taxpayers of this—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Hon. Stockwell Day: Mr. Speaker, first, we hear nothing from the NDP on whether it generally supports the approach we are taking of reducing our own expenses, eliminating the final portions of the stimulus package, and keeping taxes low. As a matter of fact, from the NDP we continue to hear a cry about the necessity of increasing taxes. That is a very different economical approach, one that history shows is tremendously damaging to workers and leads to lost jobs and increased unemployment. So it is possibly using these other items as distractions from that.

However, I will say that the Minister of Public Works, in responding to the report the member had raised, which concerned all of us, and having had some notice about that particular contract had already ordered an audit of it. When I heard about a doorbell costing \$1,000 to install, it rang my bell, and it certainly did for the members opposite.

By the way, when we looked at that particular example, we found there was a very long section of wall that was removed from a certain building and among the things that were done was that a doorbell line was stretched along it and put in. Now I am not making excuses for a particular item, but the member should check carefully. However, we are concerned about these types of expenses, and the Minister of Public Works has already ordered a full audit of that particular contract.

• (1310)

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the President of the Treasury Boards comments about wanting to control government spending.

I just want to comment briefly on the hypocrisy of the motion, which talks about cutting money going to the ten percenter program when all the parties in the opposition also want to continue to keep getting their voter subsidies they voted so strongly against a couple of years ago. So if it is all right to use voter money to fund the political operations of the parties, then why is not all right to use contrast pieces and uphold democracy so that all Canadians can see what we are doing in the House of Commons in contrasting the policies of our parties?

Hon. Stockwell Day: Mr. Speaker, that is an astute question from a hard-working member. I appreciate the manner in which he analyzes issues, especially those that can be related to the tax load on taxpayers becoming lighter. The question is very good. I would be interested in hearing the Liberals respond to that.

I will also close out this question time, as I see you are anxious to do so, Mr. Speaker, by repeating that we have not received an answer to the following question. Even though we have some overall differences between us, do the Liberals basically endorse our approach of keeping taxes low and reducing the deficit and going to a balanced budget? We have not heard them—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Resuming debate.

The hon. member for Beauharnois—Salaberry.

[Translation]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Québec.

This Conservative government's motto seems to be “Do as I say, not as I do.” The Conservatives are asking the middle class and the poorest members of our society to tighten their belts and cope with the ever-present effects of the recession. They themselves do not seem the least bit worried about wasting public money.

The Harper government continues in its arrogance towards—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member must refrain from using the name of a member. Please use the name of the party or the riding.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: The Conservative government continues in its arrogance towards those less fortunate.

For example, the budget maintained the very generous tax arrangements for banks and the oil industry, but it does nothing to help people. It is shameful that military spending will continue to rise and that there are no measures to put an end to tax breaks for oil companies or the use of tax havens. In addition, there is nothing to tap the wealthy who have an annual taxable income of more than \$150,000 or to put an end to excessive bonuses given to top managers.

Business of Supply

What is worse, while this government is trying to balance the budget by proposing flashy but ineffective measures, the media have discovered that the Department of Public Works and Government Services awarded a contract worth \$6 billion over 11 years to Profac for federal building maintenance.

Among the bills are one for installing a doorbell to the tune of \$1,000, another for purchasing two potted plants for nearly \$2,000 and one for installing lights for no less than \$5,000.

Wasn't it the Minister of Finance who made a show of acting like a good parent when he presented the budget? No family would accept that kind of spending by the government.

While the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister preach fiscal restraint, new revelations keep coming to light about this government's excessive spending.

After the government announced with great fanfare the abolition of positions that were already vacant, which represent a fraction of the money needed to attack the deficit, and after we learned that this government was prepared to pay thousands of dollars to replace lights and doorbells in federal buildings, now we learn that the budget for the Prime Minister's Office will increase by nearly 22% in 2010-11.

No doubt about it, instead of showing true leadership in reducing government waste by cutting its own spending, the Conservative government prefers to tell us to do as it says and not as it does.

As far as all the measures announced for cutting government spending are concerned, the Bloc Québécois believes that the Conservative government must target budgetary items that have a significant impact on the government's finances. A number of proposals were submitted to the Minister of Finance during the prebudget consultations.

With regard to ten percenters, the parliamentary bulletins that MPs can send out, we have to remember that federal elected members can send these pamphlets out quite regularly, and the House of Commons pays for them. This vehicle was implemented in order to allow hon. members to communicate their positions to their constituents.

Hon. members have the right to send up to 365 pamphlets a year, or one a day, to constituents in their riding or other ridings. Every mailing can be sent to a number of homes equalling 10% of the constituents in the member's riding, if the content in the pamphlet sent in each mailing is 50% different than the pamphlets sent out in other mailings.

The House of Commons covers the cost of printing these pamphlets and sending them to the constituents.

Members of a same party can also get together and send a group ten percenter once a month. The administrative rules of the House of Commons prohibit members from using their mailings to invite constituents to re-elect them, ask for funding or promote partisan or commercial activities.

It is up to the Board of Internal Economy of the House of Commons to change the rules.

Over the years, however, the pamphlets have increasingly been sent into ridings represented by a rival party, to undermine its credibility. So this is essentially a misuse of these householders.

Recently, the extent of the spending by Conservative members to send mail into other ridings has caught the attention of the media.

The total bill for members' mailings has more than doubled in four years, reaching \$10 million in 2009. The Conservative Party is responsible for nearly two thirds of the expenses billed to the House of Commons for mailings by members in that year.

But most importantly, government party members sent out mailings during 2008-09 that cost twice as much, on average, as mailings by the other parties' members.

Other figures show that the Conservative Party certainly went overboard in the use of its privilege of billing the House of Commons for its members' mailings.

- (1315)

Of the 58 members who had printing expenses of \$50,000 or more during the year, 54 are Conservatives. Eight Conservative members spent more than \$80,000. In 2004-05, members' printing expenses totalled \$4.8 million. They more than doubled in four years.

In theory, mailings billed to the House of Commons are used to inform constituents about topical issues. For the Conservative Party, however, these mailings often take the form of propaganda, to the extent that the content of the mailings has prompted numerous questions about the appropriateness of messages designed to denigrate opponents.

We need only consider the pamphlets depicting the Liberals as anti-Semites in the riding of Mount Royal in 2009. It was somewhat extreme to think that the member for Mount Royal was engaged in anti-Semitic politics when we know very well that he is actually someone who promotes Israel.

We also think of the NDP member who wants to abolish the firearms registry and who received a householder in his riding stating that he defended the firearms registry.

These two cases have been discussed in the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, of which I am a member. Frankly, they are striking examples that make the debate we are holding today a very useful one so that we can arrive at guidelines for this question.

Another ad paid for out of the House of Commons budget showed a little girl surrounded by slogans in irregular fonts. It looked like a Halloween ad. It suggested that the Bloc Québécois was against protecting children, unlike the Conservatives, who were portrayed as protectors of victims. That ad was regarded as rather hideous, and the people in my riding strongly condemned it. It did not produce any positive results for the government. In fact, I would say it had the opposite effect.

When the NDP member raised a question of privilege concerning the firearms registry and the flyer that was sent to all of his constituents, the deputy government House leader, after hearing the member's testimony, asked him what he was expecting in order to ensure that something like this never happens again. The member replied:

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So I need to be assured for my own satisfaction that whoever in party central did the design, did the work...that they are assured this will never happen again. If I get that assurance, I'll be satisfied.

We hope that with today's debate, they will put their money where their mouth is.

To sum up, the Bloc Québécois will support this motion. We also support the motion that prohibits members from sending any mailings to voters in other ridings, with the exception that whips may keep the privilege to send ten percenters into ridings that are not represented by their party, with a monthly quota.

That is the Bloc Québécois' position on the issue of parliamentary householders. We believe that members should be able to send them only to their own constituents, not to other voters. Furthermore, we want party whips to keep the privilege to send group ten percenters.

I will be pleased to respond to questions from my colleagues.

• (1320)

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in her presentation, the member for Winnipeg South Centre talked about how she arrived home and found two to four ten percenters in her mailbox. I have had the same experience. I have been getting these ten percenters since I was elected.

The fact is the member for Winnipeg South Centre is still an elected member of the House. She has been complaining about these ten percenters over the last two elections and she keeps winning. Clearly, whatever the Conservatives are doing is not working too well.

I do not think that banning the ten percenters sent to other member's ridings outright is the answer. The Liberals should think about this in terms of amending their motion. In Manitoba, we had a set of rules that we had to follow for our provincial mailings. We were not allowed to attack other parties. Perhaps we should look at that as a solution in this case.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Speaker, that is true; we agree with the member. I think it is important to keep these ten percenters, which are effective tools when they are used appropriately to inform our constituents.

However, our position is clear: we no longer want members of Parliament from other ridings to be able to send ten percenters to our constituents.

If I took advantage of the fact that I am a female MP to send one out in the riding of a Conservative who claimed to be against abortion because it causes cancer in women, if I sent out a ten percenter criticizing this position or congratulating the member on supporting abortion, I do not think he would find that amusing.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the hon. member's comments.

Earlier, I listened to the comments of the President of the Treasury Board. He asked how we could be against ten percenters, when we send them out ourselves.

That is like saying that his party is against public funding for political parties and that he does not accept it, but he does. It is clear that although they try to deny it, the Conservatives accept public funding despite claiming to be against it.

I would like to know what the hon. member thinks about that.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

Obviously, political party financing is an important issue. I believe that in order to allow for a diverse opposition and in order to ensure that a democracy and its Parliament function well, it is important to maintain this financing.

I would like to come back to the question of ten percenters. As a member of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, this matter is important to me. Please understand that we are not talking about cutting all ten percenters. I have heard from many of the constituents in my riding. While they are happy to know my stance on issues, they complain about the many ten percenters they receive from other parties. And when I say "other parties", I am talking particularly about the Conservative government. The graphics and wording in its ten percenters are very questionable and, at times, just plain wrong.

I hope that the members of the House of Commons will be in favour of restricting use to members in their own ridings and will allow our whips to make group mailings. That would allow us to maximize the rigorous and professional usage of ten percenters, which are a privilege for members.

• (1325)

[*English*]

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, reference has been made many times to the issue of the mass mailings of ten percenters. In fact, that is the way the motion is worded. All of us have received ten percenters from other MPs.

Is it being suggested that not only mass mailings be curtailed? When a ten percenter is placed in a franked envelope and mailed first class, that certainly would increase the costs dramatically. Are we going to target those as well? I personally have received mailings from the NDP that were franked with ten percenter material in the envelope, a much higher cost than if we were to simply do a mass mailing.

Could the member respond to that?

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Beauharnois—Salaberry has 30 seconds to respond.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Speaker, I will not often say this in my lifetime, but I agree with my colleague. I believe that we should ban ten percenters in envelopes, which would save 40¢ per envelope. The Bloc Québécois agrees with this suggestion and will support it in the Board of Internal Economy when the time comes.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, like my colleague, I want to speak to the motion put forward by the Liberal Party today in the House.

The motion states that “—the government should show leadership in reducing government waste by rolling-back its own expenditures —”.

The government wants to rein in the entire population and is telling everyone to tighten their belts, while it goes on spending taxpayers' money. What concerns me here today is that the government is basically saying, “Do as I say, not as I do”. The Conservative government is in no position to give any lessons when it comes to spending.

My colleague spoke at length about the excessive amounts being spent on advertising, not to mention the twisted way money is being spent on propaganda. The government is misleading the public regarding certain positions taken by the Bloc Québécois and the Liberal Party. It is not giving accurate information; in fact, it is giving disinformation. For instance, we are reading a certain bill, which I will quote later.

The motion also talks about the government's use of aircraft for travel. The same day the Minister of Finance presented the budget, he used the government plane, which I believe cost \$8,000. Another means of transportation could have been found, such as a commercial flight, which would have cost \$800. The government is telling everyone else to tighten their belts, but it can continue to do whatever it wants at taxpayers' expense.

There is also the issue of mass mailings into ridings other than Conservative members' own. These mailings are very expensive and the privilege has been abused. The budget for mailings has been doubled. I will provide the numbers later on.

The government is still allowing itself many privileges. It could have made other choices. For instance, it decided to maintain the tax regime for banks, which is still very generous. The same goes for the oil industry, which is benefiting from tax breaks that are far too generous. It is the middle class, workers who have lost their jobs, who will have to pay the price.

In the Quebec City area, a number of pulp and paper plants have had to close their doors. The forestry industry has received a measly \$170 million over two years. And yet, some \$10 billion was allocated to Ontario's automobile industry for its survival. All that was done on the backs of the unemployed. The necessary funding is not being provided to help certain industries get through this crisis. The manufacturing industry has been asking for help for five years, saying that it cannot go on this way. There have been technological changes. Companies could have invested in equipment renewal and product diversification.

Help is not getting to the least fortunate and to seniors. Old age security has not been improved. We wanted to see it increased by \$110 a month. The government offered seniors their own special day, but stopped short of offering them the money they need for better living conditions.

I have been sitting in the House since 1993. What upsets me the most is to see that they are going to pilfer \$19 billion from the employment insurance fund, like the Liberals used to do. We thought we had seen the end of that. The Liberals took \$40 billion from the fund. Now, the Conservatives are going to take \$19 billion from that

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fund between 2011 and 2015. That is not something they are bragging about.

I know that the employment insurance fund has a slight deficit, but it will bounce back; that amount will be doubly recovered by 2015. A lot of money is being allocated to military spending, which will continue to increase.

● (1330)

They also could have tapped the wealthiest in society, those who earn over \$150,000, in order to help those most in need. They could have collected higher premiums from those who earn more.

In the throne speech, they stated that they wanted to balance the books. Parliament was prorogued and, according to many observers, it was just a charade. We realize it, and it is not going to do much good.

First, there are questions about decisions by the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, who awarded a \$6 billion contract to Profac to maintain federal government buildings. Last week, the newspapers revealed a number of things immediately after the budget was tabled. Some departments are not vigilant enough about expenses incurred under such large, unaudited contracts. The Liberal Party came in for a great deal of criticism, but I believe that it will now be directed at the Conservative Party.

I will give just a few examples. All Canadians have probably read that it cost \$1,000 to install a doorbell, almost \$2,000 to purchase two green plants, and no less than \$5,000 to install lights. It will not take long to spend \$6 billion with expenses such as these. If I were renovating my own home, I hope I would not be charged the same amounts, because I would not be able to pay and I would have to file for bankruptcy.

The Minister of Finance is also telling us to tighten our belts, as I said, but what are they doing? Are they actually tightening their belts? Did the Minister of Finance show the way by paying ten times the cost of a commercial flight to hold a press conference at a Tim Hortons?

We question the good faith of the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister when they openly do what the papers are reporting.

That is not setting a good example. That is why the Liberals have introduced this motion in the House.

The revelations that have been made prove the complete opposite now. For example, in the Prime Minister's Office, from 2010 to 2011, there will be a 22% increase in the operating budget. There again, the Prime Minister is not setting an example. He put on a bit of a show the other day, at a press conference, where he said he wanted to eliminate positions that were already vacant. That was a fine performance, but it did not fool anyone. It was just smoke and mirrors designed to conceal the truth as to how genuine their intention of cutting unnecessary spending is.

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That is one side of the coin, but there is another side. The unemployed are being ignored, as are people who have lost their jobs in the manufacturing and forestry sectors. As I said a moment ago, the forestry and manufacturing industries have been put in jeopardy and left to their own devices. The government also could have increased the guaranteed income supplement for seniors living below the poverty line.

“Do as I say, not as I do.” We could just keep repeating that over and over to describe the actions of the Conservative Party. There is no end of examples of waste on the part of the Conservative government. It tells us that we must all put our shoulders to the wheel to balance the budget, but what is it doing itself? It is demonstrating the complete opposite. It is doing its own spending without considering the impact on the public as a whole.

A moment ago I referred to the cost of the finance minister’s Cessna. It was \$31,000, not \$8,000. I was out by quite a lot. It was \$31,000 for a return trip by Cessna from Ottawa to London, Ontario. I thought it was in England, but no, it was Ontario. When I was told that, I joked about it, but no, it was in fact a press conference in London, Ontario.

● (1335)

Is the government setting an example? I can understand the public. We saw it in the polls this morning: the Conservatives are losing speed. They are incapable of showing the public that they can set an example.

I am glad I found the \$31,000 figure.

I am told my time is up. That is unfortunate, because I had several other examples, including subcontracts. I could talk about everything the Conservative Party has done in terms of balancing the budget—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona.

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the opposition motion by the member for Malpeque is very clear. It talks about:

—the government should show leadership in reducing government waste by rolling-back its expenditures on massive amounts of partisan, taxpayer-paid government advertising, ministerial use of aircraft, the hiring external “consultants”...

We have listened to the President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, and we will listen to other members of the government today, who totally avoided dealing with the motion at hand. I listened to the minister for 10 minutes and not once did I hear him address any point in the motion.

That is what we want from the government. We want to know why it is not providing answers or at least admitting that it is trying to solve the problem by cutting back on over-expenditures and restricting the use of government aircraft. Clearly, members of the government are not intending to do any of those things because they are avoiding all the questions brought up in this motion.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his comments. In fact, the Conservative Party has no interest whatsoever

in telling the truth. They would have liked to keep Canadians in the dark about unnecessary expenditures and government waste, such as a \$31,000 plane trip to London, Ontario.

There is also the issue of astronomical subcontracts, which are not subject to any controls. When the Conservatives were in opposition, they criticized the Liberal Party a great deal for inflated expenditures and the sponsorship scandal.

The Conservatives who are in power today are no better. They are not giving Canadians the straight goods. That is why they are so intent on getting out their propaganda through their ten percenters. They send out pamphlets to our ridings to misinform the public.

The Conservatives would have been very happy to keep their unjustified and unjustifiable expenses from Canadians, especially since they are trying to make a good part of the population toe the line.

● (1340)

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her position.

In our ridings, we have all received ten percenters from the Reformers, as I still like to call them. Although no longer called Reformers, the Conservatives have the same Reform mentality. Only the colour of their tie has changed.

People in my riding have written to tell me that they are shocked by this waste of money. Furthermore, they reply to these ten percenters, incurring further costs not included in the \$10 million.

I would like to hear what my colleague, as a representative of the Bloc Québécois, has to say about the abuse of ten percenters.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, my colleague brought up a good question.

In one mailing, we were portrayed as supporting pedophilia, which was untrue. The bill in question did not even have to do with protecting children. We will get back to that, since I do not have time to talk about it any further.

There was also a mailing that claimed that a Liberal member, who is Jewish himself, was anti-Semitic. That was also untrue.

These mailings are very expensive. The Conservatives have already spent 62.37% of the total budget for mailings.

The Bloc is in favour of the motion that would prohibit members from sending mailings to voters in ridings other than their own, as long as the whips keep the privilege to send ten percenters to ridings not represented by their party, with a monthly quota. What the Conservatives are doing is costing taxpayers a lot of money.

I remember the Conservatives calling for fiscal restraint when they were in the opposition. I remember the speeches they made against the Liberal Party. But the Conservatives are even worse than the Liberals.

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[English]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to enter the debate on the Liberal Party's opposition day motion regarding eliminating government waste, balancing the books, et cetera. I should serve notice that I would like to share my time with my colleague from Vancouver East.

We are being asked to look at ways that we can once again tighten our belts to assist in balancing the budget. We heard the Minister of Finance deliver a budget recently and conspicuously nowhere in his budget or in the opposition day motion put forward by the Liberals today do we hear any reference whatsoever of going after the real architects of the fiscal meltdown that we find ourselves in today. Nowhere in the federal government budget or in the Liberal opposition day motion do we hear any reference to the corporate greed and wretched excess that caused us to plummet and spiral into this financial mess we are in today.

While we do not disagree with the Liberals that we should be shaking every bush and turning over every stone to look for ways to come back to a balanced budget, we have to take note that the current government and previous governments squandered Canada's fiscal capacity to cope with periods of predictable periods of financial downturn which were built into a fair tax regime that existed and developed, and put us into a balanced budget situation.

Nowhere in the federal budget or the opposition day's motion does it acknowledge that we squandered in a reckless and irresponsible fashion the fiscal capacity to cope with a financial crisis, and it leaves us \$50 billion in the hole. The government gave that fiscal capacity away to its friends in the corporate community in the blind faith and hope that it would pull us out of the financial mess we are in. It does not.

Part of the Liberal Party's opposition day motion today deals with government communications and criticizes the government for what it spends on government communications. Let us be honest, government communications has always been a cesspool of abuse and fraud in successive federal governments going back to the Mulroney and Chrétien years. Do I have to remind members of the name Chuck Guité for Heaven's sake? As we visit this notion that government communications today may be taking liberties with taxpayers' dollars, let us be honest with ourselves and take note that it has always been problematic.

If the federal government were truly interested in balancing the books, it would be more creative. All we have heard from the President of the Treasury Board so far is that the Conservatives are going to balance the books by freezing public sector wages. In other words, this whole financial crisis is now our problem, it is now ordinary Canadians' fault. We are the ones who are going to have to tighten our belts. They are even going after public sector pensions as a way to balance the books. Talk about a complete absence of any creative thought in terms of dealing with a financial crisis.

In the short time that I have let me raise one suggestion that has conveniently been overlooked by both the Liberals and the Conservatives. This is tax time. Most of us are filling out our tax forms. Year after year, Parliament after Parliament, government after government, I have been harping on the same theme: "tax motivated expatriation" is the term chartered accountants use. "Sleazy, tax

cheating loopholes" is the term that I use. Big enough offshore tax havens exist big enough to sink a yacht and believe me, that is what is going on, to an estimated \$7 billion worth of lost revenue.

Instead of going after the nickel and dime small potatoes that the Liberals suggest today and instead of going after public service pension plans, the government is again willingly overlooking \$7 billion in lost revenue so that its friends in the corporate sector, the high rollers, the architects of the fiscal problems we are having today can continue to enjoy their tax-free status without compromising or sacrificing all the benefits of being a Canadian.

I learned from a book that I recently read called *Who Owns Canada Now: Old Money, New Money and The Future of Canadian Business* by a right-wing columnist, and I do not think she would mind being called right-wing, Diane Frances, a frequent contributor to *The Financial Post* et cetera. She points out that Canada allows its wealthy families to go offshore paying a one-time departure tax on their wealth of a 25% capital gains tax, thereby avoiding the 46% taxes they would pay if they withdrew any of that money in this country. From that day forward any money that pocket of money generates exists tax-free and can be repatriated into the country tax-free.

• (1345)

So these wealthy families move all of the money in their trusts offshore. They leave their children in Canada, generate even further wealth with that money through investment offshore in a tax haven, and then support their families in this country tax-free. Their children pay no tax on it when it is repatriated and they pay no tax on it when it is generated outside of this country.

The United States of America is not that stupid. Every nickel that goes into the country as offshore earned capital is taxed. A beneficiary in the United States pays 35% tax on that money, yet we overlook this.

How did the Minister of Finance miss this? I do not think he missed it. I think the government deliberately overlooked it, just like the Liberal government overlooked this same situation when the former Prime Minister of Canada moved his entire Canada Steamship Lines to an offshore tax haven. He pays 2.5% tax in that country.

I urge members of Parliament to take note. While we chase our tail going after nickel and dime abuse of government communications programs, there are big fish to fry out there. There is big money, low hanging fruit, that the government could have, and should have, gone after. It could have plugged these outrageous offshore tax loopholes. Sometimes I think Liberal and Conservative governments view the taxpayers of Canada in the same way P.T. Barnum used to view circus-goers, as a bunch of suckers. Goodness knows, we have left a lot of money on the table and it is an outrageous situation.

In the minute that I have left I also want to remind members of Parliament that if we are serious about prudence and probity, and honesty and high ethical standards in governance, the most effective and efficient way to ensure those things on behalf of the people that we represent is through a robust access to information and freedom of information regime in this country.

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We cannot legislate morality. We cannot legislate moral and ethical standards. It is the oversight and the scrutiny of an informed general public that encourages behaviour that we can be proud of in our public service. They are the only instruments by which we will elevate the standards of moral and ethical behaviour and good management of our money.

I have also seen in the years that I have been here successive federal governments ignore repeated requests from all sides of the House to make our freedom of information act work. We should change the name of that act to the public right to know act because the public has a right to know what its government is doing with its money, and now that information is being denied to them.

It was the shroud of secrecy that allowed corruption to flourish in the Liberal years, and that shroud of secrecy is alive and well in the present Conservative government. In fact, the government is obsessed with secrecy, obsessed with denying the public the right to know basic information about its budgets, about its behaviour overseas, about all of its activities. The government has built a barrier around itself unlike any we have ever seen.

Freedom of information is the oxygen that democracy breathes. We cannot have a robust democracy in this country without enforcing the public's right to know. It is in that way we will encourage good behaviour with our money, and it is in that way that we will eliminate the waste that the government is being accused of in the opposition day motion today.

• (1350)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is somewhat humorous to hear the hon. member talk about this, especially his distrust of the Liberals, when a short time ago he was prepared to enter into a coalition government with his good friends in the Liberal Party. I can only assume that he has forgotten about that.

Only a member of the New Democratic Party would suggest that cutting taxes for families is a bad thing. Only a member of the New Democratic Party would suggest that cutting taxes for small businesspeople, so that they can invest in their businesses, is a bad thing. Only a member of the New Democratic Party would suggest that cutting taxes for students is a bad thing.

Is the reality not this? The NDP is so bereft of any policies that those members have absolutely no vision for this country. Realistically, those members are embarrassed to tell people what they want to do because they have no policies. Is the real issue not the fact that the Liberals and the NDP coalition partners, the people who wanted to rule this country, have no policies?

Here we are a week and a half after a budget and we are dealing with ten percenters. That is the best that the opposition can bring forward at this time. They have no policies, they have no vision, and they have nothing to say about—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Winnipeg Centre.

Mr. Pat Martin: Thank goodness, Mr. Speaker, somebody has come to the aid of the Bronfman family and the K.C. Irving family, and the persecution that they suffer under our tax regime. We should

have a tag day for the Irvings, the Bronfmans, and the Paul Martins who have spirited their family fortunes out of the country.

For the member to imply that I am against tax breaks for Canadian families by suggesting that those Canadian families should pay their fair share of taxes is so absurd it is pretty well comical.

What I did not get to explain to this member about those offshore tax havens is that the current Canadian law also allows them to spend 180 days a year within Canada, enjoying all of our benefits, and it still allows them to bring their family back over here if they have a chronic illness and they need the benefits of our health care system.

This was a law written for the hog-troughers of days gone by. It is a loophole that should have been plugged years ago. We have asked the Liberals to do it, we have asked the Conservatives to do it, and neither of them will do it, neither of them will even talk about it.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to the member for Winnipeg Centre. Usually he is quite forceful in telling us where he stands, but if ever I heard anything in terms of his remarks today, he basically talked around the motion.

Just where does the NDP stand on this motion? Is it willing to stand in this House and vote against government waste through false communications that it uses through consultants? Is the member willing to stand in this House and stop the waste of members here who send out these ten percenters, which are nothing short of hate mail and propaganda?

Is he willing to stand up in this House and tell us where the NDP actually stand? Stop talking around the issue.

• (1355)

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, honestly, the member for Malpeque has more gall than Caesar and he had all Gaul.

It is the Liberals who do not show up for votes on key critical votes. We have a policy in our party: we vote for things we believe in and we vote against things we do not believe in. That is why people trust us. That is why we are honest brokers in this place.

We never know where the Liberals are going to come from. Faced with something that may adversely affect them, they either hide under their desks or they bolt behind the curtains. There he goes right now, bolting behind the curtains, rather than facing real debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. That sounded suspiciously like making a comment on the presence or absence of a member in the House. I will ask the member to refrain from doing that.

[*Translation*]

The member for Beauharnois—Salaberry has 30 seconds to ask a very quick question.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the member. I want to know what he thinks about the mass mailings, known as ten percenters.

His party uses a technique that is very costly to taxpayers. It puts its ten percenters in envelopes, which costs taxpayers an additional 40¢ for each ten percenter. This is not just in their own riding, but across the country.

Is he prepared to convince his party to stop this practice?

*Statements by Members***STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS***[English]*

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry, I was not even listening. I thought my time was up. I am sorry I missed my colleague's question. Perhaps, she could ask me later in the lobby.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for Winnipeg Centre made the best speech of the day. He really hit the nail on the head and he got quite a good rise out of everybody. His forceful debate about the real high rollers and the big fry, the ones who get away, is really what we should debate in the House.

We know the motion before us has two elements. One deals with government made waste and the other deals with ten percenters, and I want to focus on the latter part of the motion.

The member for Winnipeg Centre is known as a very strong advocate around the Wheat Board. He is known for protecting it and farmers.

All of us in this caucus, and many other members of the House, are passionate advocates for what we do. One of the problems we have with the motion before us and the way that it is worded is it will completely eliminate the ability of members to communicate with people across the country.

When we look at the wording of the motion and the way it has been constructed, there are some problems with which we need to deal.

We should be dealing with the abuses of ten percenters, not the legitimate use of ten percenters. I want to say very forcefully that in our caucus we understand what ten percenters are about. We use them legitimately. There may be a mailing here and there where somebody disagrees, but we agree that these ten percenters and mailings that are sent out, whether it is by a caucus or a party overall or whether it is by an individual, should not be used to launch negative attacks on individual members or another party. They should focus on public policy issues, on areas that we deal with in our critic area.

For example, under the rules, the member for Winnipeg Centre can send out material across the country to people who are interested in the very important issue of the Wheat Board and what happens, just as I should be able to send out ten percenters about housing issues and the bill that I have before the House, or multiculturalism or foreign workers. These are some of the ten percenters I have sent out beyond my riding.

What we want to bring forward today in this debate is that while the motion from the Liberal Party focuses on government waste, and we certainly concur in that, it is very surprising to me that its response to the issues around ten percenters is to basically abandon the whole program.

I realize we are now on to statements by members.

The Deputy Speaker: The member will have seven minutes left after question period to conclude her remarks.

*[English]***RIMBEY AND AREA OLYMPIC AND INUIT GAMES**

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for two weeks in February, Canadians of all ages embraced the spirit of the 2010 Winter Olympics. Young people from coast to coast dreamed of being Sidney Crosby. They learned a lesson in courage from Joannie Rochette, and we are all proud of our local champion, Melissa Hollingsworth.

Inspired by their heroes, 350 students from the Bentley, Crestomere, Bluffton and Rimbey Christian and elementary schools staged their own mini Olympics. To the delight of local residents, the Rimbey and area Olympic and Inuit Games began with a torch relay through the town.

The auditorium of the Rimbey Community Centre became Canada House. Participants vied for medals in traditional events like hockey, curling, sledge hockey and snowshoeing. Sports that are part of the Inuit Games, including the blanket toss and high kick competition, added to the fun and excitement.

The commitment, dedication, spirit and success of our athletes ignited our passion for sport and allowed the students at the Rimbey and area Olympic and Inuit Games to share in the 2010 Olympic Winter Games experience.

Now our focus has turned to the Paralympic Games. Let us all get behind our Paralympic athletes. Go, Canada, go.

* * *

● (1400)

P.E.I. EASTER SEALS

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise in the House today to recognize the 2010 Easter Seals ambassador for Prince Edward Island. Twelve-year-old Colton Matheson from Montague, P.E.I. is an inspiration to all who know him.

Born with Down's syndrome, Colton has overcome his disabilities and has excelled at everything he has set out to do, including the Special Olympics golf team and a member of the Brooklyn-Heatherdale 4-H Club. Colton said, "My favourite activity is performing. I love to sing and dance and play guitar, drums and piano." This young gentleman's motto is "feel the joy".

On March 28, Colton will share the stage at the Confederation Centre of the Arts with well-known Canadian performer, Murray McLauchlan, for a major fundraising telethon.

Once again, I want to congratulate Colton on being chosen as this year's P.E.I. Easter Seals ambassador.

*Statements by Members**[Translation]***ST. PATRICK'S DAY**

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this year, like every year, March 17 is when we celebrate St. Patrick's Day, the national day of the Irish people.

These celebrations include the traditional St. Patrick's Day parade, the oldest of which in North America is in Montreal. This year, after a hiatus of over 80 years, Quebec City is also having a parade.

It is estimated that up to 40% of francophone Quebecers have Irish ancestors.

Let us take this opportunity to commemorate the men and women who, fleeing the potato famine, joined the largest wave of immigration from Ireland to Quebec. In fact, a monument has been raised in their honour on Grosse-Île, the island off Quebec that was the main gateway to Canada for the Irish.

In their memory and in honour of this important community's contribution to our society, I invite everyone to celebrate St. Patrick's Day.

In closing, on behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I would like to offer condolences to the family and friends of the young man who died during the parade in Montreal.

* * *

*[English]***COUGAR FLIGHT 491**

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last Friday, March 12, was the first anniversary of the tragic helicopter crash off the east coast of Newfoundland, which cost the lives of 17 men and women working in the offshore oil industry. Families, friends and the whole community continue to mourn the loss of the passengers and crew of Cougar Flight 491 and our hearts go out to them. These deaths remind us of the risks so many workers undertake every day to support their families and to build our country.

Sadly, there are still many unanswered questions about the cause of the crash and whether it could have been avoided. A helicopter safety inquiry is under way in St. John's, the Transportation Safety Board is conducting an inquiry and, recently, questions have been raised about whether Transport Canada could have acted more quickly and possibly averted this disaster.

The commissioner has already called for a search and rescue response time of 15 to 20 minutes and this standard has been adopted by the Offshore Petroleum Board.

We want these families to get the answers they need and to know that we are committed to improving the safety and protection of workers in the offshore and throughout the country.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is taking a prudent and responsible approach to climate change and environmental policy to achieve real environ-

mental and economic benefit for all Canadians. It seeks to reduce energy consumption, facilitate the development of alternative fuels, clean water, air and land, reduce smog and open more parks.

Our action plan includes billions in green investments, including \$1 billion for the clean energy fund to develop technologies, \$1 billion for the green infrastructure fund to improve air quality and lower carbon emissions and \$380 million for the ecoEnergy for home retrofit program. Year two of our action plan includes over \$190 million in new measures to support a cleaner and more sustainable environment. There are \$100 million to support clean energy generation in the forestry sector.

Our government is doing more to protect our environment than any other government in Canadian history.

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● (1405)

*[Translation]***CANADIAN ALPINE SKI TEAM**

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, of all the athletes who participated in the Olympic Games, one group in particular had high hopes. The entire country shared their personal hopes for success. I am talking about the members of the alpine ski team.

We know that these medal hopes were dashed. Erik Guay twice finished in fifth place. Those are two fantastic results in the alpine ski world, but we know that it is not the same as winning a medal.

Today I want to pay tribute to Erik Guay. After the Olympic Games he not only won the last two super-G races at the World Cup, but following those victories, he won the famous Crystal Globe in men's super-G. The Crystal Globe is awarded to the super-G world champion of the season.

I invite my colleagues in the House to join me in congratulating Erik Guay and all the other skiers on the Canadian Alpine Ski Team for their excellent season.

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*[English]***JENNY FLETT**

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the constituency of Fort McMurray—Athabasca is home to many heroes.

One such lady died this month at the age of 101. She successfully delivered 487 babies, including two sets of twins, in the isolated community of Fort Chipewyan at a time when there was no electricity and no running water. Transportation to isolated trappers' cabins was generally by dog team, often at minus 20° or minus 40°.

Jenny Flett of Fort Chipewyan earned the respect and the love of the entire community. Jenny's large family, including her 113 grandchildren, have continue to contribute to the well-being of northern Alberta. Her wisdom, guidance, helping hand and commitment to her neighbours made Jenny Flett a legend in her own time.

I thank Jenny for making northern Alberta a wonderful place to live.

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[Translation]

ISRAEL

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois wishes to join in the strong condemnation of the recent decision by the Israeli government to build 1,600 homes in East Jerusalem, which was unlawfully annexed by Israel in 1967.

The international community—the U.S., the European Union, Canada, and a number of countries, even Israel's closest allies—have condemned this decision.

The situation is even more critical given that, since the Oslo accords, the Palestinian authorities have made a freeze on colonization a prerequisite for resuming peace talks. The U.S. had just managed to obtain agreement for indirect negotiations.

Today, the Bloc Québécois is reiterating its position: we are opposed to any occupation and the colonization of Palestinian land, including East Jerusalem. Furthermore, there must be a satisfactory resolution with respect to the status of Jerusalem.

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[English]

ISRAEL APARTHEID WEEK

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Israel Apartheid Week promotes the one-sided, intolerant and unbalanced position that Israel is a racist state and Israel's friends are supporting apartheid. Last week the New Democratic Party blocked a Conservative motion condemning Israel Apartheid Week.

I fully agree with the Canada-Israel Committee, which said that the NDP's position demonstrates, "An utter disregard for the plight of students who are bullied and intimidated on campuses in Canada is staggering and unacceptable".

The NDP Houses leader even sent a message to her political supporters, bragging about her role in scuttling the motion. This is the same NDP member who tabled before the House a petition about, "Elements within the U.S. government were complicit in the murder of thousands of people on 9/11, 2001".

Why will the New Democratic Party not condemn the so-called "activists" on university campuses who use Israel Apartheid Week as a pretext to harass, intimidate and bully Jewish students?

Statements by Members

STATUS OF WOMEN

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week I spoke at the Geneva Global Summit on Human Rights, in a forum on the struggle for gender equality, commemorating the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day.

I noted that it was tragic that not only were women's rights still not seen as human rights, not only was their promotion and protection still not a priority, but discrimination against women remained, as UNESCO has characterized it, as a form of gender apartheid.

Violence against women persists as a pervasive and pernicious evil. Equal voice eludes women in our legislatures. Disparity of pay continues for work of equal value, fostering the feminization of poverty. Reproductive, maternal newborn and child health concerns remain acute. And underpinning all of these are the intersecting systemic inequalities of ethno-cultural, racialized, immigrant, disabled and especially aboriginal women.

Accordingly, we must ensure that the struggle for gender equality is a priority on the national and international agenda as a matter of principle and policy; that Canada, in its G8 presidency, continues the Italian G8 presidential initiative of combatting violence against women; and that the lived lives of women find expression in equality and security.

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● (1410)

2010 PARALYMPIC WINTER GAMES

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Friday I had the great honour to attend one of the most magnificent events ever, the 2010 Paralympic Winter Games opening ceremonies, addressed by Canadian hero Rick Hansen, and Betty and Rolly Fox, parents of the icon we have shared with the world, Terry Fox.

I would like to congratulate Colette Bourgonje from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan for winning Canada's first ever Paralympic medal on home soil. She finished second in the 10 kilometre cross-country sit-ski event, to win the ninth Paralympic medal of her career.

I would also like to congratulate Viviane Forest of Edmonton, Alberta, and her guide, Whistler's Lindsay Debou, for winning silver in the women's slalom for the visually impaired, and Josh Dueck of Vernon, B.C. for his silver medal in the men's slalom sit-ski.

On behalf of the people of my riding, the members of this House and all other Canadians, I wish our Paralympians continued success at the 2010 Paralympic Winter Games.

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PENSIONS

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are worried about their pensions. With more than a quarter million seniors living in poverty and countless workplace pensions failing, people want action now.

Statements by Members

Sarah Colquhoun, a constituent of mine, worked for an Ontario-based company which has since gone out of business. The plan was underfunded when it wound up, which means it cannot pay 100% of the pension benefit that she earned working for that same company for 37 years. She can now only expect 48% of her earned pension benefits. She never thought this could happen to her, but it has.

New Democrats have a retirement income security plan that will strengthen and secure pensions, get seniors out of poverty and ensure better futures for families. Our plan would see that workers got first priority for payment, ahead of other creditors; a new national agency could adopt orphaned pension plans; and self-financing national pension insurance would guarantee pension payouts of up to \$2,500 per month.

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[Translation]

THE BUDGET

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, how does the Bloc explain its opposition to a budget that is focused on jobs and economic growth, and that is paving the way to a balanced budget?

The Bloc falsely claims that this budget contains nothing good for Quebec.

Our government presented a budget with a number of measures that can benefit Quebeckers.

The Bloc voted against these measures.

These measures include continued investment in infrastructure. There is assistance for the fisheries, agriculture and forestry industries; there are measures for reducing the tax burden, resources for innovation and commercialization, millions of dollars to revitalize communities, and a number of research and development and green energy initiatives. In addition, we were very clear: we will not raise taxes and we will not cut the main transfer payments to individuals and the provinces.

Unlike the Bloc Québécois, which remains seated when the time comes to take action, our Conservative government is taking concrete action for Quebeckers and Canadians.

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THE PRIME MINISTER

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last week the Prime Minister decided once more to control how one of his speeches would be broadcast, to thumb his nose at traditional media and to post his response to the Throne Speech on the popular website, YouTube.

Citizens are now being invited to ask the Prime Minister questions, and he will answer the questions that receive the most votes from Internet users.

We hope that he will respond to questions from Quebeckers who, like us, are pressing him to explain various things, such as his government's position in Copenhagen, where it won several fossil awards. Others are asking him when he will stop giving subsidies to

companies mining the tar sands and when he will finally stop big business and banks from evading taxes.

We hope that the PMO's apparent decision to provide unfiltered information via YouTube will also give us answers to these questions.

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ECONOMIC ZONES

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after excluding seasonal workers from additional weeks of EI benefits, the Conservatives are about to eliminate a pilot project on economic zones introduced by the Liberal government.

In 2000, changes to the economic zones would have penalized the Madawaska and Lower St. Lawrence regions. In order to ensure that the workers of those areas would not suffer, the Liberals introduced two pilot projects.

The Conservatives plan to eliminate those pilot projects in the next few days. The solution proposed by the new Conservative member for the Lower St. Lawrence area is that those workers find more than one job. Clearly, that member understands nothing about what workers need.

Why are the Conservatives forcing workers and their families into the unacceptable position of not knowing what their future holds?

At this time, the only thing the Conservatives should be doing is reversing their decision and renewing those pilot projects. They must stop taking the families of Madawaska and the Lower St. Lawrence hostage.

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● (1415)

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we move into year two of the economic action plan, Canadians know that our government is taking care of what matters most to them: the economy. Our plan for the economy is clear. We will keep taxes low to protect the jobs of today and create the jobs of tomorrow. This is what Canadians want.

The Liberal leader does not believe in jobs and growth. He rarely speaks about the economy, and the odd time that he does, the story is always the same. Huge spending promises lead to promises of higher taxes. Canadians know that higher taxes do not create jobs; they kill jobs, and the new tax-and-spend road show the Liberal leader has initiated will not change that. No matter where he goes, it will not change the fact that his alternative to our jobs and growth budget is job-killing taxes. While the Liberal leader is trying to sell his job-killing tax scheme across this country, we will be here in the House working to keep our economy strong.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS***[Translation]***AFGHANISTAN**

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week the Prime Minister of Canada said in the House that Justice Iacobucci would conduct a thorough inquiry into the issue of Afghan detainees. At the end of the week, we learned that Justice Iacobucci does not even have the power to subpoena new documents.

Why did the government not do what the Prime Minister promised last week?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here is what the Prime Minister did say in this place last week. He said that he had requested Justice Frank Iacobucci to undertake an independent, comprehensive and proper review of all the redacted documents related to Taliban prisoners. Justice Iacobucci will look at all the relevant documents going back not just with respect to this government but even to the previous government.

He will report on the proposed redactions, how they genuinely relate to information that would be injurious to Canada's national security, national defence or international interests. We should have confidence in a man of this gentleman's esteem.

[Translation]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have the utmost confidence in Justice Iacobucci; that is not the question. It is not him that we have a problem with, it is the government. There is a difference between starting a public inquiry and simply finding a new lawyer who does not have the power to do the necessary work.

I have a very simple question: why not have a public inquiry to finally get to the bottom of things?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Let me be very clear, Mr. Speaker. Justice Iacobucci will have access to all relevant documents. He will be able to review them. He will be able to undertake his activities in an independent fashion. He will be able to do it comprehensively. He will have the ability to review all of the documents and report back not just to Canadians but to this House.

We should trust Justice Iacobucci and let him do his work.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we trust Mr. Iacobucci. We do not trust the government. That is the difference, and there is a big difference.

Mr. Iacobucci does not have the power to subpoena the documents. The test of relevance is a test that the government itself will apply. It is not Mr. Iacobucci who determines what relevance is.

Again, I ask the minister, why not have a public inquiry and give Mr. Justice Iacobucci the powers that he so richly deserves to do the job that Canadians want him to do? That is the question.

● (1420)

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have said Justice Iacobucci will be able to look at all relevant documents. How does one find relevant documents? Exactly from the motion the Liberal leader put forward. He can also look at all documents related to this issue.

Also, he will not need to subpoena documents because the government has been incredibly clear that we will provide him with all of the relevant documents. Let Justice Iacobucci conduct his review, let him report back to Parliament, let him report back to Canadians who have confidence in a man of this character.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, instead of being asked to conduct a full public inquiry, a respected jurist has been hired as yet another lawyer by the government. He will only see what the government gives him. He will report to the government. He will not be able to release his report to the public if the government claims solicitor-client privilege.

If the government really wanted answers, it would give Mr. Iacobucci the mandate to conduct a full public inquiry, or are there horrible secrets that the government is trying to hide?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is completely untrue. As we have indicated and as was indicated in the terms of reference, Mr. Justice Iacobucci will have access to all relevant documents. He will complete a proper review and he will report those general findings to the public. This should have the support of the hon. member.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, according to the terms of reference, the government will decide what is relevant and give it to Mr. Iacobucci. He will not have the power to subpoena other documents or the authority to release his opinion publicly. He will not be able to reveal the whole story to Canadians and there is no end date for his work to be completed. We are right back where we started.

Why will Mr. Iacobucci not “conduct a thorough inquiry”, as the Prime Minister said last week? What damning secrets is the government trying to hide?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are providing all the documents that are of interest to the members of the House, and we are going beyond that. We are going back to 2001, which was the beginning of our involvement in Afghanistan.

Mr. Justice Iacobucci will have complete authorization to have a look at those. Again, he will report those general findings back to the House.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister constantly reiterates that the Canadian economy is coming out of the recession thanks primarily to the regulations that govern our banking institutions. There was a time when the Conservative Party was calling loudly for deregulation of the banks. In 2000, the present Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs complained that the banks had to comply with rules from the previous century, referring to the stringent regulations concerning banks.

Does the Prime Minister realize that if we had listened to his party at that time and deregulated the banking system, that would have been a major mistake in both political and economic terms?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Bloc Québécois is obviously referring to the government's success and its Economic Action Plan for Canada's economic recovery. He is referring to the regulations that are in force in our banking system.

But he neglects to mention all of the things done by the government to ensure that the economic recovery is working. Unfortunately, as usual, he voted against it.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as usual, he is not answering the question. What I said to him was that several years ago, these people were saying the exact opposite. They wanted to deregulate everything and accused everyone of not doing things like the Americans. Today, they are patting themselves on the back for not having deregulated the banking system. It is lucky they were not in power back then.

They have the same philosophy when it comes to telecommunications. Do they realize that deregulating telecommunications could have repercussions that would be just as serious as if the House had agreed several years ago to deregulate the banking system?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the leader of the Bloc Québécois should indulge in a little humility.

In the case of the Bloc Québécois, its members are riding madly off in all directions. Let us be clear. What the government did has been accepted on the international level. At the same time, all of the G20 countries have identified these actions as the reason we have a good system.

Yes, we want to keep that system, and I hope the Bloc will support the government and its budget.

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• (1425)

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, by overturning the CRTC's decision and issuing a licence to the Egyptian company Globalive, the government has started deregulating the telecommunications sector without consulting parliamentarians.

Will the government stop deregulating telecommunications ownership until the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology can examine the issue?

[English]

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, Globalive has met all the Canadian ownership and control requirements under the Telecommunications Act.

The government did not remove, reduce, bend or create an exception to Canadian ownership and control requirements in the telecommunications and broadcasting industries. In fact, our goal as a government is to do what is in the best interest for Canadians, which includes greater competition in the telecommunications industry that lowers prices, provides better services for Canadians and more choices for consumers and business.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this is an unacceptable precedent. Whoever controls access also controls content. By opening up telecommunications ownership to foreigners without regulating content, the government is allowing foreigners to eventually have control over our culture.

Why does the government give in to the economic interests of big corporations at the expense of protecting our culture?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is simply jumping to conclusions. This government made unprecedented investments in culture in the latest budget.

With respect to broadcasting, Norm Bolen, the CEO of the Canadian Film and Television Production Association said, "We are very appreciative of the Conservative government's responsiveness to the challenges facing the broadcasting industry". We keep our promises.

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EMPLOYMENT

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance claims there is good news in the employment numbers, but the manufacturing sector lost 17,000 jobs in February. In the natural resources sector, 11,000 jobs were lost. Nonetheless, big companies are going to receive billions of dollars in gifts under the Conservatives' policies.

Is this really good news for the families of workers who have been laid off?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we believe we have seen some positive signs in the Canadian economy. The economic action plan presented by this government is beginning to show some positive results. We have seen positive developments in parts of the country and positive developments in some industries. However, the job is not yet done.

*Oral Questions***ENVIRONMENT CANADA**

The recovery that is taking hold is far too fragile and is not reaching all Canadians. That is why this government is staying the course to ensure we move full speed ahead with our economic action plan, stimulus investments and tax cuts, all designed to create more jobs, more hope and more opportunities.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the employment numbers that the government is trying to brag about actually show that there are job losses in the private sector. Any significant job growth has been in the public sector, exactly the sector that it cannot wait to squeeze and shut down.

When will the government implement a real plan to help the million and a half Canadians who are out of work, especially the 800,000 who are just about to run out of EI and will end up on welfare? When will we see a plan to help those people?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we presented some major reforms to the employment insurance system last year as part of our economic action plan to help those Canadians through no fault of their own who found themselves on hard times. We also introduced Canada's economic action plan, an action plan to create jobs and opportunity.

We are pleased that last month we saw job growth in British Columbia, in Nova Scotia and in Saskatchewan. We are pleased to see the more than 16,000 jobs created in manufacturing. We are pleased with the 159,000 full time jobs that have been created since last summer. However, the job is not yet done. We are still focused like a laser on ensuring that job creation and economic growth can find the way in all parts of this great country.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, people are being forced to turn to social assistance because their EI is running out. The numbers speak for themselves. Welfare rates are up 47% in Alberta, 43% in British Columbia and 26% in Ontario, and welfare does not even get them half way to the poverty line. They are forced to exhaust their savings and sell what they have in order to get any help. Welfare is paid by the provinces and, in some cases, even by the municipalities, not by the federal government.

Why is the government shirking its responsibility to help out when people are falling into poverty?

• (1430)

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government has a strong record of which we can be proud. We made major reforms to Canada's employment insurance system to provide a hand up and help to families right across the country. We made them even more generous this past fall. We introduced Canada's economic action plan, a plan whose principal objective is to create jobs.

The good news is that we are seeing a fragile economic recovery begin to take hold. We cannot declare a victory. We must stay focused, as all of us on this side of the House are doing, to ensure that every Canadian who is looking for work can find it and provide the dignity of a job and the pride of being independent.

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 50 months and 3 ministers later, the bullying, intimidation and censorship continue unabated in Environment Canada.

First, a young communications officer is hauled off in handcuffs. Then, a scientist is ordered not to publish his global warming theme novel because it would coincide with the slashing of climate change programs. Now, an internal Environment Canada report confirms that scientists are being muzzled, unable to share their findings with Canadians.

Why does ideology consistently trump evidence and why this deliberate policy of censorship?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, science, research and empiricism is obviously valuable to the Government of Canada, including that which relates to science change. It is valuable work. The government has supported it and continues to support it.

I would point out to my hon. friend that these allegations are dated. Environment Canada has the same media relations policy as every other department in the Government of Canada. Those are preposterous allegations.

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[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Copenhagen accord stipulates that greenhouse gas emissions have to be reduced according to scientific data. The accord calls for measures to be consistent with scientific data. The United States and the European Union are proposing major increases in funding for climate research.

Why is the Conservative government, which signed this accord barely three months ago, refusing to renew funding for the Canadian Foundation for Climate and Atmospheric Sciences? What exactly is the government opposed to, scientifically speaking?

[English]

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the matter my friend raises in the House goes back to 2007-08. I would encourage him that this is 2010. He should probably understand what is going on today in terms of climate change and Copenhagen. I understand he does not want to talk about 2010 because, of course, the government has agreed with the Copenhagen court.

I can advise the House that as of today 106 nations agree with the Government of Canada. In addition, more than 90% of the world's emissions are under this agreement. The world supports Copenhagen. Why do my hon. friend and the Liberal Party not?

*Oral Questions***AGRICULTURE**

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, CFIA's meat inspectors have given the agency a failing grade. It failed to implement the vast majority of 57 recommendations about the listeriosis outbreak that killed more than 20 Canadians. Now, another investigation into contaminated meat will include a review of five more deaths.

In the wake of this second tragedy, will the minister tell Canadians why he has yet to implement those recommendations?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. We are moving ahead with all 57 recommendations by Sheila Weatherill. There is some great work to be done and we look forward to working with our provincial colleagues to get that done.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, because of the new tainted meat recall, we find out that plants packaging meat for the U.S. market must be inspected daily in order to meet U.S. standards while plants that package meat for our domestic market get inspected only once a week.

Will the minister explain why the government cares more about the health of Americans than it does the health of Canadians?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to assure Canadian consumers that our food supply is safe because absolutely none of that is true. The inspection rate for domestic consumption, as well as for international trade, is exactly the same. It works on a 12-hour cycle.

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•(1435)

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' irresponsible attitude towards the environment has been condemned once again, this time by the American Meteorological Society. It deplores the fact that the government is not renewing its funding for the Canadian Foundation for Climate and Atmospheric Sciences.

At a time when many countries are increasing their funding for climate research, how can the government justify eliminating its contribution? It must be in agreement with the member for Beauce, who denies climate change.

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government supports research on climate change. Environment Canada allocates \$12 million annually to research on climate change. Furthermore, the 2010 budget adds \$11 million to this amount in order to establish meteorological services in the Arctic. That represents \$23 million more than the Bloc has contributed to climate change research.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government is in such denial about climate change that it is not hesitating to cut funding for scientists who challenge the government, and it is censoring those in its employ by preventing them from speaking publicly.

Will the government reconsider and stop gagging scientists who do not share its views?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not the case. I am surprised by my Bloc colleague's comments. We have not shut down the foundation; we have extended its mandate to 2012 so that it can report on the work funded with public money. We have supported climate change efforts, and the Bloc Québécois should recognize that.

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AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government is trying to shirk its responsibilities by asking Justice Iacobucci to have a look at the documents concerning the torture of Afghan prisoners.

Yet on December 10, 2009, the House called upon and ordered the government to hand over those documents.

Does the government not see that in order to respect the will of this House and protect the secrets that could jeopardize our soldiers, it could simply hand over those documents to the parliamentary committee, which could first examine and study them in camera?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, the government is responding to the House order of December, which is why we are making all those documents referred to available to Mr. Justice Iacobucci. We all have a stake in the safety and security of Canadians here. I think the hon. member should welcome the efforts and the work of Mr. Justice Iacobucci.

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[Translation]

JUSTICE

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government paid for the distribution of several studies that slam the government's policies in the fight against crime. The government's bogus solution, minimum sentences, are especially criticized, because they "undermine the legitimacy of the courts and the prosecution process" and undermine "equality before the law".

If the government considers those studies credible enough to be widely distributed, why does it not implement their recommendations and, for starters, stop proposing more minimum sentences?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we welcome research from all different areas. I am still perplexed why the Bloc members would not support a bill that was cracking down on people who traffic in children. This is a mystery to the House and certainly a mystery to everybody in their constituencies. That being said, we get input from many different individuals and we will continue to stand up for victims and law-abiding Canadians, and so should the hon. member and his party.

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ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have falsely claimed in their budget that they would ensure all Canadian women, including aboriginal women, would be safe and secure, but that same budget slashed funding for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, and 134 community projects across Canada are in jeopardy. The Native Women's Shelter of Montreal might have to close at the end of this month.

How can the Minister of State for the Status of Women stay silent as her government ignores the pleas of aboriginal women?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are committed to fulfilling the terms of the Indian residential schools agreement. That agreement did have \$125 million over a five-year period. In this budget we were pleased to announce a further \$199 million, which will not only allow us to fulfill further obligations under the Indian residential schools settlement but will also ensure that appropriate healing and other services are provided to the survivors of the Indian residential schools.

• (1440)

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, research projects are great, but it is shelters and organizations, like the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, that protect women from being murdered and kidnapped.

The Native Women's Shelter of Montreal has been around for nearly 25 years and helps hundreds of aboriginal women.

When will the minister finally defend these vulnerable women?

If the minister will not do so, who will?

[English]

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I already announced that we have put further funds into services that will be provided for aboriginal people and residential school survivors. We have also announced in the last budget the creation of a further, I believe it was, six shelters for aboriginal women who have been affected by violence. We have created another six shelters. There are further funds allocated to the health department to make sure appropriate

Oral Questions

services, such as psychiatric help and other healing services, are provided to aboriginal women.

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STATUS OF WOMEN

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, section 705 of Canadian aviation regulations sets out a four-level scale for incidents at our airports. A level-three incident includes “argumentative or...disorderly” behaviour or repeated “belligerent behaviour”. Now we learn that the Minister of State for the Status of Women is telling colleagues she might try to sue airline and safety officials for not keeping private her very public tantrum. In light of these facts, why is the minister still a member of the cabinet?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to inform the member and this House that the minister in question has no intention of making any lawsuits.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again I commend to the minister section 602 of the regulations. The list of prominent Conservatives speaking out against the minister's behaviour is growing. Senator Duffy rebuked the minister for her description of P.E.I. as a “hellhole”. Deborah Grey called it a “hissy fit at an airport” and Kory Teneycke called it “diva behaviour”. Tom Flanagan said her actions were “outrageous... not compatible with being a minister”.

Does the Prime Minister really believe there is no one else on his backbenches who would be an adequate replacement for this minister?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said in the House in the past, the minister in question, our colleague the Minister of State for the Status of Women, has made a sincere apology to the people in question. They have accepted it. I think that calls for all of us to accept the apology and move on. I do wish, however, the member opposite would listen to Mike Duffy, Tom Flanagan and Deborah Grey on other issues.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that the Conservative government has always made the safety and security of our communities and families a top priority. In those unfortunate and stressful times when an emergency strikes, Canadians expect a rapid and effective response. Dithering is not an option. Key decisions need to be made by the appropriate people, and they need to be made quickly.

Could the Minister of Public Safety tell the House what the government has done to formalize emergency planning so that Canadians are safe in the event of an emergency?

Oral Questions

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his support and hard work on this very important file.

Canadians expect that the federal government's response to an emergency will be seamless and that key decisions can be made quickly and effectively when disaster strikes.

That is why today this Conservative government has released a federal emergency response plan. This plan provides an integrated response for emergency management. Furthermore, this plan also takes the important step of coordinating responses across levels of government and private organizations.

Canadians can be assured that we are taking care of their safety.

* * *

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the terms of reference for retired Justice Iacobucci outline what we already know. This is a stalling tactic to delay and avoid accountability on Afghanistan torture. In fact, the only thing we have learned is that this will be a very expensive stalling tactic.

Mr. Iacobucci's interpretation of documents will not be guided by the constitutional powers of Parliament. His report will go only to the minister, and there is still no commitment to actually produce any documents for Parliament.

Why will the government not respect Parliament and let the Afghanistan committee do its work?

• (1445)

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we want the hon. member's party to let Mr. Justice Iacobucci do his work. He is going to undertake a comprehensive, complete review. We are responding to the House order. One of the things I like is that it will go back all the way to 2001. It will go back to the beginning of our involvement in Afghanistan.

We want to have a complete picture, and we can count on Mr. Iacobucci to provide that for us.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the terms of reference outlined are a continuation of the government's secrecy on the whole matter, hiding the facts and disrespecting the rights of Parliament. The government even has Mr. Iacobucci reviewing Canada's annual human rights reports on Afghanistan, when the United States state department posts its on its government website.

When will the government stop hiding the facts and let Parliament get at the truth?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth than the allegations made by the hon. member.

Again I point out that he can and should have complete confidence in Mr. Iacobucci, who will have unfettered ability to have a look at all the relevant documents and make recommendations on those. This should have the complete support of that member and the NDP.

[*Translation*]

FIRST NATIONS

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the report by former Justice Croteau obtained by *La Presse* found that the federal government owes the Nunavik Inuit an apology and compensation for the behaviour of police officers during the systematic sled dog massacres that the Inuit had to endure during the 1950s and 1960s.

Does the government intend to take responsibility and apply every one of the recommendations in this report?

[*English*]

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I did see that the report was tabled, but I have not had a chance to review it yet.

I do know that this is one of several reports that have been made on this investigation, some of which precede my time in this office and some even precede our government.

The RCMP has been engaged, as well, to perform an extensive and exhaustive study of documents it possesses in an analysis of that, to try to make sure we can do the right thing toward the Inuit not only in Quebec but in all of our northern regions.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada is currently examining the possibility of reducing the number of points of entry for the food mail program from 20 to 5. The Val-d'Or airport, the longest-serving and best equipped, could lose its status as a point of entry as a result.

Can the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development assure us that the Val-d'Or airport will continue to serve northern Quebec and Nunavik in the food mail program?

[*English*]

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is true that we are examining options on improving the food mail service. It has come under quite a bit of criticism over the years as not being responsive and not really being a 21st century model of delivering nutritious food to the north.

We have had a system that was based on the old mailing system, basically a subsidy to Canada Post. We have been examining options that would increase the amount of food and the selection of nutritious food for northerners. That work has been ongoing.

We have had a special ministerial representative and reports from everyone from airlines to the Val-d'Or municipality. They have all given us advice on how we might improve this program. We are looking at how we might do that shortly.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

TAXATION

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, George Bush Sr. reneged on his famous promise to not bring in new taxes. He said:

[English]

“Read my lips: no new taxes”.

[Translation]

He found the courage to admit that, in fact, he was raising taxes.

Despite claims to the contrary, the Conservatives are raising taxes.

Why does the government not show the same courage as George Bush Sr. and admit that it is increasing taxes?

[English]

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, indeed we are lowering taxes, unlike what the opposition wants to do.

Let me put it in very simplistic terms so the hon. member can understand. For an average family of four, we have reduced the tax burden by \$3,000.

• (1450)

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are raising payroll taxes, airplane taxes, income trust taxes and researcher taxes, and these are only the ones we know about so far, yet the Prime Minister says repeatedly he is not raising taxes.

This is a question of truth and honesty and character. For once will the government tell the simple truth: “Yes, we are raising airplane taxes, income trust taxes, researcher taxes and, most important, job-killing payroll taxes”.

For once will it just tell the truth?

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is a Liberal message if I ever heard one. They are suggesting they would raise all of those taxes. That is exactly what they are saying.

Might I remind the member that when he is talking about his taxes, his increase in the GST would actually take 162,000 jobs out of Canada. That is not what we want to have happen.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADIAN FOOD INSPECTION AGENCY

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, news from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency is not good. Despite its promises, the government has not yet hired inspectors. The minister promised to invest \$75 million in the Canadian food safety system. However, no monies were announced in the latest budget. Listeriosis has surfaced again and has already caused five deaths in Ontario this year.

What will it take for this minister to do something to protect Canadians?

[English]

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have moved forward within the budget framework and outside the budget framework to give CFIA the resources it needs, both monetary and human. The CFIA is in the process of training and getting on the front lines a number of new inspectors. Of course they do not grow on trees. The CFIA has to actually train these folks and get them ready for the important work they do.

The unfortunate truth in all of this is that every time we do this, the NDP votes against it.

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the audit they proposed, which Sheila Weatherill asked for, has not been done yet. That is why they do not know how many they have.

In Ontario, there have been 14 confirmed cases of listeriosis, and 5 deaths are being investigated. After the 2008 listeriosis outbreak, the government's own special investigator said Canada needs more inspectors. Meat shipped to the U.S. is checked daily; meat shipped to us, weekly.

The last outbreak killed 22 Canadians. How many more have to die before this government fixes the food safety system?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there were a couple of inaccuracies in there. Saying that somehow we test less for domestic food than we do for exports is absolutely not true. It is done on a 12-hour cycle, the same for both. The front line inspectors are there to do that important work.

We do continue to move forward with the recommendations from the Weatherill report. We work with our provincial colleagues in this particular listeriosis outbreak. The province of Ontario is the lead. We are supporting it with offering recall expertise that we have and getting the job done to make sure the products on the store shelves are safe.

If Canadians have concerns, they should go to our website, foodsafety.gc.ca, and they will find out for themselves.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the economy is showing signs of recovery, many Canadians are still seeing the negative impacts of the global recession, so it is encouraging to see that work is under way and in fact has been completed on more than 3,000 infrastructure projects, creating jobs in every province and territory.

Oral Questions

I wonder if the Minister of Transport could please inform the House what a recent report by the Conference Board of Canada said about the effects our stimulus program has had on job creation in Ontario.

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we were all pleased by the report by the Conference Board of Canada, which showed that in the province of Ontario some 70,000 jobs were created as a result of Canada's economic action plan.

This was not all about the efforts of the Minister of Finance and the economic action plan, but was all about partnerships. We work well with the provincial government in Ontario and we work well with municipalities across Ontario. Step by step we are making progress in the economic recovery.

My premier and my Prime Minister are delivering great things for this country, and we have only just begun.

* * *

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when Canadians receive the bad news from the Conservative government it will be delivered by Canada Post, not by email, because the minister has shut down their access to the Internet.

Thirty-seven hundred CAP sites across this country have been shut down. More Canadians are on the Internet, but those in rural and remote communities still have challenges getting access.

Why is the government shutting down access to the Internet for Canadians who need it the most?

• (1455)

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us look at the facts. The Liberals have been trying to shut that program down since back in 2004-05. We extended the program until 2010, and 80% of Canadians now have Internet in their homes.

We are also providing Internet services, which are now available, to 93% of public libraries. As well, we are putting \$200 million toward broadband services for all communities across Canada.

* * *

[Translation]

VUES D'AFRIQUE

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on March 11, Vues d'Afrique learned that, after a 25-year partnership, CIDA will no longer be funding its activities, including the renowned PanAfrica International film festival. CIDA's decision to abandon such a proven organization is deplorable.

Can the Minister of International Cooperation explain in what way the activities of Vues d'Afrique no longer align with the government's priorities?

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as you know, this government is about making

Canada's international assistance more efficient, more effective and more accountable.

As the Minister of Finance said in the budget, programs are being reviewed to get results. When we looked at this program we saw that it did not guarantee complete and maximized access to all Canadians for them to be aware of the product. We believe that our tax dollars can be used more effectively by actually helping people in developing countries.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government has replaced its climate scientists by appointing deniers to its scientific councils, has severely cut funds to climate research, and now we learn it is muzzling its own climate scientists.

Are these regressive moves because the government does not want its climate actions based on science, or because the government does not like what the scientists are telling it?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, this government supports scientific research, research empiricism, wherever we find it.

These are dated allegations that go back to 2007. I would encourage the member to focus on some of the investments that are laid out in the budget most recently, for example, the dollars that are allocated for new meteorological and navigational services in Canada's Arctic and the investments being made there, and the very large investments being made as well for the RADARSAT constellation mission that will have Canada leading the world in terms of northern meteorological and navigational climate change research, all things that are important to this government.

* * *

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for generations Atlantic Canadian fishermen have looked south to sell their products in the lucrative New England market. Today, a lobster pulled from a trap on the Miramichi in the morning could be on the menu in Boston later that evening.

Could the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans inform this House about the recent work at the International Boston Seafood Show and our government's support for Canadian fishermen?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was very pleased to attend the International Boston Seafood Show. I can say that I was certainly very proud to be a Canadian.

There I heard firsthand not just from Americans but also from global buyers that there is increasing demand for our Canadian seafood, because it is high quality and our fishers have a reputation for producing the best seafood in the world.

It was also evident that Canada is a leader in the emerging trend of traceability and eco-certification. With our historic investments in lobster marketing and new initiatives such as traceability and catch certification, our Canadian fishing industry stands to emerge from this global recession stronger than—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso.

* * *

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know the government believes that all Canadians have to know is the stuff that is included in the wasteful partisan ten percenters that it sends out, but that is not true.

What the minister said about the 80%, that might be so in urban Canada, but in rural and remote Canada, people are getting cut off their services, and they deserve access to the Internet. They have to know about government services and government jobs.

For a 15 year program, at 40¢ a pop for each Canadian, can we not stand up for it and allow Canadians to have access to the Internet? I think we should. Why is the government gutting this program?

• (1500)

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is high energy coming from a member who voted to cut this program away back in 2004.

This government decided to extend that program. We extended the program until the time came when public libraries had Internet, and most people live very close to a public library, within 25 kilometres. That is number one.

Number two, today in 2010, 80% of Canadians have the Internet; and the member might remember, although he might not have been here for the vote, that the government put \$200 million toward providing broadband to every community in this country. That is what we are doing.

* * *

[Translation]

HEALTH

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, tuberculosis is on the rise among aboriginal peoples, while rates of infection are declining among non-aboriginals.

The incidence is 200 times higher in the four Inuit regions of Canada than in areas further south in the country.

Tuberculosis is a danger to the health of those infected and their families.

Last week, my colleague from Winnipeg North requested an emergency debate so that the government could take action, but the request was refused.

Does the government realize that this situation is unacceptable?

What does it plan on doing to combat the high incidence of tuberculosis among these populations?

Points of Order

[English]

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the stakeholder groups used parts of the statistics of the Public Health Agency report of 2008 in their own interpretations.

I can say that our government has invested significant funding to support the management of tuberculosis, including disease prevention. We will continue to work with the provinces and territories to curb the spread of TB.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADIAN FOOD INSPECTION AGENCY

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency is setting a dangerous precedent by refusing to recall ready-to-cook foods that are potentially contaminated with salmonella. According to the agency, it is up to the consumer to follow to the letter cooking instructions that allow the bacteria to be killed.

Will the Minister of Agriculture do his job by requiring food processors to offer healthy products and by immediately having any products that pose a risk to consumer health, including ready-to-cook products, removed from the shelves?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to tell the hon. member what is most important in our country: food safety together with public health. The two go hand in hand.

When the Canadian Food Inspection Agency learns about a problem, it responds immediately. It removes any potentially dangerous product from the market. When the problem comes from the U.S., we work together with our counterparts to protect the public.

* * *

[English]

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on March 8, in response to a question from the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine on the nomination of Gérard Latulippe, I said:

Ironically, the Bloc and Liberal opposition, while simultaneously decrying the government's continued partisanship, have rejected Mr. Latulippe's appointment on almost purely political grounds...While I don't share Mr. Latulippe's political orientation, I don't believe that stated political views and career path are reasons to question a person's capacity to act in a principled manner.

I attributed that quotation to former NDP strategist Brian Topp. In fact, I should have attributed it to Leslie Campbell, former chief of staff to Audrey McLaughlin. I apologize to Mr. Topp for any inconvenience this may have caused him.

*Routine Proceedings***ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS***[English]***2010 PARALYMPIC WINTER GAMES**

The Speaker: Pursuant to order adopted last week, there will be eight minutes allotted for statements by ministers to each of the parties. I therefore call upon the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, who I understand will have four minutes for her remarks.

• (1505)

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the Minister of State (Democratic Reform).

[English]

Last Friday, the 2010 Paralympic Games were launched in Vancouver. From March 12 to 21, the best disabled athletes in the world will be in Canada to compete in five different sports: sledge hockey, wheelchair curling, alpine skiing, biathlon and cross-country skiing. These games will bring 1,350 athletes to Canada from over 40 countries, and Canada will have 55 of its own athletes there. Today is a day that we should all be proud of our Canadian athletes, who have trained and worked so hard to compete in the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Canada's first medal winners of these Games: Colette Bourgonje, Viviane Forest and Josh Dueck, whose outstanding performances yesterday won them silver medals. I am delighted to inform the House that, during our question period today, Brian McKeever, competing in the 20 kilometre visually impaired cross-country skiing event, won Canada's first Winter Paralympic Games gold medal on home soil. That is our first gold and I am sure there will be many more.

While winning is important and something that every athlete strives for, in many ways all of these athletes are already champions. These athletes have overcome physical hardships that might well have stopped them from doing even the simplest daily activities. Our paralympians do not just participate in sport; because of their dedication, they are world class athletes.

These games are important because they allow the world to focus on these athletes' abilities, not their disabilities. On behalf of the Government of Canada, I want to express our support to our great athletes. Canada is behind every one of them as they compete for the Olympic podium. It is my wish that all Canadians enjoy the Paralympic Games. Go Canada go.

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to have the opportunity to acknowledge the 2010 Paralympic Games. Canada and the world are coming together through these games to celebrate the hard work of our finest paralympians. These athletes have overcome many obstacles to get where they are today.

These are the 10th Paralympic Winter Games. The Paralympics are an opportunity to raise the profile of these very courageous and talented athletes.

[Translation]

Our government continues to support persons with disabilities in Canada. The Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development has done an excellent job implementing many initiatives for these Canadians.

[English]

We are supporting Canadians of all abilities and helping create opportunities by removing barriers to participate in society. For example, we created the registered disability savings plan to help parents and others save for long-term financial security of a child with a disability. As of 2010, we have had over 26,000 RDSPs.

In this year's budget, more flexibility has been provided to make it easier for these people to save. The enabling accessibility fund makes buildings and vehicles more accessible and creates comprehensive abilities centres. We have funded over 300 projects through this initiative in communities across Canada and budget 2010 increases funding by \$45 million over three years.

[Translation]

Our government has also allocated \$75 million for the construction of social housing for the disabled.

• (1510)

[English]

We are one of the first countries to sign onto the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This convention was ratified on Thursday, March 11, just prior to the opening ceremonies of the Paralympic Games. Ratifying this convention before the games has shown the international community Canada's commitment to persons with disabilities. I would like to congratulate my colleagues for the hard work in that endeavour.

[Translation]

These are just some examples of initiatives implemented by our government in support of the disabled.

[English]

The Government of Canada, along with Canadians, admires the strength of our Paralympic athletes who are not only inspiring but giving hope to persons with disabilities and all abilities. Our Paralympians are not only athletes, they are leaders in our communities and throughout the world. They are fathers, mothers, sisters and brothers.

[Translation]

Canadians enthusiastically supported the Olympic Games. I encourage them to give the same support to our athletes competing in the Paralympic Games.

[English]

I had the great pleasure of attending the opening of the Paralympic Games on Friday. They demonstrate how Canadians can come together and how people from all over the world, regardless of their abilities, can reach their full potential as human beings.

Go, Canada, go.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on March 3, many of us were honoured to be present on Parliament Hill when the Paralympic flame was ignited and blessed by aboriginal fire keepers.

It was a brisk but glorious morning, a morning of hope and a fitting start to the 10-day torch relay of the 2010 Paralympic Games, which brings together over 1,300 athletes from 44 countries in the spirit of Olympic competition. Canada will again be the centre of international sport and Canadians will be watching and cheering our athletes as they reach for gold in all five sports, including our hunt to finish off the golden hockey trifecta by winning the sledge hockey tournament.

It was in 1948 when Sir Ludwig Guttmann organized a sports competition involving World War II veterans with spinal cord injuries in Stoke Mandeville, England. Four years later, competitors from the Netherlands joined the games and an international movement was born. Olympic style games for athletes with a disability were organized for the first time in Rome in 1960.

In 1976 other disability groups were added and the idea of merging together different disability groups for international sport competitions was born. In the same year, the first Paralympic Winter Games took place in Sweden. In the wake of the Toronto 1976 Paralympic Games, the Canadian government granted funds to be spent in developing sport opportunities for people with a disability.

Since then, Canada has been internationally renowned as a leader of the Paralympic movement. Canada has participated in every summer and winter Paralympic Games since Tel Aviv in 1968 and has always done very well.

The Paralympics showcase the strength and determination of our athletes and further illustrate that if we focus on ability, not disability, anything is indeed possible and that incredible human potential can be reached, thereby improving the individual lives of Canadians with disabilities and our collective betterment as a nation.

I am pleased we have now ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. There is much more to be done. Let us allow the courage, strength and grace of our world-class Paralympians to inspire us and ensure that all Canadians with disabilities are given the chance to achieve their own gold medals.

Congratulations and best wishes to all athletes, coaches and organizers. They make us proud.

• (1515)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, to begin with, I would like to say that I will be splitting my time with the member for Saint-Lambert.

Many cultures have been invited to these Paralympic Games, and they will be expressing themselves loud and long. Quebec culture will be present in the form of the steely determination the athletes will exhibit in their performances. The talents of the Fortiers, Forests, St-Amands, Fogartys and Labontés will be brought to bear as they strive for excellence.

Quebec culture will make its mark in the exploits of its representatives, in the tremendous strength, both mental and physical, they display. The Paralympic Games, like the Olympic Games, where 50% of the Canadian medals were won by Quebecers, will be an inspiration to the public. Quebec culture will be on display in these games, not only in the sporting venues, but also in the intellectual and artistic venues, as Martin Deschamps' presence will illustrate.

We carry these top-notch athletes like a banner of perseverance, a model of personal investment rooted in collective values. Like Olympic athletes around the world, they deserve as wide an audience as possible for their achievements.

The Quebec nation will be represented at these games by people who believe that by investing in an ideal, we can triumph over the obstacles that life puts in our path. The obstacles that the Paralympic athletes must confront daily show us that these athletes are all the more deserving of being supported to the same standard as Olympic athletes.

That is why, for a number of years, the Bloc Québécois has been calling for greater investment in Paralympic athletes and greater equity in the distribution of funding, so that the Canadian Paralympic Committee receives funding proportional to that of the Canadian Olympic Committee.

The Quebec athletes at these games are world-class, as is the Quebec nation, and as we can never say often enough. The strength of their will is equal to the strength of their people's will, and I am proud to continue to call for the best for them.

The determination we will see exhibited at the Paralympic Games symbolizes the strong presence of the Quebec nation at these games. As Jean Labonté says so well, "We have a good chance of winning medals in all disciplines."

My colleagues in the Bloc Québécois join me in wishing all the athletes the best of luck.

Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am extremely pleased today to rise in the House to acknowledge the Winter Paralympic Games.

For the tenth time, athletes from around the world will have the chance to show all the talent, courage and tenacity that got them to these Games.

This event represents a unique opportunity to recognize the contribution and involvement of hundreds of thousands of persons with disabilities in Quebec and Canadian society and to raise awareness about the difficulties and obstacles they constantly have to face.

Fortunately, these Paralympic Games provided an opportunity for the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, a gesture that the Bloc Québécois applauds. Now the federal government, for the few aspects of the convention under its jurisdiction, has to make every effort to ensure concrete, tangible and prompt application of the fundamental principles in the convention, which it made a commitment to honour.

Routine Proceedings

It is clear that despite the undeniable progress that has been made over the decades, the fact remains that persons with disabilities far too often face obstacles that prevent their full and complete integration and participation in society. They need to be given the means to enjoy, in full equality with their fellow citizens, the fundamental rights that should in principle govern their social relationships, but in practice are often violated.

The proof is in the statistics on poverty rates. They show that in 2007, more than 20% of persons with disabilities, or twice the Canadian average, lived in a low-income situation, with all the negative effects that entails, including the worst of all: exclusion.

It is crucial that we address the fundamental problem of accessibility when it comes to infrastructure, principles and open-mindedness. This begins with ensuring the persons with disabilities are involved in all aspects of social life and, more importantly, in the development of public policies that affect them.

I hope these athletes can serve as an example and a source of inspiration to all Quebeckers and Canadians, whether they live with a disability or not, because their experience commands respect and admiration.

● (1520)

[*English*]

Ms. Judy Wasylcia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the member for Sudbury.

We join today with all Canadians in acknowledging and celebrating our Paralympics athletic achievement and abilities. These games spotlight our athletes' will to overcome enormous obstacles to contribute their talents and abilities at an internationally competitive level.

With the games opening ceremonies attracting a packed house of 60,000 last Friday at B.C. Place, clearly the message went out to the world, "We have arrived". These Paralympics will see 1,350 athletes from 44 countries compete in 64 events.

Look how far we have come from the first winter games in 1976 when we had 12 countries competing. At those games, Canada was represented by six athletes. Today, the number is 55. As has been noted in the House already, we have had three silver medallists, Colette Bourgonje, Josh Dueck and Viviane Forest and now today Canada's first gold medallist, Brian McKeever, for his 20K in cross country.

[*Translation*]

The 2010 Paralympic Games and the way they are being promoted do not come close to the 1976 games, but we still have time to make up for it.

Many Canadians expected to watch the opening ceremonies live, but only a few of us, those living in British Columbia, had that privilege. However, had they been broadcast, that would have sent a clear message about our values of equality. Unfortunately, we were not up to the challenge and we missed out on an excellent opportunity that will not come around again any time soon.

The problems with captioning of the online broadcast of the games and the lack of accessibility at some of the facilities have also been criticized.

I can only hope that these basic issues will be corrected by the next games.

[*English*]

Today, we are also celebrating an achievement on another front in the struggle for an inclusive and accessible Canada. In December the House of Commons unanimously passed my motion urging the government to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities before the Paralympics began.

Last Thursday, on the eve of the games, Canada did just that and became the 78th country to ratify the convention. We can now celebrate the Paralympic games without questions about our commitment to equal rights hanging over us. Although it took seven years to get us here, we can now say unequivocally that there is a strong consensus in Canada, both here in Parliament and outside, behind the convention and its principles and clear responsibilities at all levels of government to follow through with action.

This marks a major and meaningful achievement for the disability community in Canada. I want to acknowledge the instrumental role played by the Council of Canadians with Disabilities and the Canadian Association for Community Living in moving Canada's commitment to the convention forward. They have spearheaded an effort over the years that of course received the active support of other advocacy groups such as Independent Living Canada, People First of Canada, Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians and Canadian Association of the Deaf, to name just a few.

We now have a framework through which Canadians living with disabilities can work to achieve equality, equality that is now a matter of right not benevolence or charity. Moreover, there are very clear measures for gauging our progress.

There is much work left to be done. When the Paralympic flame is extinguished, the 12% of Canadians living with disabilities still face unacceptable barriers to daily living and participating as equals in Canada's social, economic and cultural life.

Today, we stand to show our commitment that through these games and the signing of this convention, we will work to ensure full equality. This is a true cause for celebration.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased and honoured to have the opportunity to speak on behalf of New Democrats from coast to coast to coast to honour this historic occasion, the 2010 Paralympic Winter Games which are occurring in Vancouver, British Columbia as we speak.

I encourage all Canadians to don their Canada gear once again and give our amazing athletes all the support they need to succeed and help bring home some hardware for our great country. Let us hear those loud cheers and those ringing cowbells just as we did for the actual winter Olympics.

Routine Proceedings

For over 10 years of my life I worked with adults and children with disabilities. Throughout my experiences, I witnessed firsthand what drive and determination can accomplish. These athletes do not want sympathy because of their disability. They simply want our support as they wear our country's colours with dignity and pride as they compete with leading athletes from over 40 countries.

Speaking of pride, just yesterday our Canadian Paralympic team took home three medals on silver Sunday and today, a gold. Congratulations to all of our athletes on a job well done.

From coast to coast our Paralympic athletes are inspiring Canadians of all abilities to get involved in sport. I am very proud to say my riding of Sudbury is home to one of these impressive athletes, Jeff Dickson. Jeff is a three-time Paralympic medallist who will be participating in para-alpine skiing. I know all Sudburians and all Canadians are wishing Jeff a great Paralympic Games and supporting him on his quest for athletic excellence.

Sudbury is not just home to Paralympic skiers; it is also home to the Northern Sliders, Sudbury's sledge hockey team. The Northern Sliders deserve congratulations for the opportunities it provides to all sledge hockey players, regardless of their age or skill level. One of those Sliders is my good friend, Robby McCarthy, a player who I hear is a force to be reckoned with while on the ice. While he has not been on the ice lately, Robby's heart and soul are there for each and every game.

Paralympians are talented and skilled athletes, the cream of the crop in their chosen sport. Each and every one of them trains and works hard each and every day, as every athlete in our great country does. Let us not forget that they do this on top of having to overcome adversity and obstacles that are constantly thrust in front of them.

These athletes do all of this so they can rise above their disability and be seen for their ability, their exceptional ability. In my humble opinion, that is worth just as much as any gold medal.

* * *

• (1525)

PREVENTION OF TORTURE ACT

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-498, An Act prohibiting the commission, abetting or exploitation of torture by Canadian officials and ensuring freedom from torture for all Canadians at home and abroad and making consequential amendments to other Acts.

He said: Mr. Speaker, we refer to this bill that I am introducing today as an act to prevent torture. Clearly, this is a timely bill, not only in light of the situations in recent years of Canadians having undergone torture abroad, from Maher Arar to Abdullah Almalki, Ahmad El Maati and Muayyed Nureddin, but also in considering the questions the NDP has raised in this House for years regarding the transfer of Afghan detainees.

This bill is intended to ensure that going forward, the Canadian government would be fully accountable under similar circumstances. In placing this bill before this Parliament, the NDP is recognizing in a very clear way that Canadians do not support nor condone torture in any manner.

As a result of issues surrounding the transfer of detainees, Canada has faced very serious questions regarding allegations of violations of international law. This bill would enshrine the established obligations of international law into Canadian law and thus reinforce the deterrent factor.

Once this bill became the law of the land, it would become part of the training of all Canadian officials. A great deal of clarity as to responsibility and accountability would be introduced into the issue of torture. Protocols would need to be established to set out a clear duty to report to the proper authorities any known instances of torture. The bill would make it a criminal offence to use information known to be derived from torture and it would prohibit Canadian officials from handing over prisoners to be tortured at home or abroad. It would establish clear diplomatic protocols for the immediate repatriation of any Canadian citizen at the risk of torture abroad, yet it would not undermine in the least the ability of our authorities to investigate or prosecute these citizens in Canada. Last, it would call for the creation of a government watch list of countries known to engage in torture.

I believe that had this bill been the law of the land and these deterrents had been in place, Maher Arar, Abdullah Almalki and others would never have been subjected to their horrific ordeals.

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

• (1530)

The Speaker: I remind hon. members that on introduction of bills, the idea is to give a brief summary of the bill. I would urge hon. members to observe that comment in future introductions.

* * *

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, discussions have taken place between all parties and I believe that you will find consent for the following motion:

That, at the conclusion of today's debate on the opposition motion in the name of the Member for Malpeque, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion be deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred to Tuesday, March 16, 2010 at the expiry of the time provided for Government Orders.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Routine Proceedings

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

TEN PERCENTERS

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and I think you will find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, in relation to the following motion “That the matter of the questions of privilege raised by the Member for Sackville—Eastern Shore on November 3, 2009 and by the Member for Mount Royal on November 26, 2009, be now referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and that the evidence heard and papers received in the preceding session be taken into consideration in this session.”, the motion be deemed moved and seconded; the length of speeches be two minutes maximum and the speeches be not subject to a question and comment period; and after no more than one speaker from each of the recognized parties has spoken, the motion be deemed agreed to.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Wascana have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried, but each of the parties will have the opportunity to speak.

[*English*]

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the motion which originated in a question of privilege which I raised on November 19, 2009 in the House interestingly enough on the very day that you ruled in favour of a question of privilege from the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, whose question of privilege is also the subject of this motion and where you determined not unlike your ruling in the matter of the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, that the mailings of the ten percenters to my constituents in the matters of combatting anti-Semitism, combatting terrorism and the like, misrepresented “my long-standing and known position on these matters” and “constituted interference with my ability to perform my parliamentary functions in that its content is damaging to my reputation and my credibility”, again not unlike the indicia used in your ruling respecting the ten percenters sent to the constituents of the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore.

Accordingly, I support the reference of these questions of privilege to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs including that the evidence heard and papers received in the preceding session be taken into consideration in this session so that the standing committee not only appreciates the prejudice and damage caused to the members concerned but also that such ten percenters prejudice and damage the reputation and standing of this Parliament as a whole.

I trust that the House committee, in appreciating your rulings and the related evidence, will order that such ten percenters cease and be desisted from in the interest of all members of the House and in the interest of Parliament as an institution.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives often misuse and abuse the privilege of sending members' mailings, thereby harming other members. This issue has been discussed at length here today. In some cases, this misuse is so abusive that it infringes upon members' privileges, because it damages their reputation and prevents them from properly carrying out their duties.

This is what was alleged by the hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore and the hon. member for Mount Royal in the questions of privilege raised last fall. In both cases, the Speaker ruled that the questions of privilege raised by the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore and the member for Mount Royal were well founded, first of all, and in both cases, the Bloc Québécois supported the motions that resulted from those questions of privilege.

Our position has not changed since the fall. We still believe that these issues are extremely worrisome and that they need to be examined by the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

● (1535)

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, again I rise on this issue.

I cannot say what I thought about that ten percenter when it first entered my riding because it would be unparliamentary language, but I did think it was an incredible waste of time and money.

I know that the member for Saskatoon—Waskana did not act alone. I know that it did not just come from his office. It did not come from that individual alone, although he did authorize it and signed off on it. It came from somebody within the inner bowels of the Conservative Party, and that is the nub of the problem.

In over 12 years as a member of Parliament, I have never had to say that again. I did have one complaint in 1998 against the former member for Abbotsford, but I went to his riding and straightened it out with him and his constituents. I never received anything from him again. I certainly would not want to have to travel to Saskatoon—Waskana and do that again.

That is why I believe the procedure and House affairs committee should deal with this. Prorogation should in no way, shape or form put a stop to this. I believe my wise colleagues from all parties sitting on that committee will be able to advise not only you, Mr. Speaker, but this House on the proper direction, and the proper clear and concise use of ten percenters in the future. Maybe then we will be able to have decent decorum not only in this House of Commons, but also in what we send to another member's constituency. When a member belittles, berates, exaggerates and ultimately lies about another member of Parliament in his or her riding, it does no good for democracy.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I am sure that it was completely inadvertent, but I want to make it clear that the hon. gentleman who just spoke must have been referring to the constituency of Saskatoon—Wanuskewin and not any constituency called Saskatoon—Waskana because there is no such constituency. It must be Saskatoon—Wanuskewin.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, in my exuberance I did get the riding wrong. The member is absolutely correct. I was speaking about the riding of Saskatoon—Wanuskewin.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member for the riding with the longest name in Ontario, I tend to take a tolerant attitude toward those who muddle up riding names.

I just want to say on behalf of the government that this matter was brought to committee in the last session of Parliament. We on this side of the House have no reason to believe that had it gone to a vote, the outcome of the vote would have been any different from what it was the last time around. It was on that basis and only on that basis that we gave consent to this motion going forward.

With regard to the matter involving the member for Mount Royal, it is our view, as it was several months ago, that no breach of privilege took place.

With regard to the matter involving the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, that matter was brought before the procedure and House affairs committee. At that time the member for Saskatoon—Wanuskewin had already apologized. The member for Sackville—Eastern Shore was asked three times by my colleague from Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, and the committee transcript will reflect this, what remediation the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore was looking for and he said nothing other than to ensure that this does not happen to someone else.

We actually think the matter ought to be regarded as closed and are continuing along with it simply because it was the will of other members of the House. It did not seem to make sense to take up the House's time engaging in a vote on this issue.

● (1540)

The Speaker: In accordance with the special order adopted earlier today, that concludes the discussion on this matter and the motion, as I indicated earlier, was deemed adopted.

* * *

[Translation]

PETITIONS

ANIMAL WELFARE

Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I am pleased to present a petition that circulated in my riding and was signed by many residents of LaSalle—Émard.

The petitioners point out to the government that more than one billion people in the world rely on animals for their livelihoods, and that many others rely on animals for companionship.

These petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to support a universal declaration on animal welfare.

CANADA POST

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today I am presenting a petition signed by 111 citizens of Sainte-Julie, in the riding of Verchères—Les Patriotes, calling for a continued moratorium on the closure of public post offices.

Routine Proceedings

Furthermore, the municipal council adopted a resolution on October 1 stating that the municipality of Sainte-Julie is opposed to the closure of post offices and is asking Canada Post not only to maintain, but also to improve, the level of postal services provided, especially in support of citizens who are asking that a full-service post office be re-opened in the south end of Sainte-Julie.

[English]

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it has been little more than three years since the Conservative government rubber-stamped the sell-off of Canada's two great mining companies, Falconbridge and Inco. The petitioners today are coming forward with issues that have to be addressed by the government to learn lessons.

Xstrata, the corporate raider from Switzerland, has taken over the Falconbridge operation, shut mines, hydrated deposits. Now it is shutting down the copper and zinc capacity of Ontario and shipping ore out. There has not been any net benefit to Canadian citizens. We see the same with Inco, now eight months into a brutal strike by Vale.

The petitioners are trying to raise issues on the difference between foreign investment and foreign takeovers where our assets are basically taken and stripped by foreign companies.

The petitioners call on the government to amend section 36 of the Investment Canada Act in order to make the details of these secret deals, between these companies and the Conservative government, public so we can have some accountability when we know that our main assets are being sold off like this at some kind of cheap fire sale.

JUSTICE

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am presenting a large petition today regarding Marc Emery, the leader of the British Columbia Marijuana Party who has been arrested and is facing deportation to the United States. The petitioners draw the attention of Parliament to a number of pertinent facts. I will not go through all of them but some are relevant here.

Marc Emery's activities, the ones for which he is being extradited, involve selling viable marijuana seeds over the Internet. It is worth noting that these activities were approved by Health Canada's referral of medical marijuana patients to his seed bank. It is worth noting as well that Canadian courts in ruling on this subject have ruled that a \$200 fine is an appropriate punishment for this kind of activity as opposed to extradition to a country where he can face potentially life imprisonment.

Finally, it is worth noting that under the Extradition Act the petitioners point out that the Canadian minister of justice shall refuse to surrender a person when that surrender could involve unjust, undue or oppressive actions by the country to which he is being extradited.

Routine Proceedings

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I too have a very big stack of petitions to present, about 4,000 petitions, along with other colleagues in the House who have received a similar number. These are petitions from Canadians across the country who draw to our attention a matter of great urgency concerning the U.S. call for extradition of Mr. Marc Emery, as we heard earlier. Many dedicated individuals have collected approximately 12,000 petitions reflecting a strong belief that Mr. Emery or any Canadian should not face harsh punishment in the U.S. for selling cannabis seeds on the Internet when it is not worthy of prosecution in Canada.

The petitioners call on Parliament to make it clear to the Minister of Justice that such an extradition should be opposed. I am very pleased to present this. It is a very strong reflection of Canadians' view on this matter. We hope that the Parliament of Canada will act on this and that the Minister of Justice will take this into account.

● (1545)

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I join my previous two colleagues with respect to this petition regarding Marc Emery. I believe there is a certain degree of unfairness that is inherent in the process that has been used to deal with him. The petitioners urge the Minister of Justice to not surrender Marc Emery to the United States for extradition.

While I come from British Columbia, as a former attorney general and former premier of British Columbia, I have certain sympathies with Mr. Emery not because of what he did but because I believe that the process that was used to arrest and punish him would not have been done in the case of Canadian authorities wanting to arrest him and punish him. Because of that unfairness, the Minister of Justice is urged by the petitioners to take another look at it.

HARMONIZED SALES TAX

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition with some dozens of signatures from folks within the Fraser Lake, Burns Lake and Terrace regions in British Columbia, all in the northwest of British Columbia that I represent.

This is a petition regarding the much decried HST deal between the Prime Minister and the Premier of British Columbia. The petitioners note that the HST will be applied to a number of products that neither the GST and PST apply to right now, thereby increasing the tax burden on folks in the northwest and right across British Columbia and also Ontario.

The timing of this tax increase is what the petitioners draw the government's attention to. The fact is that communities and families are struggling to get by as it is right now. They see an increase in taxation on some of these vital products, these are not extraneous things, as critical. There are many dozens of Canadians who have written the government to take action and to withdraw this much hated tax.

AIR PASSENGERS' BILL OF RIGHTS

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by dozens of Manitobans calling on Parliament to adopt Canada's air passengers' bill of rights.

Bill C-310 would provide compensation for air passengers flying with all Canadian airlines, including charters, anywhere they fly. It would include measures on compensation for overbooked flights, cancelled flights and unreasonable tarmac delays. It would deal with late and misplaced luggage. It would require all-inclusive pricing when airline companies advertise their products. It is basically inspired by a European Union law where overbookings have dropped off significantly. The residents feel that Air Canada is already operating in Europe, so why should Air Canada customers receive better treatment in Europe than they would in Canada.

The bill would also ensure that passengers are kept informed of their flight changes, whether there are delays or cancellations. The new rules are required to be posted in the airports. The airlines must inform the passengers of their rights and the process for them to file for compensation. The bill is not meant to punish the airlines. If they follow the rules, they will not have to pay one cent in compensation to travellers.

The petitioners call on the Government of Canada to support Bill C-310, which would introduce Canada's first air passengers' bill of rights.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, question No. 42 will be answered today.

[Text]

Question No. 42—**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:**

For the period from November 5, 2005 to December 9, 2009: (a) how many disclosures were made to the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner, which department did each disclosure regard and when was each disclosure made; (b) how many complaints were made to the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner, which department did each complaint regard, and when was each complaint made; (c) how many investigations into disclosures did the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner conduct, when was each investigation conducted and which departments were involved in each investigation; and (d) how many investigations into complaints did the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner conduct, when was each investigation conducted and which departments were involved in each investigation?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act, the Office of the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner was established in 2007 as an agent of Parliament, independent of the Government of Canada. The role of the commissioner is to maintain and enhance public confidence in the integrity of public servants and public institutions by establishing effective procedures for the disclosure of wrongdoings and for protecting public servants who disclose wrongdoings. As a result, the information requested is not available within the Government of Canada. However, information on the number of disclosures and complaints made to the commissioner and investigated by her is contained in the commissioner's annual reports for 2007-08 and 2008-09 which were tabled in Parliament and published on the commissioner's website. Information for fiscal year 2009-10 will be provided in the commissioner's next annual report due to be tabled in Parliament by June 30, 2010.

Business of Supply

[English]

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

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: I wish to inform the House that because of the ministerial statement, government orders will be extended by 22 minutes.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—GOVERNMENT SPENDING

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Deputy Speaker: Just before question period, the hon. member for Vancouver East had the floor, and she will now have seven minutes to conclude her remarks.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to continue with the debate on this supply day motion that is before us. As we just got into statements, I was speaking about the second part of the Liberal opposition day motion concerning what is commonly known as ten percenters.

When we get elected to this House, we do have enormous privileges. We have rights, responsibilities, and duties that we undertake. One of the most important ones is that we undertake to communicate not only with our own constituents but also to the public generally. This is something that should be taken very seriously and conducted in a very responsible manner.

I do agree that there has been a lot of misuse and abuse regarding ten percenters, which is the mass mailing program that members enjoy in this House. The costs of this program have grown enormously. The motion before us today basically seeks to eliminate the ability of any member of the House from mailing any ten percenter outside of his or her own riding. Certainly, we understand that we are not debating what one might do within one's own riding, and that is obviously very important. First and foremost, we want to communicate with our own constituents, whether it is through householders, ten percenters, notices and so on.

However, I do want to make a very important point here. In our responsibilities as members of this House, in our responsibilities as critics for various files such as agriculture, foreign affairs, aboriginal issues, housing or whatever it might be, we do actually communicate with people across the country and our ability to do that is very important.

I have been looking at some of the ten percenters that I have sent out over the recent months on things such as multiculturalism and foreign workers, when I was the labour critic. I have been sending out mailings on Bill C-15, which was the bill on mandatory minimum sentencing for drug crimes, because there are people

interested in that matter across the country, who wanted to hear what our perspective was about that bill and what was going on.

I know in our caucus, we take this very seriously and our members, as critics or on issues that they are working on, want to communicate with people across the country. Unfortunately, this motion before us today appears to eliminate that capacity and the ability to do that, which is very problematic.

I do want to say that we do support the motion overall because it does focus on government waste, but on this particular aspect of the ten percenters, we think we would be far better off to ensure that there are reasonable limits that are placed on the number of ten percenters that could be put out, so that it cannot be abused. There should be some common sense rules put in place to ensure that these ten percenters are not used in a way that they have been used and that is causing this problem, which is to launch incredibly offensive personal attacks on individual members or a member's party.

We think that rather than throwing the whole program out and denying members the right to communicate with people in places other than their own ridings, we should actually approach this from a different point of view. In fact, in the debate today there has been some reference made to the fact that the Board of Internal Economy, which is made up of representatives of all members of the House and is the governing board of the House, actually has had some discussions. That is the place where this really belongs.

This motion directs the Board of Internal Economy to eliminate all of these mailings. That is very severe. What we should be doing is putting forward our opinions and suggestions as to how we think this program should be dealt with in terms of the abuses, and letting that all-party discussion take place to hopefully find a resolution.

Earlier today, we had two points of privilege that came up. Of course, that is a very important mechanism and availability for members, when they feel that their privileges have been violated, to rise in this House on a point of privilege. As we saw with the ones that were raised today and referred back to the committee on procedure and House affairs, they both dealt with ten percenters. That is a very legitimate and severe matter, and it does need to be dealt with.

• (1550)

In terms of the program overall, we would much prefer to see a discussion and a resolution on how to place some reasonable limits and ensure that ten percenters are used in a way that is responsible and is about proper communication with different kinds of constituencies and communities that are interested in a particular issue that may go beyond one's own riding. I find it very perplexing that the Liberals would have written the motion in this way today to prevent that. It may well be that they did not take huge advantage of this but it is something that needs further discussion.

Business of Supply

In the interest of trying to find a reasonable solution, I would like to propose the following motion, seconded by the member for Elmwood—Transcona: That the motion be amended by inserting after the words “into ridings other than their own” the following: while noting that it is acceptable for members or their party leaders to continue with mailings that fall within the legitimate purview of their work and critic area for the purpose of communicating with the public in other ridings on public policy matters as long as such ten percenter mailings do not engage in negative attacks on another member or their political party.

• (1555)

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty to inform hon. members that an amendment to an opposition motion may be moved only with the consent of the sponsor of the motion. If the sponsor of the motion is not present, the House leader, deputy house leader, whip or deputy whip of the sponsor's party may give or deny consent on the sponsor's behalf.

[*English*]

Since the sponsor is not present in the Chamber, I will ask the deputy whip of the opposition if he consents to this amendment being moved.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): No, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member ended her comments dealing with the issue of ten percenters. When I was first elected to this place just a few years ago, I recall that the ten percenter was a communications mechanism that allowed the member of Parliament to communicate with his or her constituents on an ad hoc basis.

At some point, it expanded beyond the riding. One could mail it to any riding. At some point, the bylaws were changed to allow party whips to do what they called regrouping which opened the door to virtually unlimited mailings of ten percenters. I do not think it was an unwitting expansion. It was an advertent expansion on the part of the party whips of all the parties in the House and suddenly we had this mushrooming.

Would the member not agree that this is the effective conversion of an MP communication mechanism by all of the parties in the House to the use of the political parties? Because it is unlimited, is it not a little bit like letting somebody else use our credit cards? Are we, the individual MPs, not letting somebody else use our credit card on an unlimited basis? I can see the numbers here guesstimated by our research, but it is over \$10 million a year for these worthless ten percenters.

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, as individual members and certainly within our caucuses we still have the ability to say what we agree to sign off on or not. It is not like somebody else using our credit cards.

What really bothers me is that, while I agree that there are problems with the way this program has evolved and now how it is being abused, the principle of it is still very important. Individual members should be able to communicate with people even outside their riding. I do it all the time. I have the ten percenters here. They

are entirely legitimate. They are about things that are going on in the House. They are not attacking any individual member.

Presumably, if this is approved and implemented, that will no longer be available. I think members will be losing the rights they have now if this motion is implemented in the way it is written.

• (1600)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I believe that my colleague shares our view that parliamentary mailings are important; they are part of members' privileges. I do not share his opinion on the fact that all members can send mailings to all other ridings. The Bloc's position is clear on that.

I would like to know whether the member supports cancelling the practice, used so heavily by his party, of placing ten percenters in envelopes. Every mailing placed in an envelope costs 40¢ more than a mass mailing. I would like to know if his party will support the Bloc's proposal, which will eliminate these ten percenters in future.

[*English*]

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, this is precisely why this issue needs to be not just debated but resolved and worked out. The member raises a particular issue about whether we should allow ten percenters to go in individual envelopes. We do that on occasion because they are addressed to individual people in particular ridings. That is a very important element and I believe it is our prerogative to do it. Other parties have chosen to send mass mailings that go on a postal walk. If they see that as effective and they are not abusive, that is fine.

However, to address them to individual residents or voters in a particular area or in a number of areas related to a particular issue, which is what my mailings would be, I do not see anything wrong with that. To me, the issue is how it is being abused, whether it is over the top in the amount of mailings or, more important, the content. These mailings have become very personally abusive, which is what we need to stop.

However, to throw the whole program out would limit members' ability to communicate with Canadians across this country, which would be very unfortunate.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to the opposition day motion. I will be splitting my time with the brilliant member for Ajax—Pickering.

I am very happy to see this motion come before the House as it addresses some needs that Parliament has not addressed for a number of years.

First, it does go to government restraint. We are at a difficult time. We are \$56 billion in deficit. However, even when we are not in deficit, government should not be spending money wastefully. I think anybody would agree with that. In a difficult time like this, with a Conservative deficit of \$56 billion, wasteful spending is even more inappropriate than ever before.

Business of Supply

I will preface my comments, as a Nova Scotian, speaking about what has happened in Nova Scotia over the past month or so. The auditor general of Nova Scotia did an investigation into spending by members of the Legislative Assembly, an audit of MLAs' expenses.

What was uncovered was egregious spending that nobody could justify. Generators were installed in the houses of MLAs. Multiple computers, laptops and printers were purchased. Big screen TVs were purchased, just what every politician wants in their office when a constituent comes in to talk about their day-to-day problems, just trying to raise their family. Other things that were bought were espresso makers, GPS units, briefcases, digital cameras, camcorders and duplicate expenses, payments, et cetera. The premier indicated that his bar fees were being paid by the government.

People are angry, rightfully, about this abuse of taxpayer money. There have already been resignations and there may be more to come. The people of Nova Scotia feel no differently from the rest of the people in Canada, which is that politicians, their governments and parliamentarians should spend money that is theirs the same way they would spend their own. People do not accept that it is okay for government to waste money. Drastic changes have resulted.

There is no doubt that our system in Ottawa is a better system but there is a lesson to all of us: treat the people's money as if it were our own.

The message, however, has not reached the government and it has not reached all members of this House. A \$13 million increase for the Prime Minister's own departments, spending on research and management consultants that nobody could defend. To avoid tendering contracts, money is let just under the legal limit of \$25,000 without a tender, and it seems to happen all the time. There is outrageous spending on advertising of government initiatives. Over \$100 million were spent to advertise Canada's economic action plan.

We have an enlarged cabinet. Ministers who underperform do not get moved out of cabinet. They get moved to lesser responsibilities, more in keeping with their capabilities, I suppose, but they stay in cabinet with all of the perks that go with being in cabinet.

There are a lot of examples of how the government has not been spending money wisely but I want to speak specifically to the issue of ten percenters. If there is a rotten, perverted, scandalous, ridiculously bloated, wasteful symbol of how low politics in Canada has fallen, it is ten percenters which allow members of Parliament to send virtually unlimited mailings of the most partisan nature across Canada.

As we heard from the member for Scarborough—Guildwood, perhaps the preeminent expert in this House on the history of Parliament and its procedures, there probably was an noble purpose for ten percenters. Originally, I think the idea was that members could send them to people in their constituency. As MPs we are supposed to, it is incumbent upon us to communicate with our constituents.

We are allowed to do four householders a year and most of us do all four. Those are legitimate and reasonable. When I do householders, I do not put the Liberal message all over it. I represent all of the people in my constituency. I would challenge anybody to look

at the householders I have sent out or, on occasion, the ten percenters that I sent out in my own constituency. They deal with things like the Boys and Girls Club, a local theatre group called Eastern Front Theatre, the Public Good Society, Circle of Care furniture banks and things like that. To me that is a legitimate and reasonable purpose of ten percenters.

However, in the last number of years things have changed and I understand. People say that as an MP we have a responsibility to communicate around the country, but these have become absolutely and completely political. It has gotten totally out of hand. The mailings today are largely controlled out of various leaders' offices or party offices and the messages are negative and brutally partisan. MPs often do not even know what is going out under their own names.

• (1605)

It is very costly, as the Taxpayers Federation singled them out last week for special attention. All parties do it. It is true, though, that the government has raised it to a high art form, or perhaps a low art form.

We heard today the members from Mount Royal and Sackville—Eastern Shore indicating how these mailings had been abused and turned into virtual hate mail, sent out at government expense, carrying a partisan message, peppering the country with vicious propaganda.

At the same time, parties are building up their mailing lists for their own political purposes. Parties all do it. I do not condone anybody using ten percenters. I do not like the fact that Liberals use ten percenters. I like the fact that we do it less than anybody else on a per capita basis.

People in my riding ask me all the time why they are getting mail from the leader of the New Democratic Party the time. Some say that their wives communicate more with the leader of the New Democratic party than they do with them. They ask me who is paying for the mail, who is paying for the stuff that goes into their mailboxes, which they do not want. People do not like it and they are at the point of saying enough is enough.

If we took all of the offensive spending of the MLAs in Nova Scotia, which has rightly enraged Nova Scotians, it would be a tiny fraction of the cost just of the ten percenters. The cost in printing is estimated at \$10 million. The cost in postage is more than twice that, \$30 million. What could we do with \$30 million?

Business of Supply

In the Speech from the Throne last week, we heard about how the government would enhance the universal child care benefit for single-parent families. The next day in the budget we found out the total cost of that program, when it is fully implemented, would be \$5 million a year. There are \$5 million a year for Canadians most in need and \$30 million so this garbage can be sent across the country that spreads lies and hate about other parties and individuals. If there is a juxtaposition to politics today that shows how rotten this has become, it is that. There are \$5 million for those who need help and \$30 million for ten percenters.

At the same time, the Canadian Council on Learning, CCSD and KAIROS were cut. The value of that cut was \$7 million over five years from an organization that focuses on justice and peace. Yet there are \$30 million dollars a year to sustain this ridiculous policy of sending out ten percenters that every member of the House knows in his or her heart has become completely out of hand and is a total waste of money. We could save tens of millions of dollars every year just by saying enough is enough.

I heard the members of the New Democratic Party say that they did legitimate mailings and as MPs they had to communicate with other people on specific issues. The NDP member for Vancouver East spoke sincerely about the need to deal with stakeholders.

There is not a member of Parliament in the House whose stakeholder is 10% of somebody else's riding. We have mailing lists. We already have free mailing. We have bulk mailing. We have the frank. In my case, if I want to send information to people in child care or people who deal with poverty, I do not send it to 10% of the people who live in Sackville—Eastern Shore or in Cape Breton—Canso. These are political mailings.

I have one from a New Democratic member, who I will not mention. It ticks off to send back information, "I would like to receive the NDP's email newsletter". This is for political purposes. This is taxpayers subsidizing politicians to send this stuff out.

If we want to improve Parliament and politics in Canada and have members work together the way they should, the way it was designed to be, it does not help when we come in here on Monday when the Friday before we received calls from people in our association telling us that they received hate mail about us.

It is time to stop the abuse, to save the money, to put \$30 million to a better purpose and improve the atmosphere in Parliament. Let us get rid of the ten percenters. Let us do the right thing once and for all.

• (1610)

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a tremendous amount of respect for the hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, but in his own statement he says that we all do it. Over the last number of months, there have been over six or seven Liberal ten percenters in my riding, but that is not why I am standing.

With health care, unemployment, the economy, the environment, productivity, the long list of all the issues that we could properly debate in the House, on a day when the Liberals have an opportunity to put forward any suggestions they may have, any concept they would like to discuss about the country, they pick the ten percenter

program. Are they not embarrassed that they are wasting our taxpayer dollars today on this item?

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's comments, but he is talking about wasting money. That is what we are talking about. It is not just the ten percenters. We could also fix a lot of the other party's problems, in terms of wasteful spending on contracts, on travel and on everything else that is done.

However, I do not think Canadians would this was a good use of taxpayer money if they knew about this and knew the cost. I do not think people in my riding or in Burlington would say this was good use of money if they knew what was being spent. If he had a town hall meeting in his riding asked if we should we send this crap out to the people of Canada on their ticket, on their dime, I do not think they would say this was a good use of taxpayer money. If he wants to save taxpayer money, start today. Stand up and vote tomorrow night for this motion.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated before, I get probably as many of these as anybody else in the House and mine are always from one party. The only party that sends me anything is the Conservative Party. There are piles of these things. I do not let it bother me. I keep winning, and I intend to keep winning, in spite of them. I do not think a lot of people read these things after a while.

Interestingly enough, one a month ago I received one and it was not from the Conservatives at all. It was from the leader of the Liberal Party. Maybe it was an accidental mailing. Maybe it was meant for Saint Boniface and accidentally put into my riding.

This morning the member for Winnipeg South Centre brought up this issue. I have to admit she gets more of this than anybody else in Manitoba. The Conservatives have been chasing her now for several elections. Guess what? She is still here. She beats them.

These things can work against members. If they do negative advertising against a member on a consistent and constant basis, it will work against them. The member for Winnipeg South Centre is proof positive that she wins in spite of all the negative advertising.

• (1615)

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from the NDP proves my very point. Canadians do not like these things and they do not react well to them. However, we cannot say that because people still vote for somebody who is targeted that this is a good use of money. That is a ridiculous use of money.

Business of Supply

If anybody wants to see if these are political, find out where the parties send the mailings. I do not think they come into my riding from the Conservative Party, which will not win in Dartmouth—Cole Harbour for some time to come. I do get them from the NDP. I am sure all parties target these to the areas that they want to win. That is partisan political abuse of public money and it has to stop sometime, and it will stop. This may not pass today or tomorrow, but it will stop, just like in Nova Scotia. As soon as the light was shone on some of this stuff, it stopped. It will stop eventually here because it is the wrong thing to do.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, following up on the out-of-riding ten percenters, they also include a request for feedback about which leader they think is on the right track. They also ask them to send their email address and then all of a sudden this becomes a political instrument. I think the problem I have and many other people have with this is Parliament money is being used by political parties for partisan use.

Would the member care to comment on that?

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Speaker, there is no question about that. I received an email on Friday about this very issue. The woman stated that she had received a flyer, she hated it and it was wrong. She wanted to know who was paying for it, but she assumed the public was. She was right. She said that at the very least it should be paid for by political parties.

It should not be funded from the budget of Parliament. It is totally and completely political. The information is quite often wrong, and we heard that from the member for Mount Royal, but, at the very least, it should not be used to subsidize political operations. That is what happens with these flyers.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be given the opportunity to rise on this matter.

We all acknowledge that Canada now is in a very difficult situation financially. The Conservatives have run up a \$56 billion deficit, the largest deficit in Canada's history, after inheriting a surplus of almost \$13 billion. The Parliamentary Budget Officer tells us that the deficit is structural, that without major changes it will not be addressed. Canadians are rightfully asking what the plan is to get us out of this mess.

The only real item that has been brought forward so far was by the Treasury Board President, who stated that he would be eliminating some 250 plus positions. The problem is that most of those positions are already vacant. The total savings of that move, even if the positions were filled, would only be about \$1.5 million. The government, with much fanfare, held a press conference and announced the elimination of these positions as proof of its austerity, of its dedication to eliminating waste.

Yet we heard just moments ago a Conservative member attack a debate about the tens of millions of dollars being wasted through these partisan mailings, but it is not just these mailings. I will come back to some of the other things that are being done and why this issue is so important in terms of establishing the right precedent going forward.

A lot of difficult choices will have to be made as the government comes to grips with the mess it has created with this deficit. They will not be easy choices.

One of the easiest things to do would be to take the low hanging fruit. I would suggest that the more than \$10 million that are spent a year, some \$30 million if we extrapolate the postal costs for ten percenters, has to end. In fact, at its awards last week, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation stated that number one on the list of the most egregious abuses in government spending was ten percenters.

We are hitting a quagmire in this debate. Members are saying that because one member sends them, everyone should send them, so therefore we should just continue. At some point, somebody has to say enough. At some point, we have to acknowledge that this practice is wrong. We have to collectively agree to give it up. The notion that one party should continue to send them but another party will not, on principle, is ridiculous. That would put one party at a tremendous electoral disadvantage. We all collectively have to disengage from this.

A list was prepared last week of the top 20 users of the ten percenter program, 19 were Conservatives and one New Democrat. Individuals in all parties are using them, but let us take a step back and end it.

We talk about restrictions that are placed on these programs, but even the existing restrictions are not followed.

As a case in point, ten percenters were sent into my riding, which clearly violated the rules in place for these mailings. We sent this to the legal staff of the House of Commons, which said that this was campaign literature and it “contravened the bylaws of the Board of Internal Economy”. That was July 17, 2008. No action was taken whatsoever. These mailings have gone out many times. This abuse continues. All the rules are continually and flagrantly violated.

Some members have essentially been accused of supporting pedophiles through the use of these messages. Some have been accused of being anti-Semitic. The ten percenters are being used for highly partisan purposes and, in some cases, as one member alluded to, bordering on hate mail.

Who is paying for this? The taxpayers of Canada. They are expected to pick up the bill. I have talked to constituents who have stacks of these ten percenters. Some constituents save them just because they are outraged and find them so ridiculous. When they look at that giant stack of nonsense, they get enraged because times are tough. They believe we all have to chip in to fight this deficit, to get around the corner in difficult times, yet they see this kind of egregious waste.

● (1620)

They get upset when they open the flyers and are asked essentially to select their voting preferences. They are asked which party leader they like, so the parties can then turn around and use the responses to phone for campaign donations and to get signs posted.

Business of Supply

That is without question what some parties are doing with this information. It is an abuse, pure and simple. If we allow this to stand and take the time to just say this is okay, then it opens the door to continued use of taxpayer dollars as if they were part of a campaign war chest.

When we see what is being spent on advertising for the economic stimulus plan, this money is staggering. If we turn on any major event, whether the Olympics, the Oscars or the Super Bowl, there are those ads. In a time of supposed austerity, that naked partisan spending is on full display. In fact if we take a look at it, the government is spending more to promote itself than all beer companies combined. Are we going to allow these precedents to take hold and become established as part of the process of this place?

It was only in 2005 that spending on ten percenters was half of what it is today. Where do members think the trajectory of this is going? What does it say of this place? What does it do to the tone and tenor of debate?

If there is any question whether or not there is additional spending this touches on as well, let us take a look at some of the other egregious increases in spending in a number of different areas that absolutely need to be trimmed.

Under the Conservatives, spending on transport and communications has risen by \$820 million, or 32%, since 2005. By comparison, over the last four years of a Liberal government, the increase was 2.3%.

Spending on management consultants went up \$355 million over that same period, an increase of 165%.

Although the government announced a freeze on departmental spending in this year's estimates, the Prime Minister's own department, the Privy Council Office, is getting a \$13 million boost in spending for support and advice to the PMO. That is a 22% increase in advance of the freeze. The Privy Council Office has already seen its budget increased by \$31 million since 2005. Public opinion research has gone up by \$5 million. The increase in the size of the cabinet of the Conservative Party has cost taxpayers \$3.9 million. Communication services in the Prime Minister's office have increased by \$1.7 million.

There is a decision we have to make, and that is, what are taxpayers responsible for paying? What are we, as political entities and parties, responsible for? When those lines start getting erased, when parties start using taxpayers' moneys for such overtly and blatant partisan purposes, we all suffer. We have to take a moment to stand and say this is going to be over.

For my colleagues in the NDP who are struggling with this issue, whom I have heard say they recognize there is abuse, there is every opportunity to continue using their franking privileges. There is every opportunity to continue disseminating a message, but any rules that have been placed on these have been violated. Any time we have tried to control them, it has ended up in abuse and waste. The time has come for us to end this practice, to rein it in and to draw a firm line between what should be paid by parties and what should be paid by taxpayers.

● (1625)

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member's feigned indignation before this House today reeks of hypocrisy. I have in my hands a ten percenter. On it I see a statement that Parliament was locked out. In a picture I see the Liberal Party of Canada logo. I see a statement that reads, "Subscribe me to the Liberal Party e-newsletter".

Therefore, I would like to ask the hon. member if, in his feigned indignation, which I am sure I will get more of in his answer, he will tell the House the number of people the Liberal Party has signed up through its ten percenter program.

Mr. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, I made a point and it is unfortunate that the member will not listen. I ask and implore him to listen. My point is that all parties are doing this. In fact the notion that one party should not do it while other parties get a huge electoral advantage by doing it is absurd. We are saying, let us end it, let us end it together, let us end this practice.

If the member is suggesting that his party should spend millions and millions of taxpayer dollars promoting its electoral advantage and that other parties should just sit on their hands and do nothing, it is absurd and makes no sense. So if he agrees this is a waste, as I am certain his constituents do, and that it must stop, then let us just stop it. Tomorrow night, vote to end this wasteful practice.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member should recognize that the NDP amendment was basically introduced to deal with what he was concerned about. The issue is that we can eliminate the offensive negative ads, because that is what people are complaining about here. I do not think anyone in the House objects to valid information being disseminated to people who are not in incumbent constituencies. It is the offensive nature of some of these publications that is bothering people. So why can we simply not make a rule that says that the content has to be approved? We have had such rules in Manitoba for a number of years. We mail out stuff all the time there and we have to get the content approved, and we do not send out material that basically consists of attack ads against other parties.

I would ask the member once again, why could he not live with our amendment, which would ban negative attacks on another member or their political party?

Mr. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, the answer is twofold: We cannot really have a strong reason to mail a ten percenter to another member's riding. As a critic for public safety and national security and vice-chair of that committee, I can absolutely have a legitimate and strong reason to mail constituents in other communities on those issues. I have a franking privilege to do it; I do not need the ten percenter.

Business of Supply

The second point I made in my speech is who polices this practice? We already have rules today. They are broken every single day. Examples are sent to the Board of Internal Economy and nothing is done, to the point where the Law Clerk of the House of Commons called it “campaign literature”, saying it had an electoral intent and objective and that it contravened the bylaws of the Board of Internal Economy. Nothing was done. So we have rules that are being ignored. They are going to continue to be ignored even with new rules in place.

• (1630)

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the hon. member for Ajax—Pickering who made a very clear distinction. He talked about bringing the debt down and cutting expenses. The way I see it, the Conservatives and the NDP are not seeing it from that perspective. We can save millions of dollars by cutting this wasteful spending of the Conservatives. The hon. member mentioned the 21st member on this list. When I looked at the list, out of 35 members, 34 of them were Conservatives. It is that party that is misusing this privilege. Maybe we should bring it to a stop.

Is that the way the member feels?

Mr. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, I think we going to have to ask that tough choices be made. Why not start with the ones that should be easiest, that is, instead of expending literally hundreds of millions of dollars on outside consultants from PR firms, for television commercials for self-promotion, for 10 percent ads in a time when austerity is demanded, why not cut these expenditures first? I say this because it is totally unacceptable to look in the eyes of the people we are going to demand cuts from and say they have to trim their spending yet accept this kind of wasteful spending.

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 Scarborough—Guildwood, International Cooperation; the hon. member for Don Valley West, Citizenship and Immigration.

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to share my time with the member for North Vancouver.

The motion today is ironic, coming from the party opposite. The Liberals talk about fiscal management, and yet we know that of all the parties the party opposite is known for the sponsorship scandal, the \$1 billion long gun registry boondoggle, the HRDC boondoggle, and cutting \$25 billion in transfer payments to the provinces in the mid-nineties while spending billions on pet projects that did not prove to be of any value to Canadians.

Let us believe for a moment that the Liberal Party is actually being genuine in its concern about government waste. That has not been proven in the past, but let us just take it for granted for a moment. Once the Liberals accepted this, I suspect that the members opposite woke up this morning and thought that fiscal management was a good idea. That is exactly what my party is doing; we are taking the lead in fiscal management. We need only to see the Conservative track record.

Just a couple of days ago, the party opposite allowed the budget for this year to pass. In their hearts the Liberals know it was a budget

that was good for Canadians. We laid out in the budget a three-point plan to return to balanced budgets.

First, we will wind down the temporary measures in the economic action plan. Members will recall that these measures were taken to stimulate the economy during a global recession to mitigate the harm the global recession would cause Canadians. The government stepped up to help people when they needed help. Our economic action plan will ensure that Canada exits the world recession stronger than it entered. That is really a great sign of government management through very difficult times. The first thing is to wind down those temporary measures as the world economy rebounds.

Second, the actions of the government will ensure that it lives within its means. Anyone who runs a household understands that sometimes it is necessary to incur debt, but it cannot be done in perpetuity. That is why we will ensure that the government lives within its means, and only the Conservative government can do that. We know how the Liberal Party has dealt with that in the past, as I have already mentioned.

Finally, we will be conducting a comprehensive review of the administration and overhead costs. As part of these measures, the departmental operating budget will be frozen at 2010-11 levels. We are leading by example. The salaries of the Prime Minister, ministers and ministers offices are to be frozen first. The hope is that members of the House will have the courage to follow our lead because, of course, it will be up to the other members of Parliament to follow the lead of the Prime Minister and cabinet.

I would ask a pre-emptive question of the members opposite: Will they follow the government's lead in this regard?

I want to take a moment to talk about the strategic review process. This process is conducted by ministers and it goes through Treasury Board. I am a member of Treasury Board, so I have a particular interest in how and why this is done and the good that it is doing. These reviews ensure that government programs are achieving the results that Canadians expect. It is a thorough process. All programs have to demonstrate, first, that they are effective and efficient; second, that they are in line with the federal government's roles; and third, that they meet the changing priorities and needs of Canadians.

• (1635)

In the 2009 round of reviews we reallocated up to \$287 million to budget priorities and the total savings from the rounds of the strategic reviews since 2007 will be about \$1.3 billion by 2012-13.

For the 2010 round we will be reviewing departmental spending even more aggressively to ensure programs are producing the results they should for Canadians and ensuring that they are being effective at the lowest cost. There will be some \$33 billion that will be reviewed this year and we expect to save \$1.7 billion.

Business of Supply

We are also going to be looking at grants and contributions to ensure that spending is achieving the results for Canadians.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, we are proceeding with a reduction of 245 governor in council positions to ensure better governance for federal organizations. Further to these cost containment measures, we are launching a comprehensive review of our administrative functions to streamline the delivery of services across the entire government.

These measures demonstrate our government's commitment to restoring fiscal balance while at the same time delivering programs and services that meet Canadians' needs, to ensure that Canadians are safe and secure, and to foster a strong economy.

It is very clear that this government is showing the leadership that Canadians expect during difficult times. We are helping Canadians weather the storm, reducing the cost of government, and positioning the economy for growth in the years ahead.

I would like to reflect on how this government is approaching the times ahead differently than the previous government. The previous government cut \$25 billion from the transfer payments to the provinces that caused unbelievable pain and hardship among the citizenry throughout the country.

This government is not going to do that. This government is taking a different approach. It is going to ensure that the government lives within its means. I think Canadians also appreciate the fact that this government has led Canada through stormy waters. Land is in sight, safety is near. However, the recession is not over in many parts of the world and we have to stay strong and diligent.

On the issue of the ten percenters, I do not know what the party opposite has against freedom of speech. I do not know what the party opposite has against the rights of Canadians for a public discourse.

Canadians have the good sense to know what information they can find valuable. They do not need the Liberal Party of Canada to censor what they see. Canadians can judge for themselves what is relevant to their lives, to tell what information is valuable to them, and also it is an opportunity to see what other parties stand for.

Everyone has equal privileges to these ten percenters. It is a way of ensuring that Canadians are informed. It improves public discourse and it is a way to improve our democracy.

We live in the best country in the world and the best time in human history to be alive. The Conservative Party is the party that will ensure that Canada remains glorious and free.

• (1640)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the member about the general case of moneys. Governments have no moneys of their own. It is all taxpayers' money.

As the member indicated, we have some challenges ahead. All responsible parliaments and governments must look at everything they do and spend their money on to determine whether or not they would pass the sniff test by the public whose money it is and whether or not that money is being used for the priorities of the day, which is dealing with the economic challenges and certainly jobs for Canadians.

This motion seems to say we have some opportunities to save dollars and to rededicate them to important priorities. Will the member not support that?

Hon. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, it is important that we invest in democracy. It is important that we invest in freedom of ideas. It is important that Canadians receive the information they need to make the best decisions possible at the ballot box.

That is what the ten percenter program does. Sometimes they are hard-hitting, from all parties. However, it is up to Canadians to decide what the results of those messages should be. To censor or somehow cut off Canadians, not to invest in democracy, not to invest in freedom of speech, is just un-Canadian.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his comments. One thing that troubles me, though, is he speaks broadly about investing in democracy. It is really a stretch of the imagination to suggest that the millions upon millions of dollars that the government wasted advertising its action plan can be described as investing in democracy. It is sheer promotion of the Conservative Party. The giving out of cheques with the big Conservative logo on them, is that investing in democracy?

I say investing in democracy is spending some of the taxpayers' money to actually give people a voice in what our renewable energy future will be, about what our climate future will be for Canada.

I say investing in democracy is giving to all those communities out there that applied for funding under these various programs and were denied because the government chose instead to divert millions of dollars to promoting its party. That is not investing in democracy.

• (1645)

Hon. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, on the ads describing the economic action plan, I think Canadians found them very helpful.

The NDP government in Manitoba runs very similar ads about its programs and budget priorities. So for an NDP member to stand up and criticize that type of advertising, perhaps she should reflect and talk to her provincial colleagues who do very similar things to enlighten Canadians and to provide information to Canadians.

On the issue of ten percenters, it is an investment in democracy. Frankly, I disagree with many of the statements this member has made on the environment and some of the solutions that she has brought forth, but by golly she has the right, as every member has the right, to bring out these messages, to tell Canadians, not just in her riding but across Canada, what they propose to do to solve these challenges. All members have that right. In that way we enter a public discourse directly with Canadians.

That is democracy. That is worth investing in and the ten percenter program helps in that public discourse. It is essential to our democracy. I urge all members to support the ten percenter program.

Business of Supply

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to correct the minister. When it comes to spending, if we look at the Privy Council Office, the spending has gone up and general spending has gone up by 25% under the Conservative government. This money that we are spending on these ten percenters can be used for the betterment of those Canadians, the one or two million Canadians, who are out of work.

Hon. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, I would like to clarify. Public discourse is essential for democracy and the ten percenters are part of that discourse. In regard to priorities, the ten percenter program allows Canadians to see what each party is doing and allows them to ultimately make a decision based on that. They have chosen the Conservative Party. Maybe that is why the Liberals do not like the ten percenters so much.

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it gives me pleasure to rise today to speak to the Liberal opposition motion moved by Malpeque's million-dollar man.

I found it ironic that it was the Liberal Party that moved this motion. After all, the Liberal Party was in charge for 13 long years in this country and it owned the podium when it came to wasting taxpayers' dollars. From the \$2 billion spent on the long gun registry, to the billion-dollar boondoggle at Human Resources, to the millions of taxpayers' dollars stolen, the fake Groupaction contracts, and the brown envelopes left at Frank's Restaurant by senior members of the Liberal Party during the sponsorship scandal, the Liberal Party is the top dog when it comes to government waste. And, yes, it was Malpeque's million-dollar man, the same Liberal member who moved this motion today, who was part of that government that wasted and, yes, stole taxpayers' dollars. How can he get up in this House today and have the sheer chutzpah to move this motion? I do not know.

However, let me move specifically to address the issue of what we call ten percenters. As members are aware, a significant portion of today's motion deals with the issue of ten percenters.

As we know, part of being an effective member of Parliament is to communicate with Canadians from across the country on issues of the day. Whether it is the great action by our government, with Canada's economic action plan, where we are leading the way for Canadians on jobs and economic growth, or the leadership our government is showing on the world stage or, yes, informing Canadians about the past statements of the current leader of the Liberal Party, ten percenters are a valuable tool to communicate with our constituents and with Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

All of these mailouts are available to all parties in the House of Commons, and it is worth noting that all political parties, including Liberals, Bloc Québécois and New Democrats, employ this practice.

I would note that virtually every single piece the three opposition parties send out is negative, while we Conservatives send out many positive pieces, alerting Canadians to the great work our Conservative government and our MPs are doing for them.

In this weekend's *Globe and Mail*, and many times in the past, the Liberal Party has accused Conservatives of encouraging a culture of incivility on Parliament Hill.

When it comes to ten percenters, it is a little rich for the Liberals to be making accusations of incivility. First of all, virtually every single ten percenter they send out is a negative piece or an attack piece. Some of the material they have sent out has been totally shameful. Let me cite some examples.

There is the ten percenter sent out by the member for Ajax—Pickering, attempting to scare my constituents in North Vancouver. The only graphic on its cover is a handgun being aimed right at the face of the viewer. It is reminiscent of the scare campaign launched by his former colleague, Paul Martin, in the 2004 election campaign, which also featured a handgun being fired at the viewer.

Next, there are the scandalous ten percenters sent by the member for St. Paul's, trying to scare Canadians about the H1N1 virus and to politicize the issue.

Let me remind members that this is the same Liberal Party that tried to fundraise on the back of the H1N1 issue when its party president, Alfred Apps, said that the H1N1 virus could be just like Hurricane Katrina for the Prime Minister. We all know that this was just pure politicization of a very serious issue by the Liberals, and of course it never came to be.

Even worse, the member for St. Paul's sent this ten percenter into a number of first nation communities. These communities were busy at the time, ensuring that they dealt with H1N1 properly. They did not need to be needlessly alarmed by the member for St. Paul's and the Liberal Party.

Let me describe it to the House. The cover featured body bags and the title "Not the kind of H1N1 help they wanted". On the inside there was a photo of a sick first nation child, with the phrase "no vaccines, just body bags". That was shameful. Do not just quote me on this. Ron Evans, the Grand Chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, in the *Toronto Star* of October 28, 2009, said, "From the beginning I have said the crisis has been about people, not politics. (Our children were) used as props in political theatre".

● (1650)

Evans held up a black and white photocopy of a pamphlet distributed by the Liberal Party of Canada with the headline, "No vaccines, just body bags". Evans said that he was offended by the pamphlet, which included photos of the body bags and a crying child, because it was politicizing an issue he thought should be non-partisan.

Business of Supply

That is the kind of politics that the Liberal Party engages in, but it gets worse. There is the infamous ten percenter sent into a riding in New Brunswick that has a high percentage of Canadian Forces members in it. It was sent by the member for Vancouver Centre who obviously had enough spare time on her hands after chasing down the burning crosses on the lawns of Prince George, British Columbia, to send this into other ridings. It is a picture of our flag on a military-style backpack that says, "We used to wear it abroad with pride".

Can members just imagine a husband or wife of a Canadian soldier fighting in Afghanistan, someone who is proudly representing our country overseas with the flag on his or her shoulder or backpack, and how proud we are of our soldiers' service to our nation and to the cause of peace, and then we open our mailboxes and are slapped in the face by the callous remarks of the member for Vancouver Centre suggesting that a husband or wife serving overseas does not wear the flag with pride anymore? It is outrageous and the member for Vancouver Centre should apologize.

I could go on. There are dozens of examples of this type of behaviour by the Liberals. It is not just the Liberals though. The NDP and the Bloc Québécois also use the ten percenter program to attack Conservatives across the country. It is also important to note that the Liberals, the NDP and the Bloc Québécois have consistently used their party logos on their ten percenters. Until recently, the Liberals even used a photo of a former Liberal prime minister as a bogus return stamp.

Let us compare that with ten percenters put out by our party. Members will be hard-pressed to find a Conservative Party logo on them and every one of them is factual. Members of the Liberal Party and the other opposition parties might not like those facts but they are facts and it is our duty as members of Parliament to point those facts out to Canadians.

By alerting and listening to Canadians on the important issues of the day, it is our party's belief that we can better understand and implement their concerns. We want to continue the dialogue with Canadians and ten percenters allow us to do that, both in our home constituencies and across this great country.

We must make no mistake. Ten percenters are a tool for dialogue. When we send out these flyers, we express our opinions on the issues of the day and ask Canadians to write back with theirs, and that they do. Canadians have opinions and they are pleased to be given the opportunity to express them. For example, many of my constituents have many unparliamentary things to say about the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore.

This exchange of ideas between elected representatives and the people they represent is the essence of democracy. To put this simply, we do not support this attempt by the Liberals to shut down this important tool to communicate directly with Canadians.

• (1655)

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the hon. member is forgetting in his discourse the pieces that were sent out by the Conservative Party accusing members of the Bloc of supporting pedophiles. Perhaps he overlooks or has forgotten pieces that were sent out by the Conservative Party calling Liberal members anti-Semitic.

I do acknowledge that the government spends a huge amount of money in self-promotion and patting itself on the back but I would hardly hold that out as something to be proud of or something that should be laudable.

The member spent his entire speech talking about how these ten percenters are wrong and how they are misused and then concluded by saying that we should continue them. That seems a rather bizarre conclusion given his speech.

My question is very simple. If he has a problem with these and feels that they are being used in a partisan way to attack people, and I agree with the minister who spoke earlier that we should allow free speech, but who pays for it? Why are taxpayers being left on the hook?

If the hon. member disagrees with this practice and thinks that everything he said in his speech about it being too negative is true, then let us just end it.

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, ten percenters play an important role in our democracy. It is a very important way for us to communicate with our constituents. It is a cost effective and cost efficient way as well. Ten percenters are sent out by the kilogram. They are not addressed to specific constituents. It is by far the most cost effective and efficient way for us to communicate with our constituents.

The hon. member may not like what he sees in some of the ten percenters but I can tell him that these are quotes from colleagues in his party. If they do not like the quotes, they should stop saying them. If they do not like the facts, they should change them. If they do not like the policies of their party, they should change them as well.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what is strange to New Democrats about this motion is that we attempted, through our House leader, to move an amendment that the Liberals found distasteful for some reason. I would like my hon. colleague's opinion. We asked that the ten percenter mail-out program be continued but that it not be allowed to include the attacks that have caused so much grief.

I join with some of my colleagues in the Liberal Party who say that some of the odious attacks have been made by the government, in particular accusing my friend from Montreal of being anti-Semitic, a gentleman who has based his entire career on fighting for the rights of the Jewish people both here in Canada and abroad. I do not know if it shows a lack of thoughtfulness on the government's part or the absolute idiocy of some of its writers. For the Conservatives to attack that particular member as anti-Semitic strikes many of us in this place as the government members continuing to make fools of themselves through this program.

Business of Supply

The amendment that the NDP attempted to move today was: That, for the purpose of communicating with the public in other ridings on public policy matters, as long as such ten percenter mailings do not engage in negative attacks on another member or their political party. Does it seem like a reasonable limit to the ten percenter mail program for my hon. colleague to would allow MPs to communicate on issues of substance with Canadians both in their ridings and outside, but limit communication so they do not become taxpayer-funded attack ads on other members who were elected honourably by their constituents?

• (1700)

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague suggests that we introduce a level of censorship in free speech in this country and I do not think that is worthwhile. It is up to Canadians to decide what they want to read and what they do not want to read. It is not up to us to tell them what they can and cannot read. I do not agree with the hon. member's suggestion that we introduce a level of censorship on ten percenters.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, clearly the member is of the belief that the best defence is offence because he spent almost his entire speech ignoring what the actual motion is about.

The motion is about what the government is spending on government advertising, on the use of government aircraft, on external consultants, on the size of cabinet and on the size of the PMO and Privy Council, for a total of \$1 billion. When will it address the contents of this resolution or has it been told to duck, cover and hide for the rest of the afternoon?

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member asks what this money is being used for. I can tell him that it is being used to advise Canadians about important issues, such as the home renovation tax credit so that Canadians could take advantage of it before the deadline. We advised first-time homebuyers—

An hon. member: You didn't want to extend it this year?

An hon. member: Why did you cancel it?

Mr. Andrew Saxton: —about the homebuyers plan RRSP withdrawal option. We advised Canadians about the tax-free savings—

An hon. member: Oh, what a shame.

An hon. member: Oh, we cut you off.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I hope all hon. members will afford the member for Mississauga South the courtesy that we extend to all members when they give speeches and wait until the question and comment period to make remarks. The Speaker would appreciate being able to hear the member.

The hon. member for Mississauga South.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me start by asserting that we are all in a profession that is not held in high esteem. It is earned not only by our actions but our inactions. In this regard, there is a proposal before the House for us to take some measure of action that will indicate to the Canadian public that this place is sensitive to the needs of the people.

Governments themselves do not have money. We are the custodians of the taxpayers' money. We are judged on whether we make good, wise decisions and good laws. The motion before this place today is a proxy for virtually everything that has ever happened in any government by any party. We have been talking all day long about which party did what and who was at fault. It has been a rambling debate. I think the people who come to this place and sit in the gallery must wonder what is happening in our Parliament.

Why is there a question on the floor that is not getting the attention it deserves, at least in the generic sense? It is about whether we should be dealing with waste and mismanagement. As one member just said, at a time when the country is facing economic duress and high unemployment, we have an obligation as parliamentarians to constantly be prudent with the use of taxpayer dollars.

Today there is what is called an opposition motion. It is a motion proposed by one party. We are debating it today and tomorrow we will vote on it. I do not think that it is all-inclusive in its precision but it is all-inclusive in its intent. For those who may have forgotten what we are debating today, this motion reads:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should show leadership in reducing government waste by rolling-back its own expenditures on massive amounts of partisan, taxpayer-paid government advertising, ministerial use of government aircraft, the hiring of external "consultants", and the size of the Cabinet, the Prime Minister's Office and the Privy Council Office, which together could represent a saving to taxpayers of more than a billion dollars;—

It is a long ramble but it says that there is an opportunity here. I do not think it is all going to happen, but it does raise a premise. It goes on:

—and to show its own leadership in this regard, the House directs its Board of Internal Economy to take all necessary steps to end immediately the wasteful practice of Members sending mass mailings, known as "ten-percenters", into ridings other than their own, which could represent another saving to taxpayers of more than \$10 million.

For the ordinary constituent in our ridings, when we start talking about billions and millions of dollars, this is important. However, we know that, in terms of the finances of the nation, what we do with billions of dollars is where we start. It is tens of billions of dollars. We are talking about the delivery of essential programs and services to Canadians. If people cannot manage \$10 million properly, how can they be trusted? We need to be sensitive to the fact that it is an issue of trust.

I am in my 17th year in this House and I still fight each and every day for fairness and equity for people, for prudence, for due diligence and for making good laws and wise decisions. We say that prayer every day when we come to this place before we start. Every now and then, there is no question, pick a party, a government or a time right back to the beginning of time, and it will be found that people have made bad decisions.

Business of Supply

People have done bad things and wrong things. They have mismanaged money and squandered resources, which is why our profession is not held in high esteem. However, just because that may have been the case, it does not mean that members need to rise here and continue to add to that perception of what members of Parliament stand for.

• (1705)

We have before us an opportunity to indicate there is something we can do on a specific range of issues. Is there some openness to say these are the kinds of things we might be able to do?

I could stand here and go through a litany of all the things the current government has done that I am not happy about, but I am not sure if that advances the argument.

I could talk about the government's treatment of income trusts, breaking a promise it made during the 2006 election and imposing a 31.5% tax. That is a problem. That is a broken promise. That party will have to bear the consequences of that.

There are other consequences to the decision made by the Conservative government. Since that decision was taken, there has been a sale of, I believe, 25% of income trusts in Canada to foreign interests. It has lost revenue to the treasury of the government of the people of Canada, revenue of about \$1.5 billion annually in taxes.

That tax comes fully into force on January 1, 2011. Over the next few months, the other 75% of income trusts will probably be finding out how they can morph themselves into another entity, whether it be back to being a corporation or maybe even bought offshore, which will cost us even more. Yet the argument for taxing them in the first place happened to be that there was a tax leakage.

This is the first time I ever remember being involved in a government's providing documents to the finance committee that were redacted, blacked out. The government made a decision. It wants to be accountable, but it will not show us the numbers. I am not sure why, but it is a matter of state secrecy.

If we want to talk about state secrets I suppose we could talk about Afghan detainees, but I do not think we should be talking about that.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Or the \$400 million?

Mr. Greg Rickford: Or the Somali inquiry?

Mr. Paul Szabo: Does the member want the floor, Mr. Speaker? If he would like to speak—

An hon. member: And you never heckle.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, I would be happy—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. There will be a 10-minute question and comment period when the member for Mississauga South has finished. If members could just hold off until then, I am sure they will get a chance to ask the member their questions.

• (1710)

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, what we are debating is not simply a matter of dealing with waste and mismanagement. It is a matter of trust. It is a matter of character. It is a matter of doing the right thing.

I remember asking a question last week that made me think about this issue of character. It is not just the character of the current government; it is the character of each and every member here. It is to deal with the issue that, when people do something, they must be accountable.

I once defined accountability this way. People are accountable when they explain and/or justify their actions or decisions in a manner that is truthful, plain, clear, concise and correct. In simple terms, it says they tell the truth even if they have taken a decision to break a promise, a decision they believe is the best thing, in the best public interest. They explain it, disclose it, do not hide it, do not cover it but put it out on the table.

One member was talking about a \$56-billion projected deficit for the current fiscal year, which ends March 31, and we have a five-year budget that is going to almost balance by that time. However, the budget speech and the throne speech said that we will not balance the books on the backs of pensioners or by raising taxes. The Minister of Finance rose in this place and said those words.

However, accountability has to kick in, because we know that the people who purchased income trusts to emulate a pension plan, to get that annual cashflow, all of a sudden were hurt very badly.

We also have a case where we are increasing the tax on income trusts by 31.5% effective January 1, 2011. We are increasing employment insurance premiums by 9% in the first year and up to 15¢ each year thereafter for the employee and 21¢ for the employer. It is something like \$13 billion of taxes.

What do the government members say? Employment insurance is not a tax. That is a service. That is to get EI benefit.

The government is also increasing the traveller's tax. We have the income trust tax, the EI tax, the traveller's tax, and I am sure there are a few more.

I think it is *prima facie* that the government was not accountable to Canadians and to Parliament when it said it would not be raising taxes to balance the budget. It absolutely is; \$13 billion of additional EI premiums is balancing the books. It is going right down there. It is going to take care of moneys that otherwise the government would have to transfer into the new corporation to deal with the rising EI benefits because unemployment in the next year is going up from 8.2% to 8.5%. Those EI premiums are going to cost another 200,000 jobs in Canada.

We are going to have this problem where 500,000 people currently on EI are going to have their benefits lapsing. They are going to run out of benefits.

What will happen next is that we are going to have rising health care costs because of the stress on people not knowing how they are going to pay the bills.

We are also going to have a demand on social programs because people will need to turn somewhere. We will also have a rise in property crime and violent crime in Canada.

That is exactly what happened a little more than 10 years ago when we had the last recession. The crime rate in Canada tracked perfectly with the unemployment rate.

Business of Supply

We have an aging society. We have consequences of that. We have mental health problems. The list goes on. These are significant priorities, and yet the House is now wondering whether or not we should deal with \$10 million on ten-percenters and a few things to do with advertising, more discretionary things.

Why do we not take that first step of saying we have priorities that are important in this country? We have priorities in which we need to sacrifice things that we do.

• (1715)

I heard the Minister of State for Democratic Reform say ten percenters are democracy. I disagree because ten percenters, these flyers that get sent out by members of Parliament from all parties, are Parliament's money, money from the taxpayers. They produce these documents but claim that when they cross the line and are no longer just information on the important work of Parliament, they become political flyers. They become pieces of political literature. They ask, "Which leader do you support?" They ask, "Will you give us your email? Will you contribute money?" Political parties have ways to raise money to pay for these things. Why have we allowed a good tool to become jaundiced and become a political tool? Why have we done that? This is straightforward. There is not a member in this place who does not understand that, and there is no point in getting up and arguing about it in any other way.

We have made a mistake. We have not controlled this. The motion before us says let us fix it. Let us try to do the right thing. Let us be accountable. Let us be honest. Does anybody in this place really have a problem with that?

I do not have to get up here and berate the government for things it has done or a former government did. That is not the point. The point here now is that we, the members of this place, collectively have an opportunity to show Canadians that we are accountable and that when we have the opportunity, we will make good laws and wise decisions and be prudent with taxpayers' money. That is what is being asked right now. The motion will go to the Board of Internal Economy with the recommendation that we should do this.

I want to suggest that there are a couple of other areas that I really think the House will be dealing with: one would be the issue of prorogation. I do not think I have to explain to members how much prorogation costs Parliament in terms of its operations. It happened twice. We do know it happened when the government decided that, rather than be accountable to Parliament at a time when there were urgent issues, it would prorogue to try to cool it off, whether it be the fall of the government on a confidence vote or whether it be releasing the Afghan detainee documents.

While I am mentioning that, I notice the terms of reference of Mr. Iacobucci. I have some concern about spending the money on former Justice Iacobucci. He is a private citizen. He works for Torys LLP. He makes a lot of money. He used to make \$400,000 a year as a supreme court justice. Now he is making easily more than twice that by doing his work for Torys.

The terms of reference are here, and this is in terms of accountability. I would say that by the terms of reference of this, his fees will be \$500 to \$650 an hour. If we work out the math, it is about \$1 million a year. There is no term on this, but I can say that

with the terms of reference that have been laid out here, it will unquestionably be a situation where Parliament will be sitting waiting for a response for about a year. It is going to the government. It is not going to Parliament. I do not know what that Afghan committee will do.

On top of that are all the consultants and experts he needs, all of the travel expenses while he is in travel mode and all of the other attendant things, plus other areas. We do know from inquiries in the past that these things become very expensive. I am estimating that the Iacobucci inquiry will hire an outside lawyer to do the work that the Department of Justice, which has some of the best lawyers in the country, can already do.

Why is it that we will hang up Parliament from doing a job on an important issue about whether or not Canada, directly, indirectly or inadvertently, may have violated the Geneva Convention? It is not unimportant. It is very important. Equally important to me is that the authority of Parliament to have that information to make those determinations is being challenged, not only by the government, but also by the Department of Justice.

These are issues that are important to our country. Our character is in question on these matters. We need to defend ourselves, and the only way is to get the answers clearly. If there are contradictions in the information and if there is a problem, we need to address it quickly, not wait for a year until Justice Iacobucci finishes.

• (1720)

Respectfully, I do not think, as a private citizen, Justice Iacobucci even has the authority, unless he gets sworn in somehow, not to disclose it, but everybody else that he has contact with, whether it is at his legal firm or all of the experts he gets, all of a sudden this information is going out into a lot of people's hands, but not to parliamentarians, and there is something fundamentally wrong about that.

I want to conclude with one other area that is very important to me and it has to do directly with spending of money. It has to do with access to information. I chair the access to information, privacy and ethics committee and we constantly get bombarded with complaints about the government's failure to deliver responses to people within the 30 days as required. In fact, many of them are coming from people who have been waiting two and three years.

The access to information commissioner does report cards on selected areas and departments. Last year there were eight reports, six of them had failing grades and one was red-flagged. The worst offenders were the Prime Minister's Office and the Privy Council Office. The Privy Council Office budget has gone up substantially because employees have been instructed to vet virtually every access to information request to ensure there is no political damage. No wonder the costs of the PCO have gone up so greatly. It is because we have political control in the PCO which is there to advise the Prime Minister's Office in terms of governance, not to be a political mask.

Business of Supply

The motion before us brings some interesting issues for us, a small number, but they represent the bigger picture and that is each and every time that we do something, no matter which party, whether it is government or opposition, we must have due diligence, be accountable and tell the truth.

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is very difficult to sit here and listen to the hon. member talk about accountability when he was a member of a government that for 13 long years wasted people's money. I do not remember his indignation when the Liberal Party was stealing millions of dollars in the sponsorship scandal. I do not remember the indignation when \$1 billion was being wasted on HRSDC boondoggles.

We must not forget that when the 40th Parliament sat for only a month and a discussion was brought forward that we would end political subsidies, what did the member do? All of a sudden he is all worried about the money that we spend on taxpayers and communicating to people, but when his entitlements and his party's entitlement with respect to taxpayer funding was threatened, what did he do? He joined in a coalition with his friends in the Bloc and the NDP as a way to avoid that type of accountability.

The reality on that side of the House is that those members have absolutely no policies. The reason they are so afraid to communicate to people is that they have absolutely nothing to talk about. They have no policies on the budget, on the environment, on natural resources and on red tape production.

Where was the hon. member's righteous indignation for 13 years? Is it not true that the only reason he is afraid—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Mississauga South.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, the member's facts are wrong. He refers to the billion dollar boondoggle which the Auditor General checked out and it was \$87,000. The member has misled the House and I am sorry about that. Some of the other things he said probably tells the House and Canadians more about him than it does about me.

To change the channel, the fact is that we have opportunities. I would raise two other points. The public service is being attacked and the easy way to get to balanced budgets is by attacking the public service. In fact, the public service does a very good job. The Conservatives need to realize that the public service is there to serve Canadians and our country abroad too.

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I know the hon. suggested that I misled the House and he did not suggest anything, but if he would rather talk about the \$250 million that he stole and his party still has not returned—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: It sounds like a furtherance of debate. If there is time I can recognize him for another question but it is not a point of order.

The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona.

• (1725)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is about time we got back to the opposition motion at hand.

We in the NDP actually support this motion but we have concerns about the aspects of the motion dealing with the ten percenters and

the notion that somehow we should just eliminate them for being sent outside of our riding. On that basis, we introduced the amendment, which the Liberals do not seem to be too supportive of, that we would allow such ten percenters to occur as long as they did not engage in negative attacks on another member or a political party.

To me, that is an eminently reasonable compromise here and a position that the Liberals should reconsider and look at. It seems to me that would be one way of resolving the issue. We made it work on a provincial basis in Manitoba. I am sure we could look at other examples where things like this have worked.

In the meantime, we should get back to discussing the motion at hand. We know the government does not want to discuss this motion. It is very clear on that.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, the member wants it both ways.

The problem is that we have allowed a privilege to parliamentarians to become a political instrument, to our embarrassment. For every member of Parliament who has had some of these attack ads or fliers come into their ridings, our jobs are disrupted. People are asking why this is happening. They want to know why their money is being squandered like this and are asking what we are going to do to stop it.

My constituents have said that they want it stopped. I do not want to leave a sliver of hope that this could continue, because members have not demonstrated to date that they have the willingness to respect taxpayers' money in this regard.

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I recall when I was teacher I used to have a unit on slavery. We talked about William Wilberforce. I am recollecting a phrase from William Wilberforce where at that time the very volatile issue of slavery was being relegated down, riding by riding, in very personal terms. He said that there was a time when the principles of natural justice and ethics had to transcend partisanship in favour of the issue and in favour of Parliament.

Does the member believe that if we were able to come to an agreement with respect to the ethical framework around this notion of attacking members outside of natural justice, their ability to defend themselves, whether Parliament would be served better and, in fact, by serving Parliament better whether we would serve the people of Canada better?

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, I could not express it better. The member for York South—Weston does the House a service by articulating it in such a straightforward fashion.

I will just finish with another consideration for the members of the Conservative Party who have indicated that they want to vote against this motion even though all the other parties are voting for it.

We cut the budget of KAIROS by \$7 million.

An hon. member: They did.

Business of Supply

Mr. Paul Szabo: They did. The government cut the funding to KAIROS. If we were to eliminate the offending ten percenters, we could reinstate the funding to KAIROS. Let us do it.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to comment on what the hon. member for Mississauga South said.

At one point he said that today we were wasting time having this debate and that we should be dealing with more important issues, such as some social economic issues. However, we are debating the Liberal Party's motion. This is what the Liberals want to talk about, instead of talking about the things that are important to all Canadians.

It is too bad that the member's party does not get it, that we are dealing with a lot of over-the-top rhetoric coming from the Liberals themselves on the ten percenter program. They put out a lot. The member for Vancouver South already talked about how there has been a lot of misuse of ten percenters. We heard about the backpacks that portrayed our soldiers in a very negative way.

My real question to the member is what about websites? Why have there been a number of Liberal websites that just recently had to be taken down that were House of Commons websites that were used for political fundraising purposes? Why are we not going after those as well and have the Liberals take down those websites?

• (1730)

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, I do not disagree with the member. Whenever we identify areas in which we have not properly utilized the resources taxpayers have given us to do our job, we need to deal with it. Dealing with ten percenters is just another example.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member had a chance to look at the statistics and to go beyond the first 20 and find that of the top 40, 38 were Conservatives who were abusing this program. Of the top 40, it is \$2.8 million and that does not even include postage, if anyone can imagine.

I am wondering if the member feels that there is a bigger issue at stake, which is really a politicization of government. The government is using stimulus spending to send mail to targeted Conservative ridings. It is using public servants saying that they must use talking points and if they go off those talking points they will be heavily penalized. They are now even turning public events into partisan events. Is this not a picture of some bigger problem with the politicization and use of taxpayers money for partisan purposes?

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, I said a number of times in my speech and in answers to other questions that we find ourselves in a situation where we had the opportunity to use an instrument like ten percenters to support our work but we allowed it to change into something that it was never intended to be. It has become a political instrument.

Every member who receives ten percenters in their ridings must have had hundreds of angry constituents communicating with them. This is not creating hope for Canadians when what they are getting is junk from members of Parliament.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Saint-Lambert.

It is important for me to rise here today to inform Quebecers of the waste that abounds within the federal government under this Reform-Conservative administration, although it claims to be squeaky clean.

When we hear things like \$1,000 to install a doorbell, \$2,000 to look after two live plants, \$5,000 to install a light in a minister's office or \$20,000 to mop the floors in ministers' offices, one might think we have returned to the days of the Liberals sponsorship scandal.

I am hearing some people here in the House who are very interested in how this plays out. Who remembers the \$250 Christmas ornaments and the huge amounts of money spent on fictitious trade shows in Olympic stadiums in Rimouski, Chicoutimi, Trois-Rivières, Sherbrooke and Sainte-Foy? Of course, those trade shows never took place and those stadiums never existed. Yet taxpayers' money was used to pay the Liberals' cronies.

Now it is the Conservatives who have been caught red handed, caught with their hands in the cookie jar. But this is worse, because we are talking about taxpayers' money, money that does not belong to them. This is just as shameful.

The Conservative government is trying to balance the budget by proposing flashy but ineffective measures, but the media reported that the Department of Public Works and Government Services awarded a contract worth \$6 billion—that is \$6,000 million—over 11 years to SNC-Lavalin ProFac, and that outrageously expensive invoices were paid.

Instead of blaming it all on her departmental officials, the minister should release the 200 pages or so of invoices for which SNC-Lavalin refused to provide details. Also, the minister should tell us whether she will review the conditions of this contract so that a fair, equitable and transparent process can be put in place for subcontractors.

On September 2, 2009, I sent a letter regarding the problem with SNC-Lavalin contracts to the then-minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada, the member for Mégantic—L'Érable. I am still awaiting a response.

The new Minister of Public Works and Government Services, the member for Edmonton—Spruce Grove, has received a copy of this letter. I will read it out, as I think it will be of interest to everyone here who cares about transparency. It was addressed to the minister at the time.

Subject: Request for meeting—Awarding contracts and tendering process

Dear Minister,

Yesterday I met with the owner of a company in my riding regarding the awarding of contracts for federal government services. He asked to remain anonymous, as I am sure you can understand. That is why I will speak more generally about the problem with awarding contracts. [I will not limit this to the individual I spoke with.]

I am writing to you not only on his behalf, but also on behalf of several businesses in my riding, about which I have contacted you regularly since it seems as though the contracting and tendering process lacks transparency and fairness, on a number of levels, for small and medium-sized businesses in the Outaouais region.

Business of Supply

For example, when a large company like SNC-Lavalin [the letter was sent on September 9] is awarded a contract to maintain federal government buildings, it is not obligated to issue a public tender [this is outrageous]; it issues an invited tender [it asks its friends to apply].

● (1735)

It is always the same five or six companies that are called and decide amongst themselves whose turn it is to be granted the contract this time.

Is that not scandalous? How shameful. If I were a Conservative, I would hide behind a desk. Fortunately they are not listening; they do not know what goes on in the House.

Is that a fair process? [No, it is not.] Since it is not public, the majority of the companies are not aware of and cannot respond to the call for tenders. Why is there not a clause in the contract requiring the corporation that wins the contract to make public calls for tender? [I hope the minister will answer that question.]

What is more, in order to ensure fairness, the corporation should have to favour local companies. The majority of the government buildings are in Ottawa; a dozen at most are on the Gatineau side, where lots of competent small and medium-sized companies are prepared to respond to public calls for tender.

We are all aware of the problem of unfairness that prevails when it comes to goods and services contracts between Ottawa and Gatineau.

It is simple common sense. Changing lights does not require a great engineer from the planet Mars or anywhere else. Someone locally can certainly do it for less than \$5,000 a light.

Other companies are going through an extremely difficult time, as you know, since I met with you or sent you correspondence to raise the subject the injustices experienced by these companies. [I am still talking to the then-minister.] A number of them are convinced that the contracting process is not fair and balanced and that there is an abuse of power. [This letter was written last September; the media talked about this in March, a few days ago.]

That is why I would like to meet with you [I am polite and I want to explain things to him] as soon as possible [I am still waiting] to talk about this. It is imperative that we address the problems encountered by private small and medium-sized companies that in some cases cannot participate in calls for tender since only invitees are entitled to a piece of the pie, and by those who participate in calls for tender and feel shut out of the contracting process.

I am available to meet with you [we are in the same room, we can see each other in Parliament] at your convenience. I want to thank you in advance for your interest in this unacceptable situation that companies in my riding and other regions are experiencing.

Sincerely,

I hope this will be addressed. Why do we always have to wait for the media to run with this type of story to realize that the machine is not working so well?

The letter was signed by me, the member for Gatineau, and Sheila Fraser, the Auditor General, was cc'ed.

This situation is highly insulting to small and medium-size businesses in the Outaouais. Do not forget that in 2008, the federal government awarded contracts for goods and services worth \$3 billion to suppliers in the national capital region.

Only 1.4%, or \$38 million, was awarded to Gatineau companies, whereas 98.6% was awarded to Ottawa companies. This situation is unacceptable and scandalous.

In addition, SNC-Lavalin does not use a public tender process to recruit subcontractors. Instead, it invites its buddies to submit tenders. This smacks of cronyism, at the very least. It is scandalous.

Madame Speaker, I see that you shudder to contemplate such an appalling situation.

This is very clearly unfair. Gatineau business people are choosing to open offices in Ottawa in order to make it onto the federal radar and win contracts, since Gatineau seems to be off the radar. This situation must be resolved; it seems fishy.

● (1740)

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Abbott (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Madam Speaker, I was quite entertained in listening to my friend from the Bloc. I went out to the lobby just before this intervention and I picked up copies of some of the ten percenters that the Bloc sends out. They talk about the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. Although I am somewhat deficient in my capacity to read French, I get the tone and the idea.

In making the intervention, the member was being exceptionally critical of the ten percenter program, if I understood correctly. If that is the case, then what do I have in my hand other than a rather hypocritical approach to the question of ten percenters on the part of the Bloc Québécois?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Madam Speaker, I am flabbergasted and troubled by the words of my colleague, who has been in the House of Commons longer than I have. I did not say anything about ten percenters. He asked me a question and claimed that I criticized the ten percenter program.

I will be less than kind, because I feel he is taking things a little too far. Does he have a problem with his ears? He obviously did not listen to a word I said. Besides, the member simply has to use the little machine in front of him on the “English” setting when I speak French. Otherwise, he will have no idea what I am saying.

This is my most recent flyer. It calls for a museum of science and technology to be created in Gatineau. It is a very nice flyer, printed in a lovely shade of blue. I would love to see the museum set up where Canada and Quebec meet, in the former E.B. Eddy building, in order to preserve heritage buildings. I think it is a very nice flyer. I do not attack anyone or anything in this flyer; I am not a Conservative.

● (1745)

[*English*]

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Members are allowed to use and read from pieces of paper from time to time, but that looked like it was suspiciously crossing the line toward using a prop.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I thank the member for his comment. The use of props is discouraged and is forbidden. I would ask all members to remember that rule of the House.

The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I encourage the member to keep working to uncover scandals involving the government.

I note the government is trying to avert attention from the motion and not discussing it in its duck, cover and hide rope-a-dope fashion. It is drawing attention away from what the motion talks about.

Business of Supply

The motion talks about the Conservative government's advertising expenditures, its use of government aircraft. I have not heard one government member talk about how the Conservatives are planning to reduce their advertising costs, or how they are going to restrict their use of government aircraft. I have heard them say nothing about their hiring of external consultants, which is continuing unabated. They have not talked about reducing the size of cabinet, the PMO, the Privy Council Office, or any other type of reductions that are being demanded by the motion.

Would the member ask government members to at least deal with what the motion covers?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Madame Speaker, I would like to thank my NDP colleague for his question.

The Conservatives came into the House pleased as punch that they were able to take advantage of the weakness of the party that preceded them—the Liberals—who, we remember, were embroiled in the sponsorship scandal. The Conservatives introduced omnibus legislation stating that they, in the Conservative Party, drink bleach cocktails every day and are therefore more pure than anyone could ever believe.

And I take this literally. It seems to me that they really must be drinking bleach cocktails and that this is causing memory lapses. It is not causing sclerosis of the liver. It is going to the head and creating large holes—like cheese—in the party's grey matter, should such a thing exist. But we must play nice.

The Conservative government is operating as though it is above the fray. Take, for example, the member for Jonquière—Alma who goes from point A to point B by helicopter, making announcements

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I am sorry to have to interrupt the hon. member for Gatineau.

The hon. member for Saint-Lambert now has the floor.

Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today given that the subject of the opposition motion being debated is extremely important.

The use of public funds is inevitably a highly charged issue and one that became the rallying cry for the American Revolution: no taxation without representation.

This issue was one of the main grievances of the American colonies with respect to the British Empire. It established what was to become a basic principle for all democracies: public funds belong to the people and it is up to them, through parliamentary representation, to decide their use.

The motion before the House raises essentially the same issues raised in those times because stating “no taxation without representation” is tantamount to stating that taxation is only legitimate if supported by the people.

Obviously, a number of the expenses referred to in the motion would not fly with the majority of families who, in many cases, must tighten their belts in order to make ends meet in these economic times.

My colleagues have discussed at length today the famous ten percenters, the mailings that parliamentarians are entitled to send every day to 10% of the residences in their riding. Conservative members have clearly used them for partisan purposes, which has tarnished our reputation, and this usage has lowered the tone of debate because both the arguments and the accusations made are unfounded or completely out of line.

Naturally, as we say in Quebec, we should not throw out the baby with the bath water. A very useful tool should not be abolished outright just because certain parties abuse it. We believe that we should take the time and make the effort to review the rules governing their use and to make the necessary changes. For example, all members, except for the whips of each party, should be prohibited from using this parliamentary privilege to send mailings to other ridings. In this way, we would ensure that these mailings are used, first and foremost, to inform the people we represent of the legislative work being done in Parliament and action taken in our ridings, and not to inundate citizens with partisan propaganda.

Furthermore, while no one can deny that misusing or abusing parliamentary householders is a waste of public funds, the fact remains that the large amounts of money involved—around \$10 million in 2008-09, or four times more than what was spent four years earlier—are unfortunately just a drop in the bucket compared to the ocean of federal government squandering.

If anyone needs convincing, they just have to glance at the government's finances and the huge structural deficit that the Conservative government created by giving tax breaks to its friends in the oil industry and its cousins, the big banks. That \$10 million suddenly does not seem to weigh so heavily in the balance, because the burden is so massive.

What does weigh heavily is the staggering 88% increase in government operating expenditures over the past 10 years. In that time, federal revenues have increased by only 45%.

These operating expenditures reached \$55.6 billion in 2008-09, \$26 billion more than in 1998-99.

Yet ostensibly, everything suggests that the government has no intention of seriously attacking this problem, except through flashy populist measures. Band-aid solutions will not conceal the awful structural deficit, for which this government is solely responsible, and which it underestimates year after year despite warnings from the Parliamentary Budget Officer, among others. In fact, the Parliamentary Budget Officer confirmed again last week what we had known for some time: the Conservative government is obviously just as skilled at hiding numbers as it is at censoring reports.

In any case, the government discredited itself during the 2008 election campaign, when the current Prime Minister said unequivocally that Canada would avoid the recession, that the people had nothing to worry about and that, on the contrary, they should be happy that they would be able to take advantage of the stock market crash to add to their stock portfolios.

Business of Supply

• (1750)

Later on, that same fall, the Minister of Finance predicted that Canada would not only avoid the recession, but not run a deficit the following year. He then changed his mind and predicted a \$39 billion deficit, only to change his mind again and predict a \$56 billion deficit. So much for financial credibility.

The government was the only one surprised by this deficit, and the worst thing is that it is trying to download this deficit onto the middle class, those who have been hardest hit by this economic crisis we are just emerging from. The middle class must now deal with this waste of public funds.

Since we are talking about public funds, I cannot ignore the absolutely scandalous and shameful use of funds that do not even belong to the government. I am talking about employment insurance contributions. The government shamelessly admits, without even trying to justify its actions, that it plans to copy its Liberal predecessors and plunder \$19 billion from the EI fund. That is not a waste of public funds. It is worse than that.

There is a word in French to describe “the taking of another person’s property...by force or without their knowledge”, but it is not a parliamentary word. If the word is not parliamentary, then I wonder how we should classify this action, when the only way to describe it in the House is by using circumlocutions.

We can add that \$19 billion between 2012 and 2015 to the \$57 billion that the Liberal and Conservative governments took from workers against their will and without their knowledge.

Although they promised not to act like the nasty Liberals and to put a stop once and for all to this despicable practice that penalizes employers just as much as employees, the Conservatives are once again going after the middle class, since instead of increasing taxes on big corporations, banks, oil companies and the wealthy, they have chosen to dip into the pockets of workers and their employers, making employment insurance nothing more than a hidden tax.

It is one of the most regressive kinds of taxes. Because there are maximum insurable earnings beyond which workers no longer pay premiums, it seems that for the rich, these premiums represent a tiny portion of their salary, while for a worker who earns a regular wage, they currently represent 1.73% of that wage and soon will represent 2.33%.

It is also regressive for employers because a company, whether it is profitable or not, must contribute to employment insurance. This is not the case with taxes.

It is the same for both workers and employers. In these cases, it is a question of indiscriminate tax measures that in no way take into account the taxpayer’s ability to contribute. The government would rather fire into the crowd, as they say.

And speaking of guns, we should talk about the gun registry, a registry that the Conservatives would like to get rid of because they say it costs too much. How much does the gun registry cost taxpayers each year? It costs \$10 million, which is the exact amount spent on ten percenters sent to opposition ridings.

Essentially, the government is trying to tell us that it is more important to be able to inundate Quebecers and Canadians with the worst kind of propaganda than to maintain a gun registry that is supported by police, lawyers, judges, Quebec’s National Assembly, and many others.

It would rather take part in cheap attacks than maintain a tool that has proven its worth, that is consulted thousands of times a day and that has had a positive effect on the number of homicides committed with long guns, according to statistics on this issue.

It seems to me that the choice is obvious. It jumps off the page. It goes without saying. However, it does not seem to go without saying for the Conservatives, among others, who voted to scrap the gun registry. It is a choice they made and one that bears witness to their values.

It is not the Bloc Québécois’s choice, nor is it what our electors, the people we represent and who contribute to the public treasury, want.

• (1755)

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to point out that the Prime Minister, when he was the opposition leader, said on November 4, 2005 that there is no more important job to do than cleaning up government and bringing accountability back to Ottawa. So, how is it going?

The finance minister just last week, after telling Canadians they had to tighten their belts, jumped on the executive jet and flew off to London, Ontario to Tim Hortons. He spent \$9,000 for a trip to Tim Hortons in London to tell people that it was time to restrain themselves and tighten their belts. It was a photo opportunity at Tim Hortons.

In addition, while the Prime Minister is telling everyone else they have to restrain themselves, the expenses in his own department have gone up by more than \$13 million. In fact, in 2006 the minister of labour at the time racked up \$150,000 on flights on privately hired jets. For a number of those trips he was the only passenger on the plane.

Does this sound to the member that this is the type of cleaning up of government misspending that the Prime Minister promised when he was opposition leader?

[Translation]

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his comments. I agree.

While the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance preach fiscal restraint, new revelations come to light every day about this government’s excessive spending.

I am particularly disturbed by these actions when I think about my constituents. Many of my family members live on a very low income. I also worry about the fact that this federal government ignores thousands of unemployed workers, that many seniors still live below the poverty line, and that Quebec industries are struggling and have been forsaken, while this government continues to waste money.

Business of Supply

• (1800)

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Maloway: Madam Speaker, the government's answer to everything is to blame the Liberals. The Liberals have been out of power now for four years, so I would think that argument is probably wearing thin.

We want to ask the Conservatives, when are they going to start reducing the atrocious amount of money that is being spent on government advertising in this country? When are they going to reduce the amount of executive air travel on the government aircraft? When are they going to reduce some of those external consultants' fees that are coming in at huge amounts? When are they going to start reducing the size of the PMO, the cabinet, the Privy Council?

All those things on which they criticized the Liberals, they are now doing the same and even more.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: Madam Speaker, once again, I want to thank the hon. member for his comments.

I hope that everything that has been said today in the House about government waste will be heard by the government and that it will show some leadership to reduce this waste by cutting its own spending. Instead of “do as I say and not as I do”, I hope it will do what it takes as a government.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have a very quick question. I will ask it in English, since the amendment was drafted in English.

[*English*]

The New Democrats have moved an amendment to this motion to allow MPs to continue to distribute this information, but to limit the information so that these so-called ten percenters do not engage in negative attacks on other members or on other political parties. This is a way to try to balance the ability of MPs to communicate, but to prevent the attacks that all of us have seen from the various political parties in the House.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: Madam Speaker, the Bloc Québécois is in favour of continuing the use of ten percenters, keeping in mind that the purpose is to inform constituents of the issues that concern them and of bills we are discussing in the House and to allow party whips to send additional ten percenters to other ridings.

[*English*]

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise to participate in this debate on wasteful government expenditures. I will be sharing my time with my hon. colleague from Ottawa—Vanier.

It has taken less than four years for the Conservative government to spiral into a pattern of abuse of power, irresponsible spending, wasteful ways, hypocrisy, arrogance, character assassination and defamation.

Today, I would like to discuss the issue of the government's misuse of taxpayers' dollars and argue that the practice of sending ten percenters should be limited to members' own ridings or

eliminated altogether. I will be speaking on how the government's wasteful spending has gotten out of control, the damage it continues to cause, and the corrective actions that we as parliamentarians should be taking.

While all Canadians understand that we are going to have to tighten our belts to get out of this \$56 billion Conservative-made deficit, the public servants who deliver these important services cannot bear the entire burden. The Conservatives should start by cutting their own wasteful spending, like the hundreds of millions in partisan economic action plan advertising and contracts for high-paid consultants, not by cutting services to the public down to the bare bone.

An easy first step would be to eliminate the mass mailings known as ten percenters outside of an MP's own riding. This would save taxpayers \$20 million.

Control of the government's structural deficit must begin at home. Some days ago, my hon. colleague from St. John's South—Mount Pearl released a list of non-essential government spending that has spiked \$1.2 billion since 2006 when the Conservatives took power. The list is breathtaking for its arrogance. It states, “In recent years, the biggest spending increases by this government have been in areas that promote the Conservative agenda or dole out contracts to their friends. This waste should be cut first”. It cannot be made more clear than that.

Canadians do not want the government to use taxpayers' funds for self-aggrandizement or self-promotion. They definitely do not want their government to spend tens of millions of dollars of their money on advertising. Canadians want to see results, not commercials or billboards. This shameless self-promotion has to end. The numbers are astronomical since the Conservatives took power in 2006.

Under the Conservatives, spending on transportation and communications has risen by \$820 million or 32% since they took power and, by comparison, in the last four years of the previous Liberal government, this category only increased by 2.3%. Spending on management consultants went up by \$355 million over the same period. That is an astounding 165% increase.

Public opinion research has also gone up by \$5 million, the increase in the size of the cabinet has cost taxpayers an additional \$3 million, and spending on the economic action plan advertising campaign has skyrocketed to well over \$100 million. The expansion of the communication support services in the Prime Minister's Office cost \$1.7 million, and excessive spending on ten percenters has cost well over \$20 million.

Business of Supply

This non-essential spending spree has cost taxpayers cumulatively \$1.2 billion and comes at a time when government is preaching austerity and the tightening of our belts. This is pure hypocrisy, as is using the Canada jet to fly to a photo op in London, Ontario, at a doughnut chain to announce freezes, cutbacks and rollbacks. What is wrong with flying on a commercial airline? It is more hypocrisy.

While the Conservatives expect everyone else to reduce, reuse and recalibrate their spending, they pad their own coffers with an additional 22% or \$13 million to boost the Prime Minister's Office. This increase came before they announced a freeze in salaries and budgets. The purpose was to provide support and advice to the Prime Minister. It is purely hypocritical and shameful. Canadians expect and deserve better.

Our motion is clear. I hope every member takes time to reflect upon it, be reminded of our purpose here, what is expected of us, and remember to lead by example.

● (1805)

Ten percenters were designed as a useful tool to communicate with our constituents, but they have eroded into a political propaganda machine that has been abused by the government. Ten percenters have become purely political attack pieces sent to targeted voters in targeted ridings with negative messaging and partisan advertising, abusing the trust of taxpayers, the trust that taxpayers put in their politicians, us as members of Parliament.

Ten percenters were designed to be an effective communication vehicle. Their purpose was to inform constituents of happenings locally or in Ottawa, to create awareness of issues that matter to them, or advance programs in their ridings and communities, town hall meetings, community fairs, art shows, et cetera, but all that has changed. Materials printed used to be screened by the Board of Internal Economy for use of party logos and avert partisanship, but it cannot police them anymore. Today we see logos everywhere. Partisanship is rampant.

During the past year, we have seen it all: vicious, misleading, untrue information distributed across the country; damaging attacks which attack the very character of persons, those of us here, in the form of slander, damage that cannot be easily repaired. I am sure members will remember it well. It is something that the Speaker of the House has had to rule upon when points of privilege were raised. Passionate debates and votes ensued, and apologies followed from Conservative members.

I remind members of some of the examples, such as accusations that Bloc members were supporting pedophiles, how reprehensible, or that Liberals allegedly were anti-Semitic, unpatriotic, or Taliban supporters. What could be further from the truth?

The next time a Conservative member is asked to send out a ten percenter defaming, assaulting or assassinating the character of a peer, I hope he or she thinks twice. These ten percenters now go above and beyond members of Parliament using them as a communications tool. They have become a cesspool for partisan Conservative propaganda, all on the backs of Canadian taxpayers.

Ludicrous, frivolous and vexatious accusations are unacceptable, not to mention costing taxpayers \$20 million per year, with more than 10 million ten percenters being sent out per month.

The members who sent out the material apologized, but let us face it, the damage can never be repaired and the Conservatives know it.

I would like to list some of the more egregious abusers of this privilege, but the news is in an article that is readily available. The top 19 out of 20 are Conservative Party members. In fact, 38 of the top 40 are Conservatives, and Conservatives accounted for 62% of all printing costs, even though they only represent 45% of the members of the House, with a large percentage of the list being cabinet ministers. This is clearly an abuse of a privilege.

We are all aware of the limitations of ten percenters. They allow us to mail to 10% of our ridings, and that is an average of 4,000 or 5,000 households depending on the size of the riding. We send the artwork to printing and distribution, and it makes sure that we fall within the guidelines.

The Conservatives have found a way to enhance their allotment. We have reached a point where parliamentarians on the government side have purchased their very own printing presses and paper-folding machines. They keep them in their offices for attack purposes and they share those expenses. Instead of a 10% limit, they mass produce more of those same flyers, fold them and send them out.

Surely, as parliamentarians we must stand up and put a stop to such measures. The Liberal Party was calling for restraint on ten percenters last fall. We requested that ten percenters be limited to a member's own riding, that the practice of ten percenter regrouping be abolished, that the name of the leader of the sending member's party be included in the ten percenter, and that that leader explicitly endorse the content of the product. Why not eliminate them outright and save \$20 million?

On this side of the House, we have been advocating the idea of reallocating the \$1.2 billion in wasteful spending to high priority areas such as job creation, investment in innovation, R and D, early childhood learning, education or health care, investments in ways that our economy can grow, how jobs can grow, and investing in the jobs and economy of tomorrow.

The Conservatives preach austerity and cost controls, budget cuts and freezes, but why do they not look in the mirror? They are waist deep in waste, and the buck stops with them.

● (1810)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I recognize the hon. member for Kitchener—Conestoga, but I would ask all members to be mindful that the use of props is forbidden in the House.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member opposite engaged in some pretty aggressive finger pointing at the Conservative Party. Repeatedly, throughout her speech, she called for leadership by example.

Business of Supply

I have with me here a ten percenter. I am not holding it up; I am just reading from it. It is a ten percenter that went into a riding that was not the riding of the Liberal Party member. On it is a picture of a backpack of one of our Canadian soldiers with a Canadian flag. It says: "We used to wear it with pride". On the front of it is a Liberal logo prominently displayed. On the back, it refers to turning our backs on the proud Canadian traditions of diplomacy, peacekeeping, human rights and international development.

The current budget has more dollars in it for international development than any previous budget. This is clearly misleading. In terms of the pride with which our men and women in uniform serve our country, I think the record of this government is clear. We stand behind and with our men and women in uniform.

Is this the kind of material that she would refer to as leading by example?

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie: Madam Speaker, I misunderstood the question. Clearly, given the question, you would be supporting the motion, since you would like the practice to be eliminated, and you find—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order. I would ask the hon. member to address her comments through the Chair.

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie: Madam Speaker, since 38 of the 40 top most egregious ten percenters come from the government side, I can see that the hon. member must be in agreement with our motion and would like to put an end to this reprehensible practice.

• (1815)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am sure that my hon. colleague's excitement will also be brought to bear on the notion that the New Democrats put forward today and her party for some reason rejected.

If we were able to stop the attacks that she mentioned in her speech, and I would hope that my Conservative colleagues would express, at least privately, some regret at calling one of the Liberal members anti-Semitic. He is a gentleman who has spent much of his time working for the cause of the Jewish people in Canada, if not most of his life.

The Conservative Party used a ten percenter to accuse this member of anti-Semitism. I hope that there is regret on that side for this, as I hope there is regret from the Liberal Party for the accusations about Canadians not being able to be proud. I would suggest that this tool has been abused and misused by most, if not all, parties in this place.

The recommendation the New Democrats have made is that, while it is important to communicate with Canadians about important issues, there ought to be a limit on attacks against individual members in this place, duly elected by their constituents, or their parties or leaders.

Can we not find a way to communicate with Canadians without bashing one another and bringing the debate to a lower level every time? My hon. colleague from Mississauga began his question and comments today with that very thought. We are bringing the debate down in this country. Would she not see the proposal that the NDP has put forward as a reasonable one?

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie: Madam Speaker, unfortunately, the proposal that the New Democratic Party has brought to the floor is not workable. As we know, the ten percenters are already monitored today by the Board of Internal Economy for their partisanship and use of logos, and they are not enforced, so the proposal is not workable.

The member mentioned the most egregious example, where the Conservatives accused a renowned international lawyer on human rights, who is himself of the Jewish faith, of being anti-Semitic. Today, we voted unanimously to take that issue to the procedure and House affairs committee.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): A very brief question, the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River has 20 seconds.

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I was just doing the math on this. There are 10 million pieces a week of these ten percenters and the Conservatives are just squirming to get up and give more examples of how MPs are abusing these ten percenters. I made a call last year and the guy who mails this stuff said that it is mailed by the kilogram and by the pallet. There is a special deal with the post office: \$10 million for printing and \$10 million for postage, but it is paid for by the kilogram and pallet. Does she not think that there is a whole lot of savings that could be—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order. The hon. member has 15 seconds to respond.

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie: Madam Speaker, the \$1.2 billion in excessive government waste, not to mention the \$20 million plus, could go to far greater purposes. As the hon. member has mentioned, the number far exceeds \$20 million. It could go to such purposes as job creation, investment in innovation, research and development—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please. The hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I, too, am very pleased to take part in this discussion.

I will focus exclusively on the matter of ten percenters. For people who may be tuning in now or listening to the debate, I will take a minute to try to explain what they are.

Every member of Parliament in the House is entitled to send to his or her constituents a householder four times a year. In addition, we are also allowed, as members, to send to 10% of the population in the riding, what is now called a ten percenter, as often as we want.

Over the years, and I would love to understand exactly when it happened and perhaps someday someone will look into it, it evolved to allowing members to send these beyond the borders of their riding as well. Someone told me that it was at the time of a redistribution and members were allowed to send those out to introduce themselves.

Be that as it may, it has now become the routine and the practice in the House that members can send ten percenters to anyone in any other riding as well.

Business of Supply

The debate we are now engaged in as parliamentarians is whether this practice has become abusive in the way we have turned to using it. I am not casting aspersions on any particular party. I think we are all engaged in this practice. It is very legitimate discussion on whether we should continue that practice.

I hear numbers that are rather astronomical in terms of their use, ranging from up to or even more than 10 million such pieces being sent per month by one party. I have no way of confirming that. The information is not readily available to members. However, I have yet to hear anyone deny it, and I have yet to hear anyone deny that we are costing taxpayers in excess of \$10 million through these instruments.

They have also evolved in their nature. It used to be they were perhaps used to inform and advise, first, our constituents and then beyond. They have evolved to include the logos of parties and, in some instances, almost as attack pieces on individual sitting members. I, for one, think that is wrong and is a misuse of public funds.

I also quite squarely put to each and every one of my colleagues the very simple proposition that it is within each of our means to prevent that. Each one of us must sign off on the use of grouped ten percenters that are sent in a riding, where 10 members get together and each assign themselves 10% and off it goes to someone else's riding. We must give our permission for our name to be put on those.

I will stand here and say that I have squarely refused to engage in that behaviour. All members in the House, regardless of party, has the same ability to refuse if they perceive the practice has become abusive. I have heard comments from here and there that indeed there is that perception. Therefore, I invite them to consider, the same as I have decided, not to allow my party and the officers in my party to send those under my name. I will let that stand where it is.

This thing has now grown beyond these matters. I refer my members to November 18, 2008, the first day of this 40th Parliament, when we were asked to pick a Speaker. Six of us let our names stand. All of us made the same comments on the need for more decorum, civility, respect of each other, especially in the situation where the government is in a minority Parliament.

After these debates and the vote and our current Speaker was reaffirmed in his position, the four party leaders in the House stood up, and I would like to quote what they said.

The Prime Minister, speaking to the Speaker, said:

Today I believe a clear message has been sent. Your colleagues have expressed their desire to see better order prevail in this House, and I am confident that you will ensure that our debates are productive and civilized.

• (1820)

The leader of the official opposition said:

[*Translation*]

At a time when Canada has a minority government and is facing economic turmoil, we need to have cooperation more than ever. We need to have decorum and mutual respect. We all count on you to help this House with that. It is a responsibility that we must all share as well.

The leader of the Bloc Québécois said:

That said, I believe that we must improve the way we do business in this House. Everyone has called for greater decorum and more discipline. I believe that all parties have a duty to help make things better.

[*English*]

The leader of the NDP said:

One thing became very clear to all of us and it was raised in this discussion. We have to do a better job on behalf of Canadians to represent the kind of dignified and respectful debate that they look for in the House of Commons. I believe there may be a new sense that we are intent on doing that. I want to encourage you, Mr. Speaker, to use the powers that you have at your disposal to make sure that happens.

This would indicate that there was at the time a genuine desire to see if we could improve the situation. I put to my colleagues in the House that if some ten percenters are used as attack pieces by whomever, against whomever, it does not add to the decorum, the civility and the ability to get along and to work together, whether we may agree on certain issues because we will disagree. This is after all a house of partisan matters. We come here espousing certain beliefs and certain views. We are here to discuss them and to try to convince each other of the rightfulness of our approach. Then at the end of the day a vote is taken and whatever the majority view prevails and we go on.

If we are to engage in these sort of attacks, heaven help us all. It will be very difficult to engage in a very respectful manner. Therefore, I certainly hope we would discontinue the use of ten percenters beyond one's riding.

I understand the NDP has put forward an amendment, but I cannot subscribe to it in the sense that we have, as members of Parliament, an untold range of options available to us to communicate not only with our own constituents, but beyond, be it mail, email, the national media, websites, social media, be it going there and visiting. We have all these capacities at our disposal.

I would hope if we see an abuse of a particular device that has been made available to members, that we would curtail it. The national media have called for that as well. When *Le Devoir* did a very lengthy and detailed piece on this, it sparked a lot of interest, so much so that the *Globe and Mail* then picked it up and pontificated about ten percenters. It did not come to a clear decision, but the *Toronto Star* did. The *National Post* went even further to say that all ten percenters should be abolished. I do not think we could go that far. They can be a very useful tool for a member in the riding that he or she represents. The *Edmonton Journal* also called for them to be curtailed.

We have a series of circumstances that have grown beyond what I believe was their original intent, to give a tool to members to communicate with their constituents. That is still a valid use of that tool, but its use beyond ridings has grown into proportions that cast us all in a bad light. I really do believe we ought to take a very serious look, collectively, at curtailing that practice.

• (1825)

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my friend for his comments and I say that sincerely, not just in the usual polite way that we often address our colleagues across the aisle.

Business of Supply

I have sat here and listened to this debate all day long. It is emblematic of the problem because it has been a decisive debate and a debate on a motion that is designed simply to score points. The back and forth debate all day has been about scoring points until the hon. member opposite rose. I am grateful because his comments embraced the spirit of non-partisanship, if I can call it that, in the House. In the same spirit, I encourage him in that and thank him for that.

He referred to some of the comments that were made at the beginning of this Parliament about decorum in the House. I could not agree with him more when he said that it was within the power of each one of us to stop this divisiveness and stop the point scoring that seems to go on.

However, does the member think that same philosophy might be usefully applied to question period? Just the other day, for example, a scurrilous accusation was impugned in question period that the government had interfered in a court case with a former government member. Could we not all benefit if that kind of thing stopped?

• (1830)

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Madam Speaker, I would love to have a debate in this House about question period and I might have some opinions that the member might be interested in as well. We are on ten percenters but I will, nonetheless, try to address it.

I get asked this question quite often by Canadians, not only from the riding I represent but from across the country. My answer is pretty well the same every time. I tell them that there is one member in the House whose behaviour I can control and that is mine. Therefore, I have committed in my behaviour in this House to be as respectful as I can, to be truthful and to be as direct as I possibly can.

Beyond the fact that I categorically refuse to send ten percenters beyond the riding of Ottawa—Vanier, I also refuse to engage in certain questions during question period. It is an individual decision as to how we ask a question, whether or not we were prepared to ask it, and, having been on the other side, answering them as well. It is also an individual decision within certain restrictions because we are all part of a political party and a political formation, so there is that reality as well.

It behooves us all individually to improve the decorum in this House and the responsibility rests with each and every one of us.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, once again I want to note that the Prime Minister, when he was the opposition leader back on November 4, 2005, said that there was no more important job than cleaning up government and bringing accountability back to Ottawa.

What sort of cleaning up of Ottawa and bringing accountability back to Ottawa have we seen under the government in the last four years when government advertising has skyrocketed, the use of government aircraft continues unabated, external consultants have been hired in larger numbers than ever before and the cabinet, the PMO and the Privy Council Office have all increased in size?

There is no improvement over what he suggested. If he juxtaposed that to what Prime Minister Chrétien promised in his—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please. I must give the hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier equal time to respond.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Madam Speaker, as this particular period of five minutes is called questions and comments, I will take that as a comment and not a question.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to debate the motion before us today.

When we formed the government in 2006, our top priority was to stand up for accountability and transparency and to change the way government works. After all, we were elected on the heels of the Liberal sponsorship scandal, which still taints the Liberal Party and many of the members on that side of the House to this day. Canadian taxpayers have still not recovered from the more than \$50 million that were funnelled by Liberals to their friends, and I have yet to hear the hon. member who moved this motion express even one-tenth of the outrage he claims to feel today.

Like many Canadians, I remember the length and extremes to which members of the party opposite went in defence of their sponsorship entitlements. I am left wondering if the hon. member's outrage and indignation would disappear if only members of his party were still benefiting financially from their entitlements, but they are not, not any more. Tax dollars paid by hard-working Canadians are no longer paying the Liberal Party's Visa bill.

We offered Canadians a choice. The Prime Minister offered Canadians an opportunity to walk away from the politics of partisan self-interest and Liberal entitlement. Canadians elected us on a commitment to a more accountable government. This government and the Prime Minister have delivered.

Our first major achievement was the Federal Accountability Act. This landmark piece of legislation made substantive changes to 45 statutes and amends over 100 others. It delivered on the government's promise to put in place a five year lobbying ban, to eliminate corporate and union donations, and to protect whistleblowers, among many other important reforms.

In everything we do, we are driven to ensure that our activities stand up to the highest level of public scrutiny. This extends to our work on the communications front, including advertising.

What does not stand up to scrutiny is the hypocrisy oozing from the Liberal benches. Listen to this quote: "The public has a fundamental right to know what its government is doing and why, all the time". Who said that? The member for Wascana, the same member who later boasted that the Liberal government was spending \$110 million in 2002-03 to keep Canadians informed of programs, services and initiatives.

What we are seeing is just more evidence that the Liberal Party does not see a difference between tax dollars and Liberal funds. The Liberals spent years defending the illegal transfer of taxpayer dollars to their party, but now they claim outrage at legitimate advertising expenses.

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As we all know, the economic action plan is a crucial part of our plan to help Canadians weather the global economic recession. It includes measures to help Canadian businesses and families and to secure Canada's long-term prosperity. I am proud to say that our economic action plan is on track and it is delivering results for Canadians.

Thanks to almost 16,000 projects across Canada, more and more Canadians are back at work, and over 12,000 of those projects have begun or have already been completed.

• (1835)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): It being 6:37 p.m., pursuant to order made earlier today, all questions necessary to dispose of the opposition motion are deemed put and the recorded division is deemed to have been demanded and deferred until Tuesday, March 16, 2010, at the end of government orders.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved

[*English*]

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I asked a question in the House which was not answered satisfactorily with respect KAIROS and its abuse by the government. CIDA has cut KAIROS off from a 35 year relationship with the government over an amount of about \$7 million.

All the studies and all the reports indicate, the latest being the Auditor General's report, that CIDA is in a state of disarray. It is a broken system. There is a high staff turnover. There are too many people in Ottawa and too few people in the field.

All the reports are themes and variations on the same thing. CIDA is broken. There is no impetus on the part of the government to fix it. There is no senior leadership that is prepared to fix it. There is no attempt to make the minister responsible for CIDA an independent full-fledged minister. There is no effort on the part of the government to make CIDA into the institution that it should be.

Bill C-293, the one legislated mandate with respect to CIDA, is ignored completely, so the minister is left to set her own priorities. Over the past number of years, there have been dozens of priorities that have literally been set and reset.

Into this maelstrom of a mess, of a dysfunctional ministry with a weak minister and an ever-changing set of priorities, comes KAIROS and every other NGO. Therefore, KAIROS applied for its funding. It was told by the agency that it would qualify and it sat on the minister's desk for six months. Then literally one night it gets a telephone call, saying it does not qualify because it does not meet the priorities, whatever the priorities are.

Then a couple of weeks later, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism said that really the reason it was

defunded was because it is anti-Semitic. If KAIROS is anti-Semitic, then so also is everyone else in the House.

It is just awful. It is even worse than that. Not only was it defunded because of some political agenda, but this hurts people. This hurts the poor people.

In this morning's paper, there is an article by Geoffrey York about the way in which rape is used as a weapon of war in the Congo. It describes a variety of programs that are not effective. The one exception is the KAIROS program.

Here is what Geoffrey York says about it. He goes on to describe a situation involving Eliza M'kazine who was raped. She said, "I was like a dead person. Whenever I saw a man walking toward me, I was afraid it was a soldier coming to rape me again".

He says:

Ms. M'kazine was counting on help from a Congolese human-rights group, *Heritiers de la justice*, which promised to train her to instruct sexually assaulted women about their legal rights. The program was to be launched this year with \$75,000 from Canada. "It gave me strength and courage", said Ms. M'kazine.

But the program was cancelled. The Canadian government abruptly halted its grants to KAIROS, the Canadian church charity that was supporting the Congolese human-rights group. Citizenship Minister...said it was because of the charity's position on Israel. After a storm of controversy, he said it was actually because the charity did not meet the government's "current priorities..."

The church leaders have asked for a meeting to clear the air with the Prime Minister. Yet the government has repeatedly refused the church leaders for an opportunity to clear the air.

• (1840)

Hon. Jim Abbott (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Madam Speaker, our government is committed to making Canada's international assistance more focused, efficient and accountable. We have made huge strides in implementing our aid effectiveness agenda. We have fought long and hard about how to improve aid and we have brought in some important changes that will help to ensure we deliver on our aid promises both to developing countries and to the Canadians we represent.

Our aid effectiveness agenda will concentrate our resources for a greater impact and will leverage the work of our development partners. CIDA is focusing a portion of our aid on 20 countries and has adopted three priority themes: increasing food security; securing the future of children and youth; and stimulating sustainable economic growth. The priorities we have identified reflect the interests and challenges faced by our partner countries and are consistent with the principles that guide other donor countries' approaches.

I will now turn to the funding question regarding KAIROS.

Setting priorities is about making choices, and sometimes choices are difficult. The recent Speech from the Throne stated that we are a country and a government that stands up for what is right in the world. We will not pursue the easiest path. We do what is right.

CIDA thoroughly analyzed KAIROS' program proposal and determined, with regret, that it did not meet the agency's current priorities. This is important.

KAIROS is a faith-based organization with a base of seven individual organizations, also of faith. Many of KAIROS' members, as individual organizations, continue to receive CIDA support for their work in developing countries. Why? Each of them properly followed the application process and put forward proposals that met with our efforts to focus and improve foreign aid.

For example, we continue to support the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund, which is working in Bangladesh, Mozambique, Burundi and Tanzania to improve the health care for women and prevent and treat HIV-AIDS and malaria. We provide funding to the Mennonite Central Committee because it is providing food security through small farmers, as well as income generation activities and meeting basic human needs.

Allow me to list some of the church organizations that receive CIDA funding: United Church of Canada; Adventist Development and Relief Agency; Canadian Baptist Ministries; Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, Canadian Lutheran World Relief; Christian and Missionary Alliance; Christian Reformed World Relief Committee; Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada; Mennonite Central Committee of Canada; Nazarene Compassionate Ministries; Presbyterian World Service & Development; Anglican Church of Canada; and the Salvation Army. That is not the complete list.

As previously mentioned, and as the Minister of International Cooperation has said in this House, this was a difficult decision to make, but decisions like this are necessary to improve our aid.

CIDA simply cannot fund every proposal. Without a doubt, our foreign aid needs will be focused, effective and accountable. Our government has made some difficult decisions, but they were the right decisions.

Allow me to list some proof that the Conservative government is the best government Canada has seen with respect to aid. We doubled our aid to Africa. We are doubling our foreign aid. We are bringing our aid to a record \$5 billion. This is more foreign aid than ever before.

Clearly, our government delivers on our commitments. We get real results. The opposition parties can play politics and throw as much mud as they would like, but the facts remain in our favour.

● (1845)

Hon. John McKay: Madam Speaker, the mud was thrown by the current government when it called them anti-Semitic. Every one of the church leaders that the member mentioned has asked for a meeting with the Prime Minister to clear the air. Thus far, the Prime Minister has ignored them. The Mennonites, the Catholics, the United Church, the Presbyterians, the leadership of all of the churches that he mentioned, have repeatedly, since January 21, asked for a meeting with the Prime Minister and he has refused. He has refused to meet them because he has unfairly slandered them.

One of the reasons they pool their resources is that they can be more effective. That is why the Mennonites, the Baptists, the

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Catholics, everybody works together. They are more effective when they pool their resources. Now it has become extremely serious because these women in the Congo looking for support from KAIROS, a very modest grant, an effective grant, an effective grant in a situation of chaos, one of the few programs that was actually working, the current government cut. It is wrong. It was wrong today and it will be wrong tomorrow.

If this is the government's idea of priorities, then we need a real serious conversation.

Hon. Jim Abbott: Madam Speaker, the longer I am in the House, the more I realize we have a tendency to talk past each other. I do not think the member was listening to my comments, which were simple and straightforward.

All of the organizations that I listed have applied for and received funding under the current criteria, under the current criteria, under the current criteria. I say it three times so that he might possibly hear it. KAIROS did not apply under the current criteria. It did not meet the criteria and therefore did not receive the funds.

With respect to the small \$75,000 grant, any human being would have compassion for this woman and her situation, but there are six billion going on seven billion people in the world, most of whom can use Canada's aid and assistance. We need to be focused, effective and accountable to the people of Canada.

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to rise and probe a little further the question I asked on March 5 of the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism. To remind the House, the question was with respect to the new citizenship guide and some omissions and deletions in the preparation of it.

I will begin by saying that for me citizenship is much more than just about voting. It is actually about full participation in the life and fabric of our society. It is the way people choose to exercise that participation economically, socially and culturally that we celebrate when people become citizens.

Every month I sign anywhere between 80 and 200 certificates for new Canadians who have taken an oath, pledged their allegiance and decided to become part of Canada as citizens and take up those responsibilities. To help them in that process, the government has come up with a new citizenship guide. I want to applaud the government for some of the new inclusions in this fuller and quite beautiful guide about Canada.

The guide has included a military history, which was not there previously, and a greater focus on Canada's first nations and other aboriginal peoples, but there is a glaring omission or perhaps exclusion. That has to do with the history of gay and lesbian people in the fabric of our society and in full inclusion. That is quite a disappointment for me because I think there are two reasons that becomes important.

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One of those reasons is that new Canadians can celebrate the advancements made by gay and lesbian people as part of their history when they become citizens. They could actually celebrate the human rights agenda, equal marriage rights and those things that perhaps they did not have in the country they left and this new country has. Part of the embrace of Canada is the embrace of gay and lesbian people.

We cannot be naive about this because that document is also an educational tool. It reminds people of the things they might not know about this country. It also tells us that some of our rights are fragile. The minister's own actions, with the exclusion of gay and lesbian history, is part of that fragility. It is incumbent upon the government to stand up for all people and reflect the goodness of this country and the greatness of its people.

The public record is pretty clear. Documents received under access to information have clearly indicated that the department requested that the minister include gay and lesbian history. Unfortunately, he made the decision to exclude it, which is his right. The government has the right to exclude anybody from history it would like to exclude, but it does not have the right to not explain fully how that happened and why it was not party to the meeting with the director of Egale. It is clear on the public record that the minister denied his responsibility on this and said that it was a mere omission.

It is time for the minister to own up to his responsibility. He said that he was responsible for the guide. I hope he can now take this as an opportunity to assure the House, as the government needs to and which the parliamentary secretary hopefully will, that gay and lesbian history will be included in an update to the guide, that there will be no exclusion by a minister or his or her office and that there will be no attempt to rewrite Canadian history but to give every new Canadian citizen the opportunity to know he or she is written into our history the day of arrival and will never be written out of history. That is the goal and I hope the government can make that pledge and commitment today.

● (1850)

Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for Don Valley West for his question. I also want to compliment him. I just have a suit on today, but he has taken it a step further. I guess this is heightening the level of our dress required when here for a late show in the evening, and that perhaps our dress has to get even better, so I compliment him this evening for that.

This government is committed to promoting and strengthening the value of Canadian citizenship. For Canadian citizenship to be meaningful, it is of utmost importance that new and longstanding Canadians alike share a common understanding of our rights, our responsibilities, our common institutions and, of course, our history. This is how we develop and maintain a common sense of Canadian identity and pride in our country.

That process took a major step forward last fall with the launch of "Discover Canada", a new study guide for Canadian citizenship. As anyone who has read the guide can attest, "Discover Canada" better reflects the fact that one of the requirements for Canadian citizenship

is to demonstrate adequate knowledge of Canada and the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

This guide was rewritten to tell the story of Canada in a more compelling way. In so doing, it will help hundreds of thousands of new Canadians better understand the values, symbols, institutions and history of our country. It will also strengthen the value of our Canadian citizenship by giving readers more information about what it means to be a Canadian citizen and by emphasizing not only the rights that citizenship confers but also the responsibilities it entails.

The previous study guide had not been significantly revised since it was created in 1995. Even before work was done on revising the guide, key individuals and organizations involved in citizenship promotion were consulted in order to find out what they felt newcomers needed to know to get a picture of Canada and Canadians. It was determined that the previous guide lacked information on Canada's history, on its military contributions, its symbols, its values and institutions, all of the things that newcomers need to know to develop a better understanding of and stronger attachment to our country.

This 1995 guide was produced under a Liberal government, and my colleague from Don Valley West outlined some of the problem with that guide from a historical perspective. The 1995 guide omitted numerous important facts about Canada and its history. The guide we replaced failed to mention the equality of men and women, residential schools, responsible government and the 110,000 Canadians who gave their lives in the world wars. In fact the old guide had no mention whatsoever of gays or lesbians.

Many respected Canadians helped the Government of Canada write this study guide over the nearly nine month process. Each one of these public figures, authors and historians contributed their expertise and unique perspectives on Canada. All input was considered as part of the challenge of capturing Canada's history, its identity and values, and of putting it all into one document.

The result is a guide that is more comprehensive in scope, which emphasizes both the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, and whose popularity among Canadians quite frankly speaks for itself.

Perhaps I will give just a few examples of how our new guide was actually received. Let me just quote from *Maclean's* magazine of November 23, 2009:

Ottawa's new citizenship guide properly ensures every new immigrant will know what it really means to be a Canadian.

● (1855)

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Madam Speaker, I thank the parliamentary secretary for his comments, none of which I disagree with. I think this citizenship guide is a massive improvement and I have no need to defend the record of a previous Liberal government. I was not here.

What I am doing is looking to the future, and what I would hope is that the government could simply acknowledge that a group of people was left out. It was a hurtful action and it was not a just action; it was not a good action or a right action.

I do not actually even want to score political points on this. We need to lift ourselves beyond that and simply address the fact that every citizenship guide needs to be better than the previous one, and that in any new edition we have to recognize that this country is an evolving one with new people, new understandings and new ideas.

There is great fanfare that, yes, there is an Olympic gold medal winner, Mark Tewksbury, who is in it as an openly gay person, a champion; but it is simply not enough. He has said that he does not represent the broad diversity. We want a commitment that all will be included.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Madam Speaker, for Canadian citizenship to be meaningful, it is important that all Canadians share a common understanding of our rights and responsibilities.

That is why the previous study guide for Canadian citizenship, which had not been revised since it was created in 1995, has been rewritten with a broader and stronger focus on the history and institutions of Canada and our military contributions.

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The new guide is comprehensive in scope. It is focused on the rights and responsibilities of Canadian citizenship, and reinforces that citizenship is a two-way street and that newcomers and people who are Canadian by birth have both the responsibility and opportunity to build on this.

In closing, the Canadian Race Relations Foundation news release, via Canada NewsWire, stated:

It is not enough to memorize Canadian history, but rather to understand its context and meaning. This guide is a step in the right direction.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:58 p.m.)

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