

Mr. Speaker, as I rise to give my maiden speech in the House as the member of Parliament for [Edmonton—St. Albert](#), I beg the indulgence of hon. members as I make some acknowledgments.

First I want to express how humbled and honoured I am that the great citizens of St. Albert and northwest Edmonton entrusted me with the duty of representing them in the House.

With all due respect to the other members, I have the distinct honour of representing the best big city and the best small city in Canada at the same time. I commit myself to working on their behalf to the best of my ability.

For decades Edmonton has been among the most culturally vibrant cities in Canada, besides being the capital of Alberta. The University of Alberta is one of the elite universities in the country. Our river valley is a true gem. It is the longest urban park in the world.

Edmonton really is the city of champions. I have been an Edmonton Eskimos season ticket holder for many years. The Edmonton Eskimos have won 13 Grey Cups since 1954, more than any other team. The Edmonton Oilers are also champions and have won five Stanley Cups, which tops any other franchise outside of the original six. We are also proud to be the outdoor arena of choice for soccer in Canada. Commonwealth Stadium regularly brings in as many fans for international matches as anywhere else in North America.

Mr. Speaker, you probably know a lot less about St. Albert, a wonderful city of almost 60,000 people located just outside the northwest boundary of Edmonton. In a province barely 100 years old, St. Albert has a charming, well-established feel in its own lovely valley on the banks of the Sturgeon River. It also has a vibrant arts community and a great deal of cultural richness. St. Albert is the oldest non-fortified settlement in Alberta. In fact, in 2011 St. Albert will celebrate its 150th anniversary.

St. Albert is home to many small businesses and, like Edmonton, its industrial area is being shaped by the energy boom taking place in northern Alberta, the energy boom that has been the main driver of Canada's economic buoyancy in the last years when so many nations have suffered major economic losses.

As their representative, I will defend the interests of small and medium-sized businesses. I will also ensure that our energy sector remains robust, because government programs will never help sustain our economy in the way that the success of industry and private enterprise can.

The Edmonton Garrison is on the border of my constituency, and the former Griesbach base is in the southeast part of the riding. I doubt that many ridings in the country have the honour of being home to as many men and women who are serving and retired members of the military as [Edmonton—St. Albert](#) does. This is very important to me.

I take seriously our duty in the House to ensure that the people who have devoted their lives to keeping our country safe and respected are well taken care of. I will add that unlike most members of the opposition, I am extremely proud not only of our soldiers, but also of the Afghan mission itself.

It will not be easy to satisfy the expectations of the citizens of [Edmonton—St. Albert](#), because my predecessor was such a distinguished and respected parliamentarian. John Williams served in the House for 15 years, arriving with the first group of Reform Party members in the heady days of 1993. Among other achievements, he chaired the public accounts committee for an unusually long period of time, and he did so because of the respect he earned as a watchdog on government waste.

The highlight of his tenure occurred when he put the spotlight on the sponsorship scandal and made sure that Canadians found out about the corruption and kickbacks the Liberals were

engaged in with their hard-earned tax dollars. He will be remembered for his periodic publication “The Waste Report”, which served as a watchdog of mismanagement of public funds.

I am reminded every time I speak with voters that John Williams was correct. Our biggest job as parliamentarians is to ensure that government does not misuse the money we take from our taxpayers. Whether we are in opposition or whether we are in government, we have to stand up not only for the Canadians who are asking for the help of the government, but also for the ones who pay our bills. We have to think not only of the needs of the citizens, but also of the realities of the people who are employers and taxpayers. This is what I heard on the doorsteps of every neighbourhood in which I knocked on doors this fall.

Replacing a man like John Williams will be a tall order, but as one of the tallest members of the House, I hope that with some indulgence members will come to embrace me as they did him.

I proudly hail from Melville, a prairie town in eastern Saskatchewan, which is also your home province, Mr. Speaker. Like a great Conservative Prime Minister who presided in this chamber, I am a lawyer by training and a proud graduate of the law school of the University of Saskatchewan.

[\(1735\)](#)

The Right Hon. John George Diefenbaker--

[Mr. Maurice Vellacott](#): He was from my riding.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: --from the riding of the hon. member for [Saskatoon—Wanuskewin](#) is to be honoured by this government by having his name put to a new icebreaker. He was a hero of mine when I was a small boy growing up in prairie Saskatchewan. I would love to go on about the constituency of Edmonton--St. Albert, but these are times of great peril, both in the House and in the nation.

This fall Canadians gave the Conservative government a clear mandate to continue taking action on the economy. During a global downturn, the last thing our country needs is for opposition politicians to claim entitlements for tax dollars and ultimately to take power without a mandate from the people.

The benchmark TSX index took a near-record dive Monday, dropping 864 points, or 9.3%. It sustained further losses today. That is a clear indication of the economic incentives we can expect from this proposed coalition government. The investors of Canada got a chance to vote early on this proposal, and they voted it down.

Under the current [Prime Minister](#)'s leadership, our government was ahead of the curve in anticipating the global economic slowdown. We are and have been injecting billions of dollars in stimulus through tax cuts, investments in roads and bridges, and protection of the banking system.

Our focus is the economy, but the opposition parties have their own priorities. While all Canadians are tightening their belts, they feel entitled to make taxpayers pay for political party staff, for polls and for advertising. They want to replace the elected government just to preserve \$17 million worth of entitlements. This is clearly unacceptable for a modern democracy.

This time of difficulty is indeed a great opportunity for us to invest in initiatives that will pay benefits in the long term, especially with regard to correcting the infrastructure backlog that exists across this country. However, we cannot afford to be hasty about it. Canadians chose us because they trust us to be prudent and not desperate.

In addition to the infrastructure investment, there is also a chance in this troubled period to make investments in key Canadian industries. I firmly believe, however, and I think Canadians agree with me, that it would be irresponsible to simply dump money into the coffers of any companies that have run into trouble, just as it would be irresponsible to start building roads and bridges everywhere for the sake of propping up temporary jobs.

Prudent economic management means measuring twice and cutting once. This is why I congratulate the efforts of the hon. [industry minister](#), who has been working diligently on the industry file and requesting that the auto industry come up with detailed restructuring plans. Detailed restructuring plans mean Canadians can be reassured that any of their money directed to the auto industry is an investment in something that is sustainable and that makes Canada stronger in the long term, as opposed to using our money to prop up companies for a short time period, only to face the same scenario a few years and a few billion dollars later.

There has to be more consideration than that. Canadians elected this government because they trust us to act with deliberation and with the long-term well-being of this country in mind when we make these important decisions. They do not expect this government to throw billions of their dollars into anything if it is not going to reap dividends.

The opposition accuses us of failing to act as quickly as other industrial nations. To this I counter that there are two very good reasons for Canada to act with more deliberation and prudence than others.

First, we are in better shape than the other industrialized countries in terms of our economy and our solid banking system. They rushed to inject money into various sectors because those other countries' crises were well under way. We have been growing so robustly over the last three years that with few exceptions, we are not feeling this downturn, except perhaps in the stock market. I would argue that we could easily wait until the end of January before committing to huge investments, so that when we act, we can act with a well-considered plan and not a hasty one.

The second difference between Canada and any other country with which we are compared is that much of our economy is deeply intertwined with our neighbours to the south. This means we cannot act alone if we want to act effectively. The Americans, like us, have just come out of a national election and are in the process of deciding what they are going to do with their stimulus package. It would be irresponsible to risk moving at cross-purposes to American actions.

Among their big decisions is how to help the big three carmakers. Does it make any sense for Canada to decide by itself what to do in this regard? No.

[\(1740\)](#)

Obviously the U.S. is a central player in our marketplace. Just as obvious, we should work in concert with what happens on the other side of the border and with the incoming American administration.

This is only one example of many interconnected aspects of our economy, which illustrates the point that until the U.S. makes its trillion dollar decisions, we cannot know that we will make effective choices with our billion dollar decisions.

I am here to speak about the fiscal update and I will return to the subject of the economy, because our crisis is about to get much worse.

The latest moves by the opposition are obviously making our good stewardship of the nation's economy, a side issue being replaced by their naked ambition.

Both my Ottawa office and my St. Albert office have been absolutely deluged by Canadians who are outraged by the coalition of the [Leader of the Opposition](#), who has been lured into by a party that wants to make Canada a socialist state and by a party that wants to pull Canada apart. I share the outrage that so many Canadians feel.

It is one thing to say that a coalition government is better for Canada when no party clearly has a mandate from Canadians. However, that is not the case. Just six weeks ago, the people of Canada spoke very clearly. They said quite unambiguously that they did not want the [Leader of the Opposition](#) to be prime minister, not now and certainly not in the times of economic instability like the one we are about to face.

We learned soon after this coalition started that the leader of the smallest party in the House, a man who knows he will never be elected by Canadians into government because his NDP views are so out of touch with reality, had been plotting for some time to take over, with the separatists as his co-conspirators.

In the fiscal update the [Minister of Finance](#) announced our intention to lead by example in this period, where all Canadians must be prepared to tighten their belts, and proposed that all parties should give up their \$1.95 per vote, which was brought in five years ago. When this happened, the opposition parties, especially the Liberal Party, panicked. Why? Because they cannot raise enough money from people donating to them voluntarily. As with most things in society, the members of those parties think the government should spend taxpayer money on their behalf because, ostensibly, the government knows better.

The panic on the part of the Liberals was just the desperation for which the NDP members were waiting. They immediately took the anger and the insecurity of the opposition parties and before the weekend was over, had committed the [Leader of the Opposition](#) to this undemocratic plot.

A lot of Canadians and a lot more sober-minded caucus members from the opposition are wondering why exactly he was lured into this unholy pact with the socialists and the separatists. We should not be too surprised since the [Leader of the Opposition](#) has two former NDP premiers on his front benches.

Let us consider his motivations for a moment. His unpopularity drove the Liberal Party to its lowest showing ever. Since Confederation, no Liberal leader has been rejected more strongly across the nation than the man who ran the Liberal Party down to 77 seats on October 14. He was humiliated and most of his caucus members held their noses when he announced he would stay on as interim leader until they found someone to lead them in May. Clearly, at this point, he has nothing to lose and he is desperate to do anything that might salvage his reputation.

Canadians see right through this and we cannot allow it go forward. They said in October that they did not want him as their prime minister and when they said it, they meant it. He is desperate to salvage his reputation, but he is selling his soul and also the soul of his party and, sadly, the soul of the Government of Canada to the people who will run our economy into an abyss that will take us decades to recover from and people who will set the cause of national unity back decades. People can call them devils if they want to. I call them socialists and separatists.

Unlike our government, this coalition never told Canadians what it would do if it took office, so we are left to speculate. Let us do that.

The leader of this gang has wild plans about how he can save the world with radical environmental schemes. Today we heard his friend, the leader of the Green Party, in a press conference, crowing that a seat in the Senate, or maybe even something better would await her, if

this left-wing coalition ever flies. His green shift is not something he has ever disowned, even though so many of the Liberal candidates disowned it in the recent election campaign.

The NDP and the Bloc also have some extreme views on how we should take whatever steps we can to save the world, no matter what the costs to our economy or to our taxpayers. This is not what Canadians chose, especially in a time of economic crisis.

[\(1745\)](#)

Not only is this not the direction Canada chose, it is not the direction western Canadians want. There is plenty of outrage in all parts of the country over this, but especially in the west. By getting into bed with people who want to pull Quebec out of Canada, the proposed coalition has given new life to those who have entertained the idea of pulling all parts of Canada apart.

We know perfectly well that the members of the NDP think that the oil sands, which are fuelling not only the energy independence for North America but also the Canadian economy, need to be shut down. We know perfectly well that they think Greenpeace is a more reliable source of information than any provincial government or independent study.

We knew all along that the Liberals green shift, in their uniformed zeal, would hurt the economy of the nation and especially the economies of Alberta and Saskatchewan. Canadians did not vote for that, and they would not vote for it if they were given a chance tomorrow.

Normally, I would be happy about anything that would drag the Liberal name into great depths of unpopularity. However, the stakes are too high for the country I love to let the Liberals go ahead with this dangerous, undemocratic, unprincipled and un-Canadian plot.

Here is what Jeffrey Simpson from *The Globe and Mail* had to say about the prospect of these three unsuccessful leaders:

If this coalition takes power, therefore, Canada would be led by a temporary prime minister who almost every Liberal MP wishes were not the leader. Not having been successful in leading his own party, it would be fascinating to watch him run a coalition government....It will certainly be a shock to the 74 per cent of Canadians who did not vote Liberal, and the large majority who ranked Mr. Dion by far the least popular leader, to discover that he has somehow managed to become prime minister.

Don Martin of the *National Post* wrote today that the biggest Liberal loser in—

[\[Table of Contents\]](#)

The Deputy Speaker:

The hon. member for [Edmonton—St. Albert](#) is new, but I will let him know that even when we quote from other articles, we still cannot use proper names. If he is going to quote from an article and it contains the proper name of a member of Parliament, I ask him to refer to that member by title or riding name.

[\[Table of Contents\]](#)

Mr. Brent Rathgeber:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that caveat. The *National Post* wrote:

The biggest Liberal loser in the party's electoral history, a self-admitted campaign failure who advocated carbon taxes as sound economy policy and lacks significant Western Canada representation, seems set to become prime minister next week....This means an electorate that cast a third of its votes for the Conservatives will have their representation replaced by a hodge-podge of lowest-common-denominator policies produced almost

overnight by parties leaning left and toward leaving....While the discipline of power may keep the coalition together, more or less flying in loose formation for perhaps a year or even longer, this is not a system of sustainable government as much as it is a power grab minus a compelling reason to exist.

I pray for the sake of democracy and for the sake of Canada that this unholy alliance not be allowed to proceed. Governing is a privilege, not an entitlement. A leader that the electorate overwhelmingly rejected, surrounded by two former NDP premiers and six other socialists and the unthinkable, being propped up by a party whose raison d'être is to put Canada asunder, is clearly Canada's worst nightmare. It is undemocratic, un-Canadian and unconscionable. I pray for the sake of Canada it not be allowed to proceed.

Today, I pray for the future of Canada.

[\(1750\)](#)

[*Translation*]

[\[Table of Contents\]](#)

[Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours \(Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.\):](#)

Mr. Speaker, where I come from, we call that talking from both sides of your mouth at the same time. I have listened to what the hon. member had to say. He finds it aberrant that there is a possibility of a coalition government. What was wrong with his party, the Conservatives, associating itself with the Bloc Québécois just weeks after the 2004 election? Why? In order to govern as a coalition. So why was it a good thing for them to associate themselves with a separatist party then, and now it is a shameful thing for the Liberals and the NDP to want to associate with each other in order to ensure that the economy can move ahead properly?

This is a mixed message. As I said, it is talking from both sides of your mouth, as we say where I come from.

As far as the economy is concerned, could the hon. member tell me if he is in favour, or not in favour, of eliminating the two week waiting period for employment insurance?

Quit using this double-speak, quit telling people to their faces that you will do this or that, and then saying something else behind their backs. In reality, you wanted to defeat the Paul Martin Liberals, and that is also what you wanted to do to the Bloc Québécois. What is the difference today?

[\[Table of Contents\]](#)

[The Deputy Speaker:](#)

Order. It is against the rules to address another member directly.

The hon. member for [Edmonton—St. Albert](#).

[*English*]

[\[Table of Contents\]](#)

[Mr. Brent Rathgeber:](#)

Mr. Speaker, the member has been here a lot longer than I, so he knows there is no parallel to what has occurred on Parliament Hill this week to what happened in 2004.

The media has reported that the 2004 letter asked the governor general simply for consultations. It was not a signed pact to form a government among the [Leader of the Opposition](#), the leader of the socialist party and the leader of a party, whose motivation is to break our country apart. It was simply to ask for consultations.

I am sure the hon. member and all hon. members in the House will appreciate the difference.

[*Translation*]

[\[Table of Contents\]](#)

[Mr. Thierry St-Cyr \(Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ\):](#)

Mr. Speaker, that is truly pathetic. It is a little like the burglar who is caught before he breaks into a house and says that it is okay because he was caught before he committed a crime. Come on. That is nonsense. The fact is that the Conservatives are concerned about only one thing, and that is losing power. That is the only thing they are afraid of.

I would like to tell my friend—

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: I am almost done.

I would like to tell my friend that not so long ago, during the last Parliament, the Conservatives repeatedly asked this House for its confidence, and they asked the Bloc Québécois the same thing. In fact, the Conservatives were able to remain in power during confidence votes on the first two budgets of the 39th Parliament because they had the support of the Bloc Québécois.

At the time, that was obviously a good thing. It was fine for the government's survival to depend on the Bloc Québécois. But when it is not the government's survival that is at stake, but the survival of a coalition government, suddenly that is a bad thing.

Had my colleague been a member in the 39th Parliament and had he been forced to join with the Bloc Québécois on a confidence vote on the budget, would he have resigned? Would he have left the Conservative Party? What would he have done if he had had to vote with the Bloc Québécois?

[*English*]

[\[Table of Contents\]](#)

[Mr. Brent Rathgeber:](#)

Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member was in the 39th Parliament, he would know that the support of the Bloc Québécois for the current government was on a case by case basis, vote by vote. It was not carte blanche. It was not in a signed contract.

The hon. member suggested that the Conservatives were only interested in maintaining power. I suggest that never in the history of Canada has there been such a blatant power grab than what we saw yesterday, with the pact among the three leaders.

If opposition members are so concerned about holding on to power, why do they not put this pact to the Canadian electorate and let them decide?

[\(1755\)](#)

[\[Table of Contents\]](#)

[Mr. Jim Maloway \(Elmwood—Transcona, NDP\):](#)

Mr. Speaker, I want to follow up on the previous speaker on this side of the House. I want to quote from the actual letter that is the subject of discussion here. It was sent to the governor general on September 9, 2004, and it states:

“Excellency:

As leaders of the opposition parties, we are well aware that, given the Liberal minority government, you could be asked by the Prime Minister to dissolve the 38th Parliament at any time should the House of Commons fail to support some part of the government's program.

We respectfully point out that the opposition parties, who together constitute a majority in the House, have been in close consultation. We believe that, should a request for dissolution arise this should give you cause, as constitutional practice has determined, to consult the opposition leaders and consider all of your options before exercising your constitutional authority“.

This letter was signed by the current [Prime Minister](#), the current leader of the Bloc Québécois and the current leader of the NDP.

Why was it okay to try to replace the Paul Martin government, but today the idea is evil?

[\[Table of Contents\]](#)

[Mr. Brent Rathgeber:](#)

Mr. Speaker, absolutely no analogy or no parallel can be drawn between 2004 and 2008. That was a letter asking the governor general to consider all her options and for consultation.

Let me be clear about this. Yesterday on Parliament Hill three leaders appeared in this precinct and signed a contract telling the Governor General that they were prepared to become government.

What the hon. member for the New Democratic Party indicated was a letter to the the former governor general asking for consultation and encouraging her to consider all her options.

That is much different than a signed pact among the rejected [Leader of the Opposition](#), the socialist leader and the separatist leader, telling the Governor General that her only option was to allow them to form government.