

House of Commons Key Statements on the Nortel Disabled

December 16, 2010.....	1
December 9, 2010.....	2
December 7, 2010.....	3
December 3, 2010.....	3
December 2, 2010.....	4
November 30, 2010.....	4
November 23, 2010.....	4
November 18, 2010.....	5
November 3, 2010.....	5
October 28, 2010.....	6
October 27, 2010.....	6
October 22, 2009.....	7
October 19, 2010.....	7
April 19, 2010.....	8
April 12, 2010.....	8
March 29, 2010.....	9
December 7, 2009.....	9
November 27, 2009.....	10
October 22, 2010.....	10
October 21, 2009.....	11

December 16, 2010

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, 15 days from today, more than 400 long-term disability pensioners from Nortel will be cut off their benefits. They will be destitute, quite literally out on the street. But it does not have to be that way. This Parliament is sovereign. Where the law is deficient, the government has the power to fix it.

The member for York West has legislation ready to go to save long-term disability pensions.

Will the government agree to deal with this matter before it begins its Christmas holidays later today?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, we look forward to having a chance to review and examine this legislation. As it was just tabled today, it would be premature to comment on its specifics.

I think I can speak for all members of the House in expressing our deepest sympathies to the recipients in question. There is no question that this is an unfortunate situation. That is why our government has joined with the opposition to study proposed legislation designed to alleviate the difficulties these Canadians are facing. Unfortunately, the opposition's legislation that has already been before the House would not solve the problem.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, excuses do not help.

This issue involves a choice: on one side, hundreds of ordinary Canadians who have worked hard, paid their taxes, played by the rules, and now have the misfortune of Parkinson's disease or other disabilities; and on the other side, the moneylenders, the bondholders, the big banks and the wealthy, the comfortable

people who will have a very nice Christmas this year. The Conservatives have made their choice. They stand with the privileged elite.

How can they look themselves in the mirror knowing some disabled pensioners will be going hungry?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, previous legislation tabled by the Liberals on this very point was examined by the Senate. Experts before the Senate committee were in agreement that their legislation would not help the very people that they purport to want to help, that it is retroactive, that it would undo a court decision and a court agreement that cannot be undone. That is what the experts said.

On this side of the House, we want to help people with real legislation and real action, rather than the false hope that the opposition Liberals tend to gallivant around near Christmastime.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, the government has had a year and a half, and retroactivity is not a bad thing when the cause is right.

This is all about choices. The Conservatives could help families take care of sick or disabled loved ones, but instead they risk \$6 billion on extra corporate tax cuts. They could invest in students so everyone who gets the grades gets to go to college or university, but instead they risk \$13 billion on American-style mega-jails. They could help families cope with household debts and make ends meet, but instead they risk \$21 billion on stealth fighter jets.

Why are the Conservatives so stone deaf to ordinary Canadians?

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, we have heard loud and clear what Canadians' priorities are. That is why we put in place an economic action plan, a two-year plan to get Canadians back to work.

I must share with Canadians who are watching that not everyone in this House supported that plan. Some who did not support it now want to see it extended. We are still struggling with the thought process there.

Since July 2009, over 441,000 more Canadians have a job. That is an important thing at Christmas.

December 9, 2010

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, this Christmas, there are many more Canadians living in poverty than there were when the government took office. Seniors poverty is up 25%, but while the government can find \$1 billion for its bloated G8 meeting, seniors suffer. While the Conservatives were making merry at their Christmas party last night, their senators danced out long enough to kill a bill that would have made Christmas a little bit brighter for disabled Nortel employees.

Merry Christmas from their government. This on top of shafting our poor seniors by cutting their GIS. Our seniors have stood up for this country for years. Why does their government not stand up for them now?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to standing up for seniors, we have done it several times when the member and his Liberal colleagues did not. We stood up and voted in the House for splitting the pension income for seniors. We stood up in the House when it came to the GIS exemption. We stood up for making sure that seniors could work more and still collect GIS.

We are standing up for seniors. Liberals should try it once in a while.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, come on. Poverty in this country is a national disgrace. Governments make choices. They can find billions of dollars for untended planes but nothing for seniors. Seniors poverty is up 25%. Poverty is up 2.5%. We have more people living in the streets, kids going without food, skyrocketing debt, and people with increased debt loads. Those are facts, but those are the choices that the Conservatives make. The government does not seem to give a damn. What does it say to the poor, "Let them eat planes"?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, let us face it: when it comes to caring about seniors, we put our money where our mouth is. We are the ones who took 85,000 seniors off the tax rolls by reducing their taxes so that they had more money in their pockets, not in the government's pockets. We brought in pension income-splitting for seniors. We raised the age credit.

We are doing it for Canadians. All the Liberals are trying to do is scare them. That is not right. That is not fair and it is not helping seniors.

The other thing the Liberals want to do is raise the carbon tax. They want to raise the GST. That will take money out of seniors' pockets. That will not help.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, over a year ago I tabled a bill designed to help the disabled Nortel workers. A similar bill in the Senate was defeated by Conservative senators last night. Clearly the unaccountable senators have abandoned these workers.

The clock has all but run out for these workers. The minister has repeatedly said in the House that he would do something for them. Will he put aside his speaking points and tell the House right here, right now, what he will do for them?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, I can tell the hon. member that we on this side of the House, as I believe all MPs and senators, sympathize with the plight of these individuals, particularly those with long-term disabilities.

The fact is the solutions proffered by the NDP and proffered by the Liberals in the Senate do not help those people one iota. They do not help. They would be in court for years. That is the expert testimony that was heard at the Senate. They are not helping.

We on this side of the House are looking for solutions to help people, not engage in soulless rhetoric designed for the cameras and not for the people of Canada.

December 7, 2010

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, on March 25, Bill S-216 was introduced in the Senate and despite our best efforts, there it continues to languish.

Bill S-216 represents the last hope for some 400 sick, disabled and dying Canadians. These people worked hard, paid their disability insurance premiums, and now they are being cast to the wolves by a Conservative-dominated Senate that makes Ebenezer Scrooge look like Mother Teresa.

This Christmas more than 400 sick and disabled Canadians will have their medical benefits and primary income slashed without any recourse. Their only crime is they got sick.

Bill S-216 would force Nortel to do the right thing, and despite baseless Conservative claims to the contrary, experts tell us that it would actually streamline the legal process faced by the disabled during bankruptcy.

The clock is ticking. Why is the Prime Minister refusing to demand his Conservative senators do the right thing? Will the Prime Minister finally stand up and support Bill S-216, or will he continue to say humbug to all of these disabled and dying Canadians?

December 3, 2010

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the unelected, unaccountable, Conservative-dominated Senate killed the long-term disability pensions, and again the government laughs, of more than 400 Nortel employees. These people are suffering from Parkinson's Disease and similar disabilities. Without their pensions, they will be destitute just 28 days from today.

At a time when Conservatives have a lot of money for jets and jails, corporate tax giveaways and bloated ministerial offices, why can the government not help 408 innocent, hard-working but now disabled Canadians?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of the Environment, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, if the Liberal Party would like to reform the Senate, I would encourage it to get behind this government's agenda.

We have legislation before Parliament with respect to elections of senators and with respect to the term limits going from 45 years to 8 years. We think that is incredibly important.

However, the issue involving Nortel pensioners and LTD recipients is obviously a very serious one. Regrettably, the reality is we cannot legally and constitutionally make laws that apply retroactively. I think the member opposite knows that.

December 2, 2010

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, under the Conservative government, poverty among senior citizens has jumped by 25%. Veterans are forced to hold protest rallies to fight for their pensions. Conservative senators right now are killing the pensions of Nortel workers who suffer from Parkinson's disease and other long-term disabilities, and those members over there laugh. In 30 days those pensioners will be destitute.

Why such carnage wreaked on the elderly and disabled, while Conservatives lavish billions of dollars on **Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of the Environment, CPC):**

Mr. Speaker, the global economic downturn has had real consequences for every country in the world, not just Canada. Canada was the last country to go into those uncertain economic times. We are very proud we are the first country to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

We have seen the creation of a substantial number of jobs, more than 420,000 net new jobs. We are pleased with that.

We are always concerned about seniors. This is why every budget we have brought forward supports seniors. We have done an incredibly important job. One of the most important issues for seniors is health care. This government has increased funding by 30%, where the previous government cut it by \$25 billion.

November 30, 2010

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, if the Prime Minister is such a strong supporter of vulnerable seniors, he has a chance to show it, because in 32 days, the Nortel pensioners are going to lose their disability benefits and some of them are going to lose their houses.

It is not as if there is not a solution. There are plenty of solutions out there, including Bill S-216, held up in the Senate by Conservative senators.

Why is the government refusing to act, and is it possible that the government is going to let Christmas go by and have those disabled pensioners go to the wall?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, as the House knows very well, the situation he refers to was something done under something established under a court order, under legislation in effect at the time of the bankruptcy.

I think it is a terrible shame for the opposition to hold out false hope by suggesting that a bill in the Senate that would do absolutely nothing for this situation would somehow help it. The truth is that we want to make sure we take care of these seniors. We will make sure they have access to all the same protections that other Canadians have.

November 23, 2010

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, the Conservative MP for Saskatoon—Humboldt admitted recently that the government was spending like it was Christmas, and he is certainly right: billions on prisons, billions on single-source stealth fighters and \$300 million to clean up the mess it made on Camp Mirage. However, when it comes to the Nortel pensioners, disabled pensioners whose benefits will run out at Christmas, the government starts behaving like Scrooge.

How does the government explain its reckless spending and its heartless choices to disabled pensioners?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, we have considerable concern for the employees of Nortel. The Leader of the Opposition should understand that what is happening is due to a court settlement that occurred under legislation in place at the time of the Nortel bankruptcy.

November 18, 2010

Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, on January 1, 400 Nortel pensioners with disabilities will begin their new life of misery because of the Conservatives. The government could help them by supporting Bill S-216, but the Prime Minister would rather do nothing. Instead of enjoying the holiday season, these disabled pensioners will have to apply for welfare or look for a job.

Why is the government ignoring these vulnerable people who worked their whole lives for these pensions?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, we are concerned about the people who are affected by this situation. We heard very different opinions during the committee hearings on this issue. We need to continue studying the issue. We must not pass legislation without examining the repercussions more thoroughly.

Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, in just six weeks Nortel's long-term disability workers will lose access to their health benefits as well as 80% of their benefit payments. There is a solution. Conservative senators should pass Bill S-216 immediately.

Nortel workers are scrambling to find other sources of revenue, while just this morning Conservative senators scrambled out of committee in the middle of tragic and compelling testimony from these retirees.

With only 37 days until Christmas, how heartless can the Prime Minister possibly be?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, as I have said, we are profoundly affected by those who are touched by this particular situation. It is unfortunate that the members of the opposition are selling a dream that does not exactly exist.

Bill S-216 would have led to endless litigation by the parties as the government would be seeking to retroactively overturn a court decision to which the lawyers for the parties agreed. If the hon. member is advising us to break the law, why does she not stand in her place to do that?

On this side, we are trying to find real solutions for real people.

November 3, 2010

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and I attended a conference last night on disabilities and poverty where we heard Cindy Blackstock say that what government does is more important than what government says.

Given that the disabled are three times more likely to live in poverty than anybody else, this is what they want the government to do: implement the international covenant on the rights of the disabled; bring in a guaranteed annual income for the severely disabled; and make the disability tax credit fully refundable.

Will the minister do this?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, I was delighted to see the hon. member at the conference last night. He is finally showing an active interest, unlike the rest of his party, in helping the disabled in our communities.

Our government has done phenomenal things to help the disabled, including introducing the registered disability savings plan and our enabling accessibility fund. Unfortunately, the NDP voted against it.

Take my word for it? No, listen to Al Etmanski at the Plan Institute:
I believe [this] Government is hands down the most effective Federal champion people with disabilities and their families have ever had.

October 28, 2010

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, yesterday in response to my questions regarding Canadians on long-term disability who are about to lose their benefits, we were led to believe that this issue is in the hands of the highest level of the government. Maybe that is the problem. For more than 215 days, the Prime Minister has been using his influence to block a bill that would help the sick and disabled stay in their homes.

Will the Prime Minister just admit that he really does not care about these sick Canadians?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, that is absurd, wrong and ridiculous.

We are working in the best way possible to deal with issues that involve long-term disability and the failure not of the individuals but of the companies they had worked for.

That is why we are sceptical of the bill that the member supports because it actually would not help the people that she purports to care about.

October 27, 2010

Mrs. Michelle Simson (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to draw the attention of the House to Bill S-216, which is currently in the Senate and must be passed by Christmas in order to prevent 400 sick, disabled and dying Canadians from having their long-term disability benefits cut off.

Josée Marin, a former Nortel employee who will lose all her benefits, says, "the passage of Bill S-216 will mean the difference between living in my home and dying in my car".

The Prime Minister had the power to appoint 32 senators with full benefits and a pension for life. He also has the power to fast track the bill through the Senate and protect the benefits of hundreds of Canadians.

Will the Prime Minister use this power and fast track this bill to protect Canadian pensioners, or will he sit on his hands and force Canadians like Josée to fend for themselves?

We only have until Christmas. Let us get this done.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, earlier today I met with José, Sue, Peter, Patrick and about 40 other disabled individuals on long-term disability.

They were here to tell their stories, to tell us that they will face homelessness if the government fails to pass Bill S-216 by Christmas. These are hard-working and proud Canadians who need and deserve our help.

The Prime Minister can find time to appoint 32 senators for life with a guaranteed pension. Why is he now using these same senators to block passage of Bill S-216?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the hon. member and this House that we are very concerned about any individual in the country who stands to lose his or her benefits as a result of activity in the economic marketplace that is not his or her fault.

I can assure the hon. member that this is being viewed at the highest levels to ensure that we have a system that works for individual members, that works for businesses that want to continue to operate, that works with the Canadian economy as a whole, and in due course, when we have something to announce, we will announce it.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, there are only six weeks left, so I hope the Conservatives will hurry up. These people clearly need help today. They are here in Ottawa in wheelchairs and with canes, in tears, begging parliamentarians for help.

For them, December 31 is the end. Their health insurance benefits will no longer be paid as a result of the bankruptcy of Nortel. Bill [S-216](#) is their last hope.

Why is the [Prime Minister](#) not ordering his Conservative-dominated Senate to pass this bill today, before it is too late?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows, or should know, that if we actually look at the legalities of that particular proposed piece of legislation, it will not help, or cannot help, the very people she seeks to help.

We, on the other hand, are moving to make sure that this issue is dealt with at the highest levels, that we can have a plan that makes sense to the Canadian economy and makes sense for the individuals who are caught in that particular situation.

However, the bill to which she refers will not be of any help to those particular people.

October 22, 2009

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, it is official. The Conservative senators have turned their backs on sick and disabled Canadians. By refusing the quick passage of Bill S-216, Conservative senators have said they care more about junk-bond holders than about the hundreds of disabled Canadians who will lose their benefits by the end of the year.

Why can the [Prime Minister](#) find hundreds of millions of dollars to buy the real estate holdings of Nortel, but cannot find just a couple of hours to pass legislation to help Nortel's former employees?

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, it is a complex issue. It is of concern to this government. We are carefully studying this issue. We realize that there are several bills, not just one, that address this issue both in this place and the other. As with all pieces of legislation, we will carefully review these bills. We welcome any ideas that members of any party may have to offer.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, all they have to do is pass the legislation, bring it in the House, and we will pass it. That will solve the problem.

Yesterday, Josée Marin and Peter Burns stood before the TV cameras and begged for the Conservative-dominated Senate to pass Bill S-216. Josée said that the bill's passage would mean the difference between her living in her home and dying in her car.

As Conservatives continue to put junk-bond holders ahead of sick workers, I wonder if the [Prime Minister](#) can tell Peter and Josée why is he prepared to throw them out onto the street?

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, it is a complex issue. It is important to this government, and we are carefully studying the issue. There are many bills that have been before this House and the other house that are being considered. The hon. member's office is two floors below mine, and I would welcome her at any time to come up to my office and discuss this issue.

October 19, 2010

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, here is something that the minister can do right now.

Last Thursday, the Conservative-dominated Senate abandoned pensioners and the disabled by shelving Bill S-216. Instead of agreeing to fast-track the bill, the Conservatives eliminated any chance of getting it through Parliament before Christmas and, as such, smashed the hopes of hundreds of disabled Nortel workers who will lose their benefits by the end of this year.

Will the Prime Minister tell his Conservative senators to pass Bill S-216 immediately to help these desperate people?

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, this is a complex issue that is of concern to our government and we are carefully studying the issue. We realize that there are several bills, both in this place and the other, that relate to long-term disability. As with all pieces of legislation, we will carefully review these proposed bills and we encourage members from all parties to bring forward any ideas they may have.

April 19, 2010

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, last week the government said it was searching for a solution for Nortel employees on long-term disability. However, a few hours later, these same employees stated that the Conservatives had told them they would do nothing. This is an unacceptable contradiction.

Yes or no, will the government help these people who may go bankrupt because of its inaction?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, as the hon. Member knows, the Minister of Finance is meeting with his provincial and territorial counterparts today to discuss the future of the Canadian pension system.

At the same time, in the individual case that the member mentioned, he knows, or should know, that those individual pensioners, through their lawyers, made a deal with the creditors to deal with their pension issues for the remainder of the year.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):

That is no help, Mr. Speaker.

There is a private member's bill in the Senate today that would deal effectively with this matter. Since opposition parties support the bill, the Prime Minister has the power to cause all members of both Houses to carry this bill at all stages today. This would be a humanitarian act to rescue hundreds of Canada's most vulnerable citizens who, through no fault of their own, will otherwise face a life of crushing poverty.

Will the Prime Minister act?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, I am surprised at the hon. Member. What he is proposing that this House and the Senate do is to supercede the rights and responsibilities duly agreed upon by the creditors and by the lawyers for the pensioners. He seeks to put his will in place of the free will of those individual parties. That is not the role of this Parliament.

April 12, 2010

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, on January 1, a number of disabled Nortel employees will begin a new life of misery.

Because their benefits were not insured, they are at the bottom of the list of Nortel's creditors as that company goes through bankruptcy. The employees will lose 85% of their income as well as the medical benefits they cannot do without.

When will the government help these people by agreeing to amend the legislation?

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, certainly we are concerned about this situation, as well as the pension situation facing pensioners at Nortel. We continue to consult.

As a matter of fact, the finance committee will be hearing today from folks from Nortel who will bring forward their concerns. We will continue to consult and certainly wish to hear from our colleagues from all of the other parties in terms of how to address this issue.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, by doing nothing, Parliament will be condemning many long-term disability employees to a life of poverty every time a company goes bankrupt. If we as legislators cannot protect Canada's most vulnerable citizens against such unfair situations, then what is Parliament for?

My question for the government is non-partisan. For purely humanitarian reasons, will the government immediately listen to the pleas of these workers and work with all parties to fix this broken law?

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, as I just mentioned, we would like some co-operation from the other parties, bringing forward their concerns. We can have discussions.

On the issue of pensions, the Minister of Finance has recently launched cross-country consultations. In fact, the Canadian pension system is already recognized as one of the strongest in the world.

We are working to ensure what works best for Canadians and we welcome the input of members of all parties of the House in how to address the concerns of all Canadians on issues like this.

March 29, 2010

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, Canadians are looking for action not more talk.

Sick and disabled Canadians urgently need changes to the bankruptcy act to salvage their benefits. That was proven in spades by a court decision this past weekend that left 12,000 Canadian pensioners, 400 long-term disability recipients and 7,000 other former Nortel employees completely vulnerable.

Will the government agree today to move by unanimous consent to amend the bankruptcy act to help these desperate sick Canadians?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member should be aware, this government is already reviewing the provisions of the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act. We are asking Canadians for their input as well through the process that the Minister of Finance has set up.

What we will not do is adopt the policies of the Liberals across the aisle based on their taxapalooza conference of the past weekend where they want to tax everything and anything. That is not good for pensioners, not good for seniors and not good for the people of Canada.

December 7, 2009

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, the government often speaks of working together. Here is an opportunity, because last week, my colleague, the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, presented Bill C-487, which would address the situation of long-term disabled workers.

These are workers who are left out in the cold when a company goes bankrupt. It is very tough for them to find alternative work. It is probably not likely for many of them and they are literally left without hope. Here is an opportunity, because it really is our responsibility as legislators to make sure they are in a situation where they can be protected. It is our responsibility.

Will the minister undertake today to support the bill that we put before the House and work with us to get it passed?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, I think all of us know that long-tenured workers have had difficulty transitioning into new jobs and often need more long-term training.

We have made unprecedented investments in training, including training specifically for long-tenured workers, to help get Canadians back to work. We have made unprecedented investments to help those who, through no fault of their own, have fallen on hard times and lost their jobs.

The minister will continue to work with all members and all Canadians on achieving real results for these Canadians who need help.

November 27, 2009

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, we condemn the decision by Nortel executives to give themselves bonuses of several million dollars while employees are not entitled to severance pay, pensions or disability benefits.

Now that the Conservatives have taken steps for Nortel to be sold to Avaya, will they ensure that the Canadian employees, especially those who are disabled, are treated fairly and will receive the benefits for which they have worked so hard?

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, we share the outrage of the hon. member at the news yesterday. It is incomprehensible that the executives at Nortel would choose to give themselves bonuses, court-authorized or not, at a time when the rest of the country is tightening its belt.

On the issue of pensions, our Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance has travelled the country over the course of the summer to hear from Canadians on this issue. Coming out of those consultations, we introduced measures to help protect pensioners by requiring companies to fully fund pension benefits on plan termination, make pensions more stable, give pensioners more negotiating powers and modernize the investment rules of pensions.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, less than a month ago, those same employees from Nortel stood on the front lawn of Parliament Hill and asked the government to help them retrieve their hard-earned pensions and severance packages. The Conservatives were remarkable for their silence. We now hear that current Nortel senior executives have just rewarded themselves another round of huge bonuses.

When will the government finally stand up for rank and file Nortel employees?

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, of course we are outraged by the news that came out yesterday.

But again, on the subject of pensions, we have already completed cross-Canada consultations on federally regulated pensions. We are working with the provinces to set up a federal-provincial research working group on retirement income, and we have already convened a national summit of provincial and territorial finance ministers to discuss the group's findings in December.

What is remarkable is that the member for Markham—Unionville said just a few short weeks ago, "The Liberals don't actually have a policy on pension reform".

October 22, 2009

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, yesterday I was outside this building with pensioners, long-term disabled individuals and former Nortel employees. They are really losing hope that they are going to be able to get their full benefits and pensions. The Prime Minister seems to believe that he has no role to play here or no responsibility, but that is not the case.

Could he tell the workers of Nortel that the government will take action to ensure that the unfunded liabilities of their pension plan will be established as secured debts and not unsecured debts? That is action the government could take and tell us about it today.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):

First of all, once again, Mr. Speaker, as the leader of the NDP knows, the pension plan in question is under provincial, not federal, regulation.

In any case, the NDP and others have raised important questions about the situation of pensions in Canada. There are rules in place. We are consulting with Canadians and the provinces on how to strengthen those rules. We will look at a wide range of options.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):

There is an urgency here, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to cases like Nortel and many others. We need the government to take action now.

Last June an NDP motion received the support of all parties in the House. It gave a sense of hope to Canadians who were concerned about their retirement security. Here is what we called for, which was supported by all parties: expand and increase the CPP, OAS and GIS; establish a pension insurance program; and ensure that pension funds go to the front of the line of creditors whenever there is a bankruptcy.

His own party voted for it. Why not take action now? The consultation has gone on an awful long time.

October 21, 2009

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, it is about leadership. It is about the role of the federal government, which is to show leadership and to show that it cares. Clearly it is something that the minister does not do.

There are 409 Nortel employees who are on long term disability. Without government action, these individuals may lose as much as 85% of their benefits, as well as most of their funding for drug costs.

Let me tell the House about Arlene. She had a workplace injury. She began receiving long term disability payments. Now she knows that she will lose the great bulk of her benefits and her pension by the time she reaches the age of 65.

Why is it that the Conservatives will not stand up and fight for disabled Canadians?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, it is exactly the opposite. When it comes to pension reform, again in federally regulated plans, we have already made some changes. We have drafted some ideas for the federal-provincial conference that the finance minister will be conducting in December.

We understand that this is an issue that is beyond the Nortel pensioners. It involves Canadians who perhaps invested in Nortel shares 10 years ago and saw all of those savings disappear because of the mismanagement in that particular company.

We understand that, but at the same time we respect the provincial jurisdiction just as we have to act in the federal jurisdiction.