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(HANSARD)

Tuesday, February 2, 2016

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, February 2, 2016

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)
[*English*]

AUDITOR GENERAL OF CANADA

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the fall 2015 report of the Auditor General of Canada.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(g), this document is deemed to have been permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

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INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the reports of the Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union respecting its participation at the Steering Committee of the Twelve Plus Group, held in Brussels, Belgium, on September 21, 2015; and the 133rd IPU Assembly and related meetings, held in Geneva, Switzerland, from October 17 to 21, 2015.

* * *

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to move the following motion, and I seek the unanimous consent of the House:

That at the conclusion of the debate on today's opposition motion, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion be deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Wednesday, February 3, 2016, at the expiry of the time provided for government orders.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PETITIONS

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise today to present two petitions. The first is about protecting the water in the environment in my riding.

[*English*]

In particular, this petition from members in my riding speaks to the importance of designating the Saanich Inlet as a designated zone where the discharge of raw sewage is not allowed. In particular, this concerns the recreational boating community. It is an area of very little tidal clearance or flushing. The petition is from almost 300 members in my riding.

SHARK FINNING

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is an issue that came before this House in the last session when the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam made efforts to ban the possession of shark fins or the offer of shark fins for sale.

Sharks around the world are extremely endangered. The petitioners would like this House to take action.

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have some sympathy with respect to this petition, having just been rear-ended by a drunk driver.

The petitioners wish to call attention to the state of the current impaired driving laws, which they feel are too lenient. In the interest of public safety, they are asking for tougher laws and the implementation of minimum mandatory sentences, and that the Criminal Code of Canada be changed to redefine the offence of impaired driving causing death as vehicular manslaughter.

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to present two petitions. The first petition highlights the sad fact that 22-year-old Cassandra Kaulius was killed by a drunk driver. A group of people called Families for Justice who have also lost loved ones to impaired driving are calling upon Parliament to introduce tough new legislation that would have mandatory sentencing for persons convicted of impaired driving causing death.

Business of Supply

SEX SELECTION

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition highlights the sad fact that there are over 200 million girls missing in the world because of the practice of sex selection. An Environics poll found that 92% of Canadians believe that sex-selection pregnancy termination should be made illegal. They are calling upon this Parliament to deal with this important issue.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

DECORUM IN THE HOUSE

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, this is the first convenient moment to raise a point of order about a disturbing trend. Last night in the votes, I have to say it became intolerable. I refer to our rules, and you will find at page 580 of O'Brien and Bosc the following reminder:

From the time the Speaker begins to put the question until the results of the vote are announced, Members are not to enter, leave or cross the House, nor may they make any noise or disturbance.

Mr. Speaker, we have had a poor practice, certainly in the last Parliament and continuing to this one, of constant interruptions for wild applause for members of one's own party as they vote. That is against our rules. It was particularly disturbing last night to hear boing across the floor for members as they voted.

Our rules are clear that the occasion of voting is not an occasion for demonstrations of any kind. Mr. Speaker, I ask for your guidance on this point and a reminder to members.

The Speaker: I thank the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands for raising this point of order.

Members should be encouraged to stay quiet during the vote and not respond to who votes or in what way. In fact, that is what the House has decided should be the rule. Should it be the will of the House to change the rules, the House can do so, but that is the rule that the House has set, so I would urge members to abide by it.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

•(1010)

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—PAY EQUITY

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP) moved:

That the House (a) recognize that the government must take action to close the unacceptable gap in pay between men and women which contributes to income inequality and discriminates against women; (b) recognize pay equity as a right; (c) call on the government to implement the recommendations of the 2004 Pay Equity Task Force Report and restore the right to pay equity in the public service which was eliminated by the previous Conservative government in 2009; and (d) appoint a special committee with the mandate to conduct hearings on the matter of pay equity and to propose a plan to adopt a proactive federal pay equity regime, both legislative and otherwise, and (i) that this committee consist of 10 members which shall include six members from the Liberal Party, three members from the Conservative Party, and one member from the New Democratic Party, provided that the Chair is from the government party, (ii) that in addition to the Chair, there be one Vice-Chair from each of the recognized opposition parties, (iii) that the committee have all of the powers of a standing committee as provided in the Standing Orders, as well as the power to travel, accompanied by the necessary staff, subject to the usual authorization from the House, (iv) that the members to serve on the said committee be appointed by the Whip of each party depositing with the Acting Clerk of the House a list of his or her party's members of the committee no later than February 17, 2016, (v) that the quorum of the committee be as provided for in Standing Order 118, provided that at least one member of each recognized party be present, (vi) that membership substitutions be permitted from time to time, if required, in the manner provided for in Standing Order 114(2), (vii) that the committee report to the House no later than June 10, 2016.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am the Nanaimo—Ladysmith member of Parliament, and, for the New Democrats, the Status of Women critic. I will be splitting my time today with my colleague, the member of Parliament for Jonquière.

Today I honour the work of many generations of women, and their supporters, for the gains that have been made. I think of my aunt, Kim Malcolmson, a social justice activist, feminist, and one of Ontario's first pay equity commissioners, who I think is watching today.

We stand as New Democrats with many feminists who have made enormous strides over many generations. Yet, Canadian women have hit a glass wall when it comes to the salary gap. Equal pay for work of equal value is a fundamental human right. However, today women in Canada continue to be paid far less than their male colleagues.

Last night, I heard that full-time Canadian child care workers, who have to go to school and get a several-year degree, earn on average \$25,000 a year, and 97% of the people in that profession are women. A comparable profession, which is 97% male, would be truck drivers. They are also well trained, but earn \$45,000 a year on average. When comparing \$25,000 versus \$45,000, it is not fair.

On average, women working full time in Canada make only 77% of that of their male colleagues. The gap is even worse for indigenous women, women of colour, transgender women, and women living with disabilities.

Canada is one of the worst countries in the world when it comes to the gender gap, ranking 30 out of 34 OECD countries on this measure. This is unacceptable. It contributes to income inequality, and it discriminates against women.

My friend June Ross, in Nanaimo, was telling me this weekend of her experience as a single mother going to school, working as a teacher's assistant after getting a degree, and earning \$8 an hour. She watched her colleagues, custodians in the school system, earn \$11 to \$15 an hour. It was not fair. Since then, she has given much of her life's work to fighting for pay equity. She is very discouraged to see the rollbacks, the lack of progress that has been made, and is very disturbed to see senior women living in poverty in our riding. It is not fair.

Now is the time for real action toward real equality for women. That is why New Democrats are urging Parliament to recognize pay equity as a right, because women's rights are human rights.

Canada has excellent and very strong international and national direction to do so. In 1976, Canada ratified the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which requires remuneration that provides all workers with fair wages and equal remuneration for work of equal value.

In 1977, the Canadian Human Rights Act was amended to state the following:

It is a discriminatory practice for an employer to establish or maintain differences in wages between male and female employees in the same establishment who are performing work of equal value.

In 1981, Canada ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which recognizes women's rights to equal remuneration and to equal treatment in respect of work of equal value.

It has been 40 years since Canada committed to these three foundational documents, and we are still not where we need to be. However, the beautiful symmetry is that these three groundbreaking pay equity commitments were all made by the Pierre Trudeau government.

For the sake of our generation, I urge today's Prime Minister and his government to complete the work of the first prime minister Trudeau and legislate equal pay for equal work.

● (1015)

Because past governments have missed these critical opportunities to tackle the pay gap, our second recommendation is for the government to implement the recommendations of the 2004 pay equity task force report. In 2000, the then Liberal government established this task force. In 2004, the task force recommended stand-alone, proactive pay equity legislation, legislation that the Liberals of the day failed to adopt.

In 2009, the Conservatives attacked pay equity in the public service, and that leads to our third recommendation, that the government restore the right to pay equity in the public service, which was eliminated by the Conservatives.

The 2009 Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act was yet another bill that does the exact opposite of what its title suggests. It made it more difficult for women in the public sector to achieve equal compensation. It made pay equity an issue for collective bargaining rather than a human right. It forced women to file individual complaints rather than allow a union to support them. The act imposed a \$50,000 fine on any union that supported members in

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filing a pay equity complaint and it prohibited access to the Canadian Human Rights Commission. This legislation was bundled into a budget implementation bill, which the Liberals supported during a minority Parliament.

To undo that damage and to carry forward the work that the previous government did not complete, we urge this Parliament to adopt our fourth recommendation, and that is to appoint a special committee to conduct hearings on pay equity and propose proactive pay equity legislation.

We hope members of the House of Commons will agree that in 2016 this must be a priority. Not only is it the right thing to do, it is smart economically. Women with more spending power benefit the local economy. Study after study has told us that. Letting women fall into poverty costs us all. One-third of single senior women in Canada are today living in poverty, and that is unacceptable. It is long past time for the federal government to step up and do the right thing and do everything it can to tackle the wage gap.

There is no excuse for the fact that women in Canada continue to make substantially less than men. We are ready and willing to work with the Liberal government to get proactive pay equity legislation in place to finally achieve wage equality for women. Let us make it so.

● (1020)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge the efforts and the comments of the member in introducing the motion.

A couple of things have come to my mind. The member made reference to the father of the current Prime Minister and his attempts to try to bring justice to this issue. My colleague also made mention of some other positive things that occurred.

In 2004, the Paul Martin government attempted to resolve, or at least bring us one step further in the right direction, on this issue. Ultimately, a year later, the Liberal government was defeated. Now we have a new Prime Minister who recognizes how important it is that we deal with issues of this nature. We have the first cabinet in Canada's history that is composed of 50% females and 50% males. Great strides have been made.

My question relates to the regions of the country that my colleague would like to see this committee go to. Is she thinking about a committee going beyond Ottawa? Does she have specific locations in mind that she would like to see a committee of this nature visit? I wonder if she could elaborate on what sort of a time frame she has in mind with regard to the committee itself.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Mr. Speaker, we have been waiting such a long time in this country that we want to establish this as a priority of Parliament and start to move forward toward finally making real change in this area.

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I commend the Prime Minister for his cabinet appointment decisions, but we cannot rely on the particular goodwill of a particular government at one point in time. We must legislate pay equity. That would then fan out to the provinces and across the country. This is going to require partnership, but without leadership from the federal government we will remain where we are with a significant pay gap of 23%.

We hope that Parliament will choose to task a committee with this work. It will then be up to the committee to decide its own scope and who it needs to hear from. We have experts across the country in provinces that have implemented pay equity who can describe the experience. We have experts who can tell us about the realities of what this gap is costing the country. There is great wealth for us to draw on.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague for an excellent speech and for raising awareness of this issue, which I am passionate about as well.

We have a status of women committee with a similar membership to what you have outlined, and you and I are on it, so why does the member think we need an additional committee on top of that, when in the past this kind of thing would be championed by the status of women committee?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before the hon. member answers, I just want to remind members that they are speaking through the chair and not directly to the other members, and the Speaker is not on that committee.

The hon. member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from my colleague. The rationale, first, is that this is a broader issue than simply the status of women. This is a nationwide economic issue. It is not just about women. It is about all of us. The second more technical reason is that the status of women committee, on which the member and I both sit, will decide its own agenda and priorities and has a lot of big work to do.

If Parliament does agree with New Democrats that we should give a particular committee a focused task, then it is sure to be at the top of its agenda. The issue will get the profile it deserves and we will be able to move forward more quickly. It may be that its membership ends up being identical. Who knows. We certainly considered the recommendation the member is making, and this is a better way to move forward.

• (1025)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise in the House today to participate in our first opposition day. Nevertheless, I am somewhat disappointed. As everyone knows, the motion before us today is about pay equity. This is disappointing because this issue should have been resolved a long time ago. As I was preparing my speech today, I was struck by the fact that this very Parliament passed the Canadian Human Rights Act 38 years ago. I was born 38 years ago, and today I am in the House to debate this issue yet again.

For all these years, we have been talking about resolving the pay equity issue. Why have we not found a way to remedy this kind of

discrimination even though we have a law that makes it illegal to discriminate against women in the workplace?

The stark reality is that Canadian women are still paid on average 23% less than their male colleagues. This wage gap is even worse for first nations women, visible minorities, and women with disabilities. Wages are different in the same profession, which is not right. It is simply unacceptable. There is no reason for women in Canada to earn less than men. This discrimination is contributing to the growing problem of economic inequality. As I describe this problem, I look to the new government and hope that it will live up to our expectations.

The government has an opportunity to take real action to help women achieve something that is actually just a basic right.

Would my male colleagues be willing to earn 23% less than their female colleagues? I doubt it. This issue would have been resolved a long time ago. I would even say that we would not even be talking about this problem, as it would not have persisted for 38 years.

To have gender inequality is to disregard the important contribution women make to our economy. Whether the work is done by a man or a woman, the work itself does not have a gender. Let us stop dragging out this problem when we have both the reasons and the power to resolve this issue. Just look at what happened in the Canadian Union of Postal Workers dispute more than 30 years ago. It is hard to imagine that it took all those years to resolve a problem when the legislation was already on the books to deal with the situation.

Some 30,000 women could have been eligible immediately and could have kept contributing to our economy in a meaningful way. Thirty years later, when the dispute was settled, the cheques were sent to the graveyard because, unfortunately, a number of the women had died. They worked their entire career without the benefit of pay equity.

The Liberal government cannot stand idly by on this issue. We must adopt meaningful measures to put an end to lingering pay inequity. The NDP has been fighting for this for many years. Let us be honest. The previous government set women's rights back a decade.

I will now list some facts. They changed the criteria for establishing whether jobs of equal value should be included in market forces. They made pay equity a collective bargaining issue rather than a human rights issue. They imposed a \$50,000 fine on any union that helps a woman file a grievance pertaining to pay equity. That is unacceptable.

At the beginning of my speech, I mentioned my disappointment. Here is another reason. In 2000, the government asked a task force to examine the issue we are debating today in the House. This task force conducted exhaustive consultations with employers, unions, advocacy groups, and women in order to fight for greater pay equity.

Business of Supply

•(1030)

The task force's findings were very comprehensive. It made 113 constructive, meaningful recommendations in order to put an end to pay inequity.

Unfortunately, more than 12 years after the pay equity task force came out with its report, none of the recommendations has been implemented. The Conservative government is not alone in shouldering the blame. Under the Martin government, the Liberals also did nothing. The facts are known. Here are a few facts to inform our discussion and underline the need to take urgent action.

First, Canada is lagging behind in terms of pay equity. According to the World Economic Forum, Canada is ranked 80th out of 145 countries. That is quite simply unacceptable for a G7 country. Pay inequity also has an economic cost, as shown by an RBC study. Closing the gap could boost GDP by 4% by 2032. We could make real progress. Women between 45 and 54 earn an average of \$23,600 less a year than men in the same age group.

The right to pay equity is nothing new. We are not in uncharted territory here. For years, Canada has recognized that there is a problem when it comes to pay equity. Were that not the case, why would we have signed so many international treaties in this regard? Take for example the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which Canada signed in 1976 and which provides for fair wages and equal remuneration for work of equal value without distinction of any kind. In 1981, Canada also signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, where it is written in black and white that women have the right to equal remuneration.

Many provinces in Canada recognized that the problem of pay equity needed to be solved. I would particularly like to point out the efforts that Quebec has made in this regard.

It is 2016. The NDP has been fighting for pay equity for a long time. It seems to me that now is the time to take action. We are calling on the government to implement the recommendations of the pay equity task force.

Our proposal would affect all those working under federal jurisdiction in the private and public sectors. In practical terms, we are talking about women who work in banks, communications industries, and transport. The motion calls on the government to recognize pay equity as a right, to finally implement the recommendations of the 2004 pay equity task force report, and to appoint a special committee with the mandate to conduct hearings on the matter of pay equity and propose proactive federal pay equity legislation. Finally, we are calling on the government to take action to close the unacceptable gap in pay between men and women. The government needs to recognize that pay equity is a fundamental right. We hope that the government will support this motion and make pay equity a priority.

[English]

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member, who happens to represent my mother-in-law. She would be thrilled about this initiative.

Our government is committed to dealing with pay equity in a balanced and responsible way. We are developing a new direction and will be consulting on these matters with unions, stakeholders, and the members that she represented.

It is important to recognize that we may think more highly of ourselves and it is our obligation as parliamentarians to correct this perception across Canada. We are ranked 80th out of 145 countries in wage equality when it comes to women. That is clearly not good enough. We are ranked 30th out of 145 countries in overall gender gap ranking. Our government is particularly committed to economic, social, reproductive, and political equality for all.

•(1035)

[Translation]

Ms. Karine Trudel: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague. This is, indeed, a problem, and it is something we need to talk about. We completely agree that we need task forces and that we need to consult a number of stakeholders who experience this every day. This is an issue. Unfortunately, in a number of sectors, it is up to collective agreements to fix this issue, which should not be the case. Collective agreements should be about negotiating more benefits, and so on. They should not be about pay equity.

I hope that the government will put forward and apply our recommendations.

[English]

Ms. Dianne Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I agree with many of the comments that have been made by my colleagues across the floor.

The motion only relates to the public service in terms of pay equity and not women more broadly. I would like to ask the member why it is not more broad in context and why it is only focusing on the public sector.

[Translation]

Ms. Karine Trudel: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

Since we are under federal jurisdiction, we want to focus on the public and private sides. We hope to work with task forces and with the committee that will be struck, to delve into this issue, and to fix this situation for all Canadian women.

Right now, there are more than 380,000 public servants working in various sectors of our economy. We hope to be able to come to a decision and close this subject, so that it does not come up again next year. We want this issue to be fixed, so that we can focus on other problems across Canada.

[English]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, why pay equity in 2016? As our Prime Minister has said, because it is 2016.

[Translation]

I have a question for my colleague from Jonquière and I want to congratulate her on her speech. After a decade of darkness under the Conservatives, women's rights unfortunately regressed.

Business of Supply

Why is pay equity now an urgent issue? How will it change the lives of women? Why must we get moving, once again, on women's rights in Canada?

Ms. Karine Trudel: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie for his question.

This will increase women's buying power. I was walking down the street earlier, and I saw a group of women on their way to work, lunch boxes in hand. They were off to clean hotels. This will help those women support their families and play an active role in our country's economic activity.

In my speech just now, I mentioned the province of Quebec, which has been very active on the pay equity file. I strongly believe that the federal government can help these women, take the lead, and set an example for the whole world to follow.

[*English*]

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise today to speak on the issue of pay equity. I want to thank my NDP colleagues for bringing this issue forward to the House. I also want to remind the House that this is not a partisan issue. There is a lot of common ground within all political parties in the House on the issue of equality for women. It is also not an issue that should be just the focus of women.

[*Translation*]

This important issue does not affect only women. This is an issue that affects us all.

It affects families, for one. Think of the children who cannot spend time with their parents because their parents are working full time to earn one and a half incomes. Think of the couples who are worried about not earning enough money to pay for their children's education. Think of the fathers who are thinking of their daughters' future.

● (1040)

[*English*]

As a father of twin daughters, I can say that I want nothing more than to live in a Canada where there is no difference in the earnings potential between men and women, where Claire and Rose have an opportunity in the future to fully participate without barriers in the economy and in society.

A gender wage gap in this day and age is unacceptable. Differences in pay for comparable work simply based on gender are purely discriminatory. The Government of Canada believes that equal pay for work of equal value must be considered a human right. That is unequivocal and this basic principle was enshrined in the Canadian Human Rights Act, framed by constitutional guarantees of equality. Pay equity has been recognized as a fundamental human right for many decades at the international level. In fact, in 1951, the UN's International Labour Organisation adopted Convention No. 100, concerning equal remuneration for men and women for work of equal value. In 1972, as part of the response to the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, Canada ratified ILO Convention No. 100. That is since 1972.

We have no intention of turning back the clock. In fact, it is time we turn the clock forward because, as the hon. member said, it is

2016. We understand that Canada is better off when the talents and skills of women are represented in every sector of society, in government at every level, and from the grassroots all the way up to the boardroom.

The arguments some people make for having more women at the cabinet table and at the boardroom table is often that it is good for women. As someone who served in cabinet before and has the opportunity to do so again, I can tell members that when there is diversity at the cabinet table, different perspectives, different experiences, and different life experiences render better decisions for all of us. The more we break down barriers and inspire young women and girls to pursue as wide a range of careers as possible, the stronger our country will be. We need to set the tone at the top.

[*Translation*]

The Prime Minister promised to appoint a gender-balanced cabinet, and he kept that promise, which is proof of his conviction that our country is stronger and benefits from better leadership when its leaders reflect Canada's diversity. This is a defining moment.

[*English*]

It is not just the fact that we have gender parity in the cabinet, but that cabinet positions to which women have been appointed are all absolutely vital to the success of our country. When the Prime Minister was asked why this was a priority for him, his response "because it is 2015" very simply stated not just to Canadians but to the world the priority our government places on equality.

It should go without saying as well that we are committed to pay equity at every level, including at the cabinet table. In 2016, women expect to be full participants in the economic, social, and democratic life of our country.

I believe that the Prime Minister's actions on gender parity actually will have a significant impact outside of government. The question was asked earlier by a Conservative colleague as to why this motion would only apply to government, and the New Democrat member responded. I would say that when government leads on an issue like gender equality, it has a significant effect outside of the government public service. As an example, I have spoken with senior bank executives who have told me that it has made a difference in the culture even in the banks in discussions among women executives about their futures. One corporate director I know, a male very senior corporate director in Canada, sent an email out to his fellow board members on several publicly traded company boards on which he serves saying that this is a game changer and that they have to get their act together at the corporate director level in Canada. Simply setting an example at the cabinet table does raise the bar in other areas of leadership, including in corporate Canada.

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In terms of the public service, almost 55% of federal public servants are women. That compares to 42%, for instance, in 1983. This is a significant change. At the executive level, 46% of federal executives are women now. That compares to 5% in 1983. The number has more than tripled since 1993. There has been some progress, but there is a lot of work to be done. Women are increasingly taking their rightful place in the federal public service. They are taking senior positions, and across the public service we have seen an increase over time.

It has been referenced that we have a lot of work to do, for instance, in the House of Commons. All political parties need to be committed to making this place more family-friendly broadly, not just for women but for parents of young children, regardless of gender. This place is not as family-friendly as it ought to be.

In specific areas of the public service, we have seen some real strides for women. For instance, they are 57% of the law group in the public service, 56% of the economist group, and 47% of the commercial officer group. There is a lot more we can do to ensure that senior levels of government and appointments, including to federal boards, reflect today's diversity. I can assure all members of the House that the Government of Canada is firmly committed to a public service that reflects the diversity of society, which includes gender parity.

That is why we are putting in place a new government-wide appointment process that is open and more merit-based. We believe that this is an important action and that it will result in more women being appointed to senior positions. In fact, the mandate letter of the Minister of Status of Women, who will be speaking to this motion later this morning, states very clearly that she is to support the Privy Council Office as it develops monitoring and reporting processes to ensure that government senior appointments are merit-based and demonstrate gender parity.

It is important that we take a results-oriented approach, where we actually measure results and progress in this area. We cannot manage what we do not measure. This is one area that is a priority for our government, and we intend to measure and transparently report progress.

I am pleased to say that the senior executive committee of my own department, the Treasury Board Secretariat, is made up of 55% women, including the public-sector head of the department, the secretary of the Treasury Board, and our deputy minister. Overall, women form 62% of TBS employees. There is still progress that needs to be made. We are not content with the status quo.

Our government intends to make meaningful progress to reduce the wage gap between women and men in government and across the country. We need to be clear here that the wage gap still exists in the federal public service, where women make, on average, only about 91% of men's wages. That gap has closed over time, but any gap is unacceptable when based on gender. We need to deal with this gap in a balanced and responsible way that ensures women's right to equal pay for work of equal value.

• (1045)

We have heard significant concerns about the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act as it now stands. As members know,

the act was intended to set out a new process for pay equity in the federal public service. It was drafted to eliminate the complaint-based process conducted through the Canadian Human Rights Commission, and the intent was to replace it with an approach to settling equitable compensation that integrated pay equity with collective bargaining. It moved the responsibility for overseeing pay equity from the Canadian Human Rights Commission to the Public Service Labour Relations Board.

However, within the Public Service Labour Relations Board, there is insufficient experience with pay equity and no mandate to actually protect human rights, so there is a misalignment there in terms of authority.

The government, at that time, claimed that these changes reflected the 2004 pay equity task force report. In reality, those changes did not conform completely with the recommendations of the report. Instead, the recommendations had included a new pay equity commission for the federal public service crown corporations and all federally regulated corporations.

The Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act was also drafted to place an emphasis on market forces, which has not been an effective approach to addressing such discrimination.

The Public Sector Alliance of Canada, PSAC, and the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada launched a charter challenge against the act on the grounds that it violated equality rights, freedom of expression, and freedom of association.

That said, the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act was never brought into force. The regulations necessary for the implementation of the legislation were actually never finalized. The act did not strike the right balance, and this government will not be bringing it into force. It would be unfair to those affected. We need to hear from them and consult with them and take their views into account.

We are committed to dealing with pay equity in a balanced and responsible way, which is why the government is developing a new direction and will be consulting on these matters with unions and stakeholders.

We are serious about establishing and re-establishing a culture of respect for and within the public service. This is one of the areas where we believe there is a lot of common ground between the government and the public sector and the unions representing the public service.

The reason we are doing all this is that fairness is a key principle of our mandate as a government. If members look at our mandates broadly, we have fairness for middle-class Canadians. Our first act in government, from my colleague, the Minister of Finance, provides a significant tax cut to middle-class Canadians, rendering our tax system more progressive.

We did not feel that income splitting, as designed by the previous government, was fair. We felt that it provided, disproportionately, more benefits to those Canadian families who did not need the help the most and did not do enough for Canadian families who actually needed the help.

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In the budget, and as we move forward with the Canada child benefit, we will be helping the Canadian families with children who need the help the most. I will give members an example. For Canadian families making \$45,000 per year, they will be \$4,000 better off after tax than they were previously. For Canadian families making \$90,000 a year, with two children, they will be \$2,500 better off. In fact, all Canadian families making less than \$150,000 a year will be better off.

We have the potential with this policy, the new Canada child benefit, to raise 300,000 Canadian children out of poverty.

I am speaking to that, because it is an issue of fairness, and gender parity and equal pay for work of equal value is an issue of fairness. I think that regardless of party in this House, we should all be guided by principles of fairness and equality.

We will also reinstate a modernized and inclusive fair wages policy for federal procurement. We are going to restore integrity to our electoral process and improve the fairness of elections to help renew Canadians' faith in government and in participation.

• (1050)

We will also make the Canada Revenue Agency fairer, more helpful, and more user-friendly and something that has more of a customer focus to help Canadian individuals, Canadian taxpayers, Canadian businesses, and small businesses find it easier to work with CRA.

We will also make public the measurements in a lot of these areas. We will have a transparent process. For instance, when we set objectives on issues of gender parity, we will measure them and report them as part of a broader, more open, and transparent government focus.

In every decision we make, we will be considering and implementing gender-based analysis. When we do not measure something, we cannot really manage it, so measuring and having a results-oriented focus is the first step to progress.

We will restore fair and balanced labour laws that acknowledge the importance of organized labour in Canada. One of the first things I did as President of the Treasury Board was reach out to some of the public sector labour unions. I talked with Robyn Benson, president of PSAC, Debi Daviau, president of the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada, and Ron Cochrane, co-chair of the joint union and management National Joint Council, to discuss some of the issues that are important to them, and we agreed that there is a lot of common ground.

We are entering a period of negotiations now with the public service unions, and we are doing so at a time when the fiscal situation is tight. We inherited a deficit, but beyond that, we also inherited a slow-growth economy. Falling oil prices have made economic growth in Canada slower and our fiscal situation tighter. Despite that, we will negotiate in good faith. We will respect the negotiation process, and we will do so with the guiding principle of restoring a culture of respect for and within our public service.

We were elected with a very progressive mandate, a mandate to create jobs and growth and to invest in Canadians and Canadian communities. To fulfill that mandate, we need a motivated and

engaged public service. We also need to negotiate realistically if we are to implement that mandate within the fiscal constraints we have as a government.

One of the first organizations I met with was the National Joint Council. We had an opportunity to discuss the importance of the collective bargaining process and to reaffirm that we will bargain in good faith. We also had an opportunity to talk about a recent report by the National Joint Council on the issue of mental health. The reason I mention that is that mental health in the workplace is one of the areas of common ground between the unions that represent the Canadian public service and the Government of Canada, and so are equality for women and diversity in the workplace.

The degree to which we work constructively and progressively with the public service in areas where there is common ground will actually help improve the environment within which we negotiate as we move forward. There are 27 collective bargaining agreements and 15 bargaining units, and we look forward to these negotiations as we move forward.

We will work as a government collaboratively with Canadians. That is a cornerstone of our platform. It is part of our mandate as a government. Part of that is working collaboratively with members of Parliament in this House and ensuring a culture of civility and a constructive approach to these issues in this House.

Part of it is working with indigenous peoples by engaging indigenous peoples as partners in building a better Canada, with business leaders, and with provincial and municipal governments. Again, as we move forward, priorities like pay equity, equality, and diversity ought to be policies we can move forward together, not as one government or one political party in this House but as a Parliament. We can move forward and feel proud of what we are doing, working together to build a fairer and better Canada.

• (1055)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government talks a good game when it comes to gender equality. Yet after promising a gender parity cabinet, it appointed a cabinet in which five of the women in that cabinet were getting paid less than the men were. When it was caught, it revised it, but still, in terms of who is actually running departments in the government, we have 16 men and 10 women. There is not gender parity in the cabinet at all. There was not pay equity in the cabinet until it got caught.

How does the minister square this sort of high-minded rhetoric with the reality of what the government's record is and its own actions within its cabinet?

• (1100)

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, as I said in my remarks, we are committed to pay equity in our cabinet, and the government will soon be bringing forward legislation to ensure that all cabinet ministers receive equal pay.

I appreciate the hon. member raising that. We are committed to addressing it.

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Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am encouraged to hear the comments from my colleagues, the member for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country and the Treasury Board president.

I was feeling nervous about the government's commitment because pay equity was not in the Liberal election platform. It was not in the mandate letter to Minister of Status of Women. With the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act not being included in the list of bad Conservative labour bills that were announced to be withdrawn, we were feeling nervous.

Does the member intend to support our motion to implement pay equity, and get this done once and for all?

Hon. Scott Brison: Yes, Mr. Speaker, yes, we intend on supporting the motion, and we would hope that all parties in the House would support it.

In the business of government, as we move forward, we need to work together. We have gone through the motion thoroughly. There is some work to be done on it, but that is what we are sent here to do. As the Prime Minister said, "it's 2015". Now it is 2016, so it is even more urgent.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague, the President of the Treasury Board, for his wide-ranging discussion of the kind of progressive objectives that our government has and the values that equal pay for work of equal value demonstrate. Those values he discussed, such as equality, fairness, and rights, are certainly why our government is supporting the motion. It has been a proponent of improving pay equity over the years.

The President of the Treasury Board also spoke about the private sector, where the increase in women in leadership roles has been demonstrated to improve the results of a corporation when there are more women on boards. Does he see comparable gains in the results in the public sector as we reduce the pay gap and increase the percentage of women in leadership roles in the public service?

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, in terms of progress within the private sector, it makes a difference when governments lead on this. Many members of the House may know that the hon. member, as an entrepreneur, actually helped build a company active in the tree-planting business, a company that was active in a green industry. This was during a time when leadership among women and entrepreneurs building a global company in a resource-based industry was a little more rare than it might be today. Therefore, she has been a pioneer in terms of business and building a successful international business in a cutting-edge green industry.

There is a leadership role. If governments cannot lead on some of these issues, then the question is, who can? I have had feedback from corporate Canada and corporate directors saying that this has created discussion in boardrooms and at directors' tables about how corporate Canada is going to respond to some of these initiatives, including gender parity, in cabinet.

This is one of the issues, equal pay for work of equal value, that needs to be addressed, as does pay equity, but there is more. Having workplaces like Parliament that are more family-friendly can make a

difference. I talk to women, sometimes potential candidates, who raise issues of Parliament being family-friendly. I do not want to generalize, but I am told by women, and this perhaps is anecdotal, that when they watch question period, they find it creates the impression of an old boys club, not a place where we, in a civilized manner, discuss important issues and try to come to common ground and achieve progress in Canada. I am told this by women to whom I am speaking about potentially entering politics. That is the feedback I receive.

There is a whole lot that we can do as a Parliament and as government following today's motion. It is a significant step, and I appreciate the NDP having brought it forward.

• (1105)

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to compliment the President of the Treasury Board on his restraint in answering the question from the Conservatives. Quite frankly, after the 10 years of darkness that we endured in terms of gender equality and pay equity under the Conservative government, it boggles my mind that any Conservative would actually ask a question on this, or challenge it.

The history of the Liberal Party has not been one of combatting pay equity and gender equality, which is certainly the history of the Conservative Party. The history of the Liberal Party has been indifference. We have seen reports have gone nowhere. Certainly, during the election campaign, the Prime Minister made no commitment around pay equity. We did not see in any of the mandate letters any reference to pay equity.

Is the President of the Treasury Board signalling today, as a result of the NDP motion, that the new government will actually take seriously the issue of pay equity and will drive it forward as one of its priorities, even though it was not part of the election platform or the mandate letters?

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member goes back a while, when Michael Ignatieff was leader of the Liberal Party, we committed to policies that reflected what is in today's motion. He should take yes for an answer. We support today's motion. However, I would caution him against trying to create a blame game or finger-pointing exercise around an issue where there should be common ground.

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He is right that I demonstrated some restraint to a question I received from the Conservatives, and that is because I want us to achieve common ground on areas of progressive social policy in the House. I would urge him not to try to make this a partisan issue. The New Democrats do not have a monopoly on virtue. They do not have a monopoly on principles of equality. I would like to believe that all members of the House, regardless of party, are guided by basic fairness. The degree to which we try to divide people in the House and score points on this will reduce the capacity we have to work together to really move the needle in areas of social progress.

Let us not point fingers. Let us not play a blame game. Let us actually appeal to people's better angels and not try to appeal to their dark side and partisanship on important debates where we can really make a difference. I would urge the hon. member and all members of the House to do as we move forward to try to make a difference for Canadians.

• (1110)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak to the subject of pay equity. I will be sharing my time with the member for South Surrey—White Rock.

I am going to begin by reading verbatim from our Conservative Party policy statement:

The Conservative Party supports the full participation of women in the social, economic, and cultural life of Canada. The Canadian workforce has evolved to include more women than ever. We believe all Canadians have the right to freedom from discrimination in the workplace and equality of opportunity. Individuals should be only judged on skills, qualifications and merits. Women must be entitled to equal pay for equal work.

This is what our party believes, and this is what I believe.

Over the last 10 years, our party has taken steps to improve the status of women in our country. We put the first woman in cabinet. We put the first woman in Senate. We put the first female engineer in the House.

Our women on boards initiative increased by 20% the representation of women on executive boards across the country in just under two years. We placed the first female clerk of the Privy Council in the House. All of these women were paid equitably.

[*Translation*]

I fully support the statement in paragraph (a) of the NDP's opposition day motion, which calls on the House to recognize that the government must take action to close the unacceptable gap in pay between men and women, which contributes to income inequality and discriminates against women.

[*English*]

I was a victim of pay inequity on several occasions throughout my 32-year career in engineering. In one instance, a human resources lawyer was called in after years of complaints from numerous women. I, along with several women in similar circumstances, was given a 17% pay increase while I was off on maternity leave. When I asked if it was in recognition of the amazing work I had done while on leave or whether I should be expecting a retroactive cheque for the years I had been inequitably paid, I was told I would be better off if I took the increase without question.

In another role, I was given a zero bonus one year even though I was top rated. I was told the company was on hard times, and it was. However, my male counterparts each received between 5% and 10% of their salary as a bonus at the same time.

Although laws have been put in place to ensure that men and women are paid equally for the same work, there are still ways to discriminate, including time to promotion, bonuses, and disparity within a pay band.

I have two daughters who are just starting in the workforce, and I want to do everything possible to ensure they will be paid equitably with their counterparts.

Part (b) in the opposition motion calls to “recognize pay equity as a right”. As the President of the Treasury Board has pointed out, this has already been established in section 11 of the Canadian Human Rights Act as a fundamental human right, also known as equal pay for work of equal value. Some of the work still to be done is the identification of the method by which non-similar jobs can be compared to determine if there is equity.

Another area of opportunity is enforcement to ensure the good pay equity measures put into place by companies across the country remain vigilant.

When it comes to part (c) of the opposition motion, the NDP has referred to the “2004 Pay Equity Task Force Report”. There is a lot of information in the report where the recommendations have been followed up on, but there is still more work to be done. Although I do not agree with all the recommendations in the report, I agree we still need to do work on it.

However, part of the opposition motion calls to “restore the right to pay equity in the public service”. That states that this was somehow removed by our party in 2009. This is absolutely untrue. A fundamental right that is part of the Canadian Human Rights Act is not something that can be or was removed. Pay equity exists in the public sector. As evidence I would put forward the following facts.

• (1115)

In 2013, 55% of public sector employees were women. This data comes from public service hiring and staffing activity files. The percentage of women in executive positions in the public sector is 46%, as was pointed out.

The Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act, which is accessible on the government web page where it is displayed transparently, reiterates the requirement for men and women to be equally compensated for work of equal value. What really happened in 2009 was that the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act came into place. The act was designed to see issues of equal pay for men and women in the public service dealt with through collective bargaining between the union and the employer, with complaints referred to the Public Service Labour Board for expeditious resolution. This solved the issue of complaints previously brought to the Human Rights Commission, which the Senate committee on human rights testified were each taking at least six years to resolve, and in some cases up to 15 years. Pay equity cases, although they are only 8% of the caseload, absorbed half of the spending on legal fees by the Human Rights Commission.

A fact and evidence-based approach forces me to reject the wording in section (c) of the motion because the facts do not support it. Public service workers have pay equity rights and the Conservative Party did not remove their rights.

Section (d) of today's motion calls for a special committee to be put in place with a membership that looks like the representation we have today on the committee for the status of women. The committee would work on pay equity, which I understand the status of women committee has already worked on, and appropriately so. As a new member of this committee, I was quite impressed looking back over the previous Parliament's work to find that the majority of the time this committee operated in a nonpartisan fashion where gender issues impacting women were scrutinized with passion and intelligence.

In 2015, an investment of \$700 million was made through the Business Development Bank of Canada for women entrepreneurs. Changes to the labour code to allow longer leave for families were also made in 2015. The first women's trade mission was implemented.

The committee also studied Bill S-2, which specifically dealt with ensuring that first nation women were granted appropriate equal property rights on reserve in matrimonial cases, something every other woman in Canada would consider a natural right practically.

A study looking at improving economic prospects for Canadian girls was undertaken to look at what could be done to improve the fiscal prosperity outlook for women and girls across all backgrounds in Canada, including marginalized groups, such as first nation women or new Canadians, for example.

Furthermore, and something I am pleased to say occurred under the previous government, the government committee recommended that departments conduct gender-based analysis of the legislation we introduce here.

In 2010, we saw a report that talked about the elevation of debate in the House of Commons in order to attract and retain more good women in politics and better showcase the good work that is being done.

Women make up the majority of enrolments now in college programs. Women are the majority in full-time undergraduate programs. There is another generation of women graduating now that need to be assured of equal opportunity and pay equity.

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[*Translation*]

All of these efforts were taken by the status of women committee in a non-partisan, open and transparent fashion. With this in mind, I would urge the NDP to rethink why their motion today is basically calling for the exact duplication of the work that can be done by the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

For this reason, we would not be supportive of part (d) of the opposition motion, because it would create, at additional expense, a structure that is already in place and capable of doing the same thing.

[*English*]

Although I am passionate about pay equity and about making sure that the playing field is an equal opportunity one for men and women, I do not see anything in the motion that would add to the improvements our party has put in place, so I have an amendment to the motion. I move, seconded by the member for South Surrey—White Rock that the motion be amended by deleting sections (c) and (d).

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before proceeding to questions and comments 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. Therefore, I ask the hon. member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith if she consents to this amendment being moved.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Mr. Speaker, we do not consent. Removing the section on implementing the task force recommendations and asking for the committee to advise Parliament on how to make that implementation would remove any real action from the motion. It would put us right back to where we were 40 years ago. We do not consent.

● (1120)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): There is no consent. Therefore, pursuant to Standing Order 85, the amendment cannot be moved at this time.

Questions and comments. The hon. member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore.

Mr. James Maloney (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I grew up in a house with a mother who dedicated her life to this issue. She encouraged women to run so that they could sit in this House, which I am very proud of. She raised hundreds of thousands of dollars to help women achieve that goal, which begs the question why I am standing here. I do not have any sisters.

I recall early on in my life asking her, “Why are you doing this? Why is it so important to you?” The answer was, “Because it's 1985”. In fact, it might have been 1975. I cannot remember. My point in saying that is that we need to go beyond catchphrases. We should no longer be in a situation where we have to say, “It is 2015”, in order to justify something. We need to get to a stage where the answer is, “That is the way it is because it should be that way.”

My question is this. Why can we not all agree to support this motion, move on, and get things done, so that we do not have to talk about this anymore because we should not be, and it is just the way it is?

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Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Speaker, certainly we have to keep persevering. As the member said, in 1985 his mother was talking about the same issues.

When I first started in engineering women made up less than 10% of that field. Everywhere I went I built a washroom because there was none for women. We now see the demographic coming up. I am so pleased that 55% of the public sector is women. We really have a representation of the demographic that is there. Although there continue to be issues, we are moving continually in the direction of good. I think all parties are aligned on that. We need to keep working on it. I think we have mechanisms in place in Parliament, like the status of women committee, which I will be on. I will be proud to continue to work on issues of pay equity and to make sure that one day we do not need a status of women committee because all of the issues will have been resolved and there will be equity.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to thank the hon. member for Samia—Lambton for sharing her personal story.

She also talked about the Conservative track record in standing up for the rights of women. The Conservatives are known for gutting the status of women in Canada in the last government. They refused to fund any group doing advocacy, and removed equality from the mandate of Status of Women Canada.

Now that the Conservative Party is under new leadership, will the Conservatives stop their attack on the equality of women and support their basic rights, including the right to a decent income?

I have this question for the member. Will she support this motion?

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Speaker, the member is right that we can do nothing about the past, but only about the future. I will certainly be an advocate for pay equity and for solving some of the remaining issues.

There was a comment made by the President of the Treasury Board about how we need to stop the partisan politics when it comes to these issues of social responsibility. In part (c) of the motion, I see the accusation that we removed the rights of people. This is a false accusation as I have said. They still have that right and we are still continuing to work in the direction of good. I outlined the numerous excellent things that the Conservative Party did to promote women. We need to continue that. However, because of the language in part (c) and the fact that it would put a whole new committee in place when there is already a committee, and cost of huge amount of taxpayer dollars, I do not feel that this would be the best use of their work. Therefore, we will not be supporting this amendment.

Ms. Dianne Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to speak to the motion put forward by my colleague from Nanaimo—Ladysmith. I want to be perfectly clear that the only acceptable position by any member in the House is equal pay for equal work, and every person, regardless of race, religion, or gender needs to know that when they enter the workforce they will receive equal compensation.

We, as the Conservative Party, have always supported that position. In fact, it was the Conservative government that introduced the Employment Equity Act in 1984. It was also the Conservative government that appointed the very first woman to cabinet. We also

appointed the very first woman to the Senate and the very first female as Clerk of the Privy Council, whom I understand, unfortunately, has recently been removed.

I know that many of my female colleagues rose in the House last week and spoke on the 100th anniversary of Manitoba women being allowed the right to vote, and we will continue to celebrate that passion, that determination, and that inspiration. There are many women, including me, who have struggled in the workforce and had to work harder for less pay. It is incumbent upon all of us to right those wrongs. I would suggest that most of the women who sit in the House have gone through similar trials and tribulations throughout their career and can speak to those issues at great length.

We have come a very long way in spite of those wrongs. I am proud to say that during my time as the mayor of Surrey, we enjoyed a council that had a majority of women for many years. Being the first female mayor elected in that city, I had the good fortune to work with many women CEOs, business owners, public sector workers, or private sector employees. We have had those discussions around pay equity.

I believe that working with, supporting, and helping to empower the next generation of young women is something that we should all embrace. Several of my colleagues and I who are speaking on this issue today are very passionate about this topic. Indeed, I would suggest that we are all very passionate about this topic. We firmly support the basic principles of equality and equal pay for equal work.

I want to speak to my colleague's proposed amendment that was not accepted and just go through the points in the motion. Point (a) of the motion reads:

recognize that the government must take action to close the unacceptable gap in pay between men and women which contributes to income inequality and discriminates against women;

I absolutely agree that everything should be done to ensure that any gap in pay between men and women is rectified immediately. We heard from other members that in many different areas there is inequity. I would say that whether it is in the private or public sector, equal pay for equal work is essential for everyone.

Point (b) of the motion states that we should recognize pay equity as a right. Absolutely, it is a human right for all people. This point only reinforces my previous comments, and again, my colleagues and I fully agree with equal pay for equal work.

Point (c) is where we run into some difficulty. We heard from my colleague who put the amendment forward that this statement is factually incorrect. I do support my colleague, the member for Samia—Lambton, that we remove that point from the body of the motion. It is very unfortunate that the amendment was not supported, because its language is not factual and not supportable.

● (1125)

In fact, in 2009, the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act came into place. Again, this act reflects the issues that we are discussing here today. The act states that:

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3 (1) An employer shall, in respect of its non-unionized employees, take measures to provide them with equitable compensation in accordance with this Act. In the case of unionized employees, the employer and the bargaining agent shall take measures to provide those employees with equitable compensation in accordance with this Act.

Those measures are in place. The act goes on to state:

4 (1) An equitable compensation assessment under this Act assesses, without gender bias, the value of work performed by employees in a job group or a job class and identifies, by taking into account the prescribed factors, whether an equitable compensation matter exists.

Therefore, those elements are in the act.

However, point (d) of the opposition motion states:

(d) appoint a special committee with the mandate to conduct hearings on the matter of pay equity and to propose a plan to adopt a proactive federal pay equity regime, both legislative and otherwise, and...

It then goes on to define the structure of that committee.

Again, as previously stated, the status of women committee has done extraordinary work. I know that it will continue to do extraordinary work, because this is an issue that crosses party lines, and it is a place where these issues can be addressed. They should be dealt with within the existing framework and the existing structure. If they cannot be addressed in that committee, and there are significant labour issues, then it should be referred to the Public Service Labour Relations Board.

We heard from the President of the Treasury Board that the government is undergoing a new direction and a new process. I am very curious to understand what that would look like. Again, as he stated, this would not be partisan. It would include all of the comments that we have made here today.

I would stress again that this is an issue that affects all of us. I think of my two daughters who are just entering the workforce, and I think of my fellow women sitting in this chamber today. I think of all the women in the next generation who are relying on us to ensure that they are treated fairly, equitably, and with respect. I think of those brave women in Manitoba who struggled and took those important first steps 100 years ago to help us to get to where we are today. Therefore, we must address all of these issues and ensure equal pay for equal work.

I would like to thank the member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith for bringing this motion forward. I would suggest that it is incumbent upon all of us to ensure that there is equality and equity among employers, in both the private and the public sector.

• (1130)

Ms. Karina Gould (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague mentioned previously, this is an issue that women have been fighting for decades and decades.

I had a meeting with my local chapter of the Canadian Federation of University Women recently in Burlington and they raised this issue. They have been working on it for 40 years.

I would ask my hon. colleague who so passionately supports pay equity: How can members of her party justify not supporting this motion today and go back to the individuals in their communities who have been working so doggedly for 40 or 50 years on an issue that we should not have to be dealing with in 2016?

Ms. Dianne Watts: Mr. Speaker, I want to be clear. It is not that we do not support the motion. However, there are two points that we requested be amended because it is not factual information and there is work that is being undertaken. Those are the only two points that we have any issue with whatsoever.

• (1135)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech. Unfortunately, instead of providing any clarification, her speech just causes more confusion.

On the one hand, I was very pleased to hear my colleague say that pay equity for women is a basic right. On the other hand, she defended the Conservative legislation from 2009 that makes pay equity an issue covered by collective bargaining rather than a human right. That legislation bans people from taking these matters to the Canadian Human Rights Commission.

Would the member agree that, since this is a basic right, people should be able to bring these matters to the Canadian Human Rights Commission?

[*English*]

Ms. Dianne Watts: Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that absolutely it is a human right. It is a human right for pay equity for any gender, any person who enters the workforce. I would suggest that this is a very important issue and that the entirety should be sent to the status of women committee, and those issues addressed through that process; and moved forward, implementing the measures that need to be implemented and enforcing what is already there.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to the remarks from the member for South Surrey—White Rock and I appreciate her expressions of commitment to the issues of women's equality.

A number of times in her remarks, she referred to a commitment to equal pay for equal work. I think that as a former mayor of a major city, she would be very aware that it is different from equal pay for work of equal value. In fact, equal pay for equal work leaves a huge gap which is the equitableness of pay for women who are doing work in jobs that are not identical to the jobs men are in but that have equal value.

I would like to know whether this is a deliberate omission of a commitment to equal pay for work of equal value, which is a far more comprehensive type of equality in pay for women. Was that a deliberate omission? Is the member expressing that her party is not committed to equal pay for work of equal value, or was this omission an accident?

Ms. Dianne Watts: Mr. Speaker, I want to be crystal clear. Absolutely in no way whatsoever have I deliberately intended not to put in equal work for equal value. I think it is broad in nature; it is everything that we should be doing and should be continuing to do.

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[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, given the interest in today's topic, many members wish to take the floor. I am therefore pleased to share my time with the hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

It should be an honour and privilege to speak to a subject as important as pay equity and defend it as a fundamental right. Sadly, however, I am somewhat embarrassed and ashamed to see how many missed opportunities there have been. I hope we have it right this time and that the government will allow us all to put our words into action.

To still be talking about pay equity in Canada today, is to acknowledge that we still have not come far enough on matters of human rights. No one questions the merits of article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that all human beings are born free and equal. We can all agree that income earned from working is an important means for women to achieve that equality.

In my career as a teacher and a union representative in Quebec, I had the opportunity to take part in the implementation of the pay equity regime. It is hard for me to see that after all these years, Canada has not followed the course that is already set.

With the election of the Liberal government, there were glimmers of hope on the horizon, and a gender-balanced cabinet was probably the most concrete sign. As for the reasons behind this choice, many basic reasons could have been cited, but our Prime Minister summed up the facts and his rationale by saying that it was 2015.

Although his answer was short, I deduced that the Prime Minister was saying something like “it is obvious, it is a question we should no longer be asking”. Why then appoint women as ministers of state and give them a lower salary? I do recognize that after some public embarrassment and a little media frenzy, the situation was corrected, which was confirmed this morning by the President of the Treasury Board.

It is time we did the same for all Canadian workers so that Canada can stop lagging behind and start leading on pay equity issues, turning words into action. Unfortunately, this issue is not included in the Liberal Party's agenda, nor is it mentioned in the mandate letter for the Minister of Status of Women.

I was therefore very pleased to hear the President of the Treasury Board confirm in the House this morning that pay equity is one of his government's priorities. We are also very pleased that the Liberals are going to readjust their policies in this regard. After all, one might say, it is 2016.

What is the pay equity situation around the world and how does Canada measure up? According to the OECD, Canada ranks 30th out of 34 countries. That is nothing to brag about.

According to the World Economic Forum, Canada ranks 80th out of 145 countries. That is nothing to brag about either. Other governments have taken steps in the right direction or even solved the problem. Take Australia for example. It has a law that requires employers with 100 or more employees to report on their pay rates for men and women.

The United Kingdom is another example. Last summer, it announced its plans to force large corporations to release their reports on wage disparity. The United States also announced a plan to advance pay equity in the speech that Barack Obama made on January 29.

As I mentioned before, here in Canada, Quebec has once again shown leadership by addressing the issue in a law that was passed in 1997. We should draw on that work.

What has Canada done about this situation in the recent past? A pay equity task force was set up in 2001. It conducted extensive consultations with employers, unions and women's rights activists. The task force found the regime to be ineffective since it is entirely dependent on the employer's willingness to bring in pay equity. The report tabled by the task force in 2004 set out 113 recommendations to completely overhaul our approach to pay equity and to recognize pay equity as a fundamental right.

● (1140)

It has been 12 years since the task force reported its conclusions, and it is time for the new government and the entire House to stop paying lip service to this issue and restore the right to pay equity in the public service. The government must recognize that it has a responsibility to reduce income inequality between men and women, and it must take a leadership role in gradually putting an end to wage discrimination against women. We are prepared to offer the Liberal government our full support in putting an end to wage discrimination against women.

For many years, successive Conservative and Liberal governments have sometimes chosen to put their heads in the sand. The inequities we see now are a direct result of the Paul Martin government's refusal to implement the recommendations of the pay equity task force.

I remind members that women earn just 73¢ for every dollar that their male counterparts earn. This is still true today, and previous governments did nothing to make things better for women in this country. Paul Martin's Liberal government chose to ignore the task force's recommendations, even though Canada had ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which clearly states that we must ensure fair wages and equal remuneration for work of equal value without distinction of any kind.

The best example is probably Parliament, the assembly that we represent and belong to. We all come from very different fields where, in the market, salaries would probably differ dramatically based on each person's skills and qualifications. Here in the House, however, each member earns equal pay for equal work, the work of representing our constituents.

Business of Supply

Instead of getting things right in 2009, the Conservative government passed the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act, the purpose of which was to sabotage female public servants who were seeking pay equity. The Conservatives deprived female public servants of the right to go before the Canadian Human Rights Commission to defend their right to the same pay as men. To deter women from lodging complaints about pay inequity, the Conservatives' law forces women to lodge complaints as individuals rather than seek the support of their union. The Conservatives' orchestrated attacks date back to at least 1998, when the member for Calgary Heritage declared that pay equity laws were a rip-off for taxpayers and said that the pay equity act was ridiculous.

From 1998 until 2016, the Conservatives have remained firm in their position. Do we dare hope that the party, which now has a female leader, will show the openness required to resolve this unfair situation? I certainly hope so.

All parties in this House should endorse the notion that pay equity is a right. I must admit, I find the discussion we have been having today refreshing because, for the most part, it has indeed been a discussion and not a debate. This respects not only the spirit, but also the letter of the motion we moved this morning.

This issue has been central to the NDP's political action for some time now. Through motions and private members' bills, we have steadfastly maintained the pressure and continued the fight.

I will end here, Mr. Speaker, because time is short and you are looking at me with an impatient smile. I welcome questions, and I invite all of my colleagues to vote in favour of the NDP motion.

• (1145)

[English]

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Intergovernmental Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in my lifetime, I have seen advancements on pay equity. In Ontario in the early 1990s, with an NDP government in Queen's Park, to give credit where credit is due, we saw very strong pay equity legislation, only to be followed immediately by a Conservative government that effectively wiped it all out.

As we contemplate pay equity and a stronger campaign to ensure that women are paid properly, fairly, and that we achieve this important goal, what provisions would the Liberals contemplate to ensure that the next government could not come along, set the clock back, and put women in a position of vulnerability once again? What provisions could be put in place to ensure the next government, if there is one, and we hope there is not, could never roll back this important achievement being discussed and debated today?

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. The next government will be in four years' time, so we can talk about it again at that time.

For now, it is the responsibility of this duly elected government, a Liberal government. I would even say that the motion conveys some urgency, even though it is not explicitly stated.

Quebec resolved this issue in 1997. Nearly 20 years later, the federal government still has not taken the necessary action to make pay equity between men and women a reality.

Of course, the motion we moved here today not only gives us the means to gather information and make the necessary updates, but it also allows us to provide the framework for what would eventually become our national pay equity legislation.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Trois-Rivières for his excellent speech and I congratulate him.

How urgent is it to achieve gender equity in his riding? If women's purchasing power were increased through pay equity, what impact would that have on economic growth in Trois-Rivières?

• (1150)

Mr. Robert Aubin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie for his excellent question.

Unfortunately, I do not have enough time to fully convey the economic situation in my riding. In short, it is one of the poorest in Quebec.

The Liberal government's tax measures seek to put more money into people's pockets. In Quebec, the median income is \$31,000, and as we know, all those who earn \$45,000 or less a year will get absolutely nothing out of the measures that were adopted in December. The first thing to do is to ensure that women achieve equity with men at least where this median income is concerned so that they can have a decent income, if I can call it that, and at least enjoy much more favourable economic conditions.

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the hon. member a question about the issue of equal pay for work of equal value. Could the member shed some light on the question of who is in the best position of assessing the value of work? Who is best to make that determination about the value of particular work in an individual context?

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

Again, if the motion is adopted and we get the ball rolling and a committee starts sitting, then we could draw from the experience of those who have advanced this issue.

I come back to the example of Quebec, which resolved the issue in 1997 and put in place a number of processes and procedures for evaluating various tasks within a workplace and compatibilities between various jobs.

We could learn from and build on concrete examples. In this case, it is not about reinventing the wheel. It is about getting the wheel moving.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very honoured and pleased to rise in the House to discuss the NDP motion moved by my colleague from Nanaimo—Ladysmith.

Business of Supply

This extremely important motion is very representative of the values that the NDP has always held. It is a perfect example of our concern for equality, equity, solidarity and support, as part of our efforts to ensure real and continuous progress for all groups in our society.

The NDP likes to walk the talk. We have been setting the example for a long time by having policies that include action plans to improve the status of women in our society, their safety, and their social, economic, and professional advancement. We try to set an example as often as possible.

In the fall election, the NDP had the highest percentage of female candidates. In fact, 43% of our candidates were women. That means that there is greater representation of women in the caucus. In the 41st Parliament, 40% of New Democrat MPs were women. Today 41% of New Democrat MPs are women, and the percentage is even as high as 43% in Quebec. I am extremely proud of that. We must continue on that path.

When women talk about issues that affect women in Parliament, it makes it possible for female MPs, such as the member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith, to move a motion on pay equity, as she did today. This issue has been completely absent from parliamentary debate in recent years. Unfortunately, as a result, the situation of women in almost every age group, every industry, and every economic sector in the country has regressed during that time.

This also brings to light the problem of systemic discrimination, which has been going on for a very long time. A few minutes is not enough time to really address the historical impact of discrimination against women, but it is very real. In the political sphere, which I just talked about, this discrimination existed when it came to the right to vote.

For example, women only got the right to vote in federal elections in 1918. In Quebec, women did not have the right to vote until 1940. That is not that long ago. For years, in workplaces, professional settings, and universities, women were left out of public debate and not given access to places where political, economic, and cultural decisions were made.

I recently learned something completely shocking. For a brief time in the 19th century, women had the right to vote at the federal level if they owned property. Anyone who owned a home or other building could vote. In 1949, the Parliament of the Province of Canada decided that the definition of “property owner” included only men, so women lost their right to vote. We have come a long way, but we should still be a lot closer to equality today.

I have a simple example about workplaces. The last municipal civil service strike in Montreal was in 1967. Workers were challenging the fact that there were three categories of wages for the same job. There was a wage for married men, one for single men, and one for women. The unions fought to put an end to this type of discrimination. However, we have to continue that fight today and take it even further.

When I married my wife, I had the fortune of becoming the father of a blended family. We have two girls, aged 11 and 15. I want Parliament to ensure that when they start working and contributing to society, they will not be receiving three-quarters of the wage that

their young male counterparts earn. We should keep them in mind and vote in favour of this motion, to require, once and for all, pay equity at the federal level. That would be an important step. We have fallen too far behind.

●(1155)

According to the World Economic Forum, Canada is ranked 80th out of 145 countries in wage equality. Canada has refused to recognize pay equity as a fundamental right, and this has had consequences.

According to the OECD, Canada ranks 30th out of 34 countries. That is shameful. That is the result of inaction on the part of successive Liberal and Conservative governments. In recent years, the wage gap increased. It is even worse for aboriginal women. The NDP's motion seeks to create a committee that would examine these issues, to develop a proactive law with respect to pay equity.

Let us go back a little and talk about what could have been done and the damage caused by previous Liberal and Conservative governments, to show how far behind we are today. In 2004, a very interesting task force conducted very broad and exhaustive consultations all across the country. It met with employers, unions, women's groups and academics. It submitted 113 recommendations for real measures to achieve pay equity. Some may think that perhaps the former Liberal government was unable to implement all of them, and that maybe 60 recommendations or so were acted on. No. There were not 60, or 25, or 10, or even 3 recommendations implemented. There was zero, nothing. Nothing happened. The report was put on a nice shelf, and once again women were told to wait. They were told that they would get their turn later.

Then the Conservative government was elected, and in 2009 it passed a law fraudulently called the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act. This act is the equivalent of a chain saw massacre. It requires that 70% of workers be considered necessary in a unit or department if a profession is to be called female predominant. Seventy per cent is not a simple majority. It redefines the criteria used to determine whether positions are of equal value so as to include market forces, and that discriminates against women. However, that is not all.

This legislation makes pay equity an issue for collective bargaining only, not a human rights issue, and that has major consequences for any possible recourse. Women working in the federal public service are forced to file individual complaints only. The concept of collective recourse is ruled out and prohibited. Even in the case of individual complaints, the organizations of these female workers are prohibited from offering them assistance. If a union is caught red-handed helping a woman achieve pay equity, the Conservative law provides for a fine of up to \$50,000. It also prohibits any recourse to the Canadian Human Rights Commission. Those are some of the setbacks imposed by the Conservative government.

Business of Supply

Today we have in the House an opportunity to repair what has been broken, to respect women and to continue the great march forward toward gender equality. This is why I invite all hon. members to support the NDP motion moved by my colleague from Nanaimo—Ladysmith. I consider this an important and consequential issue. I join my colleague from Trois-Rivières in pointing out that this is something that is possible to do.

In 1997, nearly 20 years ago now, the Quebec National Assembly passed a pay equity law. This is a proactive law that, in both the public and private sectors, ensures that there are certain process obligations and results requirements to support pay equity. If a company has more than 100 employees, the legislation obliges it to have a plan for achieving pay equity. It must have a joint pay equity committee, jointly composed of management representatives and employee representatives. All of this could be set up by the parliamentary committee that the NDP wants to establish. That committee could review all of this to ensure that we finally achieve pay equity and that this fundamental right of women is finally respected in Canada.

● (1200)

[*English*]

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for that history and detail about this struggle.

I would like to ask a question of the hon. member because he mentioned where pay equity is in the world.

Speaking as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, it is in our mandate letter to re-energize Canadian leadership on key international issues, one of which is championing the rights of women.

I would like to ask if he would be prepared to take this fight further and to support our leadership in championing women's rights internationally.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her most interesting question.

I made a comparison with what has existed in Quebec for nearly 20 years now, which we can use as a model. However that is not the only example, and we can perhaps draw inspiration from better practices that exist elsewhere in the world. Australia also has a law requiring employers with at least 100 employees to report on the pay of men and women. In the United Kingdom, David Cameron last summer announced plans to force big corporations to make reports on pay disparity public.

I am very pleased with the hon. member's question, and I invite her to work with the NDP. We are prepared to work with the new Liberal government towards a law that is modelled on best practices in the world so as to achieve this fundamental objective of pay equity for women.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the last response from my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, who was saying he wanted to work with the government. I am in complete agreement on

working with the government, but we must also work with the opposition.

Looking at the composition of the parliamentary committee, we note that the Bloc Québécois is not included.

I would like to know if the hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie is prepared to work with the members of the Bloc Québécois.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question and his interest in the issues of women's struggle and pay equity.

We in the NDP are ready to work with all parliamentarians to advance the rights of women. I am entirely ready, as are my colleagues, to receive his suggestions and good ideas so that we can create the best committee and the best law possible.

With regard to the rules concerning parliamentary committees, you know them as well as I, Mr. Speaker. Twelve members are needed to constitute a party recognized by the House. We are only applying the existing rules.

● (1205)

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie for his excellent speech. It is clear to us that he knows a great deal about the issue.

With him, I would like to attempt a projection into the future. This summer, I had the chance to participate in the women's march with him in Trois-Rivières. In his view, with a procedure in place that would take us toward pay equity, can we hope to see no further women's marches without a resolution of the pay equity issue?

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, the struggle for women's rights and equality in our society is huge and complex. It should be over by now. We should be there already.

I hope that, one day, violence against women, gender discrimination, sexism, sexist advertising, and pay equity issues will be things of the past. I hope that our grandchildren will read about such things in the history books and have a good laugh about how weird their ancestors were, but that is not yet our reality. We have a lot of work to do and a lot of battles to fight.

I would like to point out to the House that pay equity problems in today's labour market affect women's capabilities and buying power, but these problems will also have repercussions down the road when women retire. Because of this issue, poverty is much more common among retired women than among retired men. We need a big-picture, long-term perspective on this problem so that we can help women who are working now and who will be retired in the future.

[*English*]

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Ottawa West—Nepean.

I stand here to support this motion by the New Democratic Party, which calls for closing the unacceptable pay gap between men and women that contributes to income inequality; to implement the 2004 task force on pay equity; and to do this starting within the public service.

Business of Supply

This is eminently supportable, but sometimes people listening to this debate do not know what pay equity is. People may think that pay equity and employment equity are the same thing. We see today that there is an Employment Equity Act that requires that women not be discriminated against in the workplace. This came in as federal legislation about 20 years ago.

However, pay equity is very different. Pay equity is rooted in historic fact. Women worked in certain sectors as receptionists, nurses, etc. This was also known as the “pink ghetto”. They were paid less than men because they were doing women's work. That tradition has continued over the years. In Canada, women are attaining post-secondary education at a level equal to and surpassing men in terms of their abilities and their attainment. However, they are still earning 73¢ for every dollar that male counterparts earn. We need to rectify this. It is important that we do, and this motion asks us to do it which is why we support it.

Canada also has an international obligation under the United Nations and domestic obligations. Our international obligations under the United Nations are with the International Labour Organisation Convention No. 100. Our domestic obligations are with our Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

At the World Economic Forum, Canada is now in 19th place with regard to pay equity. The Nordic countries have surpassed us when looking at the issue of gender equity. However, that is not all. In 2001, Canada was number one in terms of all forms of gender equality. Today, we are 30th, so we have slid badly with regard to equality between men and women. In 2001, at that time under a Liberal government, the minister of labour and the minister of justice asked for a task force to report on the status of pay equity and what should be done to achieve pay equity in the future. The report came out in 2004. This is the one that the NDP is asking us to bring about and change. We are in agreement with that. However, what was wrong was that in 2009 we slid even further because the then-Conservative government removed the issue of pay equity from the Human Rights Commission and put it into the Labour Relations Board, which actually said that it was all about labour relations. It is not; it is about human rights. I want to remind everyone that in 1995, 20 years ago, at the Beijing conference, for the first time in the world, women's rights were considered to be human rights. This equality issue is about human rights and we need to deal with it right away.

One of the first things we need to do is to look at the fact that currently women in the labour force bring about \$130 billion over 30 years into the GDP. However, if we implement pay equity and women are paid equal pay for work of equal value, which is what pay equity is, we would see that in the next 20 years that would go up from \$130 billion to trillions of dollars. Therefore, Canada would benefit economically when women are allowed to fully participate in the economic life of this country. We make up 51% of the population. I do not know of any business, board, factory, or industry that would ignore 50% of its workforce and decide that it is ever going to make it. That is what we do when we do not talk about pay equity.

Now that we have Statistics Canada back, we might be able to look at disaggregated data to measure how many women are not being paid equally for work of equal value, to make this transparent;

and to do the kind of data follow-up and evaluation that we need to track this issue. It is an issue that we must track.

• (1210)

The 2004 task force said that we need legislation and that legislation must be very clear. It must give clear criteria for what pay equity means. Pay equity is about similar duties and responsibilities. It is about similar qualifications, similar access to benefits, and similar rates of pay for men and women who do the same work. That is a very clear set of criteria that we would have to follow in implementing legislation.

We want to look at major wage discrimination that occurs in the workforce, not only against women, but aboriginal peoples, the disabled, visible minorities. Are they being paid equal pay for work of equal value?

We also want to make sure that we do not restrict legislation only to unionized workers but expand it to non-unionized workers.

If we are setting up legislation, we want to monitor and maintain good pay equity legislation and pay equity policies. We need to look at how all employees participate. That means that 50% of the employees who are participating in this process must be women.

We want to look at how we would follow up on complaints. There must be some kind of mechanism where people have an opportunity to follow up on complaints.

This is a matter of political will and a commitment to human rights. It is for this reason that the Liberal government supports this motion.

Michael Ignatieff, when he was the leader of the opposition, brought a similar motion to this one. It did not pass in the House, but it was calling for the implementation of the 2004 task force recommendations on pay equity. It was also a way of talking about how we, as a federal government, could play a part.

When we look at places like England, etc., there is a difference in terms of federal and provincial legislation. We cannot demand that provincial legislation and the private sector actually follow pay equity. However, if we bring in legislation and work clearly with them as partners, we can set the criteria. We could look at how we can finally give women an opportunity to play their full role in society, to improve our economic performance in Canada, and play a strong role in competitiveness in the new global marketplace.

Business of Supply

•(1215)

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Vancouver Centre for her very elegant and eloquent speech. She has been a strong defender of women's equality in the House. That is reflected in how she has approached this issue, and how she has approached many others.

Unfortunately, her eloquence has not always been matched in the past by the actions of the Liberal government. The President of the Treasury Board said a little while ago that we should not be talking about the past, that we should be talking about the present. That is fair enough. I would like to ask the member what the plans of the new government were to move forward on pay equity. We certainly did not see anything in the mandate letters, and we certainly did not see anything raised in the election campaign.

The President of the Treasury Board said that there were plans afoot. We brought forward the motion today, which I believe will have the support of the majority of the House. That is a very welcome step forward for pay equity and gender equality in the country; there is no doubt. However, if we had not brought it forward today, what were the plans of the new government? How did it plan to move forward?

That is my question for the member. Again, I would like to compliment the member for her speech. As always, she is very eloquent and very much on point when she speaks in the House.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his kind words.

We now agree on this issue, and we can move together on it. With respect to the idea that something is not in a mandate letter, if we put in every single thing, we would have a 24-page to 30-page mandate letter.

However, the commitment to gender equality in our government is clear. This is the first time that a prime minister has had 50% of women and 50% of men in his cabinet, and he took extra steps to make sure that occurred.

We have been committed to gender equality for a long time. Michael Ignatieff brought in a very similar motion when he was leader of the opposition, but it did not fly in the House at the time.

I agree that we do not always want to look to the past, but the commitment and the political will are here. We heard it from the President of the Treasury Board. This is something that we fully support in many ways. We need to bring forward the kind of legislation that would ensure the federal government is leading by example.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to see that in the House today we have unanimous support for pay equity and plans to continue working on this important issue moving forward.

One of the things I appreciated about what the member said was that everything cannot be put into the mandate letter. In conversations I have had with the Minister of Status of Women and the member who brought the motion forward today, it is clear that pay equity is going to be part of the work of that committee. I am very much looking forward to that.

Could the member tell me what specific plans she knows of in terms of the recommendations in the 2004 report?

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, the 2004 report talked about legislation and what the legislation should look like. It talked about how employees need to play a strong role in ensuring that implementation occurs. It talked about a tribunal with the ability to seek some sort of review if employees felt they were not being given appropriate pay equity. It also talked about measuring, and ensuring that we continue to monitor and evaluate.

It is really about women's rights as human rights. It is about ensuring that women have every opportunity to play an equal role in the economic, political, social, and cultural life of this country. All of us in this country will be better off for it.

•(1220)

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very inspired to hear the motion today. I am also inspired to hear collective support for pursuing this endeavour.

While pay equity is a critical element, is there a root cause? Is it a philosophical issue that we are addressing as to how women are viewed in our society?

Does the member think there is a link between women in leadership positions in this country and the fact that we have not achieved pay equity? We have not moved for 20 years in terms of the leadership positions that we have for women, and while this government and its cabinet have made great strides, the country lags behind.

Is there a connection between women in leadership and pay equity? What can we do to achieve balance?

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, if I were to answer that member's excellent question, you would have to let me speak for the next 10 minutes.

It is rooted in the philosophical and historic fact that women did not work at a particular point in time. They were chattel and they were owned by their husbands. When women did go out into the workforce around and after the Second World War, they were doing "certain sectoral jobs". Those jobs were seen as pink ghetto or women's work, and as such they were paid at a lower level because a woman was not supposed to be the breadwinner.

Today in Canada women have attained greater post-secondary education and greater abilities and credentials than men in many sectors. Yet, they do not seem to be able to get equal pay for work of equal value because that is sectoral. Women's work still remains.

One of the biggest things we need to talk about, if we want to talk about women having equal rights in the workforce, is that women have children and need to have good quality child care so they can work equal time or be as flexible as they want to be in the workforce.

The Deputy Speaker: Before we go on with debate, I will point out a slight change on these opposition days.

Business of Supply

On an opposition day that has been sponsored by the third party, the New Democratic Party in this case, members will see a different rotation with the way that we conduct the comments and questions part of the debate. When a member of either the official opposition or the government has just spoken, the first question will always go to the New Democratic Party, and then we will go in succession after that.

As a result of today's motion being a New Democratic Party motion, NDP members will get the first opportunity to pose a question to either a government member or a member of the opposition. We will be following that rotation, which is slightly different than the usual pattern that we follow in the House.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Ottawa West—Nepean.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today to contribute to the debate on pay equity in Canada. I thank the hon. member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith for bringing this important issue to the floor of the House. In 2016, it is not acceptable that women in Canada are still earning 23% less than men.

This morning, I had the honour of meeting with a group of grade five students from Woodroffe public school, in my riding of Ottawa West—Nepean, who were touring Parliament. I told the students I was giving a speech later in the day, and they asked me the topic of my speech. I told them I would be talking about pay equity. I explained that means that men and women who are doing similar jobs should get similar pay. To the students, this is something that should be self-evident. When I told them that women are only making 73¢ for every \$1 that men make in Canada, the students were terribly disappointed, and applauded me for speaking on this in the House today. This is an issue that even young children can understand, because it is an issue of basic fairness.

The face of poverty in Canada is female. There are 35% of single mothers who are living below the poverty line, compared to 17% for single dads. With regard to low-income seniors, 71% are women, a number that is even worse for senior women who live alone. Women are more likely than men to be working in minimum wage jobs, working part-time, or doing shift work. In Ontario, 58% of minimum wage earners are women.

Women in Canada today earn just 67¢ for every \$1 earned by men. I have heard some opponents say that women make different life choices, including taking time off for caregiving or working fewer hours, which they say accounts for this discrepancy. However, even when comparing people who are working full time, full year, in similar jobs, women are still earning only 73¢ on the dollar.

Even though women are now more educated than ever before, the gap continues. In fact, today more women than men between the ages of 25 and 34 have bachelor, master, and medical degrees. Therefore, the gap is not because women are less educated or qualified.

In Canada, this wage gap exists across all occupations, from the service industry, to scientists, to management. When factoring in aboriginal women, visible minorities, new immigrant women, women living with disabilities, and transgendered women, the wage

gap is even greater. This is a glaring example of gender discrimination that must be dealt with.

We live in a society where we tell our children that they can do anything and be anything. We tell boys and girls that if they study hard and work hard they will succeed, and yet the deck is stacked from the beginning. Our daughters will not be as valued in the workplace as our sons, even if they have the same marks, the same educational levels, work just as hard, and are equally skilled. This is not an issue about numbers; it is an issue about fairness and human rights.

I would like to illustrate this with a real-life example of a couple I know. I will call them Jennifer and Steve. They went to university together. Jennifer completed her masters degree with first-class honours and then went on to work in a low-paying service job to help Steve get his masters degree. She then went back to school to get more professional qualifications, and went on to work in a predominantly female profession, making \$35,000 a year.

Steve found a position immediately after graduation in a predominantly male profession. He was making \$75,000 a year. After a few years, they decided to have a baby. Even though Jennifer wanted to keep working, the cost of child care was almost as much as her salary. As Steve earned more, they made the decision that Jennifer would stay home until the child began school. That child is now nine years old, and Jennifer is making less than \$20,000 a year working part-time; Steve is making almost six figures.

One might say that this is not an example of pay equity because Jennifer and Steve are not working in the same fields, but her initial job required more education and had a greater level of responsibility than Steve's entry-level post. Had they been making the same salaries when they had their baby, she may have stayed in the labour force and the family might have made different choices.

● (1225)

Pay equity is not just about two people doing the same job; it is about a cycle of discrimination that limits opportunities for half the population.

Canada is also lagging behind internationally when it comes to equal pay for work of equal value. According to the World Economic Forum, Canada ranks 80 out of 145 countries in the wage equality for similar work indicator.

Pay equity is a fundamental human right that is enshrined in international treaties as well as the Canadian human right framework. For example, the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights includes fair wages and equal remuneration for work of equal value. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, CEDAW, refers to a woman's right to equal remuneration and equal treatment in respect of work of equal value. Canada is also a signatory to the International Labour Organization's Convention No. 100 on equal remuneration.

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Section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms calls for the equality of all citizens. Section 11 of the Canadian Human Rights Act specifically refers to equal pay for work of equal value. These rights were undermined in 2009, with the introduction of Bill C-10, the omnibus budget bill that replaced the term “pay equity” with “equitable compensation” and moved responsibility for pay equity from the Canadian Human Rights Commission to the Public Service Labour Relations Board, which had no mandate for protecting human rights, which fined unions for assisting with a complaint, and which combined pay equity with collective bargaining. This treated pay equity as a benefit that could be bargained away, as opposed to a fundamental right. It also goes against the recommendations of the 2004 pay equity task force.

The 2004 task force called for stand-alone proactive pay equity legislation that would include a commitment to pay equity as a human right, that it apply equally to unionized and non-unionized workplaces, and that it include oversight agencies and an independent adjudicative body. The task force recommendations included a pay equity commission that could receive complaints and that could issue compliance orders, summon documents, and conduct audits. It also recommends a pay equity hearings tribunal. Several provinces already have similar mechanisms that have decreased the wage gap.

I am proud to have a number of public servants in my riding of Ottawa West—Nepean. The gender wage gap is a little less in the public service at about 9%. However, this is still too large a gap. I am pleased that the Prime Minister committed to ending the wage gap in the federal public service in an interview with “Up for Debate” and the Alliance for Women's Rights. We will begin with consultations with unions, stakeholders, and public servants themselves on this.

Despite the work done by the task force over a decade ago, a young woman graduating from university today in Canada will still earn about \$8,000 less than her male classmates in her first job, and will continue to earn less throughout her career despite the fact that she may be working in a job that requires the same qualifications and is similar in demands and level of expertise. By the time she is in her fifties she will be earning almost \$23,000 less, and she will be far more likely to retire in poverty. By continuing to allow this gap and not acting on it, we are doing a disservice to women throughout Canada, but especially to those bright and aspiring young graduates entering the labour force who deserve an equal chance to succeed. At the current rate of increase, women will only achieve full gender equality in the year 2240.

This is not just about human rights. Studies show that there are economic benefits to pay equity. According to several studies, gender equality in the labour force could significantly increase GDP. Pay equity could also help to reduce poverty. A U.S. study found that if single working mothers were paid as much as their male counterparts, their poverty levels would be cut in half. Pay equity can also benefit men who work in predominantly female professions. They would be eligible for the same pay equity adjustments as women in their employment class.

We cannot afford to do nothing. Pay equity is a fundamental right, and we owe it to Canadians to take action.

● (1230)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I paid close attention to my colleague's speech, and I congratulate her.

I share her passion for the student community, and I know that young people today consider this issue to be altogether discriminatory. They think it is absurd that it has not yet, in 2016, been resolved.

Does the member think that limiting women's access to the resources they might employ to claim their rights is just as discriminatory? The Conservatives' 2009 law takes away some of their rights, including the right of unionized women to enlist the help of their union to defend their cause.

[*English*]

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Mr. Speaker, this is one of the things that I mentioned in my speech. It was very unfair that unions were not able to represent people under the 2009 law.

I believe that if pay equity is a matter of an individual person having to come forward as a particular case, that does not address the problem. In many cases, this is something that is a collective issue. We need to have mechanisms, particularly human rights mechanisms, through which women can come forward and be represented.

It is also very important to recognize that this needs to apply to non-unionized workplaces as well. Pay equity needs to be across the board.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for her years of work and service on human rights and women's equality issues.

When the member was speaking about the current absence of adequate mechanisms to ensure pay equity, she called that a disservice to women across Canada. I am thinking about Canada's role in and respect or influence on the world stage.

I would like to ask the member what impacts it might have on Canada's relationship with the other nations we partner with once we reduce or eliminate these gaps and introduce an effective pay equity approach.

● (1235)

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Mr. Speaker, it is true that in many areas Canada is a leader in the world on gender and equality.

However, this particular area is one where Canada is falling behind. Out of 34 countries in the OECD, there are only 7 that are doing worse than us. We are number 29 in the OECD. This is amongst developed countries.

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There is no reason for Canada to be lagging in this area. We have women who are attaining higher education levels, more than ever before. There is no reason that women would not be attaining pay equity.

There are countries, particularly the Nordic countries, that have exceptional models that we could be looking at. Hopefully in the near future Canada will once again become a leader in the world on this issue.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is quite clear the member is very passionate about this issue, and that is great to see.

I think all of us in this place would agree that this is a very important issue for all of us to discuss. I had an opportunity to be a member of the status of women committee during my time here. It was one of the most rewarding experiences I have ever had. We did a lot of great work as part of that committee.

I am wondering if the member could explain why she feels it is important to start up another very expensive, time-consuming committee when we already have one in place that could very well deal with this issue. It has a great track record. That is what it was established for. Why do we need to start a whole other piece of bureaucracy? Why can it not just be in the purview of the status of women committee?

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased that we have unanimity in the House on this very important issue.

I agree with the hon. member that we should not reinvent the wheel. There has been tremendous work done in this place on the issue of pay equity. There have been motions that have come before the House.

I am a member of the status of women committee, and this was in fact one of the issues that I as a member of Parliament was hoping to work on, and I do plan to work on. I think the motion before us talks about a special committee. The most important thing is that this be something that is given priority and is studied, whether it is in a special committee or in the status of women committee.

This is something where we all have an opportunity as members of Parliament to work together so that those young children who come here in the future with their school groups will not have to learn that women earn 73 cents on every dollar that men earn, and that in the future we will have parity when it comes to wages in Canada.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform you that I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

Three years ago, nearly to the day, I delivered a speech on this same topic before the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. The debate was about a report published by a parliamentarian who raised the following points: profound changes are needed in people's mindsets to combat sexist stereotypes in the workplace, and when partners share family responsibilities and more fathers take parental leave, this definitely contributes to changing those mindsets.

In Canada, much like in Europe, when a couple decides which of the two parents is going to take parental leave, the decision is often based on the spouses' respective salaries. The one who earns less usually stays home with the baby. Studies show, beyond any doubt, that there is a gap between the salaries earned by men and women. Women who work full time earn about 77% of what men earn. Women aged 45 to 54 earn \$23,600 less than men the same age, which means they will also have less pension income than their male counterparts. Actually, many retired women are living below the poverty line.

We also see a wage gap between young, educated women and men. The gap is even wider when it comes to aboriginal and immigrant women. These flagrant wage gaps between men and women are partly due to systemic gender-based discrimination. What does that mean? A few decades ago, it was the man who provided financial support in most families. Some women worked, but their salaries were considered supplementary income. As a result, jobs today are still generally evaluated based on more masculine traits, such as physical strength, for example. As a result, skills considered more feminine in nature are not as highly valued when the tasks of a position are being evaluated. That is why a secretarial job does not pay as well as a technician's job and why a zookeeper earns a higher salary than women who provide child care. It seems clear that if we want women's full and equal participation in the workforce, then we must eliminate this systemic wage gap.

More than half of all humans are women. It is proven that women earn less than men. Do we really want half the population to continue to be discriminated against?

Allow me to digress a bit.

Many people believe that pay equity means "equal work for equal pay". That is not the case. That problem was solved a long time ago. A female nurse and a male nurse at the same level earn the same salary. Pay equity means equal pay for work of equal value. It is a somewhat more complex concept, but what happens in Quebec makes it easy to understand.

In 1966, Quebec passed its pay equity legislation for workers governed by the Quebec Labour Code. One of the important elements of this legislation is the set of four factors used to assess jobs and establish equitable pay for work of equal value, no matter the position. These four factors are responsibilities of the position, required qualifications, work conditions and effort required.

Points are awarded for each of these factors and their sub-factors. For example, the "effort" factor recognizes concentration as much as physical effort. When the points are tallied, if the total value of the two different positions is equal, the pay must be equal. This process recognizes the value of jobs traditionally or predominantly held by women by eliminating bias to the extent possible.

Another important aspect of the legislation is that it seeks to maintain equity. Reassessments must be carried out every five years to ensure that wage increases have not led to equity gaps. Finally, a commission is responsible for providing information, tools and dispute resolution services. In Quebec, any business with at least 10 employees must undergo a pay equity process. The requirements vary according to the size of the business. Pay equity is a principle that is recognized around the world, and not just by members of the Council of Europe. In the United Kingdom, even Conservative David Cameron is tackling the problem of wage inequality.

● (1240)

Canada has ratified international treaties that address the issue of equal pay for work of equal value. Unfortunately, both Liberal and Conservative governments have not always been able to walk the talk, as my leader likes to say.

The Liberals' platform made no mention of pay equity. In 2004, Paul Martin chose not to implement the recommendations of a federal task force that was examining this issue. As for the Conservatives, they made it extremely difficult for the public service to achieve pay equity when they changed the rules in 2009. They had the support of the Liberals.

As a result, Canada has a poor record on pay equity among OECD countries. Earlier, I heard that Canada was ranked 29th. According to my figures, Canada is ranked 30th out of 34. That is quite shameful.

Many members of the NDP have been fighting for years to correct this injustice against women. Our former leader, Nycole Turmel, emphatically defended this principle when she was the president of the Public Service Alliance of Canada. The colleague with whom I have the honour of sharing a desk, the member for London—Fanshawe, introduced a number of equity bills, which were later brought back by another colleague, Françoise Boivin. These women and many others, along with many men, understood that ensuring that women have a decent salary is a way of combatting poverty, social exclusion, and inequality in our society.

The motion moved today by the NDP proposes practical solutions to these problems. We need to combat the systemic discrimination against women and the resulting social and financial inequality by recognizing pay equity as a right; implementing the recommendations of the 2004 pay equity task force report; restoring the right to pay equity in the public service, which was undermined by the previous Conservative government in 2009 with the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act; and appointing a special committee to propose legislation based on public consultation.

In closing, the traditional sharing of responsibilities, whereby women take care of the household and the children, still exists. Although more and more men and women are working hard to combat them, gender stereotypes unfortunately still haunt us today.

Pay equity is an important tool in creating new habits, raising awareness, and making profound changes to how we see gender roles in the workforce. The Quebec example may not be perfect, but it shows that in order to achieve this goal, any legislation in that regard needs to contain clearly defined parameters, audit mechanisms, and a conflict resolution process.

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Canada needs pay equity legislation. I am hopeful that the Liberals and the Conservatives recently elected to the House will be more open to this reality than their predecessors were. If the last speech I heard is any indication, I think that this is the case. Many members currently sitting in the House are women; surely they will support this motion. As for the men, they have mothers, sisters, daughters, spouses, and friends who are counting on them to make a difference. We cannot turn our backs on 50% of the Canadian population.

● (1245)

[*English*]

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Intergovernmental Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the comments of my colleague across the way and take very seriously her challenge to remember our sisters, our mothers, particularly my mother, and our daughters.

The concept of equal pay for equal work is hopefully rooted in all of our consciences now, but it goes beyond that. The issues the hon. member has spoken to illustrate how much more work is done beyond the pay slip. It is also about ensuring that equal opportunity is afforded to women so they can take their place, as my colleague, a minister in the previous government, stated, in the social, economic, cultural, and in all realms of the country.

Pay equity is the first step. What does the member see as the next step we need to take to ensure that women have their rights and their position in society properly sorted by this Parliament?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Mr. Speaker, we can do a number of things here in Parliament. We can encourage women to run for political office. We represent a population composed of more than 50% women. Our role could quite easily be to encourage women to enter politics to better represent this percentage.

During the last Parliament, the NDP was made up of 40% women and there were many young people. This significantly changed the way of thinking here in the House. For example, some of the young women wanted some changes to be made and those changes were indeed made.

We are continuing to work on that. This time, the Liberals and Conservatives elected a lot of women. There are more women in the House of Commons.

I think we can keep working on that, but there are a number of other aspects we could work on, such as better representation of women on boards of directors. We introduced a bill to that effect during the last Parliament and we would like to bring that bill back during this Parliament.

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[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there certainly is no dispute about the value of pay equity, but it sounds now like the NDP is calling for major additional administrative processes where the state effectively assesses the value of work in the private sector. The member has talked about a model where there is a state-run points-based system to say what the value of work is.

That is very different from the way wages are generally set in the private sector. They are based on the value of work that is assessed by the marketplace and by the employer.

Therefore, while we share a belief in the principle, does the member not think there is a better way of achieving the same objective than having government assess the value of work in every case? Does she not think that would impose very high practical costs on businesses and, frankly, make it harder for them to create jobs in the first place?

• (1250)

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Mr. Speaker, it is a bit of a stretch to say that there is too much bureaucracy when we are trying to fix a problem that affects 50% of the population.

Furthermore, I participated in the pay equity process at Pointe-à-Callière, a museum of archaeology and history I worked at. The government does not impose the process. We created our own weighting system, in which points were awarded for each criterion. The employer created a pay equity committee to do so, and the union and the employer worked together on it. We set the value of the points ourselves. In Quebec, the government does not set the criteria; it proposes a framework, which each company customizes.

I think that answers my colleague's questions.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we agree with the proposal, with the exception of one aspect that is fundamentally unfair. I would like to know what the member for Hochelaga thinks about this.

Does she agree with the democratic principle that all citizens have the right to be fairly represented in the House? That is not the case now, because the opposition parties, including the NDP, refuse to acknowledge the Bloc Québécois or the Green Party of Canada as recognized parties, on the basis of completely arbitrary criteria.

Regardless of the party line, which I realize is difficult to get around, does the member think that members of all the parties, who represent the public, should have the right to fair representation on the pay equity committee?

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Mr. Speaker, I would love to hear my Bloc Québécois colleague's suggestions, and I completely agree with him, if it were not for the rules of the House of Commons, which state that a party that is not recognized cannot have seats on a committee. There are all kinds of other ways to proceed. They can send us their suggestions and can testify. If we hold public consultations, they can certainly participate in those. There are many other ways to proceed that would enable them to share their thoughts.

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to discuss equity in the House, because it is a subject of great concern to me. People often tend to confuse equality and equity, and therefore I will take the time to clarify these two terms.

Equality means that two people doing the same work earn the same pay. Naturally, it would be illegal to pay a female nurse less than a male nurse if they were doing the exact same job. We no longer need to fight for equality. Most collective agreements provide protection for employees in this regard.

Equity means that two similar jobs are compensated in a similar manner. Here, the problem is that there is still work to do even though there have been some settlements. Let us compare a nurse who works in an aboriginal community to a police officer. We can say that these two jobs are comparable in that they require the same level of education. In Quebec, both jobs require a college diploma. Furthermore, both these jobs are demanding and have a fairly high level of responsibility. Thus, we can say that these two jobs are equivalent.

However, although pay equity settlements may restore the pay balance between some jobs, over time, negotiations and pay raises may create a new pay imbalance. That is why work on pay equity is ongoing. It is important to always be asking ourselves questions in this regard in order to ensure that pay equity is not lost over time, even if it was achieved for a certain period.

In 2013, the wage gap between equivalent jobs was the highest it has been in 10 years, mainly because women's average hourly wage increased by only 0.7% while men's average hourly wage increased by 2.2%. For every hour worked, men earned an average of \$2.91 more than women.

Despite the efforts to reduce this imbalance, wage gaps still exist. The main reason is that, unfortunately, there is a high concentration of women in a small number of low-paying job groups. The fact is that women are more likely than men to make arrangements to balance paid and unpaid work. Unfortunately, women often end up losing out.

It is important to understand that the intention of the NDP's motion to create a committee on this issue is to have concrete and binding work done. When a committee is created, it has to report on the work done on a daily basis. Since people are able to read the minutes of all committee meetings, committee members are required to carry out the work they have been asked to do.

There is also a participatory aspect to committees. We in the NDP do not believe that the study of pay equity must be confined to the government and its officials. We believe that all parliamentarians from all political parties must be involved in the cause of pay equity and, more generally, in the cause of women.

Let us therefore support the work of a committee that will be made up of members from all recognized parties and provided with mechanisms to allow the participation of parties that are not officially recognized in the House. I would point out that any member of the House may attend committee meetings, unless those meetings are conducted in camera. Apart from working meetings, the meetings of such a committee will be conducted publicly.

● (1255)

Any member may appear at and attend the entire meeting with no problem, even if the person is not an official member of the committee. There is a way to speak with the parties in order to have documents tabled. The rules of the House provide for important mechanisms that allow all members to participate. This is an essential point.

Now, this is also a participatory committee because it reaches out to the entire population. People who are interested in testifying and who believe they have something to contribute can contact the political parties and the Speaker of the House to ask to appear as witnesses. If their testimony cannot be accepted for various reasons, for example, if they cannot testify because of the time frames involved or because of a conflict with the committee schedule, they can decide to make a submission on the topic being discussed.

The committee is designed to be participatory. It will reach out to the population as a whole, rather than place the work on pay equity solely on the shoulders of a minister and her officials, something that would not be beneficial. This is precisely why we want a committee. It is to ensure that everyone can participate and work effectively.

I would like to point out that, unfortunately, Canada is well down the list of developed countries in the area of pay equity. According to the World Economic Forum, Canada ranks 80th out of 145 countries in this regard. Accordingly, since we are so far down the list, a pay equity committee is really a good way of ensuring that we make progress. We heard the Prime Minister say in Davos that he was a feminist. By agreeing to support the NDP motion, when the vote is taken tomorrow, he will show that he truly cares about feminist interests. In addition, his support would show that he clearly understands the inclusive nature of the motion and that, when it comes to improving the living conditions of women, it is important to bring everyone together, to work as a team, to avoid partisanship and to really bring solutions to the table. It is also time to take meaningful action. I believe we are at that point now. After all, this is 2016. It is important to see to it that pay equity is finally recognized as a right.

We also have to realize that public policy does not have the same impact on women as it has on men. We must take that into account when we make our decisions. We sometimes have to ensure that we push harder and make meaningful progress. Sometimes, when we support a relaxed approach we fail to achieve concrete results.

As we know, women make up about 50% of the population. However, there are always cases where women do not achieve equality. When it comes to representativeness on boards of directors or in various bodies to which people are appointed, or when it comes to public policy, we do not appoint women to those positions, although there are competent women. We really have to adopt policies that will bring about meaningful action. If we wait for things

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to happen by themselves, we will not succeed. We have to have the political will to change things and put clear policies in place.

It is high time we balanced women's job-related responsibilities and family life, to ensure that things are much more egalitarian and equitable for half the population and that jobs that fall under federal jurisdiction, whether they are in the public or private sector, remain attractive for women.

● (1300)

They have to be able to choose their job voluntarily and dedicate themselves fully to it. Society will then go forward without losing sight of the pay equity issue, so that wins do not turn into losses in a few years and we do not lose what we have gained after so much effort.

[*English*]

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, going through the election campaign I did not hear anything, not one issue, come up with respect to pay equity. I did not hear anything in terms of the Conservative plan on pay equity. Yet today, in the context of this motion, we see as part of this motion a backhanded slap at the Conservative Party. There is not one member on this side who does not agree with pay equity and equal work for equal value.

I will ask the member this. Why would her party not consider removing, as was proposed by the member for South Surrey—White Rock and the member for Sarnia—Lambton, any reference in section (c) to the Conservative Party? I would also ask, if this issue has been dealt with so much by the status of women committee and there are opportunities for Canadians to go in front of that committee, why we are doing this again?

● (1305)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, I would first like to tell my colleague that he may not have followed my personal election campaign, since I am sure that in that campaign, I spoke about women's issues at some length. It is unfortunate that he did not follow my election campaign. I realize that there were many local campaigns, but I can assure him that it was discussed during the election campaign.

With regard to the committee, we do not want it to be just a study by the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. We really want the committee to focus on the pay equity issue and do concrete work on the subject. We believe that this mandate is important enough and broad enough to occupy a committee for some time. We do not want it to be a single study that will take up two or three meetings of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. We believe that the issue is important enough for people to study the matter for an appreciable length of time. That is why we are requesting a special committee.

That said, if the member believes that this motion does not require the attention it deserves, that is very unfortunate. Personally, however, I am convinced that we need to study this issue for a sufficiently long period of time. Although we had achieved equity in some occupations, there have unfortunately been setbacks over the years, because wage increases have not adhered to the equity principle.

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Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the NDP member for her comments.

Our government has also clearly indicated that it wants to make significant progress in closing the wage gap between men and women in Canada. Our government is introducing a new policy to reform pay equity for public sector employees.

What can we, as members of Parliament, do in our work to reinforce the significant progress that we all want to see in the private sector?

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, the first thing to do would obviously be to support our motion. This committee will give all members an opportunity to take part. As I said, all members can assist in a committee's work, and it can be done at the same time as the work that the minister is doing on the issue of pay equity.

The committee will allow a much broader and more participatory effort by all members, and the minister will work on the matters that fall within her purview. The two things can be done in parallel. However, the committee is really very important. I therefore urge my colleague to support the establishment of this committee, and perhaps she will have an opportunity to sit on the committee. We will be able to have worthwhile discussions there.

[English]

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to participate in this important debate on pay equity.

This side of the House supports the principle of equal pay for work of equal value. I am proud to be part of a government that recognizes the importance of pay equity and introduced amendments to the Canadian Human Rights Act to enshrine this important principle in law in 1977.

We are living in a time of change. Women in Canada today are seizing opportunities and reaching for their dreams. Whether we look at women in post-secondary education, women in the legal profession, or women in business, in almost every sector and field of endeavour women are excelling, making a contribution, and fulfilling their personal goals and potential. They are doing so in greater numbers than ever before. They are creating jobs, they are entrepreneurs, and they are innovators.

Yet women continue to comprise a majority of employees in many low-wage sectors. Closing the gap on pay equity is but one of the solutions needed.

Some further issues that persist and need to be addressed include the overrepresentation of women in part-time work, workplace bias and discrimination, and women being passed over for work that is obsoletely viewed as non-traditional or not feminine.

The reality is that women have the greater share of unpaid work related to caregiving for children and sick family members.

Making progress on this issue is important, because today's economy is changing rapidly. Women contribute \$130 billion

annually to our economy and make up nearly half of our workforce, with many also being the primary earners for their families. Their earnings drive essential economic decisions, including decisions about quality of housing, educational attainment for children, child care, housing, and food. Their income has a long-term effect on women's ability to save and prepare for retirement. When women are shortchanged, their personal financial stability suffers, and their families suffer.

Women's earnings impact other sectors of the economy and local communities, since lower pay means that fewer dollars are spent in local businesses or invested in new ventures.

For these reasons, pay equity is important for our nation, the broader economic security of our families, and the growth of the middle class.

There is room for improvement. A widely debated contention about the wage gap is that it is attributable to women's choice to put family ahead of work. Research has shown that there is a motherhood penalty for many women who may stay at home for a period to raise their families or because of other biases about working mothers. However, it does not seem that men face the same challenges. I believe that we need to look at this further.

We also know that while female labour force participation rates are close to those of men, the glass ceiling that blocks women's advancement in many fields still persists.

Let us take a moment to look at women's representation around us in this chamber. The number of women in Parliament is still below the critical mass level of 30%, which the United Nations indicates is the target needed for women to meaningfully influence decision-making processes. In fact, Canada currently ranks 30th of 145 countries in the World Economic Forum's global gender gap index when we look at the representation of women in leadership roles in this country.

Some groups of women are also overrepresented among those living on low incomes, a trend that has not changed in the last decade. For example, using one measure, 36% of single mothers and 30% of aboriginal women live on low incomes.

● (1310)

In addition, we also know that women with disabilities, immigrant women, and visible minority women are more likely to experience low incomes. That is why increasing women's economic security is a priority of our government.

Business of Supply

We recognize the importance of helping women and men balance work and family responsibilities, and of assisting vulnerable groups in achieving greater economic independence and security. Therefore, we are taking action with a wide range of initiatives that will help women meet the opportunities and the challenges available to them in Canada today. Our government is taking action to enhance women's economic security through improved access to child care; introduction of the new tax-free and income-tied Canada child benefit to provide support to those who need help the most, including single parents and low-income families; working to increase women's representation in key growth sectors of the economy, business, and political leadership; and investments in home care and palliative care.

Our government has already made historical changes by ensuring that our cabinet is 50% female and 50% male. This is already a huge step in our commitment to ensure that women are in positions of leadership and decision-making roles.

These and other government initiatives that address women's economic security mean real results for women and girls today and in the future. They mean concrete, lasting change. They mean increased opportunities for women to more fully participate in the life of their communities and their nation, and to enjoy lives that are financially secure and free from poverty.

As we look to the future and to ensuring that Canada continues to be one of the most prosperous countries in the world, we need to strengthen women's participation in the labour force and to support their life course choices. There are many elements to economic growth; the most essential is a high-performing workforce. Let us win this fight for equality. As was the message of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 in Beijing over 20 years ago, the same message still rings true: Human rights are women's rights and women's rights are human rights.

Our future prosperity as a nation is closely tied to the prosperity of women and their families.

• (1315)

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the hon. member on her position as Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women. As I said earlier, I had an opportunity to serve on that committee. It was one of the most rewarding experiences I have had as a parliamentarian and we were able to accomplish a great deal on that committee: STEM projects, attracting women to skilled trades, and those kinds of initiatives.

This is a very important issue we are all talking about today, I think all of us would agree that this is a topic worth discussing, but I would ask why does the member feel it is important to form an entire new piece of bureaucracy, a new committee, when I would think that this would fit perfectly under the purview of the status of women committee that already exists.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to having gender equality and gender parity in every aspect of the workforce, whether it be high-level or low-level positions. This is our commitment. We cannot get ahead by leaving half the population behind, so it is very important. It is not just our government or our party that should be making this effort; it should be every single party in the House to ensure gender parity.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General's report, released this morning, suggested that concrete policies are needed. It is clear that the Conservatives' commitment to gender-based analysis was simply non-existent over the last term of government, so very little progress was made here since the last audit in 2009. Six departments that had committed to implementing the government-wide gender-based analysis departmental action plan implemented no gender-based analysis at all.

Twenty years of encouragement from the Status of Women ministry, encouraging departments to take steps to integrate gender-based analysis into their ministries' work, has not had the effect we needed.

Can we expect the Minister of Status of Women to take an active role in overseeing the implementation of proactive legislation as laid out in our motion today?

• (1320)

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Mr. Speaker, that is a very important question and it is very necessary to address.

We welcomed the Auditor General's report on gender-based analysis in the federal government. Our government believes in accountability for our obligations to ensure that meaningful gender-based analysis informs our policies, programs, and legislation. We are committed to ensuring that federal departments are conducting gender-based analysis that has been required of them for the past 20 years. Use of gender-based analysis is a shared responsibility across all federal departments and agencies. Status of Women Canada is ensuring gender is considered in all government initiatives.

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the spirit of what the President of the Treasury Board was saying this morning, regarding having a less biased and all-party approach to this problem, I wonder if the member would consider putting to our colleagues in the NDP the question of whether we could delete the words "which was eliminated by the previous Conservative government in 2009;" from part (c) of the motion? I do not see what it adds necessarily. The remainder of part (c) is clear, and I do not think there is any need to call out other parties with which we want to get involved in furthering the rights of all people.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the comment that we do not need to send an invitation for other parties to get involved. This is an issue that affects every single person in this country, in this Parliament. We will welcome anybody's views and opinions to be shared with us so we can make meaningful legislation.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to rise in the House of Commons today to talk about pay equity in the federal public service. Let me say at the outset that pay equity is of fundamental importance to this government, and that is why we are supporting this motion.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

It is the government's view that women who work in the public service of Canada—actually wherever they work in our country—should receive equal pay for work of equal value.

[English]

This is of fundamental importance to me personally as well. Forty years ago, I participated in consciousness-raising meetings at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia, which was well known for challenging the status quo. I just want to take this moment to congratulate Simon Fraser University on its 50th anniversary this year, 50 years of growth and achievement.

In 2016, women expect to be full participants in the economic, social, and democratic life of Canada. That is why one of the first actions of our Prime Minister was to appoint an equal number of men and women to his cabinet. This government is also committed to ensuring that pay equity extends to the cabinet table, an important signal that this government respects and values the full contribution of women in our society.

[Translation]

Women are fairly well represented in the Canadian federal public service, since they make up 55% of staff. They also occupy 46% of executive positions. Although this is not yet complete parity, it represents substantial progress since 1983, when they accounted for less than 5% of the executive group.

[English]

There is much more to be done to ensure that senior levels in the federal public service and government appointments to federal crown corporations and agencies reflect the full diversity of Canada. Our government remains committed to a public service that reflects today's society, and we will work to that objective.

We want a public service that is diverse, inclusive, innovative, and representative of all of Canada. We want today's public servants to be a beacon for future public service employees.

● (1325)

[Translation]

Consider the graduates of our colleges and universities. We want them to regard the Canadian public service not only as a place to build a fine career, but also as a place to contribute to building a better country. We want a public service that is diverse, innovative and representative of all of Canada. We also want Canadian public servants to be proud of the work they do, and we want them to know that the government fully respects their work and their role.

[English]

We have demonstrated that our approach to government will be different from the previous government.

I want to mention that in a previous political role as the minister of management services for the Province of British Columbia, I had the privilege of being responsible for the B.C. Public Service Agency, which managed 28,000 civil servants in our province. It was an amazing experience to see the professionalism, dedication, and capability of our civil servants.

Our government's approach to governing is collaborative. We firmly believe that Canadians can achieve greater results when working together rather than dividing into ideological camps. Canadians want a change in the way government deals with our partners in this great federation. This means working collaboratively and respectfully with unions and other partners.

[Translation]

The government is determined to restore respect for the public service, as well as respect, civility and good faith in labour relations. The government is also determined to bring about pay equity in the public service. We will rely on collaboration to ensure that the employer and the unions resolve these crucial issues together in a productive manner.

[English]

Let me take a moment to describe the way the public service had addressed pay equity in the past. In the past the pay equity system in the federal public service could be reactive, lengthy, costly, and adversarial. Action to address problems was taken only after complaints were filed.

The many years it could take to resolve complaints have taken their toll on resources, on our labour relations environment, and on women employees. The new approach is required in order to ensure that pay equity is pursued in ways that are balanced and responsible, and this is what our government will do.

[Translation]

Canada is recognized for its respect for human rights, whether in relation to fair compensation, working hours, or working conditions, including parental leave and occupational health and safety, and the government will continue to fight to protect human rights in our country.

The government understands the role that women play in the federal public service, and sees that role as a driver of positive change in Canada and in the world.

[English]

It is now 34 years since the bill of rights was entrenched in our Constitution of Canada, the bill that concerned the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Women in the public service help deliver thousands of high-quality programs and services to Canadians, and help promote Canadian values and interests on the world stage. This government has also clearly stated that we want to make meaningful progress on reducing the wage gap between men and women across the country. Women in Canada still earn 23% less than men, and that gap is even greater for indigenous women, women of colour, transgendered women, and women living with disabilities. This cannot be allowed to continue.

Past governments have missed critical opportunities to take action on the pay gap. There is no reason why women of equivalent education and seniority should earn less than men. We are committed to closing that gap.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

In conclusion, I want to repeat that the government is determined to protect the right to an equal wage for work of equal value, and that it will seek out the best way to establish and maintain this equality.

[English]

We are committed to consulting with unions and stakeholders to deal with pay equity in a balanced and responsible way, and to ensure women's right to equal pay for work of equal value.

• (1330)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to rise for the first time today on the opposition motion, which I support. I thank the member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith for bringing the motion forward.

My question for the member for Vancouver Quadra relates to a point made earlier by one of her colleagues, a parliamentary secretary, that the number of women represented in the House of Commons did not reflect the full participation of women in Canadian society. I think all parties have at various times said that they wished to see more women parliamentarians elected.

We have an opportunity in the upcoming review of electoral processes and electoral reform under the responsibility of the Minister of Democratic Institutions. However, it is very clear that systems of government and democracies that vote by proportional representation have much higher levels of female participation in their parliaments. Could the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra comment on that aspect of improving equity in Canadian society?

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, it is indeed unfortunate that Canada lags so far behind many other nations on this metric of gender equality in Parliament, and we have to do better.

The member is right to point out that electoral reform is an opportunity to shift that imbalance of gender inequity in Parliament. I am confident that the parliamentary committee, made up of members from all parties, will have that as one of the things it looks for as it discusses the options, hears about other systems in other countries, and considers what might be the right electoral model for our vast and unique country.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, gender equality is central to the concerns of the Quebec population. This is especially true of pay equity, including in the public service. However the proposal of a special committee, by virtue of its form, raises another injustice. The million citizens represented by the members of the Bloc Québécois, like the hundreds of thousands of citizens represented by the member of the Green Party, cannot be represented on this committee. Consider that it is sufficient for a committee member to oppose our taking the floor for us to be reduced to silence.

The Canadian Parliament is one of the last democratic parliaments to not recognize all of the parties represented in it. This therefore creates two classes of members.

Is the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra in favour of a representative of the Bloc Québécois and a representative of the

Green Party being allowed to sit on this committee? After all, to repeat the now-famous saying, this is 2016.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from the Bloc Québécois for asking that question.

I also wish to congratulate him on his party's support for pay equity for women in the public service and women's equality in general. I am sure that the Bloc Québécois members will find many ways to support this issue and achieve this very important goal in our public life.

[English]

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the speech of the hon. parliamentary secretary was very intelligent and well reasoned.

There is a provision in the motion for a special committee to hold hearings across the country. Could the member speak a little on the benefit of such a committee and does she have ideas on where it should visit?

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his deep interest in the issue of pay equity and women's equality in his community and throughout his work.

One of the key principles our government is bringing to the table is openness, transparency and collaboration, which means not making decisions behind closed doors and announcing them on some international stage. Rather, we will work and consult with Canadians, with the labour movement, and with the public service.

I am confident that in this process of developing a framework for the effective application of pay equity, Canadians will be fully consulted about whatever mechanism it may take to do that.

• (1335)

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Salaberry—Suroît.

In 1977, Canada enacted its first pay equity legislation following its ratification of the International Labour Organization Convention No. 100, Equal Remuneration Convention. It stipulates that there shall be equal pay for work of equal value for men and women.

Today is 2016, 39 years later. How have we done as a nation in closing the wage gap between men and women? I am sad to say that among the OECD countries, Canada ranks 30 out of 34 countries. In other words, Canada is among the worst in the developed countries in addressing pay equity, this despite the fact that section 11 of the Canadian Human Rights Act states that it is discriminatory to pay men and women different wages for work of equal value.

Business of Supply

In fact, in 2000, a pay equity task force was established. After extensive consultation in 2004, 113 recommendations were made stemming from the work of the task force. Key areas that needed changes included legislative changes, collective bargaining, oversight and enforcement. To the dismay of many of the stakeholders who participated, who put their time and effort into this work, from the advocates to the women's rights activists, to trade unionists, to people who believed in the basic principle of fairness, feminists, and some have died, to fight for the cause of equality for all women, in many ways the work of the task force was for naught.

The Liberal government of the day, under the leadership of Paul Martin, failed to implement most of the recommendations. To make matters worse, in 2009, the Conservative government passed the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act. What did this act do? I am sad to say that the Conservatives actually put in measures that made it more difficult for women in the public sector to achieve pay equity.

In one fell swoop, section 11 of the Canadian Human Rights Act was negated. Pay equity is no longer a human right, but rather an issue for collective bargaining. The number of workers required to consider an occupation "female predominate" was increased to 70%. The criteria to determine whether jobs were of equal value included "market forces". Enforcement fell to individual complainants and a fine of \$50,000 was to be imposed if any union provided support to the women faced with this inequity.

True to form, the Conservatives made these changes as part of a budget implementation bill. The Liberals at the time voted in favour of the bill. When challenged on this point, Michael Ignatieff, the then leader of the federal Liberal Party, said, "We have made it clear that we are not pursuing an amendment strategy.... Sometimes we have to hold our nose", thus making it clear to Canadians that this fundamental human right for women was simply not worth fighting for. Never mind that Canada ratified the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1976, which requires "remuneration which provides all workers, as a minimum, with...fair wages and equal remuneration for work of equal value without distinction of any kind."

Let us ignore the fact that Canada also ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1981, which recognizes women's "right to equal remuneration, including benefits, and to equal treatment in respect of work of equal value, as well as equality of treatment in the evaluation of the quality of work."

● (1340)

Let us pretend for a minute that Canada did not have section 11 of the Canadian Human Rights Act, which states:

It is a discriminatory practice for an employer to establish or maintain differences in wages between male and female employees employed in the same establishment who are performing work of equal value.

Let us imagine for a minute how we might feel if we were told that the value of our work was less than that of our male counterparts simply because we are women. This is not just academic or theoretical; the consequences for Canadian women are real, and they shall not be forgotten. The reality is that women who are working full time, year round, in Canada are making only about 75% of what

men earn. This is the case even in predominantly female occupations, such as teaching, nursing, and administration. Women earn less than men, and the wage gap is even bigger for aboriginal, racialized, and immigrant women with university degrees.

In Vancouver East, the riding I am so proud and honoured to represent, I see many women struggling. Many of them are living in poverty, many of their children are living in poverty, and they retire in poverty. The irony of all of this is that economists estimate that closing the gap would boost Canada's GDP.

This is not just a social issue or an economic issue, but a human rights issue. The implications are far-reaching. There is absolutely no excuse for tolerating this inequality anymore. As members of the House, we should be using all of the legislative tools we have available to correct the situation. The pay disparity is an obstacle to the financial independence of women.

The RBC estimates that in Canada, closing the gap in participation rates over the next two decades would boost GDP by 4% in 2032.

The impact of pay equity is not just felt by women but by the entire nation. With today's motion, we have choices to make: do we move forward and recognize pay equity as a right or sit on our hands and watch yet another generation of women be treated unfairly and unjustly; will we act on the recommendations of the 2004 pay equity task force report or do we continue to violate our own Canadian Human Rights Act; and, will we restore the right to pay equity in the public service that was eliminated by the Conservatives in 2009 or will we soundly reject economic discrimination in the workplace for women?

New Democrats stand firm in our belief that pay equity is a fundamental right. We have a long tradition of fighting for this right. This motion calls for an investment in gender equality. It is time for real action. Words or good intentions will do no good for the women who are living in precarious conditions, the immigrant women who are starting a new life and home in Canada, the single mothers who are accumulating low-paying part-time jobs, and the women in urban areas who are losing job opportunities because affordable child care is out of reach.

I urge all government MPs to support this motion. Let us get the job done once and for all.

● (1345)

Mr. Arnold Chan (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate and thank the member for Vancouver East for her contribution to this debate. We can see from her passion that she will make incredible contributions to this House.

On this side of the House, members can see that we have no substantive disagreement with the motion before the House. Rather, I have more of a comment.

Business of Supply

I happen to sit on the procedure and House affairs committee. One of the only concerns I have with this motion is the decision to refer this matter to a special committee as opposed to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. Does the hon. member have a particular reason why the New Democratic caucus has decided to proceed by way of a special committee as opposed to having it referred back to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his kind comment. My spirit is lifted when I hear that the government MPs will be supporting the motion. It is more than time to move forward on this. It is unfortunate, though, that it was not done before by the previous administration. We can imagine, had it been done, how far along we would be in addressing the real issues of pay inequality for women and what that would mean substantively for the people on the ground who are struggling each and every day because of this inequality.

On the question about the special committee, I support the motion and the need for a special committee. It allows for the range of things that need to be done, for people to travel the country to different provinces and parts of the nation, to invite input, and to ensure that we bring in all the necessary measures. I hope the recommendations stemming from that work will be adopted by the House, with budgetary support from the government for their implementation, so that we will no longer have to stand in the House and talk about how important this work is but would simply know that it has been enacted and is—

The Deputy Speaker: Order please.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate a fellow British Columbian on both her electoral victory last fall and her speech and intervention today.

Obviously, there has been a lot of agreement in the House on this particular issue. I heard a number of times the Conservative as well as Liberal members raise this question. We all feel very strongly about the issue. We all want to seek a resolution, but the question is, why create a new committee rather than refer the issue to a current standing committee?

I have sat on the status of women committee. It has institutional knowledge. It has connections. The clerks will have at their disposal witness lists of stakeholders who could come forward. That particular committee can travel. The time, energy, and set of costs, as well as populating the new list of committee members required—we know that we have had some issues with getting our committees started—would slow down what is a very good measure. Therefore, why does the NDP persist in slowing down the process when we have a standing committee, in the status of women, that is ready to go and whose mandate this clearly falls under?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Speaker, it was the Conservatives who slowed this work down. It was the Conservatives who brought in regressive changes that set the clock back for women in their pursuit of pay equality in the workplace.

The special committee would ensure that this is a priority item for the government. It would do the necessary work. With any luck, if

all the words of the many people who have spoken today ring true, we will have this work done and legislation would be brought in to address the issue of pay equality for women and we would enact the recommendations of the task force that were already made back in 2004. We would move forward to make sure that we do not miss any other work that needs to be done for the women of tomorrow.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise in the House to deliver my first speech on such an important issue for all of us, pay equity.

Since this is the first time that I have risen in the House in this Parliament, I want to take a moment to thank the people of Salaberry—Suroît for electing me. I especially want to thank everyone who worked so hard to help me once again be the member of Parliament for the riding that I adore. I am talking about my wonderful volunteers, as well as my team: Jean-Marc, Isabelle, Glen, and Julie. I also thank my family and friends, as well as the two loves of my life, Mathieu and Mila.

The people chose me to represent them here in the House of Commons for a second time. Everyone who accepts such a mandate knows that it is their responsibility to be a voice for everyone in their riding. This is a serious responsibility and an important role. Giving a voice to those who have none will be my priority.

Today, I am here to talk about pay equity on behalf of all the women of Salaberry—Suroît. Many of them are still excluded from economic equality or live on low incomes, and some of them are poor. I am also speaking on behalf of all the single mothers who struggle every day to give their children what they need. I represent the voices of thousands of women today.

Some say that we have achieved gender equality, that things have changed, and that we should stop talking about it. Unfortunately, they are wrong, so I would like them to listen closely to what I have to say.

I would like to paint a picture of the women in my riding using data from an economic profile created by an organization called Relais-femmes for the Vallée-du-Haut-Saint-Laurent conference of regional elected officials. In my region, 25% of families are single-parent families. Of those, 75% have a female head of household. The average employment income of women is \$32,000 per year, but that of men is \$46,000 per year. That is a difference of \$14,000 just because they are women. At least, that is what society tells them.

On average, women living in the Vallée-du-Haut-Saint-Laurent earn 70% of what men earn, and 12% of them live in poverty, whereas 10% of the men live in poverty.

I will not bludgeon my colleagues with any more statistics, but these numbers are similar across Canada. Those who say that we have achieved gender equality are wrong. We still have a lot of work to do.

Business of Supply

Every day, organizations in my riding help women who are stretched to their limit. These “do-it-all moms” hold down several part-time jobs, take their kids to school, do the laundry and the cooking, and take care of their kids and their aging parents. Of course they have a hard time making ends meet. How does society support them? They sure do not get much from the federal government.

Since 1989, the Salaberry-de-Valleyfield women's centre, Centre D'Main de Femmes, has been providing services to help women in need. The centre's coordinator, Jacynthe Dubien, says that women end up in poverty as a result of systemic barriers.

She said that having to hold down several precarious, part-time jobs penalizes women. If they quit their job to take another that offers more hours, but then end up unemployed, their EI benefits get cut because they had several part-time jobs and not enough accumulated hours.

Ms. Dubien also said that inequality emerges very early on in young women's lives. Often girls drop out of school because of family responsibilities. Less education leads to lower-paying jobs. With her first pregnancy, a woman has to temporarily withdraw from the labour market to take care of her child, and when she returns to work her salary is sometimes lower. This creates gaps, according to Ms. Dubien.

This is unacceptable because women do this work in order to give the best they can to their children, the future generation, the future society. In 2016, it is absurd that their pay is cut when they return to work, that they are told their work is worth less because they devoted their time to their family.

• (1350)

If women have the same qualifications, why do they earn less than men? Is it simply because they are women? That is not a reason.

We are still far from achieving pay equity. Not only are we far from it, but we have taken a step backwards. In Canada, the status of women is not improving simply because the government is standing in the way of change. The pay equity task force made 113 recommendations in 2004 with a view to improving pay equity. That was 12 years ago. What did the Liberal government in power at the time do? It did not implement any of the recommendations. Even worse, in 2009 the Conservatives passed the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act, with the support of the Liberals, which made it more difficult to achieve equity in the public service.

How did that make it more difficult? By setting the threshold for female predominance in a profession at 70%—the principle of 50% plus one never applied here—by making pay equity a collective bargaining issue and not a right—Canada refused to consider it a right when it signed a treaty that I will discuss a little later—by forcing women to file individual complaints, by imposing a \$50,000 fine on unions that helped their members file complaints, and by prohibiting recourse to the Canadian Human Rights Commission. That was in 2009, and we say that we live in a democratic country. So much for that.

It is disgusting that nothing has changed. We sit in a Parliament in which women are encouraged to run for office, and we are talking

about work-life balance, which the Prime Minister boasts about championing.

This government says that gender equality is important. The Prime Minister says he is proud of having formed a gender-balanced cabinet. That is good. I commend him on this initiative, and I am very happy that a government has finally understood that women and men do the same job in Parliament. However, for there to be a serious, fundamental change, we need to see more than female ministers. The government will have to make decisions and take meaningful action. Is this government prepared to do so and to take this action?

The motion by my colleague from Nanaimo—Ladysmith is an opportunity to take action. It is possible for Parliament and the government to take action. Will they do so, or will they continue to impede women's equality?

Yesterday morning, the Vallée-du-Haut-Saint-Laurent conference of regional elected officials organized a day of debate on gender equality. Louis-André Lussier, an advisor on equality, social economy, and solidarity, said that small gains had been made, but that equality was still a long way away.

According to Mr. Lussier, employers have to look at systemic discrimination in wages. Mr. Lussier notes that some companies have examined the pay differential between positions dominated by women and positions dominated by men, but they did not consult with employees. It would therefore be useful to improve this exercise and, why not, pass legislation to prohibit racial discrimination.

Pay equity is not a luxury; it is a right. Equality is enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, but in practice, women have still not achieved equality with men. Canada claims to be a democracy under the rule of law and to have laws to protect women's rights, but the most basic right, women's social and economic right, is violated every day.

The World Economic Forum puts Canada in 80th place in the area of pay equity. It ranks 80th out of 145 countries, even though we are one of the mostly highly developed and wealthiest countries in the world. It is a poor performance for an OECD country. Nevertheless, Canada signed the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which endorses equal pay for equal work. In 1981, Canada ratified the international Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

• (1355)

When will this government take action to ensure that Canada fulfills its commitments and respects its citizens?

As Louis-André Lussier, from the conference of regional elected officials, said, we now need the political will to make equality a priority. Here is a possible solution: stop taking women's social and family work for granted.

Jacynthe Dubien, from the Centre D'Main des femmes, believes that the government should pass legislation to support women when they are taking care of children or serving as informal caregivers, and to make it easier for them to enter the labour market after maternity leave by developing federal programs that meet their needs.

I will conclude by saying that I hope all members—

• (1400)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Time has expired.

The hon. member for Salaberry—Suroît will have five minutes for questions and comments when the House resumes debate on this motion.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

SHEFFORD

Mr. Pierre Breton (Shefford, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my riding is home to the Grand Prix Ski-doo de Valcourt, the biggest snowmobile race event in the world.

Valcourt, the birthplace of the snowmobile, first hosted this event in 1983. With 1,000 athletes from around the world, 250 volunteers and plenty of family activities, this hugely spectacular event will take place from February 12 to 14.

This winter, the riding of Shefford will also host two big hockey tournaments, the 42nd Waterloo National Pee-Wee Tournament and the 45th Granby International Bantam Tournament. Teams from all over Canada, the United States, and Europe play in these tournaments.

I myself participated in these tournaments when I was young, so I know that they teach young people discipline and healthy competition. I would also like to point out that these events, which would not be possible without dedicated volunteers, also generate major economic spinoffs for our region.

* * *

[*English*]

HOCKEY DAY IN CANADA

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week, the city of Kamloops, British Columbia is proud to host Hockey Day in Canada. Hockey is a key part of Canada's identity and the identity of Kamloops, with over 86 teams in our city.

Rogers Media said that we were the perfect setting for the 16th annual nationwide hockey celebration, and I could not agree more. Many residents have been working hard to bring this incredible event to life. We will be joined by Don Cherry; Ron MacLean; former Canucks captain, Trevor Linden; and my favourite visitor, Lord Stanley's cup itself.

We have world-class facilities and athletes and a beautifully rich sports history. Later this year, in April, we will also be welcoming hockey fans for the women's world championship.

This is our favourite game. Come celebrate Hockey Day in Canada, hockey day in Kamloops.

Statements by Members

HON. T. ALEX HICKMAN

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to commemorate the life of the Hon. T. Alex Hickman, who died last month at the age of 90.

A proud native of Grand Bank, he served his province and his country with great distinction. First elected to the Newfoundland House of Assembly in 1966, he served as a minister in both the Smallwood and Morris cabinets. In 1979 he was appointed chief justice of the Newfoundland trial division, where he professionalized the system by which magistrates were selected and trained.

He chaired two royal commissions. The *Ocean Ranger* commission uncovered and changed forever a culture of lax safety procedures aboard Canada's oil rigs, and the Marshall commission recommended ways to ensure more equitable treatment of black and indigenous Canadians in the criminal justice system.

Mr. Hickman was named an Officer of the Order of Canada in 2003.

Canada is stronger because of his contributions. He was exceptional and will be greatly missed.

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GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, here is a lesson in classic Canadian economics. Have members ever noticed that when the price of a barrel of crude jumps on the international market, the price at the pumps goes up within seconds? Why is that? They say it is the input price of the commodity being reflected to the consumer.

When the price of a barrel drops, say 70%, what happens at the pumps? For people living in northern Ontario, the price remains high. Why is that? The answers get a little more vague. It is a lack of refining. It is the low value of the loonie. It is yada yada yada. Meanwhile, people in Timmins are paying about 20% more than in Toronto and about 35% more than in Regina.

It is hard-working families in the north who are subsidizing the refineries every time they have to go to work, and it is northern Ontario businesses that are taking the hit. I am pleased that the City of Timmins has stood up on this issue of gas fairness. I am inviting all northern municipalities to do the same, because we need to stand up for our residents who are being hosed at the pumps by big oil and gouged in their pocketbooks. In this time of economic downturn, how about a bit of fairness for hard-working Canadians?

* * *

[*Translation*]

XAVIER-TRISTAN PÉLOQUIN

Mr. Ramez Ayoub (Thérèse-De Blainville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with great sorrow that I rise to tell you that the community of Thérèse-De-Blainville has been in mourning for the past few weeks.

Statements by Members

Eight-year-old Xavier-Tristan Péloquin, whom many people affectionately knew as “le Capitaine”, passed away on January 6 after a courageous battle that lasted nearly three years. He had a type of cancer called neuroblastoma, which is more common in infants and young children.

For the past three years, our community mobilized to organize record-breaking blood drives, as well as major fundraising campaigns for the Canadian Cancer Society.

As we mark World Cancer Day later this week, I want to pay tribute to the memory of our dear Capitaine, who is now sailing calmer seas. I extend my condolences to his mother, Annick Deslongchamps, his father, Robert Péloquin, as well as his two brothers and his entire family.

* * *

● (1405)

[*English*]

DICK KIRKLAND

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with great sadness that I pay respect today to the passing of former Point Edward Mayor Dick Kirkland from my riding of Sarnia—Lambton.

Dick was born 83 years ago, one of very few citizens to actually possess a Point Edward village birth certificate. His community service spanned over 60 years in office.

In addition to bringing the Point Edward casino to his community, he was an avid sportsman who was inducted into the Sarnia Sports Hall of Fame for hockey and baseball. His support of the volunteer fire department, the fish hatchery, and the Tuscan Lodge is still celebrated today.

The positive impact brought to Point Edward and surrounding area by his lifelong service is truly a legacy that will live on.

May Dick rest in peace.

* * *

BON SOO WINTER CARNIVAL

Mr. Terry Sheehan (Sault Ste. Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I am honoured to stand in the House of Commons to wish the organizers, volunteers, and participants in this year's Bon Soo Winter Carnival the best of luck.

The first Bon Soo was held in 1964 as a way to celebrate and make the best of northern Ontario's cold winters. It was the brainchild of Sault Ste. Marie businessman Henry Bullock, and was named by then ten-year-old Donald Norman.

Over the years, Bon Soo has become a winter staple in Sault Ste. Marie. It is an opportunity for residents of our community to get together with their friends and family and enjoy winter activities, including ice slides, a winter playground, and as reported this weekend's *National Post*, a Polar bear swim.

As the member of Parliament for Sault Ste. Marie, I am delighted to have this opportunity to congratulate my community on the

opening of the Bon Soo Winter Carnival, which will begin on February 4 and last 10 days.

I invite all members of the House to visit my riding and enjoy Bon Soo.

* * *

ARCTIC INSPIRATION PRIZE

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the Rotary Club of Guelph's dedication to improving the lives of our northern neighbours through its project better hearing in education for northern youth.

Hearing is such an important sense, as it allows us to live and participate in life more fully without limitations. Without the ability to hear, it may often lead to feelings of isolation. Children in the Arctic region are 40% more likely to suffer hearing loss, a contributing factor to poor attendance at school, the ability to read, and interacting with other children.

Guelph audiologist Lynne McCurdy and the Rotary Club of Guelph were honoured with the Arctic Inspiration Prize, a contest for ideas that provide concrete action plans focusing on issues of critical importance in Canada's north.

On behalf of the people of Guelph, I would like to thank everyone involved for their hard work, generosity, and dedication in addressing this matter.

* * *

[*Translation*]

VALCARTIER VACATION VILLAGE

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to tell my colleagues that in my beautiful riding of Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier there is an iconic attraction that everyone should know about, the Valcartier Vacation Village. This not-to-be-missed attraction in the Quebec City region belongs to a daring entrepreneur named Guy Drouin, who is now working on a new project. He is investing \$65 million in a new tourist attraction that will allow visitors to enjoy a taste of summer all year long. An indoor water park and a luxury hotel will offer guests an unforgettable experience.

I think it is important to point out that Mr. Drouin's project is 100% privately funded, which proves that it is possible to succeed in business without the help of government. All it takes is some creativity, originality and a strong entrepreneurial spirit.

I would like to once again congratulate Mr. Drouin for his commitment and determination to build such an attraction in Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier. He developed a one-of-a-kind concept that is going to take shape in our community. Mr. Drouin is a man of vision who is helping to put our community on the map for the last 40 years.

● (1410)

Hon. Geoff Regan: The hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

[English]

BEDFORD INSTITUTE OF OCEANOGRAPHY

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commend the approximately 25 firefighters who responded Sunday to an intense fire at the Bedford Institute of Oceanography in Dartmouth. The fire started in the late afternoon and six crews of firefighters arrived quickly to face and extinguish the 20-foot flames.

The damage to BIO is extensive, but it would have been far worse if it were not for the prompt service of our firefighters.

I recently toured BIO with the Minister of Fisheries, Hunter Tootoo. We are lucky to have a modern oceanographic research—

The Speaker: Order, please. First, I would ask the hon. member to sit down. I remind the member, and I have already reminded members and also reminded staff members of members of Parliament, when they assist members in advising them on these statements, not to use proper names, but to refer to the ministers by their departments.

The member has two more seconds to finish his statement.

Mr. Darren Fisher: My apologies, Mr. Speaker. I think I can speak for all Canadians when I thank the firefighters who put their lives on the line to protect us every day. If it were not for them, we would have lost a very important research facility in Dartmouth.

* * *

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. Ahmed Hussen (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every February, Canadians mark Black History Month, an important annual celebration of the accomplishments of Canadians who traced their family heritage to Africa and Caribbean. The great sacrifices and tremendous contributions of black Canadians go back to the early beginnings of Canadian history and have helped to create the Canada of today.

We Canadians are bound together as a people by our shared belief in the principles of equality and fairness, and remain committed to working together to end discrimination and inequality.

This month, I encourage all Canadians within our three beautiful coasts to learn more about the important role that black Canadians have played and will continue to play in shaping the strong and prosperous Canada that we know and love.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today is Groundhog Day, and while some Canadians look for shadows, many others feel like Bill Murray in the movie of the same name. Last night, the Liberals voted against energy east, an infrastructure project which would grow our energy sector and create jobs across Canada.

Canadians, especially Calgarians, can be excused for having déjà vu. They remember the Prime Minister's father whose disastrous energy policies led to massive job losses and alienated western Canada for a generation.

Statements by Members

The economic downturn in the oil industry hurts all Canadians. Energy east is a shovel-ready project, which would ease this hardship. It deserves the government's support.

The Prime Minister had an opportunity to show leadership. Instead, we have years of Liberal-led economic uncertainty ahead of us.

* * *

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise today to recognize the importance of Black History Month in Canada, as well as in my riding of Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook.

African Nova Scotians are one of the founding populations of the province, as well as our country. Black loyalists fled the America Revolution to settle in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick between 1782 and 1785.

[Translation]

Canadians have been celebrating the black community's contribution to our province and our country for a long time now.

[English]

In my riding, the community of North Preston is the largest indigenous black community in Canada and also houses the largest black cultural centre. I ask all members to reflect on their contributions.

* * *

• (1415)

[Translation]

PYRRHOTITE

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the last election campaign, I often said that I had many opponents, but no enemies.

Accordingly, I would like to join the board of directors of the Coalition d'aide aux victimes de la pyrrhotite in recognizing the exceptional dedication of Liberal candidate Yvon Boivin, who spent six years defending the interests of victims of pyrrhotite.

I would also like to take this opportunity to reiterate my pledge to fully co-operate with Mr. Gélinas, the new president of the coalition, and his entire team. I applaud his approach of bringing all elected officials to the same table in order to resolve this issue.

Although I am still convinced that the NDP has the best proposal, I remain open to any proposed action that would provide the support that victims expect. It does not really matter to me who comes up with the best solution; what matters is that we quickly find a solution. Consequently, we believe that the upcoming budget will play an integral part in finding a solution given the commitments made by the Prime Minister when he was in Montreal.

Oral Questions

[English]

MOUNT RENSHAW AVALANCHE

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with a heavy heart that I rise today to pay tribute to the five Alberta men whose lives were tragically cut short while on a snowmobile trip last week. Vince Loewen of Vegreville and Lakeland, Tony Greenwood of Grand Prairie County, Ricky Robinson of Spruce Grove, Todd Chisholm of St. Albert, and John Garley of Stony Plain were killed last Friday in an avalanche on Mount Renshaw in B.C.

These men died while doing what they and so many Canadians love: sledding with friends in the great Canadian outdoors.

I would like to acknowledge the efforts of their fellow snowmobilers who attempted to rescue their friends against impossible odds.

On behalf of the House, I wish to convey our deepest condolences to the families and friends of these five men, and they have many friends. May their loved ones find peace and comfort in their cherished memories of Vince, Tony, Ricky, Todd, and John.

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COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate three of my constituents who were honoured for promoting equality and diversity in my riding of Ottawa West—Nepean.

I would like to congratulate Sharmaarke Abdullahi, who received the Black History Month Community Builder Award for his work in creating opportunities for young people from diverse backgrounds.

I would also like to congratulate Larry Hill and Désiré Kilolwa, who received the DreamKEEPERS Martin Luther King Award.

Larry Hill, a former Ottawa deputy chief of police, was recognized for his work with immigrants and vulnerable youth.

[Translation]

Désiré Kilolwa was recognized for his efforts to eliminate sexual violence in the Congo and here, in Canada.

[English]

I am proud of these extraordinary individuals whose community leadership helps to make our society one where all are treated with respect and given the same opportunities to succeed.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's advice for hard-hit resource workers and their families is to wait it out, but what workers and their families really need is for the government to not make things worse.

Unfortunately, making things worse is exactly what the Prime Minister is doing. His plan for a national carbon tax will mean more

costs piled on to Alberta families, on top of the carbon taxes they are already paying.

Will the Prime Minister commit today to do no further harm to Alberta workers and abandon his national carbon tax plan?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for 10 years the members opposite tried to do everything they could for Alberta, and they ended up making it worse.

The members opposite were unable to get the resources to market. They were unable to diversify the economy. They were unable to recognize that combining environment and economy is the only way to build a strong resilient economy in the 21st century.

Their lack of understanding of the nature of the new economy is what led, in part, to the challenges we are facing now.

[Translation]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, he cannot simply tell resource workers and their families to wait for things to get better. The Prime Minister should not be causing additional damage.

Unfortunately, his national carbon tax plan will hurt the families of Alberta workers just when they will find it particularly difficult to pay more taxes.

Will the Prime Minister do the right thing and put his national carbon tax on ice?

• (1420)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, my colleagues on the other side of the House do not understand how important it is to show that we can build a responsible economy by developing and protecting the environment at the same time.

Their lack of understanding got us into this extremely vulnerable position, and that is exactly where many Albertans find themselves now.

We will work with the Government of Alberta and with Albertans to build a future that will be more prosperous for everyone.

* * *

[English]

LABOUR

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us compare. The Conservative Party's first bill was the Federal Accountability Act, to get big union money out of politics.

The Liberal Party's first bill is to reward big union bosses by getting rid of transparency and accountability for their expenses. Now we know that the unions spent a lot of money to help the Liberals get elected, in fact at least one illegal union donation.

Why is political payback to big union bosses priority number one for this Prime Minister?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know the members opposite seemed to look at this fall as some sort of dress rehearsal, but we actually got immediately to work and lowered taxes for the middle class while raising them for the wealthiest 1% with our very first piece of legislation.

That was a commitment we made to Canadians. It is a commitment we have kept, along with many other commitments that Canadians expect us to keep. I thank the members very much for noticing.

* * *

[*Translation*]

ETHICS

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the matter of the illegal financing of the Liberal Party of Canada by the unions, the government is not being transparent, to say the least.

Last week, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons said they were in the dark. Yesterday, we submitted a document here, but unfortunately the government refused to have it tabled. We showed that this document proves that it was the Liberal Party that asked the union boss to fill the room.

Since the Prime Minister is here, could he tell us at what point he knew that the union paid its members \$100 to pretend to be Liberal supporters?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, as soon as we learned about these irregularities, we acted immediately. We worked with Elections Canada and the unions to set everything straight instead of resorting to the previous government's bad habit of fighting all the time.

What we underscored is that we think unions are important partners in developing our economy. That is why we are reversing the attacks the previous government made on the unions.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know that unions are important allies for the Liberal Party, but not for all Canadians.

There was the event in Waterloo as well as two other events organized by big union bosses to help the Liberal Party. One was in Vaughn and the other in Oakville. That is at least three events.

Can the Prime Minister tell us whether there was illegal funding in these cases, yes or no?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party has always complied with Elections Canada laws and has always stood up for the enforcement of those laws. We are proud of our record on this. Conservative Party members' constant attacks on unions are shameful. That is why we are going to repeal Bills C-377 and C-525, which are unfair and undemocratic attacks on Canada's unions.

[*English*]

PENSIONS

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): It really is Groundhog Day all over again, Mr. Speaker. Another Auditor General report, another scathing indictment of the previous government.

Today the Auditor General reported on how that federal government made a complete mess of the CPP disability program: long wait times, a needlessly complicated 42-page application process, and no consistent standards for decisions.

The Conservatives may have been the ones to make this mess, but it is up to the Liberals to fix it. What exactly is the new government going to do to fix it?

● (1425)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are extremely concerned with what the Auditor General brought forward. We are working very hard to repair some of the errors made in the past, because Canadians deserve a government that is open, transparent, and able to deliver in a responsible way the things that Canadians expect it to deliver.

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PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians gave the previous government the boot for its many failures; now we want to know how the current government is going to undo the damage. For example, the previous government completely failed in the transition to Shared Services Canada: missing deadlines, failing to communicate with partners, data left unsecured, and millions misspent.

Exactly what concrete steps is the minister going to take to ensure that Shared Services actually works and that information is actually protected?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, obviously we have much to learn from the Auditor General's report, and indeed how we deliver services in a responsible way, including Shared Services, which is IT around the government. It is extremely important.

What we have seen through our first months is that it is not enough to do as the previous government did and simply announce things. It is actually important to follow up on them, give the tools to get things done, and execute them responsibly. That is exactly what Canadians elected us to do.

* * *

[*Translation*]

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, now that the Auditor General's report has been released, we expect the government to be clear about the concrete actions it plans to take. The backlog at the Social Security Tribunal of Canada has more than doubled. It is a long and complicated process that takes almost 900 days. That kind of management has a direct impact on people going through a hard time.

Oral Questions

Can the minister share his plan to end the interminable waiting?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for reminding us that the issue the Auditor General raised in his very welcome report is an important one. I was very concerned about the findings in the report regarding the fate of the most vulnerable members of our society. I met with the Auditor General immediately, and I can assure the House that we will do whatever it takes to fix this problem.

* * *

CANADA BORDER SERVICES AGENCY

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General also highlighted some troubling practices at the Canada Border Services Agency. Because the agency is understaffed, high risk parcels are leaving the country without even being examined. Canada does not want to become a sieve for illegal goods. We have international commitments and we must honour them. The Conservatives gutted the agency, and now we are seeing the consequences of those cuts.

Will the government reinvest in the agency so that it can fulfill its mandate properly?

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Yes, Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what we intend to do.

CBSA performs very important functions for all Canadians, as well as our international customers. We intend that this should be a first-class organization. We follow the advice of the Auditor General. There is an action plan being implemented that will implement the vast majority of the recommendations before the end of this year.

* * *

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 1990, a minister had to resign for making a telephone call to a judge. In 1996, a minister had to resign because he wrote a letter to the Immigration and Refugee Board. In 2013, a minister resigned for writing a letter to the federal Tax Court.

All of these ministers resigned because of inappropriate contact with judges and tribunals. Will the Prime Minister be setting the same standard for his government?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, colleagues will well know that when the government was sworn in, we released a very important document called “Open and Accountable Government”. It set a new standard in terms of transparency and accountability, not only for members of the cabinet but for members of their staff, for the relationship between Canadians and cabinet ministers, and for Canadians and the public service. We are very proud to have raised the bar on that important endeavour.

● (1430)

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we will see if double standard and Liberal government are still synonymous.

The reason I asked the previous question is that the government House leader wrote on behalf of the Prime Minister to a citizenship judge. He has been busy.

The government House leader also wrote to five members of the Immigration and Refugee Board, the same board that former Liberal minister David Collenette wrote to and had to resign over.

How is the Prime Minister going to hold his House leader responsible for this clear violation of ethical guidelines?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was happy to write on behalf of the government to people whose appointments were made by that member's government to take effect after the election, with no ability to be scrutinized by Parliament.

The member well knows that there is a difference between writing to a government official about the nature of an appointment and writing to a government official about a specific case before him or her. The member should know that very well. To confuse the two is a disservice to Canadians.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, political interference is political interference.

The Liberal House leader has written a number of letters that directly interfere with operations of the immigration review board and citizenship judges.

In the past, this exact issue has required ministers to resign.

Just how low are the Liberal standards when it comes to ethical guidelines?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, talking about ethical guidelines, when we are talking about a previous government's decision at five minutes to midnight to appoint a series of individuals to jobs to take effect after it lost the election, with no ability for this House to scrutinize those appointments, from our perspective that was abuse of process.

The member knows absolutely well that it is appropriate for ministers to talk to people about potential appointments. That is how the Governor in Council appointment process works. She should know that very well.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, political interference is political interference.

This is just not about the government House leader. His own letter says that he was writing on behalf of the Prime Minister.

Why does the Prime Minister think that he has the right to openly interfere with judges and quasi-judicial board members?

Oral Questions

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the logical extension of that argument would be to say that it is inappropriate for a government minister to talk to anybody about a potential appointment. For example, when the Attorney General is about to appoint somebody to the bench, she should not possibly talk to that person? We should have what? Some anonymous message sent from an account?

That is completely ridiculous.

The government has the responsibility to talk to people whose appointments we are questioning or whose appointments we are about to make. We did not talk to people about specific cases or their work with respect to any independent tribunal. The member knows that well. She is confusing the issues.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government House leader cannot answer a question on ethics because he does not know what they are.

This letter was sent on behalf of the Prime Minister of Canada. It is right there in black and white. It is not enough that the Liberal House leader appears to be breaching ethical rules, but the Prime Minister himself is involved.

Will the Prime Minister stand and tell this House how he will fix the obvious ethical breach?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will fix the obvious ethical breach of the previous government by taking a series of appointments that were made inappropriately and putting them before the standing committees of this House. That is exactly how we are proposing to clean up the ethical mess left to us by the previous government.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have seen this government fill its offices with former Dalton McGuinty staffers. McGuinty has cost Ontario taxpayers billions of dollars in higher taxes, big spending, and gas plant scandals.

After hiring every McGuinty staffer it could find, will the government at least promise that Dalton McGuinty never gets a patronage appointment, yes or no?

• (1435)

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will not confirm a personal appointment for anybody, but we are very happy to share with members of the House and the country our review of the appointments processes we know will serve Canadians extremely well.

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[*Translation*]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General's report is damning. Half of the departments audited had not conducted a gender-based comparative analysis, which is compulsory. This is 2016. This is unacceptable. We must do better.

Will the Liberal government commit to issuing a clear directive for all departments to honour their commitment and finally conduct gender-based analyses?

[*English*]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Status of Women, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we welcome the Auditor General's report on gender-based analysis for the federal government. Our government believes strongly in being accountable for our obligations to ensure that meaningful GBA informs our policies, programs, and legislation.

I am especially proud of the leadership and tone set by our government from the very top that will ensure that this remains a focus for our government.

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SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us move to the Social Security Tribunal. It is a complete mess, and it is the most vulnerable Canadians who are paying the price. Some are waiting 900 days for a decision to be made. The tribunal itself identified more than 60 areas of improvement, but it will require staff and resources.

Is the new government willing to reverse the Conservative cuts, yes or no?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am a little surprised that this question is coming from the party to our right and not the party across the way.

In any case, in response I would say that of course we want to see the Social Security Tribunal of Canada operating properly, because that tribunal deals with cases involving some of the most vulnerable Canadians and most disadvantaged members of our society. It is important that that tribunal work properly in terms of both efficiency and fairness.

* * *

[*English*]

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, does the Minister of Finance have confidence in his department's officials, or will he dispute their findings that the Conservative government left them in surplus?

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the only people who believe the Conservatives did not leave us with a deficit are the Conservatives themselves.

Oral Questions

The “Fiscal Monitor” is a snapshot in time. It is looking at our bank statement before we have paid the bills. It does not tell the whole story. The economic and fiscal update clearly shows that the previous government put us on track for a \$3-billion deficit for this year. That train has left the station. After 10 years of weak economic growth, this government has a chance to grow the economy and create jobs by focusing on the middle class, investing in infrastructure and—

The Speaker: Order please. The hon. member for Milton.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are not the only ones. Canadians, and more important, the parliamentary budget officer, know that the Conservative government leaving a surplus has to do with bank balances.

Maybe the Liberals should check their snapshot when they came in November, because I am pretty sure it was in the black, not in the red, where they will drag it after the end of this fiscal year.

The question is still the same. Does the Minister of Finance believe his caucus, who are the only ones saying we are in deficit, or does he believe the deputy minister of finance?

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I just said to the hon. colleague, the previous government has put us on track for a \$3-billion deficit for this year.

We have a plan to grow the economy, to invest in Canadians, to create investments to grow our economy, and to invest in infrastructure. That is what we said, and that is exactly what we will be doing.

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Beauce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that prosperity does not come from government spending but rather from entrepreneurs investing. The finance minister is completely wrong when he thinks that we can spend our way to prosperity on borrowed money.

Will he work with us? Will he work with job-creating entrepreneurs by lowering taxes and balancing the budget?

• (1440)

[*Translation*]

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will continue to invest in growing the economy, but as we have said from the start, we will follow three cardinal principles in our approach. We will reduce the debt-to-GDP ratio, make prudent investments in our infrastructure, and return to a balanced budget before the end of our term.

That is what we promised Canadians and that is exactly what we will do.

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Beauce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is sad to listen to my colleague. Running deficits is not the answer for stimulating the economy.

When Canadians are managing their budgets, they know that when times are tough it is not the time to be spending more. On the contrary, they know that when times are tough it is time to look closer at their spending, manage it responsibly, and save money.

Spending does not create wealth. We do not become richer by spending money we do not have.

I would ask the Minister of Finance and the government to stop living in a parallel universe where spending equals prosperity and to deliver a balanced budget for all Canadians.

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am always amazed when I hear my colleague opposite.

Canadians know that the time to invest is when interest rates are low. That is what we said. We began in December with our plan to cut taxes for the middle class. In the next budget, we will introduce the Canada child benefit and make historic investments in infrastructure.

Canadians know that the time to make investments that will grow the economy is when interest rates are low.

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[*English*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Foreign Affairs is in Rome today to discuss the coalition's campaign against ISIS. In the 2015 campaign, the Liberals promised to end the bombing, yet it is 2016 and the bombing is still continuing. Today, the Liberal government is discussing its plans with our allies in Rome while at the same time refusing to tell Canadians anything.

The media is now reporting that the government is planning a new, expanded mission on the ground in Iraq. Can the Minister of Defence confirm that he is considering expanding the number of Canadian troops on the ground in Iraq, yes or no?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to ending the air strikes, but we do work in a coalition and we have to do it in a responsible manner. There are a lot of things to factor in. When we do end it, it will be done in a responsible manner.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the bombing missions against ISIS authorized by the Conservatives will end in just a few weeks. The government has not yet announced its new plan, even though one was promised during the election campaign.

Naturally, all kinds of rumours have been circulating in the meantime, including rumours about an expanded ground mission in Iraq.

Canadians have the right to know.

Where is the minister's plan? Will he increase the number of Canadian troops on the ground?

[English]

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for pointing out that today the Minister of Foreign Affairs is meeting with a small group of the global coalition within ISIL. Discussions are ongoing of course within government and with our coalition partners to refocus and optimize our contributions.

The U.S. Secretary of State said last week, when we met with our North American partners, that he has great confidence in the contribution Canada has made and will continue to make.

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CANADIAN HERITAGE

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during the election campaign, residents of my riding often objected to the process used by the previous government to impose the location of the memorial to the victims of Communism. Can the Minister of Canadian Heritage provide this House with an update on the status of that memorial and public consultations?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government promised greater involvement of citizens in decision-making. I am proud to announce today that my department has launched an online public consultation on the memorial to the victims of Communism.

I call on Canadians from coast to coast to coast to share their vision on how we can honour the millions of people who fled communist regimes to find refuge in Canada. Based on these consultations, I will announce next steps.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we are very concerned with the comments made by the Minister of Defence yesterday when he said we must not “repeat the mistakes of the past”.

Over 40,000 Canadians served in Afghanistan. One hundred and fifty-nine gave their lives. Was it a mistake that the hard work of our armed forces enabled millions of children to go to school, including over three million girls? Was it a mistake that we restored the rights of women so they could work and have health care? Does the minister believe these successes, as we fought the Taliban, were all just a mistake?

• (1445)

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member across the floor knows very well, I served from the start of the combat mission right to the end. I was there to witness the issues that happened. I was there also for the successes. This is the conversation that we had on the ground. This is where we talked about how our political leadership failed us. This is why I will take the time to make sure, as we create future plans, that those lessons are not lost.

The Speaker: After the member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman asks his question, he might remind the gentlemen in front of him from Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis and Durham, this is not *The Muppets*.

Oral Questions

The member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the defence minister said our past military activity was a mistake. Earlier today, when he was asked what his anti-ISIS plan was, he said, “I don't know, ask the foreign minister, he's in Rome”.

Canadians really want to know who is in charge of the Canadian Armed Forces. Is it the minister of defence or the minister of global affairs?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think we need to remind the member across the floor that the election is over, that we do not have to take things out of context.

When we look at creating our plan we also look at learning from lessons from the past. As we move forward we will be making a comprehensive plan with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of International Development. When we come up with the plan it will be a plan that Canadians can be proud of.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is another example that when faced with tough policy decisions, at home or abroad, the government favours procrastination over principled decision-making.

When Liberals play honest broker, they prefer bafflelegab to straight talk. During the election campaign Liberal MPs made strong commitments to match our Conservative government's support and defence of Ukraine, so why, after more than three months in office, can the government not actually denounce the Russian invasion and call it an illegal occupation?

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, of course, we have denounced that over and over, and we are steadfastly standing with the Ukraine, as the member well knows.

However, Canada is basing its foreign policy on a policy of engagement. That is much more difficult than a policy of isolationism and choosing to believe one's own point of view. It is a hard path for us and we are choosing it, not to find agreement all the time but to be able to hold other countries to account because we are talking.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, more than 10,000 Ukrainians are dead. More than a million and a half civilians are displaced.

Oral Questions

During the election the now Minister of International Trade called for tough new measures against the Putin regime. The MP for Etobicoke Centre called for lethal weapon aid for Ukraine. However, since the election, we have heard only sunny platitudes from the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Why have there been no specifics regarding enhanced military and defence co-operation with Ukraine?

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to reiterate, we are steadfast allies of Ukraine. When we were provoked—and this was underscored by the opposition—by the foreign minister of Russia, we said that just because he wanted warmer relations did not mean we did, until they demonstrate respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine.

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[Translation]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food said that he understands the importance of protecting supply management and of having a plan to compensate dairy producers. The Minister of International Trade has said that she does not feel bound to pay the compensation announced by the Conservative government, but in the meantime the uncertainty producers are experiencing has already resulted in the loss of 257 family farms in Quebec.

The government is going to sign the trans-Pacific partnership agreement tomorrow. Can the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food assure the producers who came to Ottawa today that there is a plan to provide more compensation than the Conservative government promised?

• (1450)

[English]

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is engaged with industry stakeholders on the outcome of the TPP. We understand the importance of compensation to the supply management sector. I have met with many stakeholders in the supply management sector and I met with the Canadian Dairy Farmers today. They understand we are working together to make things right.

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INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, dairy producers are not the only ones to lose under this job-killing deal. The TPP would also expand loopholes to bring in temporary foreign workers with no regard for the impact on Canadian jobs and wages. The Conservatives allowed rampant abuse of the temporary foreign worker program on their watch and now the Liberals are about to make matters even worse.

Will the minister cancel her trip to New Zealand and take the time to look at the cost to Canadians instead of rushing to sign this reckless deal?

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are looking at all of

these matters precisely because we promised Canadians that we would consult on the TPP. We are signing the agreement precisely to give us time, in order to put the TPP before Parliament for it to be studied in committee. That is what we promised we would do, and that is what we are doing.

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THE SENATE

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister keeps pointing Canadians to her website on the Senate appointment process. However, all that is found there is how this process will take place behind closed doors and leave Canadians in the dark. Let us go over what the website says: the advisory board meets in secret; then provides a non-binding list in secret; then the Prime Minister might choose a senator from the list. Of course, it all happens completely in secret. Why do the Liberals want to leave Canadians completely in the dark on this?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are confident that the process we have introduced would lead to a stronger Senate. I do appreciate the hon. member's interest in the process here, and I have to ask this. Where was this commitment to good process when his government appointed nearly 60 senators? Was there a process?

Whatever the process, it was flawed. I urge the member to join us as we implement a more open and transparent process for appointing senators.

The Speaker: We know it is question period, but the questions come from this side, usually.

The hon. member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Speaker, did the Minister of Democratic Institutions receive written advice from the justice department legal counsel as to the constitutional validity of the phase I Senate nomination process that is now under way? In particular, did she receive advice regarding the Supreme Court's conclusion that there is a constitutional requirement that in any such process senators remain independent? In the event that the minister was given such a counsel, will she table it to the House?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have committed to a thorough and thoughtful process for appointing senators. We have done so collaborating with different departments, and we are confident that the process we have implemented will enhance the performance of the Senate without compromising the Constitution.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I hope that in the minister's supplemental she will actually answer the question I posed a moment ago.

Here is the problem. In its Senate reference ruling, the Supreme Court says that any appointment process that limits the independence of senators is unconstitutional. The fact that it is impossible for an individual to submit an application without working closely with a nominating organization, coupled with the 14-day deadline for phase I applications, which ends right after Valentine's Day, gives nominating organizations enormous control over those whom they sponsor. Therefore, is the phase I nomination process not an unconstitutional violation of the principle that senators must be independent?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I recommend a second look at the website. The deadline for applications is February 15 at noon.

The process we have introduced is more open and more transparent than anything the former government implemented, and we are confident that it will lead to a stronger Senate, establishing the confidence of Canadians in this important democratic institution.

* * *

● (1455)

YOUTH

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as in many areas across Canada, youth unemployment is a significant concern in my riding. As we know, the youth unemployment rate in Canada is much higher than for the rest of the population and youth studying at colleges and universities are already looking for summer jobs to help them save for their next year's tuition.

Can the minister advise the House what steps she is taking to help Canadian youth enter the labour market, and specifically to find summer jobs to help pay for their education?

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's summer jobs program is accepting applications now and the application deadline is February 26.

For those individuals who are getting the opportunity, employment could begin as early as May. This is of particular importance to young people who are looking for experience in the job market and finding the job opportunities we all want them to succeed at.

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INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last Friday, the parliamentary secretary indicated that she had no problem gutting the First Nations Financial Transparency Act. Does she not realize that transparency and accountability mean readily accessible information? It does not mean having a report sitting in the basement of the department of indigenous affairs.

How can the minister justify to band members that they must plead or go to court to get basic financial information?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, everyone, including the first nations, wants transparency and accountability, but we will achieve this by working with first nations on a nation-to-nation basis. Top down

solutions have never worked. Band members in most places from coast to coast to coast are able to find this information. We will work with first nations and achieve the goal of transparency and accountability with them.

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ASBESTOS

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, asbestos has been called the greatest industrial killer the world has ever known and my colleagues have been fighting hard to get this carcinogenic and toxic material out of buildings and people's lives. This known carcinogen has claimed the lives of thousands of Canadian workers, so people were shocked to learn that while the federal government is spending millions to remove it from some buildings, it is installing new asbestos in other buildings.

Will the Liberals now employ some common sense, stand up for worker safety, and immediately put a stop to this?

Hon. Judy Foote (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government takes the health and safety of all of its workers seriously and, in fact, of any visitors to our buildings. That is why whenever the presence of asbestos is identified, we move immediately to remediate the situation. We certainly will undertake a review to make sure that asbestos is not a product that is used on an ongoing basis.

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[Translation]

INNOVATION, SCIENCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to thank the people of Brome—Missisquoi for electing me to represent them in the House.

Many rural areas like mine, which is located about an hour from Montreal, do not always have access to high-speed Internet. It is therefore difficult for us to compete with the major centres, attract young entrepreneurs, and help off-site workers.

What does the government intend to do to get the regions connected faster? It is urgent.

[English]

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): I would first like to take this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to thank the member for his work on this very important file.

Point of Order

The Government of Canada, through the connecting Canadians program, is working to extend and enhance broadband service to an additional 280,000 Canadian households. Computers, mobile devices, and other modern technologies touch every part of our lives and it is for this reason that the government is working with both public and private partners to help deliver reliable high-speed Internet access at affordable prices. This is good for the consumer and it is good for business.

* * *

• (1500)

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians were deeply saddened by the recent brutal attack on their fellow citizens by terrorists in Burkina Faso and Indonesia. The killing of six Canadians on a humanitarian mission in Burkina Faso and the killing of a Canadian in Indonesia has shocked us all.

On a visit to Nigeria a couple of years ago, I also came very close to becoming a victim of a terrorist attack.

Our NGO community volunteers are working all over the world, often in dangerous places. The government owes it to Canadians to take decisive action in fighting terrorism.

When will it act?

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for reminding us about the tragedies that have happened recently and the respect that Canadians have paid to those families whose lives tragically ended in Burkina Faso. It is important to continue to remember.

When we will be acting, will be very soon. I am starting to talk like Minister Dion.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones: He is in Rome now. I should aim so high. He will be arriving back from Rome. He, together with the Minister of National Defence, will be pleased to represent our position.

The Speaker: Experienced members know, and new members are learning, that we do not use ministers' proper names. We refer to them by their title, by their department.

[Translation]

The hon. member for Manicouagan.

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EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, for over 20 years, the various reforms introduced by the Liberal and Conservative governments have decreased benefits for unemployed workers and restricted eligibility so that only two in five workers can access these benefits.

The current government must commit to making employment insurance a real insurance program for our workers, rather than a

labour tax. Will the government also commit to taking into account the specific characteristics and needs of workers in the regions, particularly seasonal workers? Will it commit to allowing regional stakeholders to participate in the process?

[English]

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, everyone in the House and all Canadians understand that our employment insurance program needs modernization.

We have committed to lowering premiums, cutting benefit wait times, and providing more flexibility to all Canadians when they need it.

* * *

[Translation]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the infrastructure program launched in 2014 is not working in Quebec. Since Ottawa is interfering in the selection process and wants to approve each project, even if they fall under Quebec or municipal jurisdiction, nothing is moving forward and the negotiations are never-ending. We do not need a repeat of this fiasco, with more money.

Does the government plan on following through on the Prime Minister's election promise and emulating the gas tax transfer, by making a block transfer, without conditions?

[English]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we understand that the old building Canada fund established by the previous government needs some improvements in the process so we can get the money out to the provinces as quickly as possible.

We have met with representatives from the Province of Quebec, and we are trying to fix that problem, because we understand that investing in infrastructure is critical and that we need to do it in a speedy way.

* * *

[Translation]

POINT OF ORDER**ORAL QUESTIONS**

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think that the most important and difficult decision we are called upon to make as parliamentarians is the decision to send our men and women in uniform on foreign missions and military deployments. This topic came up today during question period. I apologize if I got passionate and let you down, and I apologize to the members of the House.

That said, I know that I have to treat all members of the House with respect and I expect to be treated with the same respect by all members, including you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I appreciate the hon. member's apology, because I know that we are all capable of controlling ourselves in the House, even if there are some topics we are passionate about. I appreciate the member's comments, and I expect that it will not happen again in the future.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1510)

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—PAY EQUITY

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: Questions and comments.

[Translation]

There are five minutes remaining for questions and comments regarding the speech by the hon. member for Salaberry—Suroît.

[English]

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada has demonstrated, virtually since October 19, and even prior to that, a strong commitment to the issue of pay equity and gender imbalances.

In fact, one of the first actions of the Prime Minister was to announce a cabinet that had a 50%-50% gender split. We have the highest ratio of females in the federal government at the cabinet level.

The desire to do more is there. We are supporting the motion, which I think is a positive motion and a positive contribution.

I want some feedback from the member in regard to the makeup of the cabinet this year as a sign of things to come on issues such as equity and so forth.

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague opposite.

The equitable appointment of women and men to cabinet is certainly positive, but it does not change the laws in order to give women pay equity in everyday workplaces.

Women today still make only 77% of what men make, simply because they are women. We must therefore do more than simply take an interest in the issue. We have to change the laws so that there is no more wage discrimination and so that women enjoy the same respect as men. Equal pay for equal work.

The current situation is serious. Women in distress are turning to women's advocacy organizations, such as Centre D'Main de Femmes, which I mentioned earlier. These women say that they are feeling completely burnt out and that they are unable to make ends meet. Their children are dropping out of school because they

Business of Supply

are disheartened. This is Canada, in 2016, and it is time to buckle down and walk the talk.

• (1515)

[English]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate all that my colleague has shared today. She mentioned women on maternity leave and facing some issues when they come back. This made me think that there are actually other women who are being sidelined in this discussion today: women who choose to work full-time as stay-at-home parents when their children are young. These women, at least in my riding, saw income-splitting as an action that showed their value as significant contributors to the fabric of our economy and our society. I wonder what her perspective is on that and whether she would see value in the income-splitting opportunity for women who are stay-at-home mothers.

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Mr. Speaker, I am somewhat disconcerted by what the hon. member just said.

We in the NDP have been clear that income splitting as proposed by the Conservatives in the last Parliament benefited only 14% of the wealthiest couples and was of no help to women facing daily financial difficulties. We also pointed out that this measure was not going to encourage women to realize their potential and access the labour market.

What we are talking about today is defending the right to pay equity, a fundamental need entrenched in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It is a matter of encouraging women in their work and recognizing the fair value of that work.

Unlike the Conservatives, we want to move forward, not backward. In 2009, the Conservatives set back women's right to pay equity instead of moving it forward. That is totally shameful.

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Status of Women, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to participate in this debate today on the motion put forward by the member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith addressing pay equity.

This side of the House supports the principle of pay equity. I am proud to be part of a government that previously recognized the importance of pay equity and introduced amendments in 1977 to the Canadian Human Rights Act to enshrine this important principle.

As the Minister of Status of Women, I want to first say how proud I am to be part of a government that is making gender diversity and gender equality priorities in our government. Advancing gender diversity is not just the right thing to do for women; it is the smart thing to do for our economy. Women's contribution to the economy was \$130 billion in 2012, approximately 7% of our GDP. If we make gender diversity a priority in all sectors of the economy, this contribution to Canada's growth and prosperity will be even greater.

Business of Supply

Our government is strongly committed to ensuring the full participation of women in the economic, social, and democratic life of Canada, and we are committed to the principle of pay equity. We have clearly stated that we want to make meaningful progress on reducing the wage gap between men and women across this country.

Making progress on this issue is vital for a number of reasons. First, our international ranking is falling. Canada now ranks 28th out of 34 OECD countries for the wage gap between male and female full-time, full-year workers. Canada ties with the U.S. for the 11th spot out of 17 comparable western economies and earns a C grade from the Conference Board of Canada for the gender wage gap. Canada's level of overall income inequality is now higher than the OECD average. The increasing share of female lone-parent families in the workforce, those women who make lower incomes, has contributed to this trend.

The makeup of the workforce is changing. Our economy is changing. Women are often the primary earners for their families, but whether they are or not, women's earnings have ripple effects through the local economy. Their earnings can drive the essential economic decisions of their families, decisions that begin with housing, education, child care, clothing, food, and so much more. The opposite is also true. When women are shortchanged in the workforce, not only does their situation and that of their families suffer, so does the local economy in which they live.

What kind of gender wage gap are we discussing today? While definitions can vary, most Canadians would know that there is a gap and would recognize it as the difference between the total of what men earn in our country compared to women. However, while that may sound like a rather simple calculation in a large diverse economy like Canada's, many factors contribute to the gender wage gap as it exists today. As a result, it requires a multi-faceted response.

Enshrining pay equity as a right is part of the solution, as it allows us to acknowledge the undervaluing of work traditionally performed by women and to consider ways to address it, but it is only a small part. The gender wage gap is a complex issue with multiple causes, and as a consequence, no single action by an individual or an organization or a government will close this gap. It is going to take all Canadians working together.

Even as we consider ways of closing the gender wage gap, we cannot ignore the reality that in Canada today women are advancing into more positions of economic opportunity, even as the gender gap persists. Today women represent nearly half of the workforce in Canada. In the public and not-for-profit sectors, women hold many top leadership positions. Women are entrepreneurs, senior executives, CEOs, and board members across the country.

Over time, attitudes toward women in the workplace have begun to change. Across our country, the sectors of the economy that are considered non-traditional careers for women are growing fewer every day. Women now make up the majority of enrolments in college programs, and the proportion of women is even greater among graduates.

Since the early 1990s, women have made up the majority of full-time students enrolled in undergraduate university programs. Yet as I

stand in the House listing the accomplishments of women in the public sector, the private sector, trades, and professional careers, a wage gap persists.

Last week we celebrated the 100th anniversary of a woman's right to vote in Manitoba, yet women are still not equal when it comes to recognition in wages.

It is 2016, and with all of these advancements, we know even more progress is necessary. We can do better.

● (1520)

I recognize and acknowledge that there are a range of factors contributing to the persistent wage gap in Canada. In the past, Canada's gender wage gap closed naturally as more women entered the labour market. However, progress has slowed since the early 1990s. Factors affecting the wage gap today include the fact that women's labour market participation is often limited by their roles as mothers and caregivers. Women's employment generally remains concentrated in lower-paying sectors, such as retail and social services.

As we know from the statistics, women are less likely to reach more senior level positions within many industries and occupations. Some further issues persist, such as overrepresentation of women in part-time work, bias and discrimination in the workplace, the lengthy litigation that has characterized pay equity, and of course women's greater share of unpaid work.

Although women have traditionally done much of the unpaid work in a household, men are taking on an increasing role. This said, women still provide the majority of high-intensity care of 15 hours a week or more. Their overrepresentation in unpaid work leaves women at a disadvantage in Canada's increasingly competitive labour market.

How do we turn the situation around and ensure that we make more progress as we look to the future? One way we can make progress is leading by example. That is why our government started at the top. The Prime Minister made a historic appointment by appointing the first ever federal cabinet with an equal number of women and men last November.

We need to change attitudes and we need a change in the conversation. I was extremely proud to represent a party that encouraged Canadians to ask women to run for politics. Women were empowered to enter the political discourse, and this made a difference. More women were elected to the House than ever in history. However, it is not enough. Continued purposeful actions with intent will lead to comprehensive change.

Business of Supply

Next month, we will celebrate International Women's Day. We know that the empowerment of women is an essential ingredient toward achieving gender equality. As part of International Women's Day, we will promote the vision that women and girls who are empowered are better equipped to fulfill their potential for themselves, their family, their community, and their country. However, we must move beyond vision and into action together. Therefore, as a government, we are also committed to advancing more women into leadership and decision-making roles.

In the coming months, we will engage with the public, private and not-for-profit sectors to promote increased representation of women in the kinds of leadership and decision-making positions that will increase their opportunities to succeed and to prosper. We believe in ensuring that the needs of women and girls are fully understood and supported as we design new policies, programs and legislation that serve all Canadians.

For this reason, we will be applying a gender lens to the work we do. We intend to ensure that the decisions we make and the initiatives we put into place take into account the different impacts they will have on women compared to men. This will help ensure that the actions we take are effective in supporting women and girls.

Today, we received the report from the Auditor General. We accept that some progress has been made in implementing gender-based analysis, or GBA, as it is referred to across the federal government. We also agree that much more work is needed. We are looking at the Auditor General's report as a renewed call to action.

Another area focuses on direct actions that can be taken to address the specific barriers that affect labour market participation by women. This is why we are committed to addressing issues that affect women in the workforce and contribute to the gender wage gap, including child care, better access to flexible work arrangements, and more accessible home care. These efforts will have a significant impact on Canadian workers, in particular women who are disproportionately impacted by care responsibilities.

In order to close the gender wage gap, we will need the support of our provincial and territorial partners. To that end, we are collaborating with our partners on innovative ways to address the gender wage gap. Our government is closely following the current work of our colleagues seeking to address the gender wage gap. This includes the province of Ontario, which is currently conducting consultations to inform a provincial gender wage gap strategy, and other provinces that are making progress on this issue as well.

Finally, I would like to spend a few moments describing some of the important support that Status of Women Canada provides to create new economic opportunities for women in Canada.

Through Status of Women Canada, the federal government supports projects that enhance the capacity of women and girls to identify and respond to the challenges they face in achieving their economic potential.

● (1525)

Programs such as the women's empowerment network demonstrate the potential of women who are well supported. Recently, I met two women who, as part of the network, had broken the cycle of intergenerational poverty.

One of the women overcame her substance use problems and, in her words, left the system, a system that she believed gave her signs that she did not deserve more.

The second woman told me that she had never realized that raising her daughter in any way except through social assistance could be an option for her. She told me that, now, after attending the program, she had started her own business and was modelling her entrepreneurial spirit for her daughter.

From skilled trades and technical professions to new leadership and mentorship opportunities, we are supporting projects across the country that make a real difference for Canadian women.

We are also supporting projects in sectors of the economy, such as construction and mining, where women have been traditionally under-represented. Nowhere is this issue more evident than in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics industries.

Status of Women Canada funds programs like the society for Canadian women in science and technology, an innovative program that matches women and girls pursuing science and technology careers with women professionals in their sector. Programs like these provide valuable guidance and encouragement for women to succeed in fields that have been traditionally male dominated.

By recognizing that our economy is stronger when our workplaces and industries are more diverse from construction sites to corporate boardrooms, we are creating a more inclusive definition of Canadian prosperity that will ensure the tremendous talents and skills of women and girls are fully represented in every sector of society.

I would like to describe just one more initiative, among many, that the Status of Women Canada is supporting.

The New Brunswick Coalition for Pay Equity has worked with the women's program at Status of Women Canada since its beginning in 1998. As a result, the organization has now become a group of 800 individuals and 91 organizations advancing pay equity issues in the public and private sectors in New Brunswick.

In closing, I want to go back to something I said earlier. Ensuring equal pay for equal work is only one small piece of the puzzle. No single individual, or organization, or level of government will be able to single-handedly solve the gender wage gap in our country. It is too important and it is too complex for that. However, I am confident that if we work together, we can and we will increase economic opportunities for women in our country, help close the gender wage gap, and inspire a new generation of women and girls at the same time.

Business of Supply

This is the smart thing to do, to promote the growth of our economy while supporting the economic advance of women. If we do this right, we will build a country in which women and girls have every opportunity to succeed and reach their full potential. It will also lead to the kind of gender diversity and gender equality that improves the lives of women and girls, their families, and their communities from coast to coast to coast.

• (1530)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am hopeful we will have more opportunities to talk some of these issues through on one committee or another. I look forward to the conversation.

Last night, I heard a presentation from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. It described what happened at times of economic downturn or uncertainty in relation to the strength of a woman's wage, that when women were well paid for equal work of equal value, it could create a buffer when we had resource downturns. Families do better when both partners are doing well.

I also heard that there was some concern with infrastructure investments, that they may more go toward the male side of employment if they were in the traditional pipes, infrastructure and road construction.

I am curious if the minister has anything to share in relation to social infrastructure investments that will ensure that government spending over the next few years will benefit women and do what we can to improve the wage gap.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Speaker, there are two parts in the answer to that excellent question.

I am working closely with all my cabinet colleagues to ensure that we use a gender-based analysis lens to the decisions we make. That would include the decisions we make around spending on infrastructure.

However, I would like to point out that there will be direct benefits of that spending, as in wages and stimulation of sectors such as construction, plumbing and all kinds of trade sectors, as well as an indirect benefit.

We know that providing affordable housing is one of the most essential components to a woman's safety and ability to improve her economic standing. In fact, in my work in my previous life, affordable housing was the foundation from which families could start to grow and change, in an intergenerational way, the trajectory of their family's economic future.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I support the first couple of components of the motion, parts (a) and (b).

I have two questions for the minister, and I hope they come across as non-partisan.

First, I know committees are the masters of their destinies, but the scope in part (d) of the motion seems to me to be an excellent component for the Status of Women committee to study. Does the minister feel the House should spend additional resources on a separate committee for this issue?

Second, the minister mentioned the promotion of women in leadership roles. We will have the opportunity to have a lot of leadership in the House with the election of committees. What does she think about the role of women in the leadership of committees as the House goes forward?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Speaker, the intent of the government is to support the motion in its entirety. The issue of pay equity is so significant and so far-reaching that it deserves a committee of its own.

On women's leadership opportunities, we can certainly look at the composition of committees and ensure that women have opportunities to lead throughout government.

Mr. Arnold Chan (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to get the comments of the Minister of Status of Women on the decision by the previous government in 2009 to introduce the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act, which essentially removed oversight of pay equity from the Canadian Human Rights Commission to the Public Sector Labour Relations Board. Does the minister have a particular view on where that ought to be appropriately dealt with?

• (1535)

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Speaker, our government believes that pay equity is a fundamental human right and cannot be bargained away. We believe every working Canadian woman should be compensated in an equitable manner.

Our Prime Minister has put gender equality at the forefront of his leadership, and our federal government has an obligation to lead by example. We are committed to restoring pay equity for the federal public service, and we will begin by consulting with unions and stakeholders.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the minister's speech with great interest, and I think the spirit of what she is saying is embraced by everyone in the House.

I have a question about the part of her speech on representation on various boards and committees, but also in the House of Commons. I applaud the gender balanced cabinet that the Prime Minister has appointed, but is the minister also in favour of perhaps political parties having targets for women candidates? For example, parties would run slates that would be balanced with 50% women and 50% men.

The Deputy Speaker: We are on the topic here, but questions around political parties may or may not fit into that. I saw the hon. minister was rising. If she wishes to address the question, certainly that is in order.

The hon. Minister for Status of Women.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Speaker, we need to be looking at the barriers women face in entering politics before we set targets. When we set targets and do not consider the barriers that women face, then we are destined to fail in reaching those targets.

Therefore, the first step I would consider is really doing a fulsome analysis of what prevents women from fully taking their place in the House of Commons and other political arenas.

Business of Supply

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the minister for her work for vulnerable people, prior to coming to this place, which is admirable.

A number of the important programs to promote diversity and equal opportunity women outlined in her remarks today were in fact started by the previous Conservative government, and made much headway, which was not mentioned in the speech. In fact, one of the programs in the networking and promotion of higher membership on corporate boards was an initiative by the former minister, who is now leader of the official opposition of Canada.

On this important issue, and since the minister has not been long in this portfolio to chart a course that the government will set to build upon the previous work, could she highlight this for the House? Of all of the programs the Conservative government brought in to increase women in the trades and membership on boards, which one in particular does she feel has made the best progress and which one does she feel she will build upon under her mandate?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Aside from doing a complete program review, Mr. Speaker, which of course I have not conducted, I would say that when we have a good idea that is working, it is not the intent of this government to end that good idea, but rather to build on good ideas and fill the gaps that we see. Although the hon. member speaks about the work on board diversity, last year we noticed an uptick of 2%, from 15% to 17%, of women on private boards.

We have some work to do and this government is committed to doing it.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I commend the minister for her very eloquent speech on a wide variety of important issues concerning pay equity.

My question for her is with regard to her personal experience she is bringing to Ottawa. She seems to have a very comprehensive understanding of the issue. If she could do one thing, what would it be with regard to this particular issue?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Speaker, one of the strengths of this government's platform is that there is not one thing that will cure the problems facing Canadians today, but a whole-of-government approach that will help alleviate some of the struggles that Canadians face. Things like affordable housing are incredibly important. Things like closing the gender wage gap are incredibly important. Things like making sure that there are employment opportunities for young people and marginalized people, things like making sure that indigenous people have an opportunity to succeed are all important and all work together.

It is an excellent question, but it is very difficult to pull the one thing, the magic bullet, out of the question.

• (1540)

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time today with the member for London—Fanshawe.

I would like to thank the hon. member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith for introducing the motion before us in the House of Commons today, which is so worthy of our collective attention and action. The motion tabled by my colleague is quite lengthy, but in summary it calls on the government to recognize pay equity as a fundamental

human right, to implement the recommendations of the 2004 pay equity task force report, to restore the right to pay equity in the public service, and to strike a special committee of MPs to conduct hearings on pay equity and to propose proactive pay equity legislation.

Since the federal election, there has been a lot of talk about how the current government will fix some of the damage done by a decade of Conservative government. The sad truth of the matter is that the previous Conservative government turned back the clock on pay equity with support from the Liberals. Today is an opportunity to move forward in the right direction by finally working to ensure equal pay for work of equal value.

I would like to begin my remarks by discussing the challenge before us today. The gap in wages between women and men is real, persistent, and widespread. There are several ways of measuring the problem.

One way is to compare the annual earnings of women and men. Statistics Canada tells us that in 2008, the annual earnings of women were 64.4% of their male counterparts'. One explanation for this is that women are more likely to work part-time hours than men.

Another way to compare earnings is by looking at the annual earnings of full-time workers only, which tells us that in 2008 Canadian women working the full year, full-time earned on average 71% as much as their male counterparts. In median terms, women earned just 76¢ on the dollar. This figure can be skewed by a small number of people who have extremely high salaries. For example, we know that approximately 80% of corporate-board seats are held by men, according to a study done last year by Catalyst.

A third way of measuring the gender wage gap is by looking at hourly wages, which shows that women aged 25 to 54 earned about 85% as much per hour as their male counterparts. In non-unionized workplaces, the gap drops to 79%, while in unionized jobs the gap is 94%. Women in Canada are joining unions at a high rate, and it is no surprise that they are seeking jobs where pay equity is enshrined in collective agreements.

Whichever way one chooses to measure the gender pay gap, it is there, it is real, and in many ways it is getting worse.

I have already touched on some of the factors that contribute to this stubborn wage gap: more women than men work part-time; more women work in lower-wage occupations and industries; and women account for 60% of minimum-wage workers, despite making up half of the Canadian workforce.

Business of Supply

Raising the minimum wage, as the NDP proposed to do federally, would help raise the bar for women, as would implementing a national affordable child care program. Statistics also tell us that about two-thirds of the female workforce is concentrated in teaching, nursing and health care, office and administrative work, and sales and service industries. It is not enough to say that the wage gap exists because women make career choices related to work–family balance. Many occupations that are considered to be women's work have underpaid women compared to so-called men's jobs because of a historic undervaluing of women's skills and work.

A *Toronto Star* editorial published in 2014 made a comparison between licensed practical nurses, where 90% of the workforce is female, and cable-TV service-and-maintenance technicians, where the workforce is 97% male. LPNs are better educated and more skilled, but have median earnings of about \$38,000 per year compared to \$51,000 for the technicians. Let us look at early childhood educators and assistants. In 2010, their average wage was about \$22,000. We also know that the wage gap exists for well-educated women in top positions. In 2008, female university graduates earned \$62,800 annually while men earned \$91,800. Top women executives at S&P 500 companies continue to be paid less on average than their male counterparts. From the lowest-wage jobs to the highest, the gender wage gap persists.

● (1545)

Internationally, Canada is one of the worst developed countries for pay equity. The World Economic Forum ranks us 80th out of 145 countries. Among the OECD countries, we rank 30th out of 34. Even more embarrassing is that Canada's previous prime minister did not believe in pay equity at all, calling it a “rip-off” and “ridiculous”. When his Conservative government brought forward a 2009 budget bill that weakened pay equity rules, gutted Status of Women Canada in terms of both funding and mandate, the Liberal Party voted in support of the government's agenda. The day before the vote, the leader of the Liberal Party shrugged his shoulders and said to the media, “We have made it clear that we are not pursuing an amendment strategy. Sometimes we have to hold our nose”. The question facing the Liberal government of today is quite clear. Does it agree it is time to stop holding its nose and move forward with real, tangible progress toward equality for women?

Last month in Davos, the Prime Minister was lauded for calling himself a feminist and embracing gender equality. Now is the time to put words into action. I am hopeful all parties in the House can work together to get proactive pay equity legislation in place so that we can achieve wage equality.

The motion before the House today presents solutions to a problem that I hope we can all agree exists and must be fixed. Thanks to the work of the pay equity task force over a decade ago, parliamentarians already have a clear road map for moving forward on achieving pay equity for women. The task force, struck in the year 2000, was asked to examine pay equity and develop recommendations for improving the pay equity legislative framework in Canada. Over the course of several years, it held extensive consultations, as well as public hearings, round tables, and more.

In 2004, the task force produced a comprehensive report, which included over 100 recommendations related to legislation, collective

bargaining, oversight, and enforcement. It recommended stand-alone, proactive pay equity legislation that would put the onus on an employer to introduce a pay equity program rather than relying on an individual or union to pursue a complaint. Sadly, the Liberal government of the day failed to implement most of those recommendations. It acknowledged pay equity as a right and the fact that proactive legislation was needed, but it failed to introduce the necessary legislation.

The Liberals' failure to act was followed by a Conservative government that was ideologically opposed to proactive pay equity legislation, but the road map developed by the pay equity task force in 2004 still exists and today's motion calls on the Liberal government to finally do the right thing and implement these recommendations. It is so important that we as parliamentarians commit ourselves to eliminating the gender wage gap. It is both a moral issue, as well as a social and economic one.

The wage gap translates into higher rates of poverty and greater retirement insecurity for women. It means foregoing important contributions to our local and national economies. In an era of slow economic growth, we simply cannot afford to ignore the wage gap. According to Ilse Treurnicht, head of MaRS Discovery District, one of the world's largest urban innovation hubs, “Canada is in a global talent war; as a country with a modest population we can't win unless all our players are on the field”.

In addition to pay equity legislation, we can also tackle the gender wage gap by helping women and girls enter high-wage occupations, including STEM careers, where STEM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. In the Windsor-Essex region, a recent video entitled *Because It's 2016* showcased local women working in STEM careers in an effort to highlight the opportunities available for women in these good-paying jobs.

As an auto worker, I know what it means to work in a male-dominated field and that it will take a lot of work to address the stereotypes, workplace policies, systemic discrimination, and other barriers that can prevent women from entering high-wage occupations. It is 2016, and in this place women make up just 26% of elected representatives. Across Canada, women make 77¢ on the dollar compared to men, and internationally our country ranks 30th out of 34 OECD countries for wage equality.

We know that pay equity and the fight for women's equality are issues that cross party lines. I challenge my colleagues from all parties to join together, vote yes to this motion, and let us finally move forward on achieving pay equity.

Business of Supply

• (1550)

Mr. Arnold Chan (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Essex for her contribution to the debate. I very much appreciate the sentiments she was expressing in her comments.

The hon. member noted a number of significant statistics on the barriers facing women entering the top-tier professions, becoming CEOs of corporations, and so forth. Could she perhaps elaborate a bit on what she thinks are the systemic barriers that prevent women from entering these types of top-tier professions and jobs?

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Speaker, I believe that the systemic discrimination that exists is sexism. We still place a high value on a man's role in society, his need to fulfill his role for his family, and we do not put the equivalent thought into how productive women are in the workplace, how intelligent they are, all the skills they bring, and how it really is about a balance in our society.

I believe that it is a sincere issue that exists, whether we are talking about public or private, when we talk about the top levels of private companies.

It needs to be addressed. That is why we stand here today with a motion. We need legislation or we will never see the end of this discriminatory practice.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is somewhat appropriate that today is Groundhog Day, because we are hearing the same comments over and over again.

On this side of the House, as the official opposition, clearly we have stated that we are in support of pay equity. What we are not in support of is adding another layer. We have heard from members on this side of the House, male members on this side of the House, who have sat on the status of women committee, which is a fully constituted committee, who have said over and over again that it is eligible to look at and deal with this issue.

Why would we want to establish another committee to look at an issue that a fully constituted committee is eligible to look at again?

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Speaker, I would first like to say that it is a fact that as a portfolio, the status of women committee has the smallest budget that exists. To give a file to that committee, which already has a reduced amount of support from the House, just adds further strain and reinforces what we are saying here, which is that when we talk about women in our society, when we talk about women in this House, quite simply we are saying that their value is diminished, that we should not assign resources to this. I believe that striking an independent committee would take the pressure off the status of women committee, which already operates under a small budget. It would reinforce the idea that all of us, across party lines, in this House will provide the resources necessary to make this piece come into legislation.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague has made reference to the fact that she comes from organized labour. As someone who understands what goes on with respect to collective bargaining, I wonder if she would comment on the fact that the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act made pay equity an issue for collective bargaining, rather than deeming it a

human right, and imposed a \$50,000 fine on any union that supported a member in filing a pay-equity complaint.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that the previous government put many barriers in front of not only women but in front of organized labour. This was a further barrier to supporting women in our public sector and supporting the right to collective bargaining in our country, making it more difficult.

Women are joining unions at the highest rate. That is because being a member of a union and having collective bargaining language is an equalizer for women. It affords them the opportunity to make a good wage with good benefits and to provide for their families in the same way that men are in our society.

• (1555)

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while I am happy to rise in the House today in support of our motion by the member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith, it pains me to think that we are in the year 2016 and are still calling for the government to support legislation that ensures equal pay for women.

It is fitting that we are presenting this motion on Groundhog Day, because it is the same old story. Like the movie, small details, like whether it is a Conservative or a Liberal in power, may change, but the fundamental issue remains the same. We are still living in a country where women have not achieved pay equity, where we are still calling for justice, and where we are still waiting.

Equal pay for women is so achievable. It is within our grasp, if only our elected officials in government were to actually put the issue on the table. If only the Liberal governments under Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin had used their 13 years in power to implement all, and not just a small portion, of the Pay Equity Commission's recommendations. If only the member for Vancouver Centre, who was the secretary of state for the status of women in 1997, had not eliminated program funding for women's organizations, starting in the 1998-99 fiscal year, dealing them a crippling blow. If only a previous Liberal government had not cut funding for women's organizations by more than 25% over the 1990s. If only they had not disbanded the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, which conducted research on a wide range of issues affecting women. If only they had not eliminated the Canadian Labour Force Development Board, which gave organizations of women, people of colour, and people living with disabilities a small voice in training policy. If only the Liberals, under Michael Ignatieff, had not held their noses with one hand and in the next breath said to the caucus that they would unanimously support the Public Service Equitable Compensation Act, a poison pill couched in the Conservatives' omnibus Bill C-10, placing restrictions on arbitrating gender-based pay equity complaints in the federal public service.

Pay equity is a right. Canada ratified the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1976 that makes pay equity a right. Canada also ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1981, which recognizes women's right to equal remuneration, including benefits, and to equal treatment in respect of work of equal value as well as equality of treatment in the evaluation of the quality of work.

Business of Supply

Section 11 of the Canadian Human Rights Act states:

It is a discriminatory practice for an employer to establish or maintain differences in wages between male and female employees employed in the same establishment who are performing work of equal value.

That makes pay equity a right. That right, just as the right to personal liberty and freedom of expression, bargained away by the Liberal support of Bill C-51 in the last Parliament, cannot be bargained away in the interests of political expediency.

Even though it is 2016, pay equity has not made it onto the agenda for real change put forward by the government. It has not surfaced as an issue for the government. Even when the opportunity presented itself, the Prime Minister, in an effort to achieve gender balance in his cabinet, assigned women the lower-paid roles of junior ministers. That is not pay equity. The Liberal platform makes no reference to pay equity, and neither does the Prime Minister's mandate letter to the Minister for the Status of Women.

If only we did not have to keep making this argument over and over again. It is Groundhog Day 2016, and I stand here with the only effective opposition in the House calling for fairness, calling for equity, calling for justice, calling for equal pay for women.

Women receive, on average, wages that are 23% lower than men for doing the same work. However, it is not just equal wages for equal work that will create equity. Economic security for women hinges on some key and simple elements, such as access to child care and access to affordable housing as well as the ability to earn a decent living.

• (1600)

Both Liberal and Conservative governments have failed to address the need for affordable housing in Canada. The first step toward economic security for any person is a safe place to live. Despite this, the Liberals ended the federal role in social housing in 1996. Liberal and Conservative governments alike have failed to create universal, accessible, and affordable child care in this country. The combination of these factors creates a crisis of pay inequity for Canadian women, and because pay inequity contributes to poverty, it has devastating health and social consequences for children.

Pay inequity is also related to economic dependence, which can affect a woman's ability to leave an abusive relationship. The choice between abuse and poverty is one no person should ever have to make.

It is also true that women bring home lower paycheques and because of that receive lower retirement incomes. Too often, senior women live hand-to-mouth until the end of their lives. According to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, the consequences of these pay inequities follow workers throughout their lives, reducing their lifetime earnings and retirement income. In Canada, 42% of elderly women are poor, and the median income of retired women is almost half that of older men.

Canada ranks 30th out of 34 OECD countries for wage equity. Even in predominantly female occupations, such as teaching, nursing, and administration, women earn less than men. The wage gap for women working full time has become worse over the past three years for which there are data. The wage gap actually gets bigger for aboriginal, racialized, and immigrant women with

university degrees. Women aged 45 to 54 earn, on average, \$23,600 less than men doing the same work.

Female MBA grads fare worse than men from the start. They are not only likely to start out at a lower job level, they are also offered fewer career-accelerating work experiences and fewer international postings.

If an appeal for equity based in the interest of social justice and human rights is not enough of an argument, we in the effective New Democratic opposition can appeal to plain and common fiscal sense. Quite simply put, pay equity makes for a healthier economy.

In Canada, RBC estimates that closing the gap in participation rates over the next two decades would boost GDP by 4% in 2032. The New Democrat proposal in today's motion calls upon the government to:

recognize pay equity as a right; ...implement the recommendations of the 2004 Pay Equity Task Force Report and restore the right to pay equity in the public service which was eliminated by the previous Conservative government in 2009....

Again, that was with the support of the Liberals.

The motion also calls on the government to appoint a special committee to conduct hearings on pay equity and propose proactive legislation.

In the words of Rosemary Brown, and these words ring truer than ever in this instance: "Until all of us have made it, none of us have made it".

Achieving pay equity for Canadian women once and for all is good for everyone. We cannot afford inequity. Let us get off this Groundhog Day merry-go-round of ignorance and injustice once and for all. Let us do what is right for Canada, for women, for their families, and for the children of the future.

New Democrats want to work with the new government to do precisely that. Let us get started. Let us get started by approving this motion and making sure that this is the last Groundhog Day on which we talk about the inequity that too many women face in this country.

• (1605)

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her review of the history and for setting out what some of the problems are for women and pay equity.

We heard from the Minister of Status of Women earlier today. She talked about our commitment to applying gender-based analysis going forward across all areas of government and all levels of government to improve the equity of women.

I was wondering if the member could comment on how the application of a gender-based analysis going forward would be of assistance in improving the status of women across our country.

Business of Supply

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, it would be a very good first step and I know that previous Liberal and Conservative governments have been aware of GBA. I also know that the report today said that too many departments are not observing GBA. It is still Groundhog Day because members of the NDP caucus and I addressed this over and over again in previous parliaments.

Yes, by all means let us get on with GBA, but I too remember the red book of 1993, 1997, 2000, and 2003, in which there were all kinds of Liberal promises. I am just a little jaded sometimes. I want to see action.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are in total agreement with the motion on pay equity.

From the NDP, we are hearing arguments on the struggle against inequality, on democracy and on fair gender representation. What fine principles.

However, the composition of the committee as presented leads to another major inequality that we find unacceptable in terms of fair representation, given that the people represented by the Bloc Québécois will not be represented on the committee.

Let us take Quebec as an example. In Quebec, the smallest opposition party has three members. Those three members have the same rights; they have funding proportional to their representation, and they sit on committees. They are therefore able to represent their constituents in a fair and equitable manner. The 16 NDP members from Quebec know this.

Will the so-called New Democratic Party live up to its name and amend its motion so as to recognize everyone's right to fair representation?

[*English*]

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that the membership of committees is determined by the party representation in the House which is determined by the people of Canada. They determine the composition of the House and ultimately of our committees. While I understand her concern, I am absolutely confident that my colleagues from the province of Quebec will do a really remarkable job in terms of this committee work.

I would also like to say that the province of Quebec has been a real leader in regard to pay equity. It is hard work. When I was a member of the Ontario Legislative Assembly, we also did some very good work. It is hard work, but it is important work and I hope that this Parliament will see fit to pursue it.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member talked a lot about "if only" and I think she means it in the fashion of blaming the Conservatives and perhaps even the Liberals. As I have indicated in the past, I come from the province of Manitoba where the NDP has been in power for 15 years and has not done much on the issue of pay equity. I say that to indicate clearly to the House that no political party can proclaim the high moral ground. All of us should try to get behind this issue. The government has recognized the value of the motion and supports the motion. Liberals provided a report under Paul Martin to further progress us on this issue.

Does the member not believe it is best that we work together in recognizing the inequity that exists and start to deal with it in a very tangible way? One of those ways is by acknowledging that the Government of Canada is going ahead with this committee in order to get the job done.

• (1610)

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, I think there are all kinds of blame and it can certainly be shared. Lots of blame to go around. I recall that the member was an MLA in Manitoba. I hope that as an MLA he made representation to that government to act.

While I am glad that the government is supporting this motion, my concern is that these motions can pass the House and then be ignored. I want to see action. Words come easily. Actions are a little more difficult and it is time for action.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville. I am proud to rise in the House on today's opposition motion. To begin, as a woman and mother, I will always support an effective motion for equal pay and compensation for equal work. It is important that every Canadian entering the workplace receives equal compensation.

In 2012, the Conservative government successfully passed the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act. This act affirms that women in the federal public sector should receive equal pay for work of equal value, consistent with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

This act included significant objectives, including timely and efficient resolutions for compensation matters as well as accountability, definition, processes, and transparency. I am proud to say that in the last 10 years, we have seen an increase of women in the public sector. Fifty-five per cent of the federal public service are women and we have seen the gap in pay equity decrease in the public sector. Currently the pay gap between women and men aged 35 and less has lowered to 2.2%.

The Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act and the reform of pay equity is the only act that advances joint union-employer accountability, providing a proactive process, collective bargaining, and the right to equal pay for equal value. This is just one advancement put forward by the past Conservative government.

Our party was the first party to have a female cabinet minister as well as the first female senator, and the most current support can be seen by our very own leadership.

Studies completed in the 41st Parliament include: "Women in Skilled Trades and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Occupations"; "Promising Practices to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls"; "Economic Leadership and Prosperity of Canadian Women"; "Eating Disorders Amongst Girls and Women"; and "Sexual Harassment in the Federal Workplace". We have an excellent track record.

Business of Supply

I would support this motion with the following amendment, “That, given that the Conservative Party absolutely supports pay equity, the motion be amended to delete part (c) and part (d) in their entirety.” Part (c) accuses the Conservative Party of removing the rights of public service employees to pay equity, which is not factual, and part (d) calls for a special committee to look at the pay equity issues for women, and this committee would duplicate the work of the status of women committee.

Today, I am joined to speak on this motion by fellow Conservative members representing Sarnia—Lambton, South Surrey—White Rock, and Yorkton—Melville, great women from across this country.

Women represent nearly half of the Canadian workforce. Women make up the majority of enrolments in college programs and the number is higher among graduates. The majority of graduates from university since the early 1990s have been women.

I am proud to stand in this House as the member for Elgin—Middlesex—London. I am proud to share that at my party's nomination, four of the six candidates were women. In the 2015 election, three of the six candidates bidding to represent my riding were women.

Furthermore, in my own constituency, there are a large number of females in leadership roles including chief financial officers and chief administrative officers in many of the municipalities that I represent. Many of the successful small and large corporations in my riding are run by women, including construction companies, financial institutions, and automobile dealerships.

I come from a family with very strong-willed women in leadership roles. My sister Linda is a principal. My sister Ann is the head of a science department at a high school. My sister-in-law Lisa is in charge of logistics for a successful trucking company. My own mother ran the business side of the family farm.

Personally, I have dealt with pay equity issues. In 1989, after working two and a half years at a business in my community, it came to the attention of a co-worker and I that the male employees were being paid almost \$2 more an hour. Our action was to take this issue and address it with management and the board of directors. Shortly after, this issue was ratified and equal pay for equal work was the policy.

Maybe as a young woman, I did not realize that a girl playing on an all-boys baseball team was strange. Maybe I was not aware that playing ice hockey and football in the schoolyard was not supposed to be for girls, or maybe I have always seen myself as an equal.

Women's issues are very important in this country and I believe we must focus on important issues, including violence against women and children as well as self-esteem issues. We must educate our youth to be sure that we condemn abuse to others, and we must work to instill values of equality in all people, including young girls.

• (1615)

We must support programs on mental health as well as local programs in our communities to improve self-worth. We must work together as a society to be inclusive.

As I said so many times, I am a proud mother of two teenaged daughters. I have five nieces and one great-niece. Just yesterday, one of my daughters found out that she was accepted into a program at St. Clair College for protection, security, and investigation. My niece Britney just received a recognition as the College Hockey America player of the month, and my niece Sarah was awarded the sportswoman of the year for the Mid-American Conference for golf. At one time, these were all-male dominated fields and activities.

Last year, I was proud to be one of the speakers at the Elgin Business Resource Centre's International Women's Day event. I was surrounded by successful businesswomen, including two local business owners who were also presenting. The room was filled with successful businesswomen and entrepreneurs.

I would like to share with members a few exciting facts. Women represent nearly half the workforce in Canada. Women are senior executives, CEOs, and board members here and across this country.

Our party's view is that Canada will be far better off when the full potential of women and girls is represented in every sector of the economy and society.

The previous government launched the successful “It Starts with One—Be her Champion”, seeking 5,000 leaders to not just counsel those they mentor, but to truly champion young women.

In budget 2015, status of women was mentioned multiple times, and \$700 million was invested in the Business Development Corporation. Our government also introduced changes to the Labour Code that have supported longer leaves for families. In 2012, the federal budget announced women on boards. Then again, in 2015, the first women's trade mission took place in Brazil, and our Conservative government created the women's entrepreneur forum, a national conference for women entrepreneurs.

I must reiterate that I fully support equal pay for equal work. However, portions of the motion before us duplicate an act that we already have in place, and that we already have seen provides excellent growth for women. We must continue to support women in the workplace and provide opportunities for them. However, the request for a committee consisting of 10 members, and that includes more resources, would just duplicate the work that the Standing Committee on the Status of Women already does. I am a proud member of that committee.

The mandate for the status of women committee already allows for subcommittees to focus on particular issues as well as to study policies, programs, expenditures, and legislation of departments and agencies. The motion would duplicate a committee as well as have an added expense for the taxpayers. The status of women committee under its mandate already focuses on equality, poverty of women, and violence experienced by women. I cannot support additional funds for an additional committee when one already exists.

Business of Supply

When reviewing the motion, I will accept points (a) and (b). I believe it is important to continue to close the unacceptable gap in pay between men and women, which contributes to income inequality and discriminates against women. I do recognize that pay equity is a right. As a proud woman, I will always support equal pay for equal work. Unfortunately, the motion does nothing further for any cause for Canadians.

The Conservative Party supports pay equity for women. By introducing the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act, Conservatives ensured that pay equity cases were dealt with fairly, quickly, and directly through collective bargaining. The act ensures pay equity issues are dealt with forthright instead of lingering for up to 15 years as in the previous Canadian Human Rights Commission process. That is not fair for anyone.

The motion also seeks to create a special committee of the House. There is no need for another special committee to be created. The House has a standing committee on human resources as well as the status of women committee that could certainly examine this if they wished. We need to be accountable to taxpayers, and additional funds for duplicate committees is not about spending well.

● (1620)

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member mentioned that in 2009 the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act was introduced, which might be one of the most deceiving titles for a law in Canadian history.

I would like to bring to the attention of the member comments by Margot Young, a professor of law at the University of British Columbia, who said the act “effectively treats pay equity as if it’s not a human right”.

Would the member care to comment on that?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Mr. Speaker, the act was put in place in 2012, not 2009. I am not sure we are looking at the same thing, but we probably are. The act sits there as a guideline. It sits there as our legislation. It is important that we enforce this.

Even today’s motion is a template for Canadians to follow. It is up to us as Canadians to make sure we are abiding by this new legislation and these new laws.

Although I am not sure of the quote that this lady has used, legislation of this sort is important. The motion on the table is important. We must close the gap on gender equality when it comes to pay.

At the same time, my concerns are with sections (c) and (d). I do not stand for the quotes that they said about the Conservative Party because there is some incorrect information there. I am also concerned, as are the taxpayers of Canada, that we spend taxpayers’ money well. I do not believe setting up another committee would do that.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if my colleague could tell me what she considers to be an acceptable level of difference in pay. What percentage of difference is acceptable to the member? What are some of the barriers that my colleague thinks account for those differences, and what should be done to lower those barriers? I look forward to her answers.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Mr. Speaker, equal pay for work of equal value is important. That is basically what I stated. If there is a difference, then we must look at other variables. Is the person doing the same level of work? If the answer is no, then I can understand there being a bit of a difference. However, at the same time, there must be equal pay for equal work. That is what I believe.

I recognize that at this time we do not have total equality. As I indicated, there is still a 2.2% gap for individuals under the age of 35. I recognize that. It is important that we work together as Canadians to continue to close that gap. It is not perfect, and we must work together to make sure that it does become effective. As I indicated, we have seen a decrease in the gap. We have also seen an increase in the number of federal public servants who are women.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the member’s point that the Conservative government is above reproach in its position on gender equity, I wonder if she could explain why in the early years of the previous prime minister’s mandate the goal of achieving equality for women was removed from the mandate of Status of Women Canada.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Mr. Speaker, we had a strong Status of Women Canada mandate. I cannot speak for the 2005-06 period that my colleague may be referring to, but with the leadership we had, we saw many changes. We saw this compensation act come into force in 2012, and we saw a variety of other things that we could do.

I stand here with my colleague from London—Fanshawe. It is people like her and me, who within our constituencies can mentor young women. We are sitting here as examples of what Canadian women can be and what we can obtain. I am proud for doing that.

● (1625)

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand here today to speak to the importance of pay equity, equal pay for work of equal value, for women in the Canadian workforce. All Canadians need to know that when they enter the workforce they will receive equal compensation.

This is very important to me personally. This was an issue in my own life. As a young university student in the seventies I was working at a summer job where the men were doing the same work as I was and yet were being paid a higher wage. The issue was approached, was addressed, and I received a much appreciated bonus cheque after returning to my studies.

Therefore, on a personal level, I appreciate how important it is that we have pay equity. It is important to me personally, and to the Conservative Party, as has been said over and over again today. The Conservative Party has always been deeply invested in improving the financial success of women in whatever venture or occupation they choose.

Business of Supply

I take great pride in the fact that the first female cabinet minister and the first female senator were Conservatives. Another exceptional example to young women seeking job equity is Janice Charette, the former clerk of the Privy Council, who did much of the heavy lifting on the Liberals' transition into power before being replaced by the current government.

One of our three pillars for the Status of Women Canada mandate while in government was to advance equality for women by increasing women's economic security and prosperity. Through the economic action plan of 2015, our Conservative government affirmed our unwavering support for work and pay equity for women, in a multiplicity of ways.

As it was 2015, I am thankful that the Minister of Status of Women indicated today that the Liberals will continue to build on successful initiatives. She has much to choose from here.

We amended the Canada Business Corporations Act to promote gender diversity among public companies, and in just one and a half years, we saw female participation in private sector boards increase from 12% to 20%. We created online platforms to foster networking among women, and introduced the "It Starts With One" campaign to ensure mentorship and the championing of women. We provided the first women's trade mission, in May 2015, to Brazil. We committed \$700 million over three years to finance women-owned businesses, and enhanced support for small and medium-sized businesses. We provided \$14 million over two years to Futurpreneur Canada in support of young entrepreneurs, many of whom we hear are young women.

We provided \$37 million annually to extend the 2014 employment insurance compassionate care benefits from six weeks to six months, which would allow caregivers, often women, who are away from work temporarily, to care for family members who are gravely ill. We have to appreciate that women are extremely complicated and we have a lot of hats to wear. It is important that we value all of those roles equally. Part of that is taking care of people we love, those who are older in our family, our spouses, and our children.

Since 2007, more than \$18 million was approved through Status of Women Canada for projects that support women in skilled trades and technical professions. There were 45 projects that promote women in skilled trades, including mining, construction, shipbuilding, energy, manufacturing, and agriculture. I can tell members that in my riding, where the mining and agriculture sectors are very strong, women are everywhere, in every role, in those areas.

I fully support (a) and (b) in the NDP's motion today. However item (c) is completely incorrect when it says "pay equity...was eliminated by the previous Conservative government in 2009". In reality, in 2009 the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act came into place. The act was designed to see issues of equal pay for men and women in the public service dealt with through collective bargaining between union and employer. Complaints are referred to the Public Service Labour Relations Board.

The process we instituted leads to speedier resolution of disputes, some of which dragged on in previous processes for years and years. For example, the Treasury Board testified in front of the Senate Committee on Human Rights that most complaints took at least six

years to resolve, while one case took 15 years. It also stated that the Canadian Human Rights Commission found that pay equity cases represented less than 8% of all cases but absorbed one half of the commission's total spending on legal fees.

Also, in section (d), the motion seeks to create a special committee of the House when we have vehicles in place, also through the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, to champion these concerns.

● (1630)

I cannot tell members how much I want to vote in favour of this motion. However, I feel that intentional roadblocks were included.

A member for the Liberal Party to my right mentioned today that there are inflammatory statements in here that are not crucial to this motion, that are causing angst on this side of the floor and not enabling us to support something that we clearly do support. I am very frustrated by that. It prevents me from being able to support clauses (a) and (b) in this motion in the way that I very much want to as a woman in this House who has worked very hard to get here.

The responsibility of government is to ensure a fair environment, in which women have the freedom to make their own choices as to where and when they want to work and have a family, career, and profession. This includes recognizing pay equity as a right and ensuring equal opportunity for employment and service.

With the right environment for choice and opportunity, women have a very unique part to play and much to contribute to our society, our culture, our communities, and our economic prosperity as a country.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am so happy to hear this astonishing change in tone from the Conservative bench. Clearly voters have sent a different brand of Conservative to the House. I appreciate very much the strong statements of support for pay equity. I too would like to see the members all support this motion unanimously.

Let me say a couple of things to try to help them get there.

The first point is that we have not had pay equity in legislation for Canada in all this time, so we need section (c), which is implementing the recommendations of the pay equity task force report. If we do not vote in favour of that, nothing happens. We have to move there.

I appreciate that some members are saying they do not agree that they took away the right to pay equity in the public service. They are going to have more members on the committee than the NDP will, and they can argue that point and make that recommendation to Parliament.

Business of Supply

The third point is that using the status of women committee over all these decades, with all this great work, did not get the job done. We need a single focus, a specific mandate, a one-track focus for this committee so we can get this done well.

My question for the member is that with those, I hope, persuasive reassurances, is it possible for the members to my right to support the motion and finally close the wage gap for women in Canada?

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Mr. Speaker, we are on the same page, even with clause (c), until we come to the part where the member chooses to be derogatory in her motion, her statement, toward the Conservative Party. We have done many good things.

The minister on the other side of the House has said that where good things have happened they do not want to rewrite the rule book; they want to work and build on it. I have heard from all over the House that people want to work together.

I heard from over here that it is time. It is time.

Yet, this motion has been put forward in a way that causes issues for the Conservatives you want to work with.

That is my issue. I feel the wording was put into the motion in an inflammatory way and was not necessary.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her presentation about gender equity and parity. I particularly like the part where she suggested that we value all of our roles as women. In my own experience, as someone who practised law for a number years and then chose to raise my family for a few years, I understand all of those roles.

My question for my friend, as a woman who has worked hard to get here, is whether she has any ideas, having reviewed the history in this House about how we have worked toward gender parity and equity, on how we can increase female participation in the House, given that we are only 26%.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. I think a large part of that comes with what I have heard in the House today as we have debated this.

We have heard about how things have been improving. I think we need to continue to build on that and encourage women to participate here. This is not something that I saw doing at a young age because my priorities were different.

I want to say to young women all over our country that you can do it all, but you do not have to do it all at once. There is this amazing stage of life that I am in, and I have a lot to contribute. I think there are a lot of things that we as women can do. However, quite honestly, the men around me are very supportive as well in continuing to see things improve in our country.

• (1635)

The Deputy Speaker: Before we resume debate, just as a reminder for all hon. members that from time to time members are finding it easy to slip into the second person form of speech in the House, addressing other members as “you” and so on. I have a couple of tips perhaps for hon. members. They are not just for new members, without pointing anyone out, but this is just the style of speech we use in the House.

First, members should address the Speaker in the course of their comments, even when posing a question. It is fine to pivot to members opposite from time to time, but generally speaking, they are to address the Chair in the course of their remarks. That way members are not necessarily looking at the other members to whom their comments might be directed.

Second, if members find themselves using the word “you” in the course of their commentary, this is a first sign that perhaps they are slipping into that mode and they should come back and start referring to other hon. members as “other members” or “he”, “she”, “they” and so on.

Those are just some tips.

Resume debate, the hon. member for North Island—Powell River.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to let you know that I will be sharing my time with the member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

Today we are speaking on the important issue of pay equity. I am proud to stand in the House to speak in support of the motion. I would be remiss though if I did not take this opportunity to mention the woman who pushed me toward considering politics.

In 2005, I received a phone call from Fran Jones while working for Homalco First Nation. Fran, a woman of great integrity and dedication, wanted to discuss how to increase opportunities for aboriginal youth to work in our community.

For the following years, I had the honour of calling Fran a friend. She encouraged me to think about politics. She brought me multiple articles about women in politics and why it was so necessary for women to take their space. She knew that women had to take up space to create a better country. Fran left us not too long ago. If it were not for her, I would not have even thought to put my name forward when asked to run in 2014. It is women like her who make the world a better place and she is sorely missed.

Across my riding women are working hard. They are leaders in their workplaces, their communities, and in their families. Yet it is still largely the work of women that is undervalued. In fact, in Canada, women working full-time are making only 77% of what men make. Even in occupations with high levels of women, for example, nurses, teachers, and administrative workers, women often still earn less than their male counterparts.

Today, I stand in the House to encourage all members to stand with us to bring forward this change. It is time for Canada to be a leader in pay equity rather than to continue to see our country move down the list. We are now ranked by the World Economic Forum as 80th out of 145 countries when it comes to pay equity.

Business of Supply

Pay equity is important as it means that jobs must be evaluated on their skill, effort, responsibility, and working conditions. Too long have job titles been used to pay women less in many sectors. I know that in my travels across the riding I am consistently talking to women around striving toward leadership positions and politics.

In fact, after the October 19 election, I was interviewed by a local paper about being a woman elected to a Parliament with 88 female members, a movement in the right direction. At 88, we are almost at one-third of the members of Parliament. One of my favourite sayings has always been “to regain balance you must move from one extreme to another”. I look forward to a day when the House is full of women.

I am also proud to come from a party that does the important work of making space for this change. By committing to increasing women to 50% of our representation, we must take active steps in making this a reality. It is the only way that people must reflect on what the barriers are that are preventing women from taking this much needed step.

During this interview, we also contemplated the question of why women still did not make up larger numbers in roles of power. We must encourage women to step forward and encourage one another in these roles. I am proud to be one of the 88 women parliamentarians, but we still have much work to do.

We also talked about the fact that my granny could not vote until 1960, when aboriginal people were finally given the right. It is with great pride that I stand here in her memory. The fact that I am even in the House, that I am in this role, would not have been part of her vision for me. This is what oppression does. It narrows the vision for people. I am proud that it will be a vision for my granddaughter.

This is why pay equity is more important than we can comprehend. Valuing work, valuing women widens the vision for women and for all Canadians. Pay equity is often seen as a woman's issue. This is a societal issue. Until we value people for the work they do in a fair way, it says much about our society and about our country. It also means less opportunity.

● (1640)

Multiple research efforts have been focused on diversity and its positive impacts on business and innovation. Diversity means a focus on multiple stakeholders and potential markets. This only builds competitiveness and creativity. Pay equity will assist with building a better Canada.

The motion put forward today is also based on the hard-working women in labour. In the 1950s and 1960s, these women fought hard for pay equity. Standing next to their male counterparts, they knew they were doing the same jobs and receiving less pay. This fight built a stronger framework and today women in unions are paid, on average, over \$6 more than women who are not.

In May of 2015, a report called “Women as a Catalyst for Economic Growth” was released. This report showed that Canadian working women were making \$8,000 less than men doing an equivalent job. This gap is double the global average of \$4,000. This report confirmed that although women comprised nearly half the Canadian labour force, they made up just 5.4% of Canadian CEOs.

There is much work to be done. As I knocked on many doors in my riding, I heard the story repeatedly of women who had given up their work because child care was too expensive. They simply were not making enough. These women were worried and shared their concerns about retirement, about building their careers, and about being examples to their children. Pay equity is key in this discussion, because women are retiring with less, not because they did not work hard enough but because they were not paid fairly.

I have met many senior women in my riding who live in poverty. They have worked all of their lives. Because they were paid less, often for the same work, they had less opportunity and were challenged to support themselves as they aged. This is simply not fair.

In 2009, the right to pay equity in the public service was eliminated by the Conservatives, while the then Liberal leader held his nose and voted with them. This must be restored. The public service should be a leader across Canada, not contributing to the issue and discrimination of pay equity. Pay equity is a human right, not an issue to be negotiated during collective bargaining.

The motion before the House today calls on the government to: first, recognize that pay equity is a right; second, finally implement the recommendations of the 2004 pay equity task force report; third, restore the right to pay equity in public service; and, fourth, appoint a special committee to conduct hearings on pay equity and propose proactive pay equity legislation.

Today, in the year 2016, it is time for the federal government to take action. It is time to finally stand up for all the people of Canada and say that this issue is important and that it is time to get it right.

Yesterday, many members of my riding were sending me reminders that the lunar new year was only days away. It is time to clean one's home and prepare for family celebration of the new year. Today, I hope we will clean this important House of Canada by supporting a motion that will benefit everyone.

● (1645)

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it has been wonderful to hear all of the speakers today. There is great support in the House for gender parity and the pay equity issue in the motion before us.

I have heard some concerns from my friends across the aisle in the Conservative opposition about some of the wording in what I believe is paragraph (c). Would my friend consider, because it might be stronger to have the entire House stand as a whole in support of this motion, putting forward an amendment so the offending provision might be removed? Perhaps we could then have the support of the Conservative opposition.

Business of Supply

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Madam Speaker, my response to that is simply the fact that we need to have a focused discussion. A committee needs to deal with this issue and the members of that committee can discuss how that detail is going to play out.

The reality is that women are worth it, young children are worth it, and young girls are worth it. We need to ensure we have pay equity moving into the future and that it is in legislation. I hope today everyone will stand and vote for it, because women are worth it.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to go back to what the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville said.

All day today, during the course of this debate, we have heard support for pay equity on all sides of the House. We have heard some of the aspects of what the Conservative government did to advance the status of women in our country over the course of the last 10 years, as has been well said by my colleagues on this side of the House. However, there are a couple of challenges that we face, but the main one is our being pigeonholed by section (c) of the motion that somehow neglects or fails to recognize the work that has gone on over the past several decades, the past 100 years, of advancing women's issues in this country by all sides, whether Liberal or Conservative governments.

Would the member talk to her caucus and the mover of this motion consider taking that part, section (c), out of this? We can have talks with our caucus, but this is what is causing us a major concern right now.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Madam Speaker, first of all, I talked earlier in my speech about Fran Jones who was an incredible woman who encouraged me passionately. She was a devoted Conservative. She knew that women needed to be in politics, and she knew that people who are in this role take it as a secret oath to their riding.

Today, I am happy to hear how many strong women across party lines are here, standing up for their communities, and who I hope will have this as their discussion. I am excited to see this vote. It is time to vote to support women.

• (1650)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have a quick question to follow up on the two previous questions.

What if the member had the option of having the current motion as is and a large number of members of Parliament voting against it, or have a consensus on one aspect of it, with the potential of getting all members of the House supporting its intent? The intent is so wonderful, pay equity. That is what we should all be trying to achieve. It would appear as if the Conservatives are prepared to support it, if in fact there were an amendment moved.

Would the member rather see an amendment put forward and have everyone get behind it, or would she rather try to push this motion through even if it means that one of the major political parties votes against it?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Madam Speaker, I do not believe we can erase the history that is there. I believe that we need to stand up and be real about where we are today. I am happy to support this motion.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise today on an issue that has long been near and dear to my heart, that being equity.

As the proud daughter of a hard-working mother and hard-working grandmothers, and as the proud mother of three daughters who are entirely capable, I burn with righteous indignation when I think of the value of the work they have done and have the potential of doing and realize that we have allowed ourselves to be skewered and talked into a legislated environment that today makes it acceptable to pay a woman less for equal work. That is why I am honoured to be part of the New Democrat caucus and to speak on behalf of our opposition day motion.

The motion calls on the government to recognize pay equity as a right; to finally implement the recommendations of the 2004 pay equity task force report; to restore the right to pay equity in the public service, which was eliminated in 2009; to appoint a special committee to conduct hearings on pay equity and to propose proactive pay equity legislation, which is the icing on the cake for me to expedite such an important issue.

It blows my mind that in the year 2016 we are actually talking about it. I wish it were a decade ago and I could be sharing in anticipation with my younger daughters the kind of future held out for them as they entered their era of political activism as young women.

Why pay equity? To paraphrase the Prime Minister, which we have done often here today, it is 2016 and women make nearly a quarter less than men on the dollar. Put simply, pay equity is a fundamental human right, the principle of equal pay for equal work.

In her 2012 paper, "A Living Wage As a Human Right", Mary Cornish points out that by failing to achieve pay equity, Canada is in violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related United Nations conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The goal of pay equity is to stop discrimination related to the historic undervaluation of work traditionally performed by women, or "women's work" as they say. Let us be clear that pay inequity is a form of discrimination and the gender wage gap is usually greater for aboriginal women, women with disabilities, racialized, and immigrant women. The more categories a woman occupies, the greater her financial disparity.

A good example of this can be taken from the area where I live in Windsor Essex County, where my riding, Windsor—Tecumseh, is located. Forty-one point eight per cent of female-led, lone parent families live in poverty, according to Pathway to Potential, Windsor's poverty reduction strategy. Here, pay equity is but a symptom of larger structural inequities, with women being hit the hardest, be they from a minority community, or aboriginal, or a person with disabilities, or merely single.

How did we get here? How did it happen that women came to earn 77¢ on the dollar of what a man makes? Lower rates of pay do not just emerge *ex nihilo* out of nothing. There are broad historical and cultural factors at play.

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An interesting report from Status of Women Canada last year detailed some of these factors. These include a stubbornly consistent rate of violence against women in Canada despite dropping rates of violence against men; a greater vulnerability of aboriginal women to violence than non-aboriginal women; increasing poverty rates of single moms and senior women; and following from the above, a 20% income gap between men and women. This is two percentage points higher than the gap that exists in other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD, countries. While this report notes that Canadian women are better educated and are entering the workforce in greater numbers than men, the latter are still paid over 20% more than their female colleagues. This pay gap puts Canada fourth from the bottom of 34 OECD countries, with only South Korea, Japan, and Germany scoring worse.

• (1655)

What can we do? How can we fix the problem? According to a recent OECD report, “Achieving stronger growth by promoting a more gender-balanced economy”, there are certain enabling conditions that are needed to create an environment where gender equality and then pay equity are possible. These enabling conditions turn out to be concerns that New Democrats have been fighting for generations. These conditions are maternal health measures such as prenatal, childbirth, post-natal, and reproductive health services.

In Canada, women on average do 1.5 hours more unpaid work a day than men do, and the affordability and quality of child care overall in Canada is still an issue forcing many women to drop out of the labour market or reduce their working hours during their child-rearing years.

Gender equality in future labour force participation crucially involves policies enhancing gender equality in education, such as ensuring that boys and girls have equal access to good-quality education, ensuring equal rights and opportunities for them to successfully complete schooling, and helping students make informed choices about their field of study and career path.

I want to salute Unifor and Windsor's Women's Enterprise Skills Training for promoting awareness and mentorship. Members might check out the independent video *Because It's 2016* and see why this video is getting well-deserved accolades for the awareness and mentorship of young women in skilled trades.

To this I would add that it is about having legislation, laws with real teeth that set out more than mere voluntary goals that feel and look good and that explode well in public attention during campaigns. Those kinds of fireworks disappoint and frustrate us when we are here in the House of Commons and hear the rhetoric first. Let us get some legislation with teeth, and having an independent committee is the most expeditious way for us to take that dedication seriously and do the work that really needs to be done.

Last, pay equity is not just about being the right and moral thing to do, although this alone should be cause enough to desire it. I look across the aisle at our other parties and I know that each and every member has a sister, a mother, or a daughter, and finds it unacceptable that females should be paid less than males for doing equal-value work.

• (1700)

Ms. Karen Ludwig (New Brunswick Southwest, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to stand today, not only to speak to the House but also to address Madam Speaker on this very important issue.

As a university professor, past associate dean, a business owner, and international exporter, I, like many of my colleagues in the House, have worked very hard to get here. We have an opportunity as politicians to be role models.

I would ask that the member across the aisle consider renegotiating and setting a tone of openness that we so desire in this House, as role models and in mentorship to others, whether male or female, by reconsidering part (c) of the motion. We all, I believe, have the ultimate goal of seeking pay equity. That is the ultimate goal. Let us set the tone.

Would the member consider renegotiating that and making that amendment so we can pass pay equity, because it is such an important cause?

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: Madam Speaker, at this point I feel overwhelmed by how we are wallowing in the past mostly because of the fact that it can be embarrassing or uncomfortable for some people who have tried to champion the cause. For us to move forward though we have to acknowledge past practice.

The member should look at the motion through the lens of Status of Women Canada in trying to expedite and acknowledge as we move forward the truth and reconciliation to how women are being treated in the workforce and our past practices having to be nullified. That would help in the context of how she could move forward to support this motion.

It is important for us to have an independent committee work on pay equity. The committee would look at the legislative environment in a way that would help us expedite pay equity as quickly as possible. Other barriers against women would gradually crumble because we would have taken care of the legislated environment. It is important for us to put forth the history of that legislated environment. It is not the same thing as talking about goals and policy that have been undermined. This is a regulated environment.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague a question and in the process correct the record.

It has been said in the House that there is no pay equity legislation in Manitoba and that is not the case. There is pay equity legislation in Manitoba and Nova Scotia in the public sector. Ontario and Quebec have pay equity in both the public and the private sector.

If we can pass the motion and get action on federal pay equity, would that not be a template or a motivator to bring in those other provinces and territories that do not yet have pay equity legislation?

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Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: Madam Speaker, yes, absolutely. I mentioned a regulatory environment. Once we normalize, once we reach certain milestones, there are other sectors that can and will emulate that. They do look to government for leadership.

Mr. Doug Eyolfson (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I cannot find any fault with any of the goals of the motion and what it wants to accomplish. We want to improve the rights of women and have equality in the workplace. We have a golden opportunity in the House today to have unanimous support for the motion. We understand that there is some history that the hon. member and her party wishes to acknowledge, but is there any way that removing this objectionable clause to get unanimous support would abrogate any of the rights of women in the workplace?

• (1705)

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: Madam Speaker, unfortunately the damaging legislation that had been passed, which undermined the progress of the work of Status of Women Canada, was not passed unanimously. I do not know if this has merit in this case to stall us from working on this real milestone achievement that would help to negate the damage that has been done. We should be further ahead by now.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Surrey—Newton.

I welcome the opportunity to take part in this important discussion regarding federal pay equity policies. As we all know, this is not new. It is an important issue that governments and their partners have been working to address for many years.

Guy Ryder, director general of the International Labour Organization, made a statement last year on the occasion of International Women's Day. He said that, globally, only half of all women are in the labour force, compared to nearly 80% of men—a figure basically unchanged in 20 years. The large gender pay gap has not narrowed much, with women still earning on average 23% less than men.

Furthermore, new evidence is emerging that mothers suffer a wage penalty, often over and above the gender pay gap. We cannot accept that at current rates of change, it may take more than 70 years for women to achieve equal pay status with men. Now 70 years is a very long time to close that gap, and I am sure some of my colleagues may be wondering how closely these international figures reflect our current situation.

The principle of equal pay for work of equal value is enshrined in the Canadian Human Rights Act. However, the simple fact is that, on average, women still earn less than men. Even here in Canada, the gender-based wage gap persists.

Consider a few key indicators. According to the Statistics Canada 2015 labour force survey, women earn almost \$0.82 compared to every dollar earned by men. In 2013, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development released a report showing that Canada's unadjusted gender wage gap, the difference between median earnings of men and women, was 19%. While we have made some progress in the area of equal pay for work of equal value, we

find these continuing disparities troubling and unacceptable. Much more needs to be done.

In the not-too-distant past, the Government of Canada undertook efforts to help understand how to better achieve pay equity. In 2000, the Bilson pay equity task force was formed and mandated to conduct an in-depth review of the existing federal pay equity legislation. This task force outlined 113 recommendations in its report on pay equity reform in 2004. These recommendations included a number of rich and innovative ideas to help reform the federal government's approach to pay equity. At the time, consensus could not be reached on the implementation of these recommendations.

However, the task force's recommendations now merit a closer look. A lot has changed since 2000, and we need to carefully review these forward-thinking recommendations. Such a review includes engaging with our partners, including at the provincial level, and drawing on their feedback and first-hand experiences.

The current government is deeply committed to pay equity and the fair treatment of all workers in the workplace. The government is also committed to open dialogue with our stakeholders, academic experts and organizations that support pay equity.

• (1710)

This way, we can make, and move forward with, the best decisions possible. From our point of view, this will mean undertaking consultations with our stakeholders, including federally regulated employers, and other organizations, before we move to implement legislative changes.

Our government will fulfill its ambitious, new mandate by working cooperatively with our many partners, with a renewed spirit of innovation, openness and collaboration.

As we mentioned in our Speech from the Throne, Canada succeeds in large part because we value diverse perspectives and different opinions. We all know that more work needs to be done.

Our government has made equity and diversity a priority in mandate letters for ministers, and in how the cabinet was formed. Our government values fairness, transparency, and collaboration. We put the well-being of Canadians first, and we understand that their interests and views need to be considered in every decision we make. That is why we are committed to reaching out and engaging with our stakeholders and other partners across Canada.

Pay equity is an important issue for Canadians, and they want us to find a fair and balanced approach. Too many women still face unfair challenges in the workplace, even in 2016. We need to work together to ensure that all women have the opportunity to fully participate on an equal footing in the workplace. It is both the right thing to do and a certain path to economic growth.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to take part in the debate.

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What will the repercussions be if we fail to give serious consideration to this subject and the recommendations that the committee will produce in an effort to achieve equality? What will the long-term consequences be if we fail to take action today and consider the useful recommendations that we receive from the committee responsible for studying the matter?

Mr. Marc Serré: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question. I also thank the NDP for raising this issue in the House today.

I am very proud of the steps the government has already taken to begin examining social equality and pay equity. The committee must do its work, conduct research and discuss the issue with the provinces, private sector players and union leaders, in order to make recommendations.

• (1715)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will not pass up the opportunity to ask a question on such an important issue as pay equity. For many years, even in the Manitoba legislature, many individuals have been engaged in the importance of this issue, recognizing that women and girls are entitled to the same rate of pay for the same type of work.

I suspect we will hear this at the committee level where we will get presentations that say that Ottawa has to play a role. I am glad to convey that our Prime Minister and the government as a whole are very supportive of pay equity, and we will play a leadership role in this.

However, we also need to signal that others need to play a role, especially other forms of government, whether it is provincial, municipal, school trustees or school boards, and so forth. We need to encourage and demonstrate that leadership so other jurisdictions look to Ottawa and recognize that what is happening is a good thing.

This is one of the benefits of having a standing committee or a committee of this nature to review this. There is a great deal of pride. Both men and women from both sides of the House appear to be very supportive of the motion.

Would the member provide his perspective on the importance of this issue and having the national government play a leading role in this?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Serré: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Of course I am very proud of the government's commitment. The first measure we implemented, as we said earlier, was gender parity in cabinet, that is, a cabinet made up of an equal number of men and women.

We will also examine the issue of infrastructure and housing for the homeless and seniors. Our investments in first nations communities will also be very important. We also plan to look after young Canadians. These important aspects will be considered when we examine those investments. I am therefore very proud to be part of this government.

I have four daughters, so this is a personal commitment I want to make to take care of their future by ensuring that they are treated fairly and regarded as equals, and that they can also fulfill all of their dreams.

It is therefore very important to me that we take a closer look at the role of the federal government and the private sector in these areas.

I have also been a school trustee, so I have a lot of experience working with students and teachers. This issue is important to me and to this government. I will continue to work hard on this file.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, my question is on the legislation passed by the Conservatives in 2009. My colleague may recall that the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act was amended and that a number of the new criteria made it much more difficult to achieve equity.

At the time, Mr. Ignatieff, who unfortunately voted in favour of the bill, said, "We have made it clear that we are not pursuing an amendment strategy. Sometimes we have to hold our nose".

How does the hon. member explain the position of the Liberals, who voted in favour of the bill at the time?

Mr. Marc Serré: Madam Speaker, there were a lot of problems with the legislation passed in 2009. As a result, a number of things have to be amended. The House acknowledged that and we are working on making the necessary changes in order to have a more positive impact on pay equity.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Madam Speaker, if you seek it you will find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That, notwithstanding any Standing or Special Order, at the conclusion of the debate on today's opposition motion, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion be deemed put, a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Wednesday, February 3, 2016, at the conclusion of oral questions.

• (1720)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): 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)

[*English*]

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member from Nickel Belt for his passion about bringing real change and equality for all women.

I am pleased to offer my remarks today in favour of this motion. I would like to thank the NDP member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith for bringing this motion forward.

It is most encouraging that on the Conservative benches I see members speaking in favour, but on the other hand, the members from the NDP have a valid point that we have to bring the history out. At the same time, I would also encourage the NDP members to take the word “Conservative” out. If we could have the support of the Conservative members, we could have unanimous support of the motion.

Next year will mark the 50th anniversary of the Government of Canada appointing the Royal Commission on the Status of Women. The mandate of this commission was “to ensure for women equal opportunities with men in all aspects of Canadian society”.

Three years after being formed, the commission tabled a report of recommendations, and one of the core recommendations was for legislation to ensure that equal work between men and women was given equal value.

This report then led to this concept being included in the Canadian Human Rights Act, which became law in 1977, a law to provide equal opportunity to individuals without discrimination based on gender, religion, or disability.

Then, of course, in 1981, Canada became a model for the world by introducing the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This is where the equality of all citizens became a fundamental principle of Canadian society. That is why I chose Canada to be my home and why I wanted to raise my family here. I am proud that the people of Surrey—Newton have allowed me the opportunity and privilege to sit in this House, for the third time, so that I am able to speak on their behalf to bring in a change that I aspired to bring before moving to this great nation.

In 1999, the Government of Canada created a pay equity task force, which in 2004 released a final report of recommendations. This included a commitment to the principle of pay equity, recognition that the basic principle of equal pay is a human right, and an acknowledgement that employers are obliged to take positive steps to eliminate wage differences that discriminate based on gender.

This is just a brief history of how long we have been talking about pay equity in Canada, and yet here we stand in 2016 debating this motion, which by now should be a normal part of our thinking. Unfortunately, this concept of equality still remains elusive.

I am the proud father of two young women, Keerat and Joat, who graduated with degrees in medicine and who are both starting their careers in the medical profession. Their ambition and their accomplishments make me very proud.

My wife, Roni, and I have always taught them that there is nothing that can stop them from pursuing their dreams and succeeding. It is a good thing we brought this resolution today. Every woman in Canada should be able to have the same opportunities as my daughters.

● (1725)

What we did not realize was how the previous Conservative government worked against the notion of pay equity in this country. Under the previous government, the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act was introduced, which might be one of the most

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deceiving titles for a law in Canadian history. I earlier mentioned this in the House. According to Margot Young, a professor of law at the University of British Columbia, the act “effectively treats pay equity as if it's not a human right”.

The act speaks a lot about qualifications and market forces. This is code for completely ignoring the fact that women in Canada are paid on average about 27% less than their male counterparts. The act gutted the ability of women to expect equal pay in two ways. First, it allowed employers to use qualifications, job descriptions, and employer needs as a justification to bypass equal pay within the workforce. Second, it did not recognize pay equity as a fundamental human right of every Canadian citizen.

Change, and I mean real change, takes leadership from the top. Let me provide some contrast for Canadians and in the House. When he was head of the National Citizens Coalition in 1998, the former prime minister and current member of Parliament for Calgary Heritage said that for taxpayers, pay equity is a “rip-off. And it has nothing to do with gender...That's why the federal government should scrap its ridiculous pay equity law.”

However, here is what the current Prime Minister and the member of Parliament for Papineau stated about pay equity in 2014: “Too many women face unacceptable discrimination in pay equity, barriers to employment... Liberals will continue to stand for action, and we will always advocate for women's full economic, social, reproductive, and political equality”.

This is real leadership. It is why this government, as one of its first acts, is correcting the imbalance in pay within cabinet so that all ministers, whether with a department or as a minister of state, will receive equal pay and equal status. It is also why my government colleagues and I stand today to show support for the motion. Pay equity should be returned to the public service as a fundamental right, not a negotiating position.

Further, a special committee with all of the budget power and respect of any other parliamentary standing committee should be created.

What we do not need more of are reports or recommendations that never go anywhere. This is why allowing this special committee to report back with a defined plan is necessary and long overdue. It is absolutely amazing that we have spoken about this issue in the House of Commons for almost half a century. We still have progress to make in achieving pay equity, both in the public service and for every job across Canada.

Tomorrow, members from all parties can correct this delay. The concept is very simple. Women must receive equal pay. The workplace can no longer be an institution of discrimination between genders. Most importantly, the House has to step up and correct this long-standing injustice.

I strongly encourage every member of the House to join me in voting in favour of this motion tomorrow and in case anyone might be asking why, the answer is very simple: because it is 2016 and the time for action is now.

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• (1730)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, I was glad to hear the member mention in his speech the bill introduced by Conservatives in 2009. I was a little surprised to hear how critical he was of it, seeing as the Liberals voted for the bill to implement the changes that he himself just condemned in his speech.

Can the member explain why the Liberals voted for the bill, which was a budget bill, if I remember correctly? Was it a political move to avoid triggering an election?

[English]

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Madam Speaker, when I was a member of Parliament in the previous Parliament, I remember a motion similar to the one the NDP is talking about today. It was Bill C-471, introduced by the then leader of the Liberal Party, Michael Ignatieff.

It has always been the intent of the Liberal Party to bring equality for women.

Look at the charter. I am very proud to stand here today. The Right Hon. Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau brought in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to enshrine equality, to enshrine individual rights, in our Constitution. I am very proud of the history of the Liberal Party. I am very proud of its present leadership. The Prime Minister brought in equality, with an equal number of female and male ministers in his cabinet, and equal pay for them all.

I am very proud of our record and will remain proud.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, I was quite interested in the remarks from the member opposite. He seems to have been acknowledging the nature of the 2009 Conservative bill, the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act, as very problematic, as unacceptable. Yet, he seems, like others in the Conservative benches, determined to ignore the fact that there is a history behind the lack of pay equity in this legislature.

Also, I must say that we hear on both sides an excuse to not support this motion because section (c) is just not acceptable and they would like to have a unanimous response to it.

My question is, if they truly believe in the social and economic justice of the motion, why are they balking?

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Madam Speaker, I am not balking. I am strongly supporting this motion that was brought forward by the NDP.

I mentioned the 2009 legislation. I had a problem with that legislation because it does not accept pay equity as a human right. It should be a human right. That is why I am standing here today to support the NDP motion that has been brought forward.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Madam Speaker, I was concerned at times that in the member's speech he appeared to leave an impression the previous government did not hold the same ideals that I think all members of this House hold, in terms of equality of opportunity.

He may have missed the speech from his colleague, the minister, earlier today, where she recounted a number of exceptional programs that her department has been running and facilitating, working with a

lot of partnership organizations across the country in recent years, that were all creations of the previous government.

Would it not be fair to say, if his minister is highlighting the exceptional work done by some of these programs to get women on corporate boards, get women into diverse trades and opportunities, that the last government did indeed do a lot on this very important topic?

• (1735)

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Madam Speaker, as I said, today I heard very encouraging remarks from the Conservative benches, contrary to what I have heard in the past 10 years.

I also mentioned earlier that the previous Conservative government removed the word "equality" from the mandate of the Minister of Status of Women. That is the history. I spoke about it.

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Madam Speaker, this is my first speech in the House and I want to thank Hamilton Mountain residents for their support, as it is a privilege and honour to be here.

I would like to thank my colleague from Nanaimo—Ladysmith for taking leadership on this important motion. I am disappointed that I am standing here, in my first speech, talking about this issue. We are in the year 2016 and we are still talking about equality for women. It is really very disappointing, because it is something that should have been done years ago.

I am a former member of the United Steelworkers, president of Local 5328. Having participated in collective bargaining throughout my life, I know that there used to be what was called a CWS, a co-operative wage study, to ensure that all wages were the same for equal work. It did not matter whether the worker were a man or a woman, the person was going to get paid a specified rate for that type of work. That was implemented back in 1956 and here we are in the year 2016 having trouble with the federal government trying to implement the same change.

We all heard many other speakers today go through the statistics of what was done. I heard some Conservative MPs state that they are hurt because of what was done in 2009 and they feel it is an embarrassment, but it is the truth.

Canada ratified the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1976, which ensures "Remuneration which provides all workers, as a minimum, with: (i) Fair wages and equal remuneration for work of equal value without distinction of any kind". In 1981, Canada also ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which recognizes "The right to equal remuneration, including benefits, and to equal treatment in respect of work of equal value, as well as equality of treatment in the evaluation of the quality of work".

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Then I found out that in 2009 a new act was implemented. The Conservatives passed the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act. Women were forced to file individual complaints rather than allowing a union to support them. I do not see that being applied anywhere in the 1981 or 1976 ratifications. The unions were making pay equity an issue for collective bargaining. I have a hard time understanding that when there is nothing in 1976 and the 1981 ratifications that they agreed to. What happens if there is no union?

Madam Speaker, I neglected to let you know that I will be splitting my time with the member for Churchill—Keewatinook Aski. I should have said that earlier.

What happens if the public sector does not have a union? Do we just throw it out and say it is the workers' right and they should file a complaint? Why should they have to file a complaint? It should be the law. It is a right, not a gift. It is shameful that we have to go through this.

There is a positive side to it. I have heard that the Liberals would like to support this motion. I also heard that the Conservatives would like to support it if some language is taken out, but I am not sure why. If they are going to support it, they should support it for good reasons and not say it is because their nose was hurt.

In 2000, the task force was set up and everything was implemented, and then in 2004 there were 113 recommendations made. The former Liberal government at that time did not implement all of them. It is nice for Liberals to say that they will support this motion, and I am glad they will, but it is also important that they implement the task force recommendations.

● (1740)

I have three daughters who have all gone through university. Therefore, it would be an injustice to them if they went to get jobs in the federal government and found out that because they were girls they may not be paid the same amount in wages as the men doing the same jobs.

I also have a granddaughter and grandson, and my message to the House is this. What kind of message are we sending to our children if we teach them to be fair to everybody in our country and then they find out that while fairness has gone a long way, but if they are women, they may be treated differently from men when it comes to being paid for the same type of work? That is not the Canada I want and I do not want to raise my children that way.

Also, this is discriminatory under the Canadian Human Rights Act, so why are we arguing it? Section 11 states:

...It is a discriminatory practice for an employer to establish or maintain differences in wages between male and female employees employed in the same establishment who are performing work of equal value.

Under the Human Rights Act, we cannot pay women a different wage for the same type of work. Imagine if we paid female MPs less than male MPs. There would be an outcry.

Women should not have to file complaints, because the law should be the law. The provinces of Ontario and Quebec have this, and I believe most of the other provinces will come along if we adopt this motion.

It is 2016, so why has this not been done? It looks like the majority members will support the motion, but that is just for the task force or to get this started. However, we have to implement it. We have to stop this injustice.

Therefore, I ask the House and all of its parties to unanimously endorse this motion without any hesitation. We must move on. We have other things to do.

It is not that this is happening all across Canada. Some companies are very good and already pay equitably, but some do not. Why? This is the question we have to ask ourselves. I hope the motion passes unanimously.

Mr. Arnold Chan (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member for Hamilton Mountain on his “in the union movement”, particularly as it relates to the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act.

What are the member's thoughts relating to this legislation, which was passed by the Conservative government? It prohibits unions from filing pay equity complaints. Why is this particularly offensive to unions?

● (1745)

Mr. Scott Duvall: Madam Speaker, I found it unbelievable when I read about imposing a \$50,000 fine for any union that supported members in filing a pay equity complaint. People who are unionized are there to represent employees. If they fail to do that, they can be charged under the act, and that is called “misrepresentation”. We have a job to do. However, to do what the last government did, I imagine it would have to go court. It is unbelievable.

I know from my own experience that if a person came to me with a grievance, I would look at it and ensure I had all of the facts. I just could not say that I could not do it because the company did not want me to. I had to go forward with it. If I did not, I could be charged under the Ontario government's labour laws.

I am not sure if that has any relevance to the member's question, but it is an insult to any union or people who pay union dues to have a union represent them, and then have legislation say that it cannot. It is wrong.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his inspiring speech. I too want to ask a question regarding his union background and about his riding in particular. I would love to hear some of the positive impacts he has observed with pay equity, having experienced that in his work environment in the past. If we could hear some of the pros, I think it would be beneficial at this point in the day.

Mr. Scott Duvall: Madam Speaker, Hamilton is a steel city town. It is the hammer town. We are very well unionized there. We treat people in Hamilton the same as everyone else. When people have jobs, if they are doing the same type of work, they get the same pay.

We have to remember, back in the old days, I guess in my father's time, or even prior to that, people were paid differently, because families felt that the man was the breadwinner.

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Times have changed, and the man is not the breadwinner anymore. There are a lot of women out there who are the breadwinners. Some are not married. Does that mean that they have to have less pay? Maybe something drastic has happened. They lose a spouse and there is nothing for them. They have to go out and get a job. Does that mean they have to have less support? They go to work to make a living, just like I do. They pay the same amount of money for bread and butter, and they want to do it.

It has been great in Hamilton. The people in Hamilton are treated fairly.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his passionate support of the beautiful women in his family.

I would like to ask him about April 17. Does he know that it is the day on which women finally catch up to their male counterparts? Men receive salaries from January to December, but it takes women until the following April to make up for lost wages.

• (1750)

Mr. Scott Duvall: Madam Speaker, I am sorry, but I did not hear the full question. I am sorry.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The time is up. I am sure that the member can ask the question during the next round of debate.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Churchill—Keewatinook Aski.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to stand in this House in support of our opposition day motion. I want to thank my colleague, the member of Parliament for Nanaimo—Ladysmith, for putting this NDP motion forward. It is something that is fundamental to our party, to our movement.

As New Democrats, one of the key tenets of our party is the pursuit of and struggle for equality. There is perhaps no more clear example of the need for work on our behalf than the existing and persistent gender inequality that exists in our country today. Of course, a clear example of that is the wage gap, what is known as pay inequity. There is a need to pursue pay equity.

I am very proud that today we put forward, as the progressive opposition, a motion that seeks to close that gap. It makes the very clear statement that the federal government has not just a role but a duty to play a leadership role on this front.

Our motion today calls on the government to recognize pay equity as a right; to finally implement the recommendations of the 2004 pay equity task force report; to restore the right to pay equity in the public service, which was eliminated by the Conservatives in 2009, with the support of the Liberals I might add; and to appoint a special committee to conduct hearings on pay equity and propose proactive pay equity legislation.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: That sounds good to me.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Speaker, it does sound good, and it sounds like something that should never have been repealed, as was done by the Conservatives previously. It certainly is a motion that many of us are saying is high time for us to act on.

Why are we having this debate right now? Canada is one of the worst countries in the developed world when it comes to pay equity. The World Economic Forum ranks us as 80 out of 145 countries, something that most people in Canada would find shocking. We know that it contributes to income inequality, and of course it discriminates against women. It is time for real tangible progress. We believe that in 2016 it is more than time for the federal government to take action to recognize pay equity as a right. That is why we are tabling this motion in the House today.

We are certainly glad to see the support that Liberal members have shown so far. It is unfortunate that Conservative members of this House are not seeing a change of direction on this front as well, like others they have seen in recent weeks, to be able to support this motion in its entirety.

However, I do want to note that unfortunately the Liberal support for pay equity has not always been there. I was in the House when the omnibus bill was put forward that included a repeal of pay equity legislation. Of course, we fought vehemently against that bill. Unfortunately, the Liberals voted in favour of it. When asked about the changes, former Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff said we have made it clear that we are not pursuing an amendment strategy but sometimes we have to hold our nose. While we certainly appreciate the sentiment of support today, we recognize that a few short years ago not only was there no support, but a comment that was quite dismissive of the importance of pay equity legislation by the Liberal leader.

Today the majority of the House is acknowledging that the NDP motion is the way to go, that striking a committee is critical, and that recognizing pay equity as a right is fundamental. That is extremely important. It is a key piece in what should be our approach as a country in addressing income inequality. Income inequality, as we know, is increasing in Canada by leaps and bounds. In fact, starting from the mid-nineties, income inequality has increased significantly in our country, again under Liberal governments, and it continued under Conservative governments. We find ourselves in a situation today where there is an increase in the gap between those who have and everybody else. None of this is by accident.

• (1755)

I know we have heard many speeches today about the importance of pay equity. However, I want to talk more broadly about the agenda of the federal government over the last number of years that has actually set women further back. If we go back to the nineties and look at some of the decisions made by the Liberal government at the time, we know that there were some important systemic changes made at that time that set women back.

Business of Supply

First, there were cuts to women's advocacy so that women's organizations no longer had the ability or the resources to be able to advocate. We know that there were cuts to social transfers with respect to health and education that affected sectors that women are both employed in and benefit from a great deal, as they are often the primary caregivers. We know that there were commitments to a national child care program that never materialized, except in some of our regions, which came at the eleventh hour and thus too late for most Canadian women. We also know there were cuts to employment insurance and other critical social programs made at that time, programs that in many cases have helped support women and men when they fall on hard times. We also know that particular sectors of women paid an especially high price when these cuts started coming down.

As a feminist, I am proud to be part of a feminist party and realize that it is important to apply an intersectional lens and recognize that in many cases these cuts deeply affected indigenous women. For example, I think of the particular cuts to education and other social transfers to indigenous communities that disproportionately affected indigenous women, the poorest women in our country.

We know that racialized women, disabled women, and immigrant women have paid the price. Generally, we started seeing that women in our country were starting to lose more and more ground, despite the gains that had been made in the couple of decades prior. I do not think I am surprising anyone in this House when I say it is important to note that this occurred under Liberal governments and the decisions that could now be called austerity that led to a regression of the gains made by women in the decades prior.

That was followed by a Conservative era in which many of us have said there was an open war on women's equality, whether it was the attack on a woman's right to choose, whether it was the failure to support an inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women, or whether it was the ongoing culture of fear vis-à-vis advocacy organizations and research service-oriented organizations that predominantly focused on women. There is no question that over the last nine years Canadian women have lost significant ground.

The question is this. Where are we today? This motion is an important step forward. However, there is a lot more that needs to be done.

I want to acknowledge that there has been some positive use of language, such as the use of the word "feminist", and a commitment to gender balance in the cabinet. However, the reality is that Canadian women are seeing the need for immediate action to address the gap they are facing, not only in terms of wages but more broadly in terms of the standard of living, in terms of opportunity, and the understanding that in a country like Canada, in the year 2016, we should be moving forward not just on behalf of some women but on behalf of all women.

This motion today is a step forward in that direction, and I certainly look forward to working with my colleagues in the NDP to continue to drive a feminist agenda, not just for Parliament but more importantly for Canadian women.

• (1800)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to give the member a reality check. It goes far

beyond the New Democrats in the House of Commons of those who support pay equity. The NDP does a disservice when it tries to portray itself as the only party that cares about this issue. Those members often make reference to the 2009 vote that took place. The member needs to realize that the 2004 task force was a Liberal task force. Many of the recommendations were not implemented because the Liberal government fell when the NDP voted against the Liberals when they attempted to bring in child care from coast to coast to coast.

Some of the most serious problems with respect to pay equity are in our home province of Manitoba where the NDP has governed for over 15 years. There is a lot of room for improvement, even among the New Democrats.

We have an opportunity here. The Prime Minister and our government have said that we see this as a positive step forward. We support the motion.

Does the member believe that it is in Parliament's best interests to have unanimous support, if possible, so we can get this issue dealt with in a more apolitical fashion.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Speaker, unlike the member across, I had the honour of being in the House when the omnibus bill was voted on, so I do not need to take any advice from anybody as to what happened at that time. I read the then Liberal leader's words into the record. What was clear was the dismissive attitude toward pay equity for women. Any attempt to rewrite that history would be a futile one.

As we look forward, we welcome the support of the Liberals for the motion.

Our message today is that this is only the beginning. Canadians, Canadian women in particular, are hopeful that beyond some of the change in language that action will be taken to make equality a reality for women.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech and for her tireless work on this issue.

I am always a little surprised by the comments from my colleagues across the way as they try to rewrite history. My colleague from Winnipeg North really likes to talk about the non-partisan and unanimous things we should do, but his statements used to be somewhat more partisan.

If we do not take steps immediately, and if this problem is not resolved in the next few years, what impact does my colleague think income inequality could have on our economy and our society?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Sherbrooke for his important question. He is quite right. Pay equity for women would have positive effects on the economy in general, if only because women would get the pay they deserve.

Business of Supply

In western Canada, near my home, there have been many job losses, especially in sectors dominated by men. Thus, families there are relying heavily on the salaries of women, which are much lower just because they are women. If women were treated fairly, all families would fare better in the current economic situation.

It also goes without saying that women would make a huge contribution to the economy if they had pay equity. Gender equality is important, but this issue has an economic aspect. That is why we must take action.

• (1805)

[*English*]

Hon. Judy Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to this particular issue today. It is especially nice to see you in the chair, someone with whom I spent many hours at airports having discussions on a variety of issues, and this is a good chance to get to know each other.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to a very important motion put forward by one of the hon. members on the opposite side of the House urging the federal government to tackle the wage gap between men and women in Canada. My colleague spoke a moment ago about how important that issue is to her in particular. In work that the two of us have done on the Status of Women committee in a previous Parliament, these issues about balancing this House were raised many times.

This issue, which is so fundamental to human justice and fairness, clearly merits the attention of a government that came to power on the promise of building a better country. That promise has excited all of us here and all of us as Canadians. It is to advance a better, more fair country for everyone, not just one side. That means visible minorities, it means women, and it means all Canadians.

The fact is that Canadian women have fought too long and too hard for equality with men in every respect to be denied pay equity in the year 2016.

Consider the milestones that have been achieved in the struggle for women's rights since Confederation. In 1872, for example, the Ontario legislature passed the Married Women's Property Act. This act gave a married woman the right to her own wage earnings, free from her husband's control, something we would be absolutely astonished by in 2016, but in those days, it was perfectly acceptable.

Then in 1909, the Canadian suffrage organization, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, and many others organized a delegation of over 1,000 people to the Ontario legislature on March 14. A petition of 100,000 names of people supporting suffrage was presented.

Then in 1971, amendments were made to the Canadian Labour Code that also included a prohibition against discrimination on the grounds of sex and marital status, the provision of 17 weeks of maternity leave, and a strong reinforcement of the principle of equal pay for equal work. It sounds so simple: equal pay for equal work. We would hope that equal pay and equal respect would be there.

The people who stood up for women's rights and fought for these victories, were they not fighting for human dignity and basic human rights at the same time? I think they were.

Last week in the House we talked about the Manitoba legislature and the things that were done there to advance women's rights. Today we have a chance here in the House, with unanimous consent, to pass a bill that I think we all believe in, that we all would like to see happen. We can only hope to get unanimous consent to move it forward faster so that we can start trying to get this to happen. Clearly that fight is not over. We must continue their cause in this century and push for pay equity across this great land of ours.

We know that the situation concerning pay equity in the federal public service needs reform. We have known that for many years. Unfortunately, the previous government did not believe it and did not move it forward. The Liberals have always believed in this.

Canada's federal public service has the proud reputation of serving Canadians with excellence, and we have to extend that tradition of excellence by working diligently to move toward pay equity.

Federal employees work in more than 200 federal organizations in dozens of different occupations. Many of those occupations are occupations that women would not normally be working in, but they certainly are every bit as capable as any man of doing them. It was often their choice to choose a different career path, for many other reasons, but now, from border guards to food inspectors, from public health specialists to diplomats, we are seeing women doing the same jobs as men, every bit as good, sometimes better, as any other person is doing them. They deserve to be recognized and given the pay equal to that and the level of respect for that.

• (1810)

As a result, the public service of Canada attracts men and women with competitive salaries and a full range of family-friendly benefits, something that I think we should be talking about more in this House, about how we can make this environment of ours friendly to families.

On all sides of the House, we have many younger members who have small children, who are trying to balance all the things that life puts in front of them. It is very difficult. If we can build on the pay equity, and the good feeling in the House today on this particular motion, we could actually put it into motion in other areas, like making this place much friendly to families.

The federal public service has also made strides toward greater gender balance, especially within the senior ranks with many more women being deputy ministers and assistant deputy ministers. Our federal public service also reflects the diversity of our great country. In the federal public service, women, indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, and members of visible minority groups are fully represented in the core federal public service, and have been for some time.

In fact, all four employment equity groups that I just mentioned, women, visible minorities, indigenous peoples, and persons with disabilities, continue to exceed workforce availability. Today, in the federal public service, women and men have equal access to all positions and identical wages within the same groups and levels. I think that sets a very good example for the rest of the country and for the rest of the world.

However, we cannot grow complacent, because the situation, as we all know, is still very far from perfect. The wage gap still exists in Canada, even in the public service, where women still earn about 10% less on average for work of equal value. We cannot be content with the situation today, and we cannot point to progress in the past in a way that absolves us of the hard work that remains to be done.

The work will not be finished until pay equity is a reality across our land. We understand that Canada is stronger and our government is better when decision-makers reflect Canada's diversity. We also understand that in 2016, women expect to be full participants in the economic, social, and democratic life of Canada.

That is why one of the first actions of our Prime Minister was to appoint an equal number of men and women to his cabinet, and why this cabinet will ensure that there is pay equity in the cabinet and elsewhere.

This government will work to ensure that the struggle for justice and fairness in whatever form it takes in Canada in 2016 will not be rolled back. It was far too hard to get it to where it is today, and we are looking forward to advancing it, not having it go back.

I can see that I have run out of time and that you, Madam Speaker, are giving me the signal.

Business of Supply

I do hope that we get this passed very quickly so that we move on it and get busy working on it.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am sorry that the member had to be cut off. Unfortunately, we are at the end of debate. A lot of people were trying to get more information on this and were very involved in listening to the discussion, even in Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskinging.

[*Translation*]

It being 6:15 p.m., pursuant to order made earlier today, all questions necessary to dispose of the opposition motion are deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Wednesday, February 3, at the expiry of the time provided for oral questions.

[*English*]

Mr. Arnold Chan: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I believe if you seek it, you will find the unanimous consent of the House to see the clock as 6:30 p.m.

• (1815)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:15 p.m.)

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