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Monday, May 9, 2016

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, May 9, 2016

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayer

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1105)

[*English*]

MODERNIZING ANIMAL PROTECTIONS ACT

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.): moved that Bill C-246, An Act to amend the Criminal Code, the Fisheries Act, the Textile Labelling Act, the Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation of International and Interprovincial Trade Act and the Canada Consumer Product Safety Act (animal protection), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I put forward Bill C-246, the modernizing animal protections act, to improve our country's animal welfare laws.

I have often been asked why I chose to introduce the bill.

First, animal welfare matters to me personally. Yesterday was Mother's Day, and I thank my own mother for instilling in me the value of respect, including respect for animals. Second, animal welfare matters to many of my constituents. I can joke about the percentage of dog ownership in my riding, but during the time we put out a call for ideas for a bill, we received more correspondence on the issue of animal welfare than any other. Third, I am interested in ideas that cross traditional party lines, and I believe animal welfare is an issue of concern for all Canadians, from farmers to hunters to anglers to pet owners, including supporters of every political party.

I have a great deal of respect for the members for Ajax and Vancouver Centre and previous Liberal justice ministers McLellan, Cauchon, and Cotler. Each of them introduced nearly identical provisions to modernize and strengthen our Criminal Code.

These changes are targeted at animal abuse, from animal fighting to deplorable puppy mill conditions, not animal use.

The bill seeks to accomplish three goals: first, a ban on the importation of shark fins; second, a ban on the importation and sale of cat and dog fur, and a requirement to label the source of fur; and third, the modernization and strengthening of existing animal cruelty offences in our Criminal Code.

With respect to shark finning, it is estimated that more than 70 million sharks are killed every year for their fins. The practice is cruel. Their fins are cut off and the shark's bodies are thrown back into the ocean while they are still alive. They are left to sink to the bottom of the ocean and drown. It is as cruel as it is wasteful.

Canada has banned shark finning within our borders since 1994, but we remain complicit in this cruel practice. *The Globe and Mail* recently reported that Canadians imported over 300,000 pounds of shark fins last year alone. We represent 1.5% to 2% of the global market. The bill would ban a person from importing or attempting to import shark fins into Canada.

These amendments were drafted based upon advice from the Library of Parliament and legislative counsel. If there is a better way of addressing these concerns, I ask that such matters be resolved at committee.

I want to specifically thank the member for Port Moody—Coquitlam for bringing this matter to the attention of the House in 2013. His legislation was narrowly defeated at second reading. I believe it is time to correct that mistake.

Canadians across the country agree. We want to protect the world's oceans. When polled in 2013, 81% of Canadians surveyed supported an importation ban against shark fins. Similar bans have been led by those in the Chinese community, including Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam, who helped to ban shark fins in Toronto in 2011. Chinese American senators have introduced shark fin bans in Hawaii and California. Both businesses and the government in China are moving away from serving the product.

If necessary, I am open to a change that would limit the ban to countries that do not have the same regulations as we have here in Canada; that is, requiring that a shark be landed before its fin is removed.

With respect to cat and dog fur, the bill seeks to ban its importation and sale. It also seeks to require that all fur products be labelled as to the source of fur. Large companies, such as Canada Goose, already follow this best practice. Again, if there are any concerns with particularities in the drafting of the provision, they should be dealt with at committee.

Private Members' Business

There is an e-petition before the House with more than 13,000 signatures, calling on the government to ban the importation and sale of cat and dog fur. Such measures have already been adopted by the EU and U.S., and it is time for Canada to catch up.

Finally, with respect to the Criminal Code amendments, I have received questions about the meaning of proposed new subparagraph 182.1 (1)(a). That is the provision that states that it is a crime to wilfully or recklessly cause unnecessary pain or suffering to animals. This provision would not affect any animal use practices. I know that, because the same provision has been in the code for decades, and it has never stopped animal use. Some have incorrectly suggested that the word “recklessly” is being added. This is blatantly false. The current section 429 of the code already applies the word “recklessly” to existing animal cruelty offences.

Here is how my bill would change the code. First, it would close loopholes related to animal fighting. It is not currently a crime to profit from animal fighting, nor to train or breed animals for the purpose of fighting. The bill would make these activities criminal.

Second, it would close a loophole in the definition of bestiality.

In Australia, it is a crime to engage in any sexual activity with an animal, yet due to a recent decision of the B.C. Court of Appeal, bestiality in our Criminal Code requires penetration. The court stated that it is up to Parliament to expressly amend the code if it deems a change necessary. That is exactly what this bill aims to do, make all sexual conduct with an animal a crime.

Third, it would create a new offence of brutal and vicious killing to close a loophole where an owner had killed his dog with a baseball bat but the judge acquitted on the basis that the dog died immediately and there was no evidence of pain and suffering. This language was drafted by the justice department in 1999, and previous justice minister Cauchon stated categorically that such a change would not affect animal use practices. When I consulted with the current justice department, it had no concerns whatsoever with this part of the legislation.

Reasonably, any concerns of unintended consequences should be addressed at committee. We can hear from criminal law experts, and if the amendments could plausibly affect accepted animal use practices, their language should be changed or an exemption list be added to ensure that they do not have that effect. I accept that.

I am open to reasonable amendments and have repeatedly said so. My in-laws would disown me if my changes stopped farming, fishing, or hunting, as they have owned a farm outside of Sarnia since 1834. As a lawyer, I do not believe that the Criminal Code should be used to regulate accepted practices. It is in place to punish egregious and immoral conduct in our society. Had I intended to affect farming, I would have done so through the Meat Inspection Act or the Health of Animals Act, not the Criminal Code.

Fourth, it would allow judges to ban animal ownership if one is convicted of animal cruelty for a second time, getting tougher on animal abusers.

Fifth, the bill would change the current animal cruelty offence of wilful neglect to one of gross negligence, a standard applied to every other criminal negligence offence under the Criminal Code,

modernizing our legislation. The current wilful neglect standard can make prosecution difficult. Under a gross negligence standard, there is no mental element to the offence, and the crown need only prove that animal cruelty was caused by conduct that is a marked departure from the norm. That remains a very high standard. Clumsiness, incompetence, and ordinary mistakes will not be criminalized.

An example of a recent case of criminal negligence is the conviction of the Albertan parents who failed to take their sick baby to a doctor for over two and a half weeks and resorted only to natural remedies until the baby died. Criminal negligence requires a significant departure from what is generally accepted in our society in order for the moral censure of a criminal punishment to be appropriate.

Finally, my bill would move animals from the property section to a new part entitled “Offences against animals”. This is a symbolic change. Animals will remain property at law, but it recognizes that animals are different from tables and other kinds of property. It recognizes that an offence against animals is wrong because it is wrong to harm animals, not because it is wrong to damage another person's property, which just happens to be an animal.

Previously, the Criminal Lawyers' Association testified at committee that the removal of the animal cruelty provisions from the property section would not cause the loss of any available defences under the code. This part is important. When it was studied at committee in the Senate, the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters and the Poultry Welfare Association both hired counsel to testify. Each noted that its only legal concern with the removal from the property section would be the potential loss of the colour of right defence. They proposed one specific amendment to fix that. To address those concerns, I added that proposed amendment at proposed section 182.4 of my bill. If any concerns remain, again I am open to amendment. The purpose of this bill is not to affect accepted animal use in our society.

A broad range of groups support my bill.

Private Members' Business

First, I am proud to say that the Canadian Centre for Abuse Awareness supports the bill. The CCAA is a national charitable organization with a mandate to reduce the incidents and impact of child abuse through education and public awareness. As John Muise, director of public safety at the CCAA, retired veteran police detective, and former board member at the Parole Board of Canada, notes that research confirms the link between abuse of animals and other forms of violence including child abuse.

The CCAA appreciates the targeted approach taken in this bill in a number of specific areas. Of note, this legislation, when passed, would close a “sex with animals” loophole successfully used by a child sexual abuser in court. The CCAA believes this evidence-based PMB is deserving all-party support, and looks forward to testifying in support of the bill at committee.

• (1110)

Second, the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association supports the bill. The CVMA is the national and international voice of Canada's veterinarians. The CVMA writes, “Veterinarians are often the first professionals to examine an abused animal. The CVMA continues to support efforts to strengthen the Criminal Code's existing animal cruelty provisions...strongly supports passage of C-246 at second reading and looks forward to providing more detailed and in-depth input at the committee hearings.”

Third, humane societies and SPCAs across the country support the bill. The Montreal SPCA states, “Cases of severe neglect...are unfortunately not uncommon, and changes need to be made to facilitate the prosecution of these offences.”

The BCSPCA states that, “The bill closes loopholes related to animal fighting and creates a gross negligence offence for animal cruelty to make it easier to prosecute cases such as deplorable puppy mill conditions.”

The Canadian Federation of Humane Societies has written to every member of Parliament in support of the bill. Each year, SPCAs and humane societies investigate more than 45,000 complaints of animal cruelty and neglect. As organizations entrusted by governments and by Canadians to enforce the law, the member societies of the CFHS regularly witness the impact of inadequate and antiquated animal cruelty sections of the Criminal Code of Canada.

This is not new legislation. The Criminal Code amendments were originally drafted by the Department of Justice in consultation with animal use organizations. There was near identical legislation that passed this House at third reading on three different occasions, and passed third reading at the Senate on one occasion, subject to minor proposed changes.

Many current members of Parliament have voted in favour of that legislation, including the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, and the members for Cape Breton-Canso, Malpeque, Yukon, Kenora, Vancouver Centre, Scarborough—Guildwood, Brome—Missisquoi, and Steveston—Richmond East.

That legislation included the brutal and vicious language, “lawful excuse” language, and the addition of the gross negligence standard.

It was not only supported then by current colleagues, it was also supported by animal use groups. For example, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture supported that legislation in 2004, and a broad coalition of animal sector groups wrote a letter, dated November 22, 2004, to the then minister of justice, Irwin Cotler, to support the legislation. The letter was signed by, among others, the BC Cattlemen's Association, The Canadian Cattlemen's Association, the Canadian Association for Laboratory Animal Science, the Canadian Sheep Federation, the Dairy Farmers of Canada, the Manitoba Cattle Producers Association, and the Ontario Farm Animal Council. The letter stated:

Canada's animal-based sectors, as represented by the undersigned, wish to express our support for the swift passage of certain amendments to the Criminal Code: Cruelty to Animals provisions. This national coalition, on behalf of over one million Canadians we represent, join with others who are expressing support for improved animal cruelty legislation. Specifically, we are calling for the reintroduction and adoption of the measures contained within Bill C-22[...]

It is our hope that the consensus that has already been achieved in Bill C-22 will result in the re-introduction and passage of this important legislation as rapidly as possible.

Bill C-246, my legislation, reintroduces that important legislation. The previous member for Peterborough, a riding with a cross-section of rural and urban communities, the Hon. Peter Adams, said this in 2004:

This is legislation that is important to all those who care about animals. It is equally important to those who own pets as it is to farmers who care for their livestock. [...]

It simply brings old provisions designed to protect animals into the 21st century. Enough is enough.

That was 12 years ago, yet the words still ring true today.

The purpose of a vote at second reading is to vote on the objects of the bill. I have laid out these objects and reiterated that the intention of this bill is not to affect animal use practices. I ask for members' support at second reading, such that any concerns, questions, and potential drafting errors, can be addressed properly at committee.

I ask for members' support to improve our animal welfare laws.

• (1115)

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's efforts to bring better animal welfare standards in Canada. As an out and proud cat lady, I am very excited to hear that.

I have two questions that I think some have concerns around.

Private Members' Business

Paragraph 182.1(b) talks about an animal being killed “brutally or viciously”. I wonder if my colleague could tell us if that is defined in the bill right now or if he would be looking to define it such that certain methods of slaughter for agricultural animals would not be included in that.

The other component is paragraph (d) under the same section, which talks about injections of poisons or an injurious drug or substance. Could the member talk about an intent for definition around that? I do know that there will be people who run animal modelling facilities at research institutions across the country, who will be concerned about definitions therein.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Mr. Speaker, it is important to clarify some of the language. I tried as much as possible to state that quite clearly this is not intended to affect and will not affect animal use practices.

With respect to the two provisions in particular, the poison section is already in the Criminal Code. That provision has long been in the Criminal Code and has never stopped animal use practices. We ought not be worried about that particular provision.

In fairness, the brutal and vicious provision is not legislation that I drafted. It was originally drafted by the Department of Justice, in 1999. The minister is stating categorically that it will not affect animal use practices, but I completely appreciate that some might want to see that in black and white. That is exactly why I am asking to get this bill to committee. Let us have criminal lawyers testify as to its plausible effects, and if there is any possibility that would affect any animal use practices, let us either remove that provision or put a definition section in the bill.

● (1120)

Mr. Fin Donnelly (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague from Beaches—East York for the work he has done on this bill and for bundling a number of animal welfare concerns into one bill.

I know he is well aware, as he referenced it in his comments earlier, of the work that I did in the last Parliament on banning the importation of shark fins to Canada. He has acknowledged that, and I certainly provided as much material as I could. Unfortunately, in the past Parliament, it was defeated by five votes. It was a very close vote. With a majority Conservative government, unfortunately, it did not pass. Over 100 million sharks a year, as he knows, die due to this cruel practice.

My question is this. There has been a lot of misinformation spread by certain Conservative members in communities across the country, and I wonder if my colleague could talk about the Criminal Code amendments and the misinformation that has been spread about hunting and fishing in this country.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Mr. Speaker, I first want to highlight that the member mentioned the bundling of various provisions. I have heard attacks on omnibus legislation. First, all of the provisions are related to animal welfare, the same topic, but more than that, it is seven pages. If it is an omnibus bill, it is the shortest omnibus bill that the House has ever had the opportunity to debate.

To the member's point about misinformation, there has been far too much misinformation. For example, I have highlighted the fact

that I am not adding “recklessly” to the bill, though there have been comments that I have. There have been comments that I am aiming to stop hunting and fishing and that this bill would do that. It simply would not do that. There is not a single criminal lawyer in the country who suggests that would happen, and previous testimony at committee, in the House, and the Senate, has stated absolutely the opposite.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the hon. member for Beaches—East York for bringing forward this very important legislation. I also had a private member's bill in the past that dealt with shark finning.

My question is one the member has actually anticipated. When a bill affects many other bills, sometimes people make the blanket statement that it is somehow illegitimate as an omnibus bill.

The legitimate use of many statutes in the same bill is when they speak to one purpose. I wonder if the member would expand on the purpose, which is to take a great step forward against animal cruelty in Canada.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her question and her work on the issue of animal welfare.

The purpose of this bill is to take a step toward bringing Canada's animal welfare laws into the 21st century. I referenced the former member for Peterborough who said that very thing in 2004, and yet no action was taken. The attempts to ban shark finning were narrowly defeated.

The EU and the U.S. have banned cats and dogs for sale and importation for many years. Canada lags behind them.

Some of the offence provisions in the Criminal Code, which we are hoping to update and modernize, have not been updated for over 100 years. It is time for Canada to bring its animal welfare laws into the 21st century.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Red Deer—Lacombe.

I rise in the House today to speak against Bill C-246, the so-called modernizing animal protections act. I am very proud to represent the vast constituency of Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa in west central Manitoba. My riding is primarily agricultural and—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I would like to get clarification from the hon. member. He mentioned that he wants to split his time, but normally time is not split in a private member's debate. I assume he means that he hon. member for Red Deer—Lacombe will also have 10 minutes, but perhaps later in the debate.

The hon. member for Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member for Red Deer—Lacombe will also be speaking.

My riding is primarily agricultural. In addition to producing grains and oilseeds, the land supports thriving cattle and hog industries. My constituency is also blessed with vast tracks of natural habitats and numerous lakes that support hunting, angling, and trapping activities that are critical to our way of life and our thriving tourism industry.

The wise use of our fish and wildlife resources, and the efficient, humane, and environmental sound raising of livestock are critical to maintaining the economy and the way of life in my riding. It is my duty as the MP to vigorously defend our way of life against the ill-conceived Bill C-246.

Let me be clear. We all support animal welfare, but animal welfare is a far cry from animal rights. Canada has good animal welfare legislation at both the provincial and federal levels. However, Bill C-246 is a Trojan horse that would advance a pure animal rights agenda.

The animal rights movement is very clear that its primary goal is the elimination of all animal use. Animal Justice Canada strongly supports Bill C-246, and it is “working to enshrine meaningful animal rights into Canadian law, including the right of animals to have their interests represented in court, and the guarantee of rights and freedoms that make life worth living”.

The group PETA, on the masthead of its website, proudly states that “Animals are not ours to [kill], eat, wear, experiment on, or [exploit] for entertainment”. Then there is PETA’s famous line, “When it comes to pain, love, joy, loneliness...a rat is a pig is a dog is a boy”.

There are many other animal rights groups that are advancing the same agenda and strongly supporting Bill C-246. We are known by the company we keep.

The Criminal Code of Canada, and all provinces, have comprehensive provisions that criminalize various kinds of animal cruelty and neglect. The courts have for decades consistently interpreted these provisions as not intending to forbid conduct that is socially acceptable or otherwise authorized by law, such as hunting, fishing, medical research, and slaughter for food.

What would Bill C-246 change? I am looking at the Criminal Code side. I am not looking at the cat and dog or shark finning matters.

First, offences against animals would no longer be offences against certain property. This significant change would take animal cruelty offences out of the section dealing with offences against certain property and move them to the section of the Criminal Code dealing with offences against persons, giving rise to the suggestion that animals are no longer a special type of property but are potentially entitled to rights that are similar to persons.

Second, there is an inclusion of the new “recklessly” test. The new section 182.1 includes the test of “recklessly” to the existing “wilfully” test for causing “unnecessary pain, suffering, or injury to an animal”. This would expand the kind of conduct that could be criminalized.

Private Members' Business

Third, with regard to the new “kills” and animal offences, the bill would add two new offences that are not currently in the Criminal Code. Section 182.1(1) says:

Everyone commits an offence who, wilfully or recklessly,

(b) kills an animal or, being the owner, permits an animal to be killed, brutally or viciously, regardless of whether the animal dies immediately;

(c) kills an animal without lawful excuse;

This “brutally or viciously” test is completely novel and does not appear to have been previously used in any Canadian statute or interpreted in any Canadian court. This provision does not appear to exist in any legislation in the United Kingdom, Australia, or the United States. It would create a new and very broad offence. For example, would the current method of cooking lobster by placing them live in a pot of boiling water be criminalized?

Currently, killing an animal is not the focus of the Criminal Code. Cruelty, not killing, was a focus of the offences. This new test would force a court to evaluate the method of killing that is chosen, and if it falls within the test or there is no lawful excuse, it criminalizes the behaviour. Lawful excuse is not defined in Bill C-246.

These two sections, depending on how they would be interpreted by the courts, could have the effect of criminalizing many recreational, agricultural, commercial, and scientific activities, such as medical research, and religious practices such as kosher or halal butchering.

Four, there is the addition of a negligence standard. This widening of the test for criminalizing from “wilfully” under the current section, to the much lower “negligently” test in the new bill, could have the potential of criminalizing far more types of behaviour.

● (1125)

It must be noted that anyone convicted under the expanded provisions would now have a criminal record that would follow them for the rest of their lives, affecting international travel and employment prospects.

A person will no longer have to be wilfully cruel to be criminalized, just clumsy, incompetent, or unlucky. For example, this section could create consequences for accidentally striking an animal with a vehicle. This is a vast expansion of criminal liability to areas of activity that should not be affected by the criminal law or are already regulated under other existing federal-provincial legislation.

Fifth, there are no specific exemptions for legal conduct to offences listed.

The bill provides in 182.5 that common law defences in subsections 8(3) and 429(2) of the Criminal Code are not effective. However, these are defences to the commission of the offence, not the exclusion of otherwise legal activities from being criminalized under the Criminal Code.

These specific legal activities, ranching, hunting, fishing, trapping, medical research, etc., should be clearly listed in the bill so that otherwise legal activities should be taken out of the Criminal Code completely and not criminalized.

Private Members' Business

There are also possible constitutional issues. All provinces have animal cruelty laws. I have read every one of them. Where a federal bill criminalizes an activity that is deemed lawful and regulated under provincial law, constitutional issues relating to the validity of the statutes arise. This is another reason to clearly and specifically spell out which otherwise lawful activities are not criminalized.

The Criminal Code is meant to contain laws that criminalize certain actions or behaviours. It is meant to be broad enough to allow enforcement but specific enough to target particular actions. The problem with this legislation is that it is not targeting specific actions. We do not actually know what action may be considered criminal with this vague language. It does not even provide a list of activities that are permitted.

In terms of Bill C-246, many people mistakenly think this is a rural versus urban issue, or it is all about hunting, angling, trapping, and ranching. If enacted, Bill C-246 could affect all Canadians.

Let us look at medical research. Most, if not all, animal rights groups oppose animal-based medical research. Canadians must realize that most significant medical breakthroughs result from animal-based medical research. Approximately 60% of all cardiovascular research is conducted on animals. The Heart and Stroke Foundation, on its website, notes:

Remarkable progress has been made tackling cardiovascular disease in Canada over the past 60 years with death rates declining by more than 75 per cent. This has largely been due to research advances....

It must be noted that all surgical techniques are developed and tested on animals before they are applied to humans. Humanity owes a great deal of gratitude to those animals that are sacrificed so that we might light.

I, and hundreds of thousands of Canadians, are alive today because of cardiovascular advancements, which were developed using animal experimentation. If we were to stop performing medical research on animals, we are basically saying that we should stop making life-saving medical breakthroughs. This is not acceptable to me or anyone else.

Some of these groups want to stop using animals, while others would prefer to push even further and use vexatious litigation to punish those who use animals in any manner. The effect of their campaigns have been devastating for remote, rural communities, such as those represented by the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and others that depend on sealing and trapping. Those communities are represented by MPs from all parties in the House.

I do not approve of wilful cruelty to animals, however, words are very important, and I fear the language in Bill C-246 will not, in fact, crack down on those who wilfully harm animals, but instead will put legitimate and necessary animal use practices in legal jeopardy.

I cannot vote in good conscience for legislation that could potentially cast a chill over medical research on animals, potentially criminalize ranchers, trappers, and jeopardize traditional outdoor activities, such as hunting and angling, along with the many other legitimate animal use practices that are vital for our economy and well-being.

I would ask my colleagues to consider these serious concerns, and vote against Bill C-246.

● (1130)

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise to speak in support of Bill C-246. I salute the member for Beaches—East York for his leadership in bringing this back to the House. I say “bringing it back” because we have seen the three initiatives here in different forms introduced by different parties over many years. Bringing it together and modernizing our animal cruelty bill just makes sense, and I commend the member for his efforts to do that.

I have proudly seconded this bill, and I wish to note very clearly that, this being a private member's bill, members will take different positions on it. However, as my friend from Port Moody—Coquitlam pointed out, initiatives such as the one dealing with shark finning came within five votes of becoming the law in this land. I certainly hope we do not lose this opportunity to do the right thing this time.

We can be proud that this bill builds on the work of so many others and of so many different parties in the House. Part of this bill would follow through on an initiative championed by my colleague, the member for Port Moody—Coquitlam, to implement a measure widely supported by Canadians; namely, a long-overdue ban on the importation of shark fins.

Members have heard that it is estimated that, shockingly, 100 million sharks are killed each year simply for their fins, the rest of the carcass discarded. Their fins are cut from their backs and the bleeding sharks, often still alive, are tossed back into the ocean where they sink to the bottom and drown. As a result, one-third of all shark species is threatened with extinction. In Canada, the fins of endangered and near-threatened shark species are regularly consumed. We can do better as Canadians.

Of course, our ocean ecosystem needs sharks. They are a vital apex predator, yet their populations are plummeting. This is an international conservation crisis. We should all be disturbed by this ongoing practice, and we should be acting quickly to implement measures that will eliminate the trade in illegally obtained shark fins.

Private Members' Business

A number of Canadian cities have joined this fight, attempting to ban the sale and consumption of shark fins. In 2012, however, a court ruled that these bans were beyond municipal jurisdiction. Since these municipal bans were struck down, the consumption of shark fins in Canada has increased by 85,000 pounds. Therefore, the bill calls out for appropriate federal legislation, so I commend my colleague for bringing this to the attention of parliamentarians so we can do the right thing. Canada must show global leadership in the fight to stop this cruel practice, by implementing an import ban. As a country, we can and should end our role in the trade of fins.

I want to say how proud I am of the work of a group called Fin Free, of school groups across the country, and particularly of the work of Margaret McCullough, an instructor at Glenlyon Norfolk School in Victoria. She has organized children to fight for shark fins at the provincial, municipal, and federal levels, to fight for a ban on shark finning which came so close in the last Parliament to being realized. I have met with the students on several occasions, and I can assure members that their passion for this issue is truly inspirational.

From meeting with elected officials and business owners to participating in a documentary film on shark finning, those students have worked hard to make this long-overdue measure a reality. Because of their work, and the work of thousands of others like them across Canada, we came so close, as I said, in 2013, five votes. I know we can deliver this change for those children and for people all over Canada demanding that we as Canadians play our fair part in this international conservation crisis in addressing it head-on.

This bill would also update Canada's existing animal cruelty offences. As the member for Beaches—East York noted, these have not been updated substantively since 1892. While I know it is the member's intention to bring anti-cruelty laws into the 21st century, I would settle for the 20th century. In fact, Camille Labchuk, the executive director of Animal Justice, said this bill would "... help Canada "move past our status as the country in the Western world with the worst animal protection laws and help us take a first step in the right direction"."

• (1135)

These measures on animal cruelty have not only been proposed in the House before by members of more than one party, they have actually been passed by the House on no less than three occasions. However, I must acknowledge that some have raised concerns about whether the bill would affect the millions of Canadians who enjoy hunting, trapping, and fishing every year. I have been assured that this is neither the intention nor is it the effect of the bill, which would address only criminal conduct with regard to animal cruelty.

I am happy to say that my examination of the bill so far has given me no reason to doubt the words of the minister and officials of the Department of Justice, who told the House, both in 2002 and in 2005, that these amendments would not impact lawful activities involving animals, including hunting, trapping, and fishing.

One need only look at the existing sections of the Criminal Code to understand the way in which these offences are designed and applied. Section 444 of the Code makes it a crime to kill cattle without a lawful excuse. Section 445.1 makes it an offence to wilfully cause unnecessary pain, suffering, or injury to an animal. Of course, these provisions are neither designed for nor apply to

farming, fishing, hunting, or research, as has been suggested earlier to the House.

We hope to get the bill to the committee where we can study it in greater detail. We can hear from criminal law experts at that time. We can see whether the Department of Justice is right, which I think it is. At that point, if amendments are required, the hon. member for Beaches—East York has made it abundantly clear that he would be open to amendments of clarification. One such amendment which I will be moving, if we get it to that stage, is one that is extraordinarily simple. It would go something like this: "For greater certainty, this bill has no impact on hunting, fishing, and trapping".

What else do we need?

My province of British Columbia consistently puts in its legislation "for greater certainty" clauses to ensure that certain bills dealing with land use or resource development do not derogate from aboriginal or treaty rights. Those bills are almost rote now in British Columbia legislation. "For greater certainty" clauses are typical, and everybody understands that.

First, let us be clear that the animal cruelty sections have been over-pronounced by the Department of Justice, having none of the effects that the hon. member, my colleague from the Conservative Party, has addressed.

Second, the member has made it clear that he would be willing to entertain an amendment of that sort, which would take out any such concern that the House might have. Consequently, I see no reason why it cannot proceed. It is addressed, after all, at those who wish to combat intentional, reckless cruelty to animals in particular. There is no legal basis whatsoever on which to dispute the analysis of the justice department that these provisions already have no effect on lawful activities involving animals.

The last part of the bill, the third item, is relatively straightforward. It would ban the sale of cat and dog fur in Canada and require source labelling for fur products. This would match laws found in the United States and Europe. This measure, which has already won the support of tens of thousands of Canadians through one of the petitions that are now possible under our advance rules, is necessary to prevent the kind of horrifying stories revealed in the 2012 *Toronto Star* investigation that found dog and cat fur being used to make children's toys.

In conclusion, the bill is a collection of measures that are long overdue and well-considered, having been introduced, studied, and, in some cases, passed by the House in the past.

Private Members' Business

It deserves further study. It will get further study at the committee if we can agree to send it there so we can do our part, as Canadians, to modernize our animal cruelty laws to no longer be part of the problem with shark finning, and to deal with the issue of dog and cat fur that the bill would so carefully address.

• (1140)

Mr. Bill Blair (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in the House today to speak to Bill C-246, a bill introduced by my colleague and friend from Beaches—East York, which aims to strengthen the law concerning animal protection.

As I understand it, the bill has three main objectives. The first objective, already spoken about previously by my friend from Victoria, was to ban the importation of shark fins by amending the Fisheries Act and the Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation of International and Interprovincial Trade Act.

The practice of cutting fins from live sharks and discarding the remaining animal into the sea, allowing them to sink to the bottom of the ocean to either die from suffocation or be killed by other predators, is cruel and wasteful. It allows fishing vessels to operate more profitably, but it goes without saying that shark finning is a cruel and wasteful harvesting of this animal.

The bill seeks to amend the Fisheries Act to create a prohibition on shark finning. I would point out, however, that the practice of shark finning is already banned in Canada through licensing conditions administered under the Fishery (General) Relations, and any violation of shark harvesting licensing conditions is a chargeable offence under the Fisheries Act. As such, the proposed amendment to the regulations may create some confusion or redundancy.

The second purpose of the bill is to ban the sale of cat and dog fur in Canada by amending the Canada Consumer Product Safety Act and to require fur source labelling by amending the Textile Labelling Act. I am a confessed dog person, and I support my colleague's recommendation for providing greater clarity to the use of these products and to ensure that appropriate protections are extended as required.

My primary concern with the proposed amendments to the Criminal Code made by my colleague concern those sections of the act intended to modernize the animal cruelty provisions in the Criminal Code.

I agree that the animal cruelty regime does merit significant reform and I would like to take the opportunity to applaud and commend my colleague from Beaches—East York for his strong efforts and advocacy in bringing this important matter forward. I do, however, believe that there is going to be a larger review of the Criminal Code taking place under the mandate of the justice minister and I believe that the changes to the animal protections in that code should be the subject of broad public consultations prior to moving forward.

Bill C-246 proposes to create two new offences. The first offence contained in proposed subsection 182.1(1), regarding the killing or harming of animals, states that:

Everyone commits an offence who, wilfully or recklessly,

(a) causes or, being the owner, permits to be caused unnecessary pain, suffering or injury to an animal;

(b) kills an animal or, being the owner, permits an animal to be killed, brutally or viciously, regardless of whether the animal dies immediately;

I believe that there is considerable merit in the proposed amendments brought forward by my colleague from Beaches—East York, but I also wanted to share with the House some of the concerns raised by my colleagues from various jurisdictions across this country.

The first concern that has come to my attention is in regard to conflicts and exemptions within the bill. Bill C-246 does not have a list of exemptions for specific lawful activities such as ranching, hunting, fishing, trapping, medical research, etc. The bill may inadvertently create a conflict of law, making existing legally regulated activities illegal by the very nature of their existence.

In addition, the bill raises concerns regarding constitutional issues in that it may effectively render hunting, fishing, trapping, ranching, and other heritage and indigenous activities illegal because they may be deemed to be brutal or vicious, or they may have an inherent reckless level of activity as part of their very nature.

• (1145)

This new test of “recklessly” that has been added to “wilfully” under proposed section 182.1 for causing unnecessary pain, suffering, or injuries to an animal expands upon the kind of conduct that could become criminal, as one who sees the risk and takes the chance that pain and suffering may occur. This has caused a great deal of concern among those who are hunters, trappers, and fishers across this country as this risk may be inherent to the very nature of those activities. Even if they are practising their sport or commercial or traditional activity lawfully and by prescribed socially accepted practices, they may come into jeopardy.

I listened very carefully to my friend's comments and his reassurances that these matters will not be connected to those traditional activities, but there is a very legitimate concern across this country with respect to their potential impact, and therefore, I must unfortunately advise that I cannot support the bill as it is currently proposed.

I know that many stakeholders across this country are concerned that these new offences of killing an animal in a brutal or vicious matter go too far and may capture traditional animal slaughter practices. I am aware that when these matters were previously discussed in the House there were a number of reassurances provided to those members, but a great deal of public concern still exists.

Canadians who enjoy hunting or fishing, or raise animals to be slaughtered for food are deeply concerned that these practices could be captured by these new offences, notwithstanding my friend's reassurance. Given the strong concerns that were expressed when a similar bill was debated, I think it would be most appropriate to broadly consult with Canadians across the country before pushing forward with any legislative amendments.

Private Members' Business

I believe that most Canadians would agree that animals deserve our protection apart from any property interests that may be attached to them. I am certainly not disagreeing with the need for strong legislative action to protect animals. Studies have confirmed that a person who abuses animals is much more likely to begin doing the same to people, and there is also research linking animal abusers to increased incidence of domestic violence.

However, it is my strongly held view that aspects of Bill C-246 are sensible and appropriate from a criminal law perspective. I believe that any reform to the animal cruelty offences in the Criminal Code deserves the benefit of broad public consultation and further study.

Animal cruelty is an important social issue that deserves a comprehensive legislative response. It needs broad public consultation to allow us to get this right. The best way forward is in the review of the Criminal Code that will take place in the future. This way we can hear and attempt to address the concerns of Canadians engaged in legitimate activities of hunting, fishing, ranching, medical research, etc.

We want to ensure that any legislative changes are appropriately balanced and do not impinge on the rights of Canadians to continue enjoying these important activities. These are activities that are not only traditional but an important part of our economy, and I know Canadians feel very strongly about them.

Canadians are concerned that they do not want to feel that the enhancements that we put in the Criminal Code may put them at increased risk of prosecution as a result of engaging in these traditional activities. It is too difficult, in my opinion, to do this within the context of the existing private member's bill and its associated processes. The best way forward is by a comprehensive review of the Criminal Code that will allow consultations to take place.

I look forward to a full debate on this matter in the House.

• (1150)

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I sit here listening to the debate this morning, I can see that this is obviously a very passionate issue for a lot of the members in the House.

I want to thank my colleague across the way, who I have gotten to know through committee work and a bit of work outside of normal duties. I totally respect this individual. I respect his right to bring the bill forward and have it discussed. I personally wish that we were not having this discussion, because I believe that some of the proposed changes in the legislation would have a potential impact on the constituents who I serve. It is very courageous, and I mean this with the greatest of respect, particularly for a new member of Parliament to bring forward what I consider to be a very large and ambitious piece of private member's legislation. He can be commended for that. We do not know what the final decision is going to be, so we will see how it goes.

I want to thank the parliamentary secretary for bringing forward a very respectful position, I assume on behalf of the government, on how it is going to deal with this. I am going to go into some examples in the bill. I do not disagree with all parts of the bill. The question that I have, though, is not about the intended consequences,

but always the unintended consequences. That is what I am going to get at.

The bill is quite large in its scope. It deals with shark finning. We have known from debate in previous Parliaments that Canada already, through its current practices and so on, does not allow this in its own waters and does not allow through its regulatory regime the importation of fins from sharks that have been finned. However, if it is the will of the House at some particular point in time to pass that legislation, I would not be personally affected.

In fact, as somebody who is a zoologist with a fisheries and aquatic sciences degree, I understand the importance of the ecosystem, the entire web of the food chain. I know that a top predator is always welcome in the system and understand that we do not want the extinction of any species through these harvesting practices. It is something that I would at least be open-minded to. It is something that I could deal with. Had the bill only dealt with that aspect of things, I could maybe find my way to supporting it at some point in time.

The bill also goes on to talk about dogs and cats. This is a heartstrings amendment. People think about their little dogs at home being used for their fur at some particular point in time. I say this as a pet owner. I was a dog owner as a youngster growing up on a beef farm in central Alberta, and our dogs were used quite differently, by the way, on the farm.

Our dogs on the farm were work dogs. We loved them, we respected them, and they respected us, but we had a completely different relationship with the blue heelers and other dogs that worked on the farm, helping us herd cattle, helping us protect our assets, and so on. That was a completely different relationship. When our dogs behaved and performed well, they were rewarded. When they were out of line and needed to be corrected, we used appropriate methods to correct the behaviour of our dogs. This is something people learn at any dog training school, or whatever the case might be.

However, that is a far cry from my little lap dog, because now I live in town. Regrettably, there was not enough room on the farm for all of us kids, so I live in town now and I have a little lap dog. I have a completely different relationship with that dog than the dogs I had growing up on the farm. Therefore, no, I would not want that to happen, but I am in control of that, because I am the dog's owner, I am the dog's master, and I can decide whether that animal ends up in some other type of situation. I have that ability and responsibility, and I take care of my family dog. I do not know of any families that do not love their pets. My dog is part of the family. If she is watching, she will not understand a thing I am saying, but she will at least see me on the screen.

Private Members' Business

I am very concerned about the bill trying to make everything homogenous. It assumes that every animal is part of the same experience. For example, for people who have only lived in town—and I am not saying this in a derogatory way, in any way, shape, or form—who have had pet dogs their whole lives that have been lap dogs, they have a very different world view of their pets than somebody who might be working on a farm. That is my only point in bringing this up.

I am also a hunter and an angler. I have spent years of my life training. I have a zoology degree in fisheries and aquatic sciences. I have a conservation law enforcement diploma. I spent years researching fish. I spent years working as a conservation officer, protecting the environment, protecting wildlife, conserving our resources, and I am very proud of the past that I have had.

I can say that the vast majority of people I work with in this community are the most ethical, responsible people one has ever met. When they see this piece of legislation and see the clauses in the bill that say anybody who kills either recklessly, violently, or brutally, they think, “If I catch a walleye to take home to feed my family and I bonk it on the head in the boat, does that mean I am going to go to jail?”

• (1155)

The sponsor of the bill would have us believe that is not the case, and I believe his intention. However, do we know for sure? Here is an example.

Animal rights activists use every opportunity they can to advance their agenda. That is fine. That is their right. They may do whatever they lawfully can. They are entitled to that. We are a free and open society, and they have that right. However, here is an example of how these things can go sideways. It actually pertains to the agricultural sector.

We know that cameras are put in livestock facilities from time to time in an effort to advance an agenda. Sometimes they do good; sometimes they do not. I can say, however, in no uncertain terms that a number of constituents have come to me having documented people who they know are stalking their farms. These people are driving their vehicles up, parking lawfully on the edge of the road, photographing, and documenting farming practices. I myself have heard phone calls and recordings of individuals who have left threatening messages on family farm answering machines, because they did not like the type of farming in which the farm was actively engaged. These are the same folks who belong to such organizations as PETA or any other animal rights coalition groups. I am not saying all of them would share that same agenda, but certainly folks use these kinds of methods and techniques to intimidate, brow-beat, and otherwise try to shut farms down. They become the self-proclaimed purveyors of social licence of this particular issue and use these methods to advance their own agendas.

My sincere fear is that, if the bill were to pass in its current form, it would create ample opportunities, motivation, and no end of people trying to use the legislation. All they would need is a willing judge and a simple case of negligence.

The test right now in the Criminal Code has a very high bar for how one could be charged, and so it should. A criminal offence is a

very serious matter. In the legislation put forward, all it simply means is a little neglect. Who gets to decide that?

In the section in dealing with punishment, it states:

...being the owner, or the person having the custody or control of an animal, wilfully or recklessly [—recklessly is not defined anywhere—] abandons it or negligently fails to provide suitable and adequate food, water, air, shelter and care for it;

That care could be something as simple as grooming the matted fur on one's dog. The penalty for that could potentially be a criminal record.

These are the things that are sending a complete chill into not only parts of the industry, but the hunting and angling community.

We all want good animal welfare standards. There are parts of the bill that would improve animal welfare. I agree wholeheartedly with my colleague when he talks about raising animals for the purpose of fighting, betting, and these types of things. I do not think many people in Canada would actually disagree with that. If the bill did only that, then I am sure my colleague would have the support of the vast majority of the members of the House. I do not mean this maliciously, but I am hoping the overambitious agenda of the bill will be the end of it before it even has an opportunity to get to second reading.

I am very pleased to hear the parliamentary secretary say a much more rigorous and consultative approach needs to be taken to ensure that everyone with a vested interest is involved. First nations people have been left out in the cold on this. Dealing with dog and cat fur, it is quite traditional to use husky fur in the use of garments. Would that be a problem with this legislation?

We know already about the ambitious campaign against the seal hunt. The use of the hakapik is a veterinarian-approved process. It stands the rigours of all the scientific evidence we have, but has been brutalized in the public media around the world. It has resulted in the exponential growth of the seal population off the Atlantic coast, while at the same time creating economic havoc, particularly for vulnerable coastal communities that rely on this traditional lifestyle.

There are countless communities that do this. There are farmers, ranchers, and people who live off the land. It is not just first nations people who live off the land. They want to be assured that all members of Parliament in the House understand the gravity of what could potentially be at risk here.

• (1200)

While I commend my colleague for bringing the bill forward, I cannot in good conscience support this bill.

I should mention that we had discussions. He honourably came, sat down, and talked with me, because he knew my feelings on this. I respectfully told him that I could not support the bill. Therefore, it will come as no surprise to him that I rose to speak on this piece of legislation today.

I will always stand up for the people in animal husbandry, farming, ranching, and the hunting and angling community. I will always make sure we preserve these traditional ways of life, and I will not open up any opportunities for the unintended consequences of these industries to be sacrificed, such as they could be with this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

PUBLIC SERVICE LABOUR RELATIONS ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-7, An Act to amend the Public Service Labour Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board Act and other Acts and to provide for certain other measures as reported (with amendments) from the committee and of Motions Nos. 1, 2, and 3.

[*Translation*]

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Deputy Speaker: The Chair would like to rule on the selection of report stage motions for Bill C-7, an act to amend the Public Service Labour Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board Act and other acts and to provide for certain other measures. Specifically I would like to address report stage Motions Nos. 1, 2 and 3, standing in the name of the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands on the Notice Paper.

This being the first report stage debate of this Parliament, it affords the Chair an opportunity to remind the House of the Speaker's role in selecting report stage motions, and the practice that guides it.

•(1205)

[*English*]

In deciding the matter, the Chair is bound by our established practice in relation to the Speaker's role at report stage.

A note to Standing Order 76.1(5) states:

The Speaker will not normally select for consideration by the House any motion previously ruled out of order in committee and will normally only select motions which were not or could not be presented in committee.

[*Translation*]

House of Commons Procedure and Practice, second edition, sets out the following general principle with respect to the selection of report stage motions. At page 783, it states:

As a general principle, the Speaker seeks to forestall debate on the floor of the House which is simply a repetition of the debate in committee [...] the Speaker will normally only select motions in amendment that could not have been presented in committee.

[*English*]

On June 9, 2015, at page 14830 of *Debates*, the Speaker in the last Parliament referenced these passages. At the time, he said: "Both these excerpts point to an essential truth about report stage, namely that it is not meant to be another opportunity for detailed consideration of the clauses of a bill. For this reason, the Chair

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rigorously limits the types of motions that could be considered at report stage. In so doing, the Chair rests on the presumption that a committee's clause-by-clause consideration provides ample opportunity to scrutinize the clauses of the bill and have amendments considered accordingly".

This principle continues to be applied with due regard to the particular circumstances of each case.

At the time that clause-by-clause occurred for Bill C-7, the committee had not yet adopted a mechanism to allow for the participation of members from non-recognized parties in committee. I am not certain, however, that the Chair would agree with the presumption that, in light of this, report stage would be the only vehicle available to these members to propose amendments to the bill.

[*Translation*]

Committees have shown great flexibility in the past in how they consider amendments at clause-by-clause. In describing this flexibility, we refer to the much repeated axiom, "Committees are masters of their own proceedings".

[*English*]

With that said, Bill C-7 was one of the first bills to be considered in committee in the 42nd Parliament, and with committees still trying to determine how members from non-recognized parties could participate in committee proceedings on bills, a certain amount of flexibility is appropriate in this instance.

As such, I will allow the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands to move her Motions Nos. 2 and 3, even though they ought to have been moved in committee.

I would like her and all members to understand, however, that in the future, the Chair will be stricter in exercising his authority at report stage. Unless truly exceptional circumstances arise, the Chair will not select report stage motions that could have been moved in committee. I encourage all members to make efforts to have amendments dealt with in committee, so that report stage does not become a repetition of the committee clause-by-clause study of a bill.

Accordingly, Motions No. 1, 2, and 3 will be grouped for debate and voted upon according to the voting pattern available at the table.

I shall now propose Motions Nos. 1, 2, and 3 to the House.

•(1210)

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP), seconded by the member for Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel, moved:

Motion No. 1

That Bill C-7 be amended by deleting Clause 1.

Motion No. 2

That Bill C-7, in Clause 33, be amended by deleting line 15 on page 20.

Motion No. 3

That Bill C-7, in Clause 33, be amended by deleting line 25 on page 21.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I will note parenthetically that I would reserve the right to come back to you to argue more substantively on the question of the rights of smaller parties in relation to report stage.

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It is very clear, though, as you have outlined, Mr. Speaker, that in this case there had been no direction from the committee to afford an opportunity, one that I would either welcome or resist, to appear before committee as opposed to having this opportunity. In our system of our parliamentary democracy, it is a very fundamental issue that all members of Parliament are equal, and it is our job, as to our abilities and our efforts, to equally contribute to the passage of legislation.

To the matter of Bill C-7, we have before us important legislation to create, for the first time, the ability of RCMP officers to collectively bargain with their employer, to unionize the workforce to have an opportunity to work together as employer and employees to set out how that working relationship would go forward and to give rights to the RCMP officers collectively to bargain.

This should not really just rely on legislation. We go back to the B.C. hospitals case. The Supreme Court of Canada was very clear on this matter, that all workers had the right to collectively bargain, whether they were in a position to form a union or not. In fact, in the B.C. hospitals case, it was made very clear that labour rights were human rights.

Why do I bring forward this very critical amendment? I hope members of Parliament from all sides of the House will give my amendment serious consideration to improve this legislation. The amendments are essentially sub-deletions within a section, therefore they are considered substantive amendments and only a member of Parliament in a party with fewer than 12 MPs at this stage in our proceedings is in a position to put forward this amendment. I hope many members of Parliament from other parties will actually be grateful that we have this one opportunity to improve the legislation substantively before passage.

Here is the problem with the sections that my amendments would delete. They would pre-empt the collective bargaining process to say that the collective agreement could not include conditions relating to "conduct, including harassment". All I am attempting to do is remove that line, to remove the pre-emptive legislative act of taking out of the hands of collective bargaining the opportunity to ensure that the collective agreement between RCMP officers and their employer has the possibility of provisions to protect the workers from harassment.

I want to stress again that by passing this amendment, the legislation would not insist upon the inclusion in a collective agreement of steps to protect workers from harassment. It would only leave that opportunity open to them through the process of collective agreements.

I am actually baffled that we are even having this conversation in 2016 about the rights of RCMP officers to collectively bargain to protect themselves from harassment. The number of complaints that make their way to the public media are fewer than the ones that actually occur. I am in touch with several RCMP officers who have filed complaints against their superior officers or their colleagues for sexual harassment, but their cases are still private and I will not mention their names. However, I will mention the names of women who have been sexually harassed within the RCMP and have come forward.

It is certainly not news to any member of this place that we have an unacceptable degree of sexual harassment within the RCMP. Far too many fine, well-trained exemplary officers find themselves unable to work in a toxic workplace, file a grievance for sexual harassment, and then find themselves completely alone. They often have to go their doctors who tell them that they are basically dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder, that they cannot go back into that workplace, and they are given notes for sick leave. Officers who could be contributing to putting people behind bars, to helping to take evidence, and to helping to put a case together are home on sick leave while their harassers are at work. There needs to be some rebalancing here.

• (1215)

I refer to the recent case of Corporal Catherine Galliford, which was settled out of court. It was not an internal RCMP sexual harassment complaint, she actually went to court, after years of sexual harassment. She said, "What broke me is that I had no one to go to for help."

That struck me when I was dealing privately with some of the RCMP officers currently involved in internal harassment complaints. I did not realize how grim it was for women within the RCMP when they filed a complaint of sexual harassment. They have no access to a union rep to help them through the process. They have no help in getting a lawyer to protect them and their rights through the process. They are isolated and essentially harassed all over again because they are shunned by other members of the force because they have filed a complaint.

This place has dealt with how we handle issues of sexual harassment within Parliament. We have issues of sexual harassment on university campuses. We are looking at an unacceptable acceptance of misogyny and sexism in various places throughout our society. We have the chance to make one small amendment to Bill C-7, which would give RCMP officers, male or female, the right to have a mechanism in place in a collective agreement to deal with inappropriate conduct within the force.

I do not need to remind members of the evidence, which RCMP Commissioner Bob Paulsen spoke to recently. He said that he really did not need to have it pointed out to him that it was unacceptable for RCMP officers to wander around naked at the office.

Conduct provisions in a collective agreement should be open to the employer and employee to negotiate what level of conduct they can stand, what level of support a victim of harassment, male or female, needs to continue to do his or her job.

Given the extraordinary degree of public awareness of the problem that women in the RCMP face, given the unacceptable conduct in a minority number of cases of men being mistreated within the RCMP, and given that we know the RCMP is one of the finest police agencies on the planet, we want support the RCMP going forward to clean up what many members of the force have referred to as an unacceptable culture, an abusive culture. This legislation is one of the mechanisms to do that.

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Why would we as lawmakers pre-empt collective bargaining? As members can see from my amendment, there is no attempt to remove the specific terms or conditions that should go into a collective agreement related to policing. The provisions that would be left in place cover a lot. The collective agreement shall not touch on law enforcement techniques, or transfers from one position to another, or appraisals, or probation, or anything related to carrying out the duties. Anything related to what he or she must do as an RCMP officer cannot be in a collective agreement. I understand why lawmakers would take that stand.

However, why would we remove the possibility of a proper regime to assist any member of the force who needs the support of a union, a lawyer, a counsellor, whatever provisions can be worked into a collective agreement through free, unfettered collective bargaining? Why would we close the door on an RCMP officer's ability to access collective agreements that would include rules, guidelines, and a framework to deal with harassment?

I want to focus the House's attention on the fact that this is one single amendment. It is not an attempt to slow down the passage of the bill. It is not vexatious. Using the democracy that exists through the Westminster parliamentary system that allows any member of Parliament to improve legislation at report stage, I invite all of my colleagues, whether they were on committee during clause-by-clause or not, to take a fresh look at the bill in the hope of improving it. Let us ensure that the House speaks with one voice and supports every woman in the RCMP who has ever been harassed. Let us end an abusive culture by giving them real rights in collective bargaining agreements to improve the conduct of the RCMP and end sexism within the RCMP, end an abusive culture once and for all.

• (1220)

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands on her passion and insight. I agree with much of what she has said, including that the RCMP is one of the finest police forces anywhere, and that harassment is a problem which needs to be better addressed. We need a better regime, and we need to end an abusive culture. However, is collective bargaining the place to do that?

The Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness has said that this is a priority for him. He is currently developing legislation to address just that. The Government of Canada takes harassment very seriously and is addressing it.

When Bill C-7 was in committee, there was agreement among the members present to request that the commissioner and the RCMP team come back to talk about what would be part of a change in culture and what the plans were to do that. Would the member support having the RCMP coming back to the committee to begin that work of changing the culture in the RCMP?

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I know at least one member of that committee stood up on this point, the hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona. We are not dealing with either/or. I have great respect for the Minister of Public Safety, and I am sure he takes this on board as a priority. However, why close the door on a mechanism that is open for free and collective bargaining between the employer and the employee?

New legislation to deal with harassment on the force would be great, but it is not inconsistent nor contradictory with this place speaking up and saying that RCMP officers have a right to free collective bargaining, which includes taking steps against harassment.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands for bringing this amendment forward. It is, as she said, an opportunity to bring some improvement to a bill that, in my opinion, would not do a good job of bringing in a proper collective bargaining regime for RCMP officers.

For the benefit of government backbenchers who may be wondering about the gravity of what they are being asked to decide here, could the member expound upon the fact that by making this amendment, all we are saying is that RCMP members would be able to bring these issues to the bargaining table? This would not mandate any particular outcome. It does not guarantee success on any particular proposal, or any proposal at all. What it would do is allow those members to bring their expertise working on the ground and knowing the RCMP, in a way that most members of the House would not know, to the bargaining table to start addressing some of those issues. To not pass this amendment is to say that Parliament knows better, that we need not even give them the option to bring those things to the table.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, yes, this was in evidence before the committee, and was well explained by a lawyer with a lot of experience in labour relations. I once practised in labour relations, but it has been a couple of decades. However, Paul Champ has worked in the area of labour relations and has actually taken on some of these cases.

Mr. Champ was asked directly by the hon. member for Burlington what the implications would be, from a legal point of view, of taking out the words, “including harassment”, from the bill. His response was that we would have an association negotiating some clause in the collective agreement that would say “fair treatment in the workplace”, or “no harassment in the workplace”, but it would not open the floodgates. Members would not be able to bring in a case to adjudication on their own. It would have to be approved by their bargaining association.

What is more, which was very clear from his response, is it would only create the opportunity for a collective agreement on this point. It still is a matter of free and fair bargaining between the RCMP management and the RCMP workers as to whether they want to have a provision that deals with harassment in their collective agreement. However, what we do by removing the words “harassment” from Bill C-7 is give them the possibility of free and fair collective bargaining on an issue that is of paramount importance to fairness, decent treatment, and human dignity in the workplace.

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●(1225)

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak in support of Bill C-7. I applaud the bill and the process that led us to dealing with the bill today. It puts in place the labour relations regime that governs the RCMP members and reservists, and it respects their constitutional rights.

I want to say personally that I think it goes beyond respecting their constitutional rights. It is a statement of respect for who they are. The members of the RCMP and the reservists are people who make sacrifices for the Canadian public. They are willing to be on the front lines and put their lives in danger. They are posted anywhere in Canada, so their families need to be willing to support relocation and disruption of family life. They do this all in defending the safety and security of the Canadian public and our country. I respect them for that, and I am pleased that we are respecting the members with this bill.

[*Translation*]

Bill C-7 recognizes and responds to the Supreme Court of Canada decision in *Mounted Police Association of Ontario* versus the Attorney General of Canada.

In that case, the Supreme Court ruled that the main parts of the RCMP's current labour relations regime were unconstitutional.

[*English*]

For one, the court struck down the inclusion of RCMP members from the definition of "employee" in the Public Service Labour Relations Act as unconstitutional. Moreover, the court held that a section of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police regulations infringed upon the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The court affirmed that subsection 2(d) of the charter:

protects a meaningful process of collective bargaining that provides employees with a degree of choice and independence sufficient to enable them to determine and pursue their collective interests [...]

[*Translation*]

In the RCMP's case, the court found that, and I quote:

...the current labour relations regime denies RCMP members that choice, and imposes on them a scheme that does not permit them to identify and advance their workplace concerns free from management's influence.

In fact, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Regulations imposed the staff relations representative program on RCMP members.

[*English*]

The aim of the program was that at every level of hierarchy, representatives and management would consult on human resource initiatives and policies, with the understanding that the final word always rested with management.

The court found that the staff relations representative program did not meet the criteria necessary for meaningful collective bargaining. Under this program, RCMP members were represented by an organization that they did not choose themselves. What is more, they had to work within a structure that lacks independence from management.

Clearly, this process failed to achieve the balance between employees and employer that is essential to meaningful collective bargaining. Therefore, the court held that this violated the charter right to freedom of association.

The bill is a direct response to the Supreme Court decision and is meant to address the ways in which the RCMP labour regime was found to be unconstitutional.

[*Translation*]

First of all, the bill removes the exclusion of RCMP members from the definition of "employee" in the Public Service Labour Relations Act, and changes the title of that act to "Federal Public Sector Labour Relations Act".

The bill also follows through on the court's finding that RCMP members must be allowed to choose the labour organization that represents them, and that the labour organization must be independent and free from management's influence.

●(1230)

[*English*]

Given that independence and freedom of choice were two key elements of the Supreme Court's decision, the bill before us today would take action to address both of those elements. It would provide RCMP members and reservists with the freedom to choose whether they wish to be represented by an employee organization which would be independent of the influence of RCMP management. As such, it would enshrine the constitutional freedom of RCMP members and reservists to engage in meaningful collective bargaining.

Personally, I am grateful for the Supreme Court's decision. It is an important decision that gives us the opportunity to modernize the labour relations regime that governs RCMP members and reservists.

The bill before us today harmonizes the labour rights that govern groups of federal employees with the fundamental freedoms enshrined in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. That is why Bill C-7 contains certain exclusions.

The RCMP is a national federal public sector police organization. Therefore, its labour regime must be aligned and consistent with the fundamental framework for labour relations and collective bargaining for the federal public service.

Bill C-7 includes several general exclusions. For example, to be consistent, staffing, pensions, organization of work, and assignment of duties are excluded from collective bargaining. Each of these issues is instead dealt with under other legislation, for example, the Public Service Employment Act, for staffing; the Public Service Superannuation Act, for pensions; and the Public Service Labour Relations Act, for labour relations in the public service. This system has been in place for years, and it works. Bill C-7 is consistent with government's approach.

Government Orders

Bill C-7 also amends the Public Service Labour Relations Act, by adding a separate part to address the specific and unique circumstances of the RCMP as a police organization in the federal public sector. We did hear in committee many times how unique the RCMP is, and we know how unique it is in our communities. As I mentioned earlier in my speech, it is a national force, and the members can be posted anywhere across the country, with all of the implications that has for their families.

RCMP-specific matters that are excluded from a collective agreement or an arbitral award include the deployment of RCMP members, conduct and discipline, law enforcement techniques, RCMP uniforms, medals, and orders of dress. These matters relate to the effective management of this unique police force and the broader accountability of the RCMP for the safety of Canadians.

[*Translation*]

It is important to note that the legislative provisions establish a number of other mechanisms outside the official collective bargaining process, which allow the employees to advance their objectives and interests using a collaborative and solutions-based approach.

For example, the RCMP Pension Advisory Committee is making recommendations on the administration, development, and funding of pension benefits. Then we have the workplace health and safety committees. It is their role to work with the employer on developing, implementing, and monitoring workplace safety programs and to resolve safety-related problems.

There are also the labour-management relations committees, which deal with workplace issues such as harassment and disclosure of wrongdoing.

[*English*]

On the subject of harassment, I can assure my colleagues that the government takes this matter very seriously and the minister is working on legislation to address this.

The Minister of Public Safety did come to the committee. He takes it seriously, and the government is seized with this issue. The government and the RCMP's goal is to strive for a workplace that is free from harassment, so that when an allegation occurs, there will be robust processes in place to safely and effectively resolve the issue.

Today, we have a historic opportunity to enshrine the constitutional freedom of RCMP members and reservists to engage in meaningful collective bargaining. I encourage all my honourable colleagues to seize the opportunity before us and support this very important bill.

• (1235)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will start by noting that regardless of whether this bill passes, RCMP members are going to get the right to collective bargaining. It is not a decision being made by the government and whether or not it passes this legislation. It is a decision that unfortunately had to be made by the Supreme Court. That will happen whether we pass this bill or not.

The question is how to create a good framework for collective bargaining. That is what we are here to debate. We are here to debate

whether this bill creates the appropriate framework for collective bargaining and improves upon what is already in the PSLRA, which will be the framework for RCMP members if this bill does not pass.

The parliamentary secretary talked about the issue of harassment. I wonder if she would recognize that in terms of the approach that the government has outlined with the minister and the management of the RCMP, it is an approach that has been in place in various manifestations, studies, and initiatives for decades. Would she not acknowledge that giving members the right to advance those concerns at the bargaining table would have been genuinely new in terms of addressing issues of harassment in the workplace?

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, it is members of the Liberal Party and senators, who were formerly part of the Liberal caucus, who spent years studying this issue, holding hearings right across the country to hear from members of the RCMP who had been harassed. We understand the issue. I personally hosted some of those events, and it was heartbreaking.

We clearly understand that there must be substantive change. The question is whether the bargaining table is the right place for a discussion on the human right to be free from harassment. I would ask the member to think about his arguments at the pay equity committee, where New Democrats are arguing that pay equity is a human right and should not be at the bargaining table. Here the member is arguing that freedom from harassment is also a human right and that it should be at the bargaining table.

There need to be stronger laws. There needs to be a new regime to protect members from harassment, from being subjected to further harassment when they report. That is exactly what the Minister of Public Safety is working on.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I want to again pursue the point raised by the hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona with the parliamentary secretary.

Would she not agree that if a collective agreement creates a framework for handling the issue within the RCMP, that it does not in any way, shape, or form alter the government's ability to bring forward legislation? Surely we are not saying that because freedom from sexual harassment is a human right, universities do not have to take any steps to deal with rape culture on campuses, that workplaces do not have to do anything to protect workers from sexual harassment. Because it is a human right, that does not create a circumstance in which access to a framework to deal with protections for that right in specific workplaces is off the table.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, it is the opposite of what the member just stated. What I and the government are saying is that we are very concerned about harassment. I want to again reinforce that the member for Humber River—Black Creek devoted hours, days, and weeks to this issue, over a number of years, before being on the government side.

Government Orders

We understand how unfortunate and pervasive this problem is, and we know that it needs to be addressed. The question is whether collective bargaining is the place to do it. We believe that the minister is correct. He is seized with this matter. He is working on new legislation. It is not about either being in Bill C-7 or it is not being addressed. It is the opposite of that. This will be addressed, and that is the correct place to do it.

• (1240)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to address the House to speak to Bill C-7. Throughout the discussion I will take the opportunity to emphasize that, even though I am not my party's critic on the matter related to this bill, two aspects of it concern me in both form and substance.

Bill C-7 concerns the 28,000 officers of the RCMP, or the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

This bill was introduced in response to the Supreme Court's January 2015 decision in *Mounted Police Association of Ontario v. Canada* concerning the right of association of RCMP members. In its ruling, the Court gave the government one year to introduce legislation on the right of RCMP members to associate. That deadline was extended to May 16, 2016.

That is the first thing that I wanted to mention, as it reminds us of what we are going through, in terms of form, with the study of Bill C-14 concerning medical assistance in dying, in which I was directly involved.

RCMP members were not unionized, but they were part of groups and could have discussions with the employer under the staff relations representative program, which was established in the 1970s. It worked quite well, but was challenged by some groups of RCMP officers in Ontario, which resulted in this decision.

For the benefit of the Quebeckers who are watching, I should explain that the RCMP is also the largest police force in eight out of 10 provinces. Ontario has the Ontario Provincial Police, Quebec has the *Sûreté du Québec*, and the other provinces have the RCMP, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, which is the police force that enforces the laws and regulations and maintains order in Canada.

The Supreme Court ordered the government to pass legislation conferring on RCMP officers freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining. It was at that point that our government, which was in power at the time, began to clear the way for drafting this legislation, under the direction of the hon. member for Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis.

Negotiations concerning freedom of association, agreements governing salaries, and all such matters do not happen overnight. We need to take the time to do it right, and that is the point we have reached.

The current government introduced Bill C-7. We agree on the principle of the bill, but we had some serious problems with some of the clauses. Therefore, during the clause-by-clause study, my colleague, the hon. member for Durham, who was a minister and who is a lawyer and a member of the Royal Canadian Navy, proposed some very important amendments.

Clauses 40 and 42, which were deleted from Bill C-7, had to do with health care and insurance provided to RCMP members. We are very happy that the government listened to the Conservative member for Durham with respect to deleting these two major clauses.

However, we do not recognize freedom of association in the same way as the government. We have two opposing views. This is also the case with another bill, Bill C-4, which I am working on in my role as employment and social development critic.

What is the government proposing, and what would we have liked to see in this bill? We think that the right of association must be recognized, but that it should be subject to a secret vote that reflects the will of the members. This is a key element that we enshrined in Bill C-525, for example, which was passed by the House of Commons. This bill required that union certification, specifically when a group of workers is trying to unionize, be subject to a secret vote.

• (1245)

The Conservative member for Durham proposed that solution, but the government rejected it. We find that unfortunate. The sacred right of association must be enshrined in law so that, when it comes time to negotiate, that right is even more powerful, legitimate, influential, and authoritative. In our opinion, the best way to ensure and assert that authority and strength is establishing secret ballot voting.

We know what we are talking about here in the House of Commons. We were all elected by secret ballot. That way of doing things dates back to 1874. It is nothing new. Elected members of the House of Commons have been familiar with the principle of the secret ballot for a long time. The same is true for elected officials in the provincial legislatures across the country. Every elected representative is elected by secret ballot. The same is true at the municipal level. Our mayors and municipal councillors are elected by secret ballot. That is a given in our democratic system if we want those representatives to be powerful, strong, authoritative, and competent.

A solid foundation is needed when it comes time to negotiate and discuss and to ensure that people are properly represented. On this side of the House, we believe that the best way to give unions or union representatives more authority is to allow them to obtain that authority by secret ballot. We encountered exactly the same problem with Bill C-4, for which I am the official opposition critic.

Bill C-525, which was introduced by a Conservative member under the former government, enshrined in law regulations regarding unions and the creation of unions through secret ballot. All of us here, who have decision-making authority, obtained that authority because the people in our ridings voted for us. We think that, when people need to create a union or an association, their representatives, who will be given the authority to negotiate with their employer, should be chosen through the same approach.

Government Orders

That is fundamental, but unfortunately, the government members decided to do otherwise. That is the government's decision to make, but it is not what we would have done.

We believe that that element is fundamental and that the government should have acted accordingly. The Supreme Court specifically stated, in the ruling handed down in January of last year:

The flip side of...freedom of association under s. 2(d) is that the guarantee will not necessarily protect all associational activity.

From our perspective, the best way to give the newly formed group the necessary authority is a secret ballot.

[*English*]

I want to be clear. We support the fact that the 28,000 members of the RCMP, for whom we have a lot of respect, are doing a great job. It is the most honourable job in our country. They deserve a lot, and they deserve it for our citizens. We have a lot of respect for them. We agree with the fact that they should have the right to negotiate as a group. We recognize that. That is why our colleague, the hon. member for Durham, did a tremendous job at the parliamentary committee by pulling out two clauses, clauses 40 and 42, which were not as good as they should have been.

However, we are at a crossroads. The government prefers to have a way of recognizing the group that will represent the RCMP members. We believe the RCMP members would be better served if the election of those people as their representatives was done by a secret ballot vote in front of the government. That is why we agree with the principle of the bill, but unfortunately, we will not be supporting Bill C-4 because the government has failed to recognize that the secret ballot vote is the best way to ensure the strongest dignity of this group to be represented.

• (1250)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Picard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague opposite for his thoughtful comments.

I expect or I hope that, as a good Quebecker, he took a special interest as I did over the past two years in the public inquiry into Quebec's construction industry, during which numerous witnesses related horror stories involving dubious practices related to secret ballots.

I would like my colleague to share his views on the protection that type of election affords when, under the proposed alternative, one or the other would be suitable for proper recognition.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure whether the member and I were watching the same Charbonneau commission. Personally, what I remember from that commission is that, unfortunately, people in positions of authority in the unions violated the fundamental rights of union members to have proper representation. That is exactly the opposite of what we saw.

On this side of the House, we believe that, in order to be free of any express, malicious influence on the part of the union authority over the newly unionized members, voting should be done by secret ballot. That way, everyone can vote in good conscience, in a voting booth, and make the choice that they are most comfortable with.

Voting by a show of hands or by identifying oneself, while three or four people are watching each individual closely to see who is on their side, is not necessarily the best way to go about it.

On this side of the House, we believe that secret ballot voting is the best way to give people who want to form a union even more strength and authority, whether we are talking about Bill C-7 or Bill C-4.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am rising to respond to my Conservative colleague's comments.

As part of the union accreditation process, secret ballot voting is always a tactic used by employers or management to lower the success rate of the unionization process. Signing a membership card respects the rights of individuals who want to become part of a union that will represent their interests and who want to have the ability to negotiate a collective agreement.

I would like my colleague to explain why he supports a process that systematically reduces the chances of the unionization process succeeding, as proven by university studies.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, I am appealing to my hon. colleague's sense of democracy. Why would there be a lower rate of unionization with a secret ballot? It may be because people do not want to unionize. Perhaps it is the reason because perhaps it is the reality.

MPs were all elected by secret ballot. Should we challenge the authority of people elected by secret ballot? Not at all. My hon. colleague faced very strong opposition in his riding. He won because he did his job well and that is how people showed the choice they wanted to make. We cannot have varying degrees of democracy.

We believe that the best way to ensure solid, strong, authoritative and clear accreditation of a group is by having a secret ballot. Voting by signing a card can result in people being influenced. When a person is in a voting booth, they vote with their conscience. If there is less unionization with secret ballots, it may be because people do not want to join a union.

[*English*]

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his great remarks today in the House, and reminding all members that we are indeed here as a result of the democratic process that involves a secret ballot to show the will of the people, unburdened by pressures, their own vote, as it were.

The important thing to remember is that we are here on Bill C-7 as a result of a Supreme Court of Canada decision brought by an association challenging the inability under the Public Sector Labour Relations Act for the RCMP to form a union. However, the front-line men and women in uniform across the country have never actually had their say on this process.

I would ask my colleague to weigh in on the fact that Bill C-7 is the government once again denying the right of the rank and file members to weigh in on this process, which many have concerns about, and the secret ballot vote would allow everyone to have their say.

Government Orders

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, the government failed to recognize the authority of secret ballots. More than that, it missed the great opportunity to create something new, something stronger for our proud RCMP members. If they had a secret ballot vote decision to become unionized or not, and to elect their representatives, the union as a group that will come from that will be stronger, more accurate, more responsible, and in front of the government, will have more authority than what is proposed.

• (1255)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think it is important not to let the debate on an amendment that has to do with harassment and whether or not RCMP members would be allowed to bring issues of harassment to the bargaining table to get derailed by questions of process on certification. There will be time for that in the debate. There has already been a lot of discussion around that. There will be more opportunity for discussion on that at third reading. I would say, because what I have not heard in the arguments of some members is why a different rule should apply to RCMP members than a rule that will be applying to other Canadian workers who are federally regulated. The place for that debate is on Bill C-4, which will be coming back to this House, as well.

I just want to take some time to talk about however RCMP members get there, if they get there, to have a certified bargaining agent, the question we are talking about now with respect to this amendment is what that bargaining agent is going to be able to bring up at the bargaining table. That is the important issue, I think, with respect to debate on this amendment. I am pleased to rise in support of this amendment.

Members who have been following this debate closely will know that I argued at committee, with the support of my caucus, for an even greater lessening of restrictions on collective bargaining because we think that is required, frankly, in order to honour the spirit of the Supreme Court decision that was taken.

That ruling, and we actually heard quotes from that ruling from the hon. parliamentary secretary earlier, says very clearly that part of the impetus and reason for the kind of freedom of association that is guaranteed as a charter right and thereby also guarantees collective bargaining is that workers have to be able to have a meaningful recourse within their workplace and a way to identify their own priorities to bring them to the employer and to have a shot, I guess is the really informal way of putting it, at having some success.

If we are going to bring a bill forward that says for all the many reasons that RCMP members sustain a protracted court battle in order to get collective bargaining—those have to do with workplace safety and health; they have to do with the topic of this amendment, which is harassment and conduct within the workplace—if we are going to bring forward a bill in response to that decision that says, “Okay, fine. You have collective bargaining on paper but you can't bring any of those issues to the table. We don't even care what your proposals would be. We don't care how reasonable they would be. Before we know even what they are, we're going to rule them out of court through this legislation”, I think it does a real disservice to the Supreme Court's ruling. I think it does a disservice to members. I think it is a reason why, if we do not relax these exemptions, we are going to see, in very short order, another court battle and I think, eventually, if the Supreme Court continues to rule in the spirit that it

has been on collective bargaining, we are going to see that this law does not pass muster.

We have an opportunity now to move forward with a bill that would actually give RCMP members what they asked for and what they fought for going through the court process. I still think there is going to be a lot of problems with the bill because there are so many other exclusions, but we will support this amendment because it is a way of making a bad bill a bit better. It is a bad bill that has a strong likelihood of passing, because the government seems quite committed to passing it in its present form. Why it feels such a loyalty to this form is beyond me. This is actually the language that was pulled out of a previous Conservative bill. The Liberals have not minced words when it comes to criticizing the previous government in terms of its approach and thinking. The Liberals certainly have not held back criticism of the previous government when it comes to its approach to labour relations, and yet, the first bill that they are likely to pass does not just adopt that same philosophy and approach, but it is actually for the most part word for word, the very same bill that had been contemplated by the previous government going back as far as 2010.

This amendment is a way, I think, of trying to bring the bill a bit closer to the spirit of the Supreme Court decision. I do not think it gets us there, but I think it is important for RCMP members, if there is a possibility of passing this amendment, and I hope there is, that would at least make things a bit better for them.

• (1300)

I would argue, and have been arguing at length throughout this entire process, that it is not just an opportunity for RCMP members, but it is an opportunity for the institution as well.

We have heard, and we are hearing today from Liberals about how the government is engaging to work on the issue of harassment to improve it. The Liberals are going to study it, as if it had not been studied before, and then they are going to make some changes, and I wish them well in that. I am not saying that is not important. I am not saying that is not an important part of the process, but what we have here with the Supreme Court decision and now Bill C-7, if it is changed, is an opportunity to bring in a genuinely new approach, to do something genuinely different, and to allow RCMP members to bring their knowledge and expertise of the force and how things work on the ground directly into conversations with management.

For instance, if it is the case that Parliament is going to be addressing workplace issues in the RCMP, along with management, and it is going to take parliamentarians going around studying issues, having a law come before Parliament and passing through the two Houses in order to address workplace issues, then is it the view of the government that somehow that is a better process? Is that somehow more responsive than a process that would allow a union that represents RCMP members made up of the very people who are out there doing that good work on behalf of Canadians?

Government Orders

Consider the time that it takes for an issue to filter up through an organization, get media attention, and build public pressure for government to act on it, and it is unfortunate that with issues of sexual harassment in the RCMP we have reached that point. It means that it has become very bad. However, there are all sorts of other workplace issues that maybe do not get quite that bad, but are egregious nevertheless, which could be addressed by a process that actually consults the people who are doing the work on a day-to-day basis. We could get that kind of day-to-day or month-to-month feedback between the people doing the job and the people managing it.

If the model which says that somehow issues have to get bad enough that they come to Parliament and then we go out and study the issue, sometimes for years, and bring legislative changes, is how we are going to address issues in the RCMP, then I do not think one has to be a super business ideologue to say that this is just a bad model. It is just not efficient.

Why would we not want a model, if we are seriously trying to address an issue, that would allow us to get more frequent feedback, which does not involve a bunch of third party players, like parliamentarians, for instance, who do not have that day-to-day experience and do not have a real operating knowledge? It may be that some members of Parliament do have that experience, but if they do, it is a coincidence of the fact that a particular person was elected to represent a particular riding. I think it is fair to say that most of us in this chamber do not have that kind of day-to-day experience. Therefore, it seems wrongheaded to me to pretend that the most serious issues of the force are going to have to come here before they can be dealt with.

There is an opportunity here to have a better system, a system that RCMP members appreciate much more fully, that they are actually a part of. However, part of our point is that we should not prejudge the issue of whether this is going to work well or not. If it works well, it means that fewer of those issues are going to come to the House.

I would say that by the time issues get here, they have become really bad, and they are probably far away from being effectively solved. A good collective bargaining process can help us catch more of those issues early on, and resolve them in the workplace so that they do not have to come to Parliament to get fixed.

To the extent that this amendment, in a limited way, creates more opportunity for that kind of better process in respect of a certain issue, we are in favour of it.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his speech on this motion and his concern.

The reality is we cannot wait even for collective bargaining to take on this issue. The Prime Minister has committed that we as a government will ensure that the RCMP and all parts of the public safety portfolio are workplaces free from harassment and sexual violence. Also, the minister has already asked the RCMP to review its policies and procedures on this, and review the recommendations on the new process it put in place in 2013. Therefore, we do have a serious and non-negotiable expectation that there will be transparent investigations, serious disciplinary measures, support for victims, and a plan to end toxic workplace behaviour.

In the pay equity committee, the member's party is throwing out the idea of legislation from the previous government because it is bargaining a human right, i.e., pay equity, which they said should not be treated at the bargaining table. We agree with the member's party on that. Why is it not a place for this human right to be negotiated, whereas the member is proposing that it is a matter for negotiation with respect to Bill C-7?

● (1305)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, to say that pay equity is a human right and to want that legislated does not preclude employees from bringing to the bargaining table in their own workplace proposals about how pay equity can be better realized or from bringing to the table facts about the workplace that say that pay equity, despite whatever legislation is on the books, is not being adequately realized.

The problem with this bill is that it says whatever is not going right with the legislation and whatever could be improved in the workplace, RCMP members will not have the right to bring that to the bargaining table. Nothing in the NDP position on pay equity is saying that workers should not be allowed to at least bring to the bargaining table issues of pay equity in their workplace. That is the difference.

I think it is a serious mischaracterization of the issue to say that the NDP is somehow against workers being able to talk about pay equity at the bargaining table. Other provisions that support and enhance pay equity are welcome, but we are not proposing a ban on discussing pay equity at the bargaining table.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, as this debate has progressed, particularly with the excellent presentation by my friend from Elmwood—Transcona, I am beginning to wonder whether the restrictions on access to free and fair collective bargaining contained in the bill would actually lead to a further Supreme Court case to find that the legislation before us, Bill C-7, is an inappropriate and unacceptable limitation on free and fair collective bargaining rights that the RCMP officers and workers have already won before the Supreme Court of Canada.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I would like to emphasize again that I think that is where this ultimately is headed and I do not see a need to wait. We talked about many of the challenges that face the RCMP as an organization. I believe that collective bargaining, as one piece of a multi-faceted puzzle, one other way of addressing those issues, could actually help the institution resolve some of those long-standing issues by bringing a new approach. We are not doing right by RCMP members if we cause them to have to mount another battle in the courts in order to get there and we are just adding time to finally addressing those things in a meaningful way.

Government Orders

Part of what I am beginning to suspect in this debate is just how many members of the House actually understand what collective bargaining means and how it works. We constantly hear a misrepresentation of what happens in bargaining, that somehow, being able to bargain something is going to mean that suddenly employees control everything and there is no role for government or management anymore. It is just not the case. Being allowed to discuss things at the bargaining table is not even a guarantee that a proposal of any kind will be accepted at the bargaining table. I have been shocked, frankly, to see how few members of the House seem to appreciate that point.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Picard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise in the House today to speak to the debate on a bill that has an impact on Canada's national police force, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, a police force that has been the pride of Canada for nearly 100 years.

As we look back throughout Canada's history, the RCMP contributed in many ways: from the march west from Fort Dufferin in Manitoba, to the last spike of the Canadian Pacific Railway in Craigellachie, British Columbia, back when the organization was known as the North-West Mounted Police, to the St. Roch's passage through the Northwest Passage, to the vital roles it played in World Wars I and II. The RCMP's history is indeed Canadian history.

The bill before us is another important step in that history because we are seeking to give RCMP members the right to collective bargaining for the very first time.

Bill C-7 will establish a labour relations regime for RCMP members that complies with the Constitution. This regime will give them the freedom to choose to be represented by a union and to negotiate with the employer so that their labour needs are taken into consideration.

For now, I would like to talk about the second and third amendments proposed by the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

As with the labour relations regime that governs police forces across the country, Bill C-7 would exclude some elements from collective bargaining, particularly because of the unique nature of the work RCMP members do. These two proposals would remove conduct, including harassment, from the list of exemptions.

I know that all members share the concerns the hon. member raised about harassment in the RCMP, and this issue is particularly worrisome to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

I want to share a quote from the Minister of Public Safety's mandate letter, in which he is clearly instructed to "Take action to ensure that the RCMP and all other parts of your portfolio are workplaces free from harassment and sexual violence".

● (1310)

The minister clearly indicated that he expects allegations of harassment in the RCMP to be handled with comprehensive,

transparent investigations; strong discipline; support for victims; and plans to prevent toxic workplace behaviour.

To that end, he asked the Civilian Review and Complaints Commission for the RCMP to undertake a comprehensive review of the force's policies and procedures on workplace harassment, and specifically to examine and evaluate the implementation of the commission's recommendations in its 2013 report.

Furthermore, as the minister emphasized to the committee, this is part of a whole set of initiatives under way to deal with this very troublesome concern, and there is more to come.

Other questions were raised in committee, and there was a lot of discussion about clauses 40 to 42. Under those provisions, the RCMP's occupational health care benefits for workplace injuries or illnesses would have been administered by provincial workers' compensation boards and coverage for RCMP members would have been similar to that of officers working in other police departments. This issue was examined at second reading and then again in committee, where several witnesses appeared to talk about it. In the end, it seemed that everyone agreed to defer consideration of this issue to a later date so that it could be examined in more detail, and these provisions were removed from the bill. This shows how committed our government is to respecting Parliament and the independence of parliamentary committees.

The government still believes that it is not ideal for employers to make the final decision as to whether an injury is work-related.

We will continue to work with the RCMP, its members, and the governments that have contracts with the RCMP in order to implement a long-term solution that will meet members' needs.

Nevertheless, the bill before us is one that would achieve the essential objective of allowing RCMP members to be represented by an employee organization of their choosing. In its decision that found the previous labour-relations regime unconstitutional, the Supreme Court determined that the staff relations representative program, which was imposed upon RCMP members, violated their charter rights because it did not allow members any option for representation, nor did it provide an effective mechanism for dispute resolution. On top of that, the program was not independent of management. Bill C-7 would ensure that RCMP members' charter right to freedom of association is respected.

In addition, the legislation would ensure that any certified RCMP bargaining agent is solely focused on the representation of RCMP members and would clarify that the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board would have to consider the unique role of the RCMP in administering and enforcing the act. The bill also proposes binding arbitration with no right to strike, which would ensure both that the labour rights of RCMP members would be respected and that Canadians could continue to rely on the RCMP to ensure safety and security in communities from coast to coast to coast.

Government Orders

●(1315)

This bill's real purpose is to ensure respect for RCMP members' rights. They were consulted throughout the development of this new labour relations regime, and they are the focus of our attention as we study the bill before us today.

I will conclude by pointing out that, every year, RCMP members respond to well over two million service calls from Canadians while conducting all kinds of complex, long-term federal investigations related to organized crime, financial integrity, corruption, and terrorism.

In addition, as we have seen in northern Alberta, RCMP members are always ready to respond when tragedy strikes. From the onset of the crisis in Fort McMurray, the local RCMP and members of detachments across Alberta have acted in countless ways to support search and evacuation activities, and we will be forever grateful to them for the outstanding work they are doing during this extraordinarily difficult time.

To sum up, the bill before us would protect those who protect us by ensuring a labour relations regime that respects their rights.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am still confused because I do not understand how this all works.

If discussing sexual harassment at the bargaining table is an option, why is it a problem for the government to conduct more investigations and take action to improve things with respect to sexual harassment in the RCMP?

Mr. Michel Picard: Mr. Speaker, the minister's mandate letter was very clear: all forms of harassment in the workplace are unacceptable, and the minister has a duty to take action to resolve the issue.

I have personally spoken with members who work for the association and victims of this kind of dispute, and having been a member of that very fine institution myself, I can assure the House that everyone has the utmost admiration for that institution.

I have complete confidence in that institution, and we issued a very clear request to the commissioner, asking him to conduct thorough investigations to resolve the outstanding disputes.

Furthermore, a system has been in place since 2014, and it should give us the results we are hoping for. We strongly recommend that the RCMP demonstrate that it is implementing its system in order to show how effectively it is managing this kind of crisis.

[*English*]

Ms. Dianne L. Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am just wondering if the member can tell the House how the government is dealing with the class-action lawsuit that entails about 400 people who have been harassed.

Mr. Michel Picard: Mr. Speaker, it would be inappropriate for me to comment on any ongoing settlement with the court. However, there has been a clear demand to Commissioner Paulson to provide us with a deep investigation of what is going on. With respect to the case going on in court, we are looking forward to a settlement.

●(1320)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have had what I would like to characterize as a wonderful relationship with the RCMP detachments in my riding in north-western British Columbia. We have had dialogue and exchanges. I have an enormous amount of respect for the work they have to do, particularly in rural Canada in some of the more remote communities where the challenges are quite intimate.

What the bill is seeking to do is to provide a better workplace and environment for serving members of the force. It is because the challenges are real and because the stresses are often high that there has been an unfortunate history within the force. As my friend from the Conservatives just noted, there is a very large class action lawsuit, overwhelmingly if not entirely brought forward by female members of the force. We have had commissioners and government in the past say they were going to get to this.

My question is very simple. In no other labour relations anywhere in the country, that I am aware of, would a government say workplace health and safety is going to be excluded from the bargaining, from the negotiation between the employees and the employer. That makes no sense. In fact, many women, when asked why they enjoy participating in any kind of organized labour at all, say it is for those very same protections. In the past in Canada, and too much in the present, there have been these sexual misconduct actions by others, and if women in particular do not have the power of unity to press their cases, they do not feel as safe in the workplace.

For heaven's sake, why would the government not just allow this to exist as part of the conversation, if it ever comes to that, at a bargaining table between the RCMP and the people who work for it? It makes no sense to me at all. I wish the parliamentary secretary—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. parliamentary secretary.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Picard: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I am pleased to hear that all members of the House have so much respect for the RCMP as an institution.

Although my response may seem inadequate, I am repeating the response I heard from some people who have been the victims of this kind of behaviour. Despite the pain and difficulties caused by such incidents, these people believe that a solution exists within the institution and there is a way to find that solution from within.

We asked the commissioner very clearly to share the results of the investigations, because this kind of behaviour is simply unacceptable and cannot continue.

In any case, a system was recently implemented, and we need to see how effective it is and give the RCMP some credit for putting it in place.

Government Orders

[English]

Ms. Dianne L. Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to speak to a very important issue that affects RCMP members across the country. I come from a city that is home to the largest RCMP detachment in Canada. I speak not only as a member of Parliament but also a former councillor and former mayor. Over those 18 years, I have seen many changes in the organization, and I have worked with many people who care very deeply about the RCMP members and the force.

For purposes of context, within British Columbia, all communities and cities, except for about seven, are policed by the RCMP. There is a provincial RCMP force in eight provinces. All large cities pay 90% of the cost for policing, and communities under 5,000 are supported. The 10% that the federal government pays is for the ability to pull 10% of the force at any given time to deal with federal issues or events.

As I mentioned, this is because many cities have grappled with numerous issues over the years, whether it was resources or lack thereof, equipment for officers, how to deal with the changing face of crime, how to better support members, or the cost of downloading. Some of these issues will continue to be a challenge while other issues are ever evolving. Cities have also had their challenges with ever-changing legislation, with results that only come to light when we see it played out on the front lines.

I want to note that it was the Supreme Court, not this government, that is responsible for this. The Supreme Court ruling held that the exclusion of members of the RCMP from collective bargaining and the imposition by management of a non-union labour relations regime was unconstitutional. Further, the current RCMP labour relations regime denied RCMP members choice and did not permit them to identify and advance their workplace concerns free from the influence of management.

I support the right of RCMP members to be represented, if they so choose, and to have a collective agreement in place. It can provide clarity and certainty, not only for members but management, and especially for the cities and communities they serve.

I took the opportunity to discuss this bill with many RCMP members across the country and in my own city, and I heard a number of concerns. While some of those concerns have been addressed and we were able to get the government to make amendments to the bill in committee, there are still concerns that remain.

I support the amendments to strike clauses 40 and 42, and I thank my Conservative colleagues for the work they did in committee to make that a reality. However, I feel there are still fundamental flaws with Bill C-7 and that the government is not listening to RCMP members.

As I stated earlier, there are issues that the organization continues to grapple with. Some programs have been put in place. However, certain issues continue to surface. I feel very strongly that we have an opportunity at this point to work together to finally address them and bring about the change that is sorely needed.

One of the fundamental tenets of any policing organization is safety, not only for the members themselves, but also their fellow

officers and the general public. RCMP members should be involved in a meaningful way and have mechanisms in place to discuss any and all safety concerns, without the real or perceived threat of discipline. They should also have the ability to address working conditions within a respectful and supportive process.

In my opinion, this should not be part of the bargaining restrictions. It saddens me deeply, as it does every member in the entire force, that since 2006, 30 RCMP members have taken their lives. The most recent was here in Ottawa, on March 17 of this year.

● (1325)

Post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, mental and emotional trauma, are very real conditions within the workplace environment. What police officers witness and experience on a daily basis goes far and beyond what any one of us may experience in our entire lifetime.

I have always been an advocate for mandatory support measures to be in place for RCMP members. As we discuss Bill C-7, I feel we can strengthen and broaden the mandate to begin to address some of these issues.

One RCMP officer wrote me and said, “Essentially, this bill tells members of the RCMP that although they are trusted to put their lives on the line every day for Canada, Canada does not trust them to ask for appropriate changes to their working conditions, equipment, or harassment concerns”.

Each and every police officer should be supported and protected as they fulfill their duties. I have immense respect for the work they do on our behalf in our communities, and for our families. We should do the same for them. Therefore, I will not be supporting the bill in its current form.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I find it unfortunate that the member has determined that the bill is not worthy of support. One can appreciate that there is always room for improvement, but at the same time recognizing that the bill would move us forward on an important file.

Does the member see any benefit within the bill itself? Is there any aspect of the legislation that she or the Conservative Party supports?

● (1330)

Ms. Dianne L. Watts: Mr. Speaker, as I stated earlier, I have worked closely with members of the RCMP for over 18 years. A number of issues have been systemic, which as the former mayor working with the federal government and provincial governments, we have tried to overcome and work with.

The Supreme Court of Canada ruled that RCMP members have a right to a labour organization and to be represented. I support that 100%. The bill supports that element of the Supreme Court decision, and we would go forward with that.

There are significant elements that are not within Bill C-7, and because they are so fundamental and so underlying, I cannot support the bill.

Government Orders

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as many in the House know, I have had a long relationship with both the RCMP and the union movement in Canada. Both have touched my family significantly and personally, so I am in a unique position to comment on Bill C-7.

The one area in Bill C-7 that I have great difficulty with is the provision that would not allow members to vote in a secret ballot environment on whether to certify or decertify at any time in the future. I would ask my colleague to expand upon this if possible. The secret ballot is a fundamental tenet of democracy in this country. All of us who sit in this place were elected by secret ballot. The Speaker of this assembly was elected by a secret ballot. It is the norm across Canada. Most provincial legislation ensures that secret ballots take place in union certification drives.

Does my friend and colleague believe that the bill should contain a provision to allow secret balloting? Could she comment on why the government seems so steadfast against allowing our RCMP members to vote in a secret ballot environment, as every other Canadian would have the right to do?

Ms. Dianne L. Watts: Mr. Speaker, it is a fundamental right for every person who belongs to any labour organization to have the right to a free ballot. I cannot answer the question about why the government does not want that measure in place, on any front, because fundamentally it is our right as individuals to have the ability to do that.

As my colleague clearly stated, those who are elected in a general election are elected by secret ballot. It is all done by secret ballot because that protects the right of the individual. I absolutely agree with the member that it should be within the legislation, and it is not.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from South Surrey—White Rock for bringing her experience to this House.

The best part of this new Parliament, from the viewpoint of the opposition, is not the fact that we are in opposition—that is certainly not a bright point at all—but the fact that one-third of our caucus is now made up of new members of Parliament.

The hon. member who just spoke brings to this House her experience as a municipal leader, particularly in Surrey, as she mentioned, which has the largest RCMP detachment in the country. In recent years, that has probably been the most tasked detachment in the country, working with challenges in violence and organized crime that the area has seen. Her leadership as mayor was recognized long before she joined this Parliament.

That is when the House of Commons is at its best. It is when we have members of this place rising in the House to talk on legislation, not just based on what is contained in it, but how it impacts the lives of those impacted by the bill, how the work done by the men and women of the RCMP in Surrey, indeed across the country, is fundamental to the safety and security of the people of Canada and the people of Surrey. They reached out to her council while she led council there, with concerns about crime and these sorts of things.

As a mayor, she also brought to the debate the impact of uniformed service on men and women in the RCMP, the rise of operational stress injuries, the risk of violence, the impact on family

of stress, moves, and these sorts of things. I appreciate her addition to the debate here today, and her discussions with me and other members of our caucus on Bill C-7.

It is her input, and the input of members of the RCMP across the country, that is leading the official opposition to oppose Bill C-7. As members may recall at the introduction of this bill, I said we would try to work with the government on it.

Bill C-7 is in this place as a result of the Mounted Police Association of Ontario v. Canada. This was a Supreme Court decision that stated that the staff relations program at the RCMP was not sufficient to meet the rights of association guaranteed to all Canadians under the charter.

That program was an internal HR function that tried to work between management and the men and women on the front lines of the RCMP. The Supreme Court decision stated that the exclusion of the RCMP from the Public Sector Labour Relations Act and its inability to associate violated the charter. Therefore, Bill C-7 is here before us.

In my speech, I said we would work with the government as a result of the timeline that the Supreme Court of Canada gave Parliament to provide a framework so the men and women of the RCMP could get union representation in a way that suits the needs of the unique role that the RCMP plays.

I remind members of this House, I remind the government, that it was given a lot of flexibility by the court. The key element, though, was that it had to be free from management. This type of collective structure needed that degree of independence from management. The rights and the freedoms of members needed to be reflected in that association, so their charter rights needed to be secured.

We did not see that in Bill C-7, from introduction through to committee. That is why our willingness to work with the government only had the legs to get us to committee. As my friend before me said, we were very concerned with clauses 40 and 42 in Bill C-7, which could have resulted in a patchwork of entitlements by RCMP members for health and occupational safety provisions across the country.

In fact, clauses 40 and 42 have nothing to do with the standing up of a collective bargaining agent for the RCMP. It was essentially the outsourcing by the federal government of workers compensation programs to provincial regimes. As each province is different, it would have taken a single unified national police force and created a patchwork of benefits for their members, depending on where Canada asked them to serve.

● (1335)

We had problems with that because the men and women in RCMP uniform go where their nation needs them, whether that be to Surrey or Shelburne, Nova Scotia, similar to when I was in the Canadian Armed Forces. They should not have to worry about a patchwork of benefits and occupational rights depending on which posting they are in.

Government Orders

Therefore, I am happy to say that the government did listen to the concerns that the official opposition expressed with respect to clauses 40 and 42. Ultimately, I am sure that some of its own members heard from members of the RCMP, and the government agreed to strike those provisions at committee. I applaud the government for listening.

I also will remind members that I had profound concerns that some members of the RCMP felt they were being told they could not speak to their member of Parliament and express concerns they have as Canadians with respect to a bill that would impact them and their family, which is Bill C-7. Once again, the government disappointed the opposition, and as the critic, I rose in the chamber to seek unanimous consent of the House and to show that, in the matter before us that would impact thousands of Canadians across the country, none of them should be intimidated or prevented from giving their opinion to their member of Parliament. Because there was that concern within the RCMP, I stood in this House and asked for unanimous consent to say that, as parliamentarians, we should hear from all members who are impacted by the legislation that we are debating and voting on.

Sadly, members of the government denied unanimous consent for such a basic fundamental democratic right. I was not asking for the ability of uniformed RCMP members to throw up bonfires and protests; we were asking for the simple democratic right for members of the RCMP, or their partners or spouses, to be able to come to their MP and express their concerns with respect to legislation. I was profoundly disappointed when the government denied that unanimous consent that would have encouraged MPs to hear from people in uniform on what is probably the most profound bill in generations to impact the RCMP.

While we are on the topic of democratic rights, the other thing I clearly said in my initial speech on Bill C-7 was that we expect Bill C-7 and ultimately the collective bargaining unit for the RCMP to be the subject of a vote by members. We said that in the House and at committee, and the government is not providing that. If we combine Bill C-7 and Bill C-4, it would take away that right from the members of the RCMP in one bill and be silent on it in Bill C-7. The government knows full well that it will pass Bill C-4, which will deprive RCMP members of a secret ballot vote, while concurrently passing Bill C-7. That is shameful. That is why we are opposing Bill C-7.

Why is it shameful? We are debating Bill C-7 as the result of a Supreme Court of Canada decision that asked Parliament to fill the void that the Supreme Court indicated was there with respect to the exclusion of the RCMP from the Public Service Labour Relations Act. Therefore, we are here debating Bill C-7 because of a court decision. However, no members of the RCMP have really been asked about this fundamental question. Why would the government fear giving a secret ballot vote to all RCMP members from Surrey to Shelburne on a collective bargaining agent that is in their own interest?

What is ironic is that every member of the 338 members in this chamber were elected to this place by a secret ballot vote. However, they do not feel it is the same to give the basic fundamental democratic right to vote on their representation collectively to people whom we give the important task of keeping Canadians safe in rural

parts of Canada, where the RCMP is the only face of the government and of law and order in this country, those members whom we ask to keep us safe. It is a sad irony that the new government that runs on and talks about sunny ways is clouding those sunny ways by running Bill C-4 and Bill C-7 through the House at the same time.

● (1340)

While I am glad the Liberals listened to us and struck clauses 40 and 42 from the bill, the fact that they are not listening to the existing concerns my colleague from Surrey mentioned and not giving the men and women the right to vote means that Canada's official opposition, the Conservative Party, cannot support Bill C-7.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we need to recognize that one of the reasons we have this legislation before us today is a Supreme Court of Canada ruling. It is also important for us to recognize the valuable contribution that unions and organized labour play in Canadian society. It is very widespread in terms of that recognition.

I appreciate that the Conservatives might have concerns with respect to the management issue, the registering of unions, and so forth. Maybe the member could reflect on how important it is that the RCMP be afforded this legislation, which then ultimately allows its members to have that union representation. It is that principle that I think is really important and why the Conservatives might want to revisit the way they are voting.

I am wondering if the hon. member could provide comment on that issue, the principle of being able to have a bargaining unit to represent the RCMP.

● (1345)

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, what is interesting in my colleague's question is that he said the RCMP members are being afforded this legislation that came as a result of the Supreme Court of Canada decision. I agree they have. Why should they not also be afforded the basic democratic right to then have their own vote on whether or not they have a collective bargaining agent and who that should be?

We are setting the framework here. We are affording them the ability to have that, as a result of the Supreme Court of Canada decision in the Mounted Police Association of Ontario case, but we are not then affording the rank and file to have their say.

The fact that in recent weeks we are hearing that many of those rank and file members do not understand the full impact of Bill C-7 on their workplace means that we should then give them the right to absorb the framework given by Bill C-7.

If the hon. member feels we should afford the force this right to collectively organize, we should then afford the same right to the individual members who are the collective of what the union will represent.

Government Orders

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am a little bit surprised that the Conservatives have chosen this element of this piece of legislation to circle again and again as their main point of contention. I am surprised they did not focus on the piece that is excluded from this legislation and the imagined collective bargaining that would happen between the employees and employer, the RCMP, which excludes the right of members to bargain around things like sexual harassment and workplace safety and security of the members as they serve our community so diligently.

There is the unfortunate recent history and long history, unfortunately, of the RCMP with these massive court cases now being conducted by women who served in the RCMP, who went through sexual harassment in the workplace, and it was never rectified despite commissioner after commissioner and government after government saying this is important. It never happened. They had to take it to court.

Why would the Liberals then choose to exclude that specifically from the right to bargain around issues like sexual harassment and workplace safety for those who are serving our communities? No other collective bargaining in the country would exclude this. For heaven's sake, why would the Liberals want to do this for the members of the RCMP? It is just beyond me.

This is one of the reasons why many women join unions, so they can have sexual harassment enshrined in their collective rights to protect them, so that the employers cannot abuse those privileges that they have as an employer.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, I think what the member's question best illustrates is the fact that Bill C-7 is not well understood. In fact, I said at committee, and I said it quite clearly, as someone who served in uniform of the military for 12 years and understands the paramilitary structure of the RCMP, that there needs to be the ability to have postings, appraisals, operational performance, and those sorts of things. Therefore, we tried to sort of understand that approach on exclusions.

However, what he is illustrating and what members of the RCMP have told us is that they have concerns about some of them.

I do not feel that some of the exclusions result in what some people are suggesting about harassment or workplace safety. Those have to be paramount considerations. Our previous government brought legislation to this place on the harassment issue itself. That is critical.

However, what his question and the emails and calls I get show is that members have not really been asked for their say with respect to Bill C-7. The rushing, the limiting of debate, and then the elimination of that right to vote of front-line members has profound considerations. This is why we will be opposing Bill C-7.

• (1350)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again it is a pleasure to stand in this place and continue our dialogue and debate on Bill C-7. If members in this place were here when I made my initial comments and observations on Bill C-7, they will know about my history, both with the RCMP and the labour movement in Canada. To risk repeating myself, I will

remind members exactly how the RCMP has touched me and my family over the years, and how the union movement in Canada has been involved a great deal in my life and my upbringing.

As I mentioned in my first intervention a few weeks ago, my mother's first husband was an officer in the RCMP who was killed on active duty at Depot, many years ago. Although I never met my mother's first husband, I learned of him very early in my childhood. My mother would tell me stories about who my father could have been. She told me stories about her husband and how much they loved each other and how much he loved his job with the RCMP. She told me about the unfortunate tragedy that took place when he was killed that one fateful day at Depot.

Since that time, I have always had a deep and very resolute appreciation of the dangers that every member of the RCMP faces each and every day of his or her life. Also, since that early childhood of mine, I have grown to know a great many RCMP members, many of whom are very close friends of mine, some who are current, some retired, and unfortunately a number who have passed on to a better life. However, universally all of those members shared common values: respect for the tradition of the force, and also a respect for democracy and democratic rights in Canada.

That is why, with all of the RCMP members whom I have spoken with since Bill C-7 was first introduced, to a person, they have all stated the same thing. They believe their right to certify if they wish should be conducted using a secret ballot. In fact, it is more a result of their being incredulous to the fact that Bill C-7 would not allow them that right.

My colleague from Durham who spoke just before me mentioned that many members of the RCMP perhaps were not aware of all the provisions in Bill C-4 and Bill C-7. They were not aware of the fact that they would not be able to cast a ballot in private. However, they are starting to become aware of that right now. Why the current government is hell-bent on its desire to prevent a secret ballot environment for our national police force almost defies credulity.

I can only think of one reason why that would be, and that is the fact that in the last election campaign, the Liberal Party campaigned aggressively to try to gather and garner the union vote. I can assure members that rank-and-file members of unions believe in secret balloting, union bosses not so much. The reason for that is that if they do not have a secret ballot when determining whether, for example, to strike, rank-and-file union members can be intimidated.

I know this first hand. I referenced the fact that I grew up in a union household. I did. My father was the head of the United Steelworkers of America, very active obviously in the union movement. In fact, he mentored Ken Neumann, who is now the national head of the United Steelworkers for Canada. At a very early age, I recall my father taking me to union meetings. I jokingly put to members that perhaps he was doing it for one of two reasons. One, he was honouring a commitment of babysitting that he made to my mother, or two, he hoped that his young son would grow up to be a union representative like him. If it was number one, he succeeded admirably. If it was number two, he failed miserably.

Statements by Members

• (1355)

While I am certainly not a member of any union and I am certainly not enthralled with the union movement as a whole, I can say that I respect the right of any organization in Canada to unionize. I respect the role that unions have in Canada. I understand the role that unions play in Canada. However, there are many faults in the bill as it appears before us today. The biggest single fault is the inability of the legislation to allow for a secret ballot on determining whether or not to certify.

At the union meetings I attended as a youngster, I saw first hand how intimidation can work. Again, I use the example of a strike vote, where all union members would gather in a union hall, hear speeches primarily from their brothers and sisters in leadership positions within the union, and then would be asked to vote by a show of hands. I can assure the House that if there were any members in that union hall that did not want to strike for whatever reason, many times they would be afraid to express their true will by a show of hands. Why? Because some of their brothers and sisters would gather around them and let it be known in no uncertain terms the way in which they were to vote because the union leadership wanted a strike.

I think that is absolutely unconscionable. It was unconscionable then and it should be unconscionable now. Intimidation factors should not be allowed in any workforce or any workplace. By the same token, I will freely admit that there have been times in the past in certain non-unionized organizations where management would use intimidation factors. That also is unconscionable. That also should not be allowed but there is a simple way to fix this, to remedy this, and that is to allow secret ballots.

If an organization chose to unionize, so be it. It is the will of its members. However, if they chose not to unionize, those who voted against that very concept of unionization should not be then consequently intimidated and threatened because they voted against the wishes of their union leaders.

Across Canada, most provincial legislation allows for secret ballots in the workforce. In fact, they expressly prohibit non-compliance with that legislation. They make it a point to ensure that democracy is served. The ability for Canadians in any walk of life to express their will in a secret ballot environment is a basic tenet of democracy. Why the government fails to allow this in Bill C-7 and Bill C-4 is almost beyond belief. I can only go back to what I said just a few moments ago. I think this is payback to the union leaders who they courted during the election campaign of 2015 and that is shameful, absolutely shameful.

I have spoken with so many RCMP officers since Bill C-7 was first introduced because Depot used to be in my riding before the boundaries changed in the last election. Consequently, I am a frequent visitor at Depot and because of my history with the force, many members there know me and know me well. To a person, every single one of them was aghast at the fact that they would not have the right, if they decided to vote for or against union, to do so in private.

Bill C-7 is flawed. We know it is flawed and I believe the government knows it is flawed. That is what makes this doubly

shameful. On the opposition side we will not be supporting Bill C-7. I cannot support Bill C-7 and I think it is a shame because other than that, the bill does contain provisions that are very helpful to the RCMP. However, that one provision disallowing secret ballots is something that is a deal breaker for me and I will certainly not be supporting the legislation.

• (1400)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan will have five minutes remaining for questions and comments when the House next turns to debate on this question.

Now we are going to statements by members.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

ANNIVERSARY OF POLISH CONSTITUTION

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it pleases me to rise today to mark the visit to Canada of the President of the Republic of Poland, Andrzej Duda, to commemorate the historic 225th anniversary of the Polish constitution on May 3 and to extend my best wishes this special national day to the Polonia, our many Polish communities in Canada.

My riding, along with the city of Mississauga, is home to over 30,000 members of the Polish diaspora in Canada. They have made a remarkable contribution to local businesses, services, and the cultural fabric of the city. Along with me, they will wish to pass along their warm welcome. *Witamy Pana Prezydenta.*

It is especially significant that constitution day in Poland celebrates the adoption of the first written constitution in modern Europe. This constitution is most enlightened, advanced, and a reflection of the Polish spirit and the endurance of years and years of political hardship. *Happy Trzeciego Maja.*

* * *

TOURISM IN HURON—BRUCE

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, spring is in the air, summer is around the corner, and Canadians from coast to coast are planning their summer vacations. I recommend the riding of Huron—Bruce to take their vacation. With over 100 kilometres of shoreline, featuring beautiful beaches, boating, and some of the most beautiful sunsets in the country, they should check it out.

With the Blyth theatre, Huron Country Playhouse, historical lighthouses, museums, renowned golf courses, hiking trails, biking trails, triathlons, the Kincardine Scottish Festival and Highland Games, the Goderich Celtic Roots Festival, Lucknow's Music in the Fields for country music, Dungannon tractor pull, the Walton motocross, camping around the riding in our beautiful provincial parks, and some of the best restaurants our country has to offer, Canadians should visit Huron—Bruce and make 2016 a summer to remember.

*Statements by Members***SCARBOROUGH GURDWARA**

Mr. Shaun Chen (Scarborough North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this year marks a milestone for Gursikh Sabha Canada as they celebrate the silver jubilee of the Scarborough Gurdwara.

This place of worship has served the faithful Sikh community in the greater Toronto area since its construction and grand opening in 1991. Over the years, the original building was expanded, establishing the gurdwara as an important landmark in my riding of Scarborough North. Like the Sikh community in Canada, the Scarborough Gurdwara came from humble beginnings.

We should not forget that this year is also the 102nd anniversary of the *Komagata Maru* incident.

As Canadians, we should all be proud of the tremendous progress and contributions made by the Sikh community. Sikhism teaches selflessness, equality, and social justice, and these are values that all Canadians can cherish and share.

Congratulations to Gobinder Randhawa and the entire congregation of the Scarborough Gurdwara on their joyous 25th anniversary.

Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh.

* * *

[Translation]

GEOHERMAL ENERGY

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am blown away every day by the innovation and resourcefulness of the people of Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie. The people who live on the laneway between Bordeaux and Chabot, near Bellechasse, have undertaken a project unlike any other. They are heating and cooling their homes using geothermal energy. They are adopting a back-to-the-earth approach right in town.

Using geothermal energy, the natural heat from the centre of the earth, can reduce both our greenhouse gas emissions and our electricity bills. It is a revolution in the renewable energy industry and a hope for the future.

I want to acknowledge Bertrand Fouss for his remarkable involvement and for bringing this idea forward, and Coop Carbone and the Chantier de l'économie sociale for supporting him on this project.

I also want to congratulate the borough of Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie for encouraging the initiative as the primary investor.

I hope the federal government will follow suit and also invest in this extraordinary project that is moving us toward greener energies.

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SAINTE-DOROTHÉE WOODLAND

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am rising today to let people know about the Sainte-Dorothée woodland, which is located in my riding of Laval—Les Îles.

The Sainte-Dorothée woodland is one of the three largest wooded areas on Île Jésus. You can go there for walks and birdwatching, and there are also interpretation panels. Furthermore, the public part has

a three-kilometre network of paths, which is used by hundreds of snowshoers every year.

The Sainte-Dorothée woodland is located in a neighbourhood in my riding of Laval—Les Îles, where there has been a very sharp increase in residential construction in recent years.

This treasure must be preserved at all costs in order to give future generations the opportunity to maintain it and appreciate the great joy and memories associated with this fabulous area.

* * *

● (1405)

[English]

GEORGE T. INGHAM AND SON JEWELLERS

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Mr. Speaker, loving what one does is what drives bold individuals to take a leap of faith and start their own businesses.

George Ingham took this leap in 1916 and started George T. Ingham and Son Jewellers in Innisfail. This fine business is a prime example of entrepreneurship, commitment, dedication, and strong business sense, which has allowed this family business to thrive in our community for 100 years.

My family, along with many other families of Innisfail and district, have appreciated the fine service and quality of product of this outstanding small business as it has passed through the generations, from father to son to son.

On May 16, my wife Judy and I are pleased to be joining our fellow community members in honouring Garth and Joanne Ingham as they proudly celebrate 100 years of passion, craftsmanship, and service to our community.

* * *

JACQUES DÉLISLE

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Jacques Déglise, mayor of Napierville, who passed away suddenly on April 15. Jacques was a great public servant, devoted to his community and cherished by his Louise Larose and family.

[Translation]

I had the opportunity to meet with Jacques Déglise a number of times in recent months. That is why I would like to pay tribute to him one last time. Jacques was devoted to the residents of Napierville and liked by all the people he worked with. The development of his municipality was important to him, as was contributing to the advancement and completion of great projects such as the indoor pool and merging the recreation services with those of Saint-Cyprien. Jacques left us far too early, but he is leaving a wonderful legacy to the people of Napierville, a legacy that will last for years to come.

Statements by Members

[English]

BARRIE STRAFFORD

Mr. Ron Liepert (Calgary Signal Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Dr. Barrie Strafford, who passed away two weeks ago today at the age of 87.

I am so pleased I had the opportunity, the Friday previous to his passing, to have a chat with Barrie, where, like he always did, had bought a table to support the Bow Valley College fundraising scholarship luncheon. So when Barrie did not show up for work on Monday morning, everyone knew something was wrong.

Barrie and his wife Brenda immigrated to Canada from England in the 1950s. Tragically, Brenda was killed in a car accident in 1974, but that tragedy inspired Barrie to create the Brenda Strafford Foundation, which has gone on today to be responsible for an 80-bed women's shelter for battered and abused women in Calgary, several long-term care centres, including Wentworth Manor, which is in my riding where my mother-in-law happens to reside, but, more important, a number of health care centres for the underprivileged in Jamaica, Haiti, and the Dominica.

I know Barrie can rest peacefully because his foundation and 40 years of good work will be carried on by family members, volunteers, and staff.

* * *

EVENTS IN COQUITLAM—PORT COQUITLAM

Mr. Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this past weekend, I attended Port Coquitlam's 93rd annual May Day celebration. The day kicked off with a community pancake breakfast, followed by the Rotary May Day Parade and finished at the community block party. I commend the organizers for putting on a world-class May Day celebration, and it is just the beginning.

Next month, Coquitlam hosts the B.C. Highland Games, with the region's best bagpipers, Highland dancers, and caber tossers coming to compete. In July, Port Coquitlam gears up for the PoCo Grand Prix, a premier cycling event, with 200 top international cyclists. In August, 60,000 spectators will attend Port Coquitlam's 12th annual downtown car show.

I encourage all members to join me in the tri-cities, a wonderful community that is doing great things.

* * *

●(1410)

CARNATION REVOLUTION

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honour the anniversary of the Carnation Revolution, which took place last month on April 25.

The annual commemoration of 25 de Abril, as it is known in the Portuguese community, the largest ethnic group in my riding of Davenport, celebrates the end of almost 40 years of the longest authoritarian government in Western Europe. April 25, 1974, marked the day that effectively changed Portugal into a democracy.

The revolution started as a military coup, but soon transformed into a popular campaign of civil resistance. It is called the Carnation

Revolution because almost no shots were fired in ending the dictatorship and as the population took to the streets, carnations were placed into the muzzles of the rifles and on the uniforms of the army men as the population helped hasten the end of the dictatorship.

I want to thank Carlos Morgadinho and the rest of the executive of Associação Cultural 25 de Abril for their tireless efforts to ensure that the lesson of the Carnation Revolution is never forgotten. Once democracy is won, we must stay vigilant and always fight against any threats to our democracy, whether in Portugal or in Canada, this blessed country that we are so lucky to call our home.

* * *

[Translation]

SUDBURY BOOK FAIR

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Sudbury, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the seventh Salon du livre du Grand Sudbury took place last week. Every two years, thousands of book lovers gather in downtown Sudbury to attend this event and meet their favourite francophone authors from across Canada.

Our communities still find it quite difficult to access francophone cultural products, including French-language books. That is why readers from across northern Ontario come to Sudbury for this wonderful book fair, which has become one of the largest literary events in the country. Francophones in northern Ontario all look forward to this special event that takes place in our community.

The week was jam-packed with artistic activities. In addition to the book fair, Sudbury also welcomed Reading Town Canada, a national reading campaign, and hosted the fifth edition of the Foire d'art alternatif, a major alternative art exhibit that is crucial to the visual arts.

Long live the Sudbury book fair, the Reading Town campaign, the Foire d'art alternatif, and our authors and artists.

* * *

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER AMONG FIRST RESPONDERS

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the first-ever Heroes are Human capital-to capital bike ride launched on Saturday morning from right here on Parliament Hill. A hundred first responders from across North America are participating in this event to increase awareness about post-traumatic stress disorder.

For about 15 days, 88 paramedics, police officers, and firefighters will ride the 1,600 kilometres between Ottawa and Washington, D.C.

Statements by Members

As deputy public safety and emergency preparedness critic, I want to congratulate the event organizers. Awareness of the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder is very important. Just think about what the first responders battling the flames in Fort McMurray are going through.

In closing, I want to inform the House and all Canadians that my colleagues on the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security and I are currently conducting a study on PTSD and will soon be making recommendations in order to establish a national action plan to properly support our first responders.

* * *

[English]

THE RAPTORS

Mr. Raj Grewal (Brampton East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, whether it is the NHL, the MLB, or the NFL, sports are important to Canadians. It brings people together, it inspires a healthy lifestyle, it helps us understand the value of hard work and teamwork, and it generates community unity.

We may be divided on our favourite hockey teams, from the Canucks to the Canadiens, but Canada only has one NBA team, and the Raptors are making a serious run in this year's playoffs. The sport of basketball is the fastest growing sport in the country. The Raptors have the best fans in the entire world, including our favourite rapper, Drake.

With a crucial game 4 tonight, I ask all my hon. colleagues to tweet "Let's go Raptors" to the Raptors to show our support.

* * *

HOMELESSNESS

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on February 10, Victoria participated in a point-in-time count to assess the extent of homelessness in our community. The results are staggering. At least 1,387 people have no safe place to call home, including 223 children and youth.

We are grappling with a housing and homelessness crisis. The most serious illustration at present is the tent city on the grounds of the provincial courthouse in downtown Victoria.

The good news, going forward, is that our community has a plan, but we need federal help to make it work. The capital regional district has recently invested \$30 million to build permanent housing and has called upon the province and the federal government to do the same.

Today, I am asking the government to match this commitment so we can get started this year on shovel-ready housing projects.

Years of federal inaction have brought our city to its current crisis. It is now time to step up.

* * *

● (1415)

FORT MCMURRAY FIRE

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday was World Red Cross Day.

As we salute more than 150 years of humanitarian actions around the world, I want to recognize the inspiring Canadians in Lakeland who embody the vision of the Canadian Red Cross to improve the lives of others by caring for those in need.

I spent the weekend with people in wildfire evacuation reception centres. Hamlets, villages, small towns, rural people, and first nations are welcoming evacuees with open arms, offering refuge, basic supplies they did not have time to take from their homes as they fled, and providing supplies for first responders.

St. Paul, Smoky Lake, Wandering River, Boyle, and Grassland are just some communities in Lakeland assisting our neighbours in Lac La Biche, and other Albertans giving all they can to help people who have lost everything, people who have done so much for all of Canada for so long.

In light of World Red Cross Day, I urge everyone to support the relief efforts for Fort McMurray in whatever way they can. It is my hope that the incredible generosity goes directly to the people affected, as compassionate Canadians intend.

To those affected by the fires, keep staying Alberta strong. We are all here for them.

* * *

NATIONAL NURSING WEEK

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during National Nursing Week, we honour the dedicated women and men who are there to care for us and our loved ones when we are most in need.

There are many dedicated nurses in my riding of Scarborough Centre, but I would like to pay tribute to one outstanding nurse who is making a difference at Scarborough Hospital's mental health department, Kelly Brockington.

Kelly was recently honoured by Cancer Care Ontario and the Ontario Renal Network at the Human Touch Awards for going the extra mile to touch the lives of patients. Kelly is passionate about helping cancer patients, and has volunteered to lead a project that is making mindfulness and cognitive behavioural therapy part of the cancer care program. Kelly is one of the many nurses making a difference in the lives of patients every day.

During this National Nursing Week, I ask the House to join me in thanking her and all our outstanding Canadian nurses.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS***[English]***DISASTER ASSISTANCE**

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the stories emerging from Alberta regarding the response to the wildfires are truly inspiring. In typical Canadian fashion, there has been an outpouring of support and aid from all over the country. From restaurants offering free meals to people rescuing pets, Canadians from coast to coast are stepping up and helping in any way they can.

While it is right that the government agreed to match donations to the Red Cross, will it take the next step and match donations to other worthy charities that are on the ground and delivering assistance?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Red Cross has proven to be an enormous and valuable partner in dealing with the immediate crisis of this situation. It has extraordinary depth and reach and capacity to provide the kind of immediate emergency assistance that was required in the very short term in dealing with those circumstances. It has done a magnificent job.

As we move now into future phases of how we will assist Alberta and Fort McMurray in the recovery, we will examine all possibilities for how everyone can help to the maximum extent possible.

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week the Liberals struggled to justify the Prime Minister's massive celebrity-sized entourage that accompanied him to Washington. We all know that our relationship with the U.S. is important and that high-level visits are beneficial. We know that there are important issues to discuss, like perhaps the energy sector, but what we cannot figure out is what expertise the Prime Minister's in-laws have and why he could not find room for the natural resources minister.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague knows full well that the Prime Minister's in-laws and Mrs. Trudeau herself were guests of the President of the United States at a state dinner. He should also know that it is the first time since 1997 that Canada has been awarded the honour of a state dinner at the White House. These members of the Prime Minister's family were part of the official delegation.

I would remind the member that the President himself drew attention to Margaret Trudeau's presence there and her tireless work on behalf of those with mental illness.

• (1420)

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister did not just squeeze out cabinet ministers for his in-laws, he did it as well for Liberal Party bagmen and Canadians are disgusted that Liberal fundraisers went along for the ride.

The Prime Minister's political friends were granted unprecedented access to senior U.S. officials. The Prime Minister used the state visit to help his buddies connect with Washington insiders for their own

personal gain. In exchange for raising money for the Liberals, they were invited to go along to make contacts to further their own personal interests. This was clearly a reward for their political support. How can the Liberals justify this unethical behaviour?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Again, Mr. Speaker, my friend knows very well that the two individuals to whom he is referring were invited to attend the event by the White House. He should also know that the taxpayers in no way contributed to the expenses of these individuals. All of their expenses at all times were incurred by them personally and the taxpayers in no way, directly or indirectly, contributed to this part of the visit.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, natural resources are very important to Canada's economic development, whether we are talking about oil for the west or the Plan Nord for Quebec.

When the time came to meet the President of the United States, where was the Minister of Natural Resources? He was here in Ottawa.

However, the Prime Minister chose to bring some very important people with him, such as the president of the Liberal Party and the Liberal Party fundraiser.

Can someone from this government seriously tell me why it is more important to have the guy who raises money for the Liberal Party in Ottawa than the Minister of Natural Resources?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are proud of what we accomplished during that historic visit to Washington.

I would like to remind my colleague that it was the first time since 1997 that Canada had the honour of attending a state dinner at the White House.

My colleague referred to some people who work as volunteers with the Liberal Party of Canada. He knows full well that they covered their own expenses personally. Taxpayers did not contribute in any way at any time to funding their trip.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is precisely the problem.

If it was so important, if this was the first time this had happened since 1997, then why did you leave the Minister of Natural Resources here in Ottawa? Why did you choose—

The Speaker: Order.

I would remind the hon. member to direct his comments to the Speaker. He may resume what he was saying.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, I trust your judgment.

The question is simple. I can see the Minister of Foreign Affairs, so I would like him to answer me directly.

Oral Questions

Does he think that it was more important for the Liberal Party's bagman to go to Washington, rather than the Minister of Natural Resources, who stayed in Ottawa when he should have been in Washington speaking out on behalf of petroleum producers and natural resource industries across Canada?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for giving me the opportunity to tell him and the House that, thanks to the excellent work of the Minister of Natural Resources, we have an agreement with the United States on renewable energy and natural resources.

The two governments and all the representatives celebrated that agreement at the state dinner in Washington. We can congratulate the Minister of Natural Resources for his excellent work.

* * *

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the information from the Panama Papers that was made public today clearly shows that Canadians are implicated, including the former boss of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

The Prime Minister keeps saying that tax evasion is a priority for him, but there has been no investigation and no charges have been laid in the KPMG case. This two-tiered system is unbelievable.

What is the government waiting for? When will it bring KPMG to justice?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, middle-class Canadians pay their fair share of taxes, but certain wealthy individuals are not doing the same. What I want to tell my colleague opposite is that criminal proceedings are underway and it is not right to misinform the public.

• (1425)

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the misinformation comes from the government. The reality is, Canadians are implicated in the Panama papers, including the former boss of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage. The government's words are empty unless it is willing to actually charge people guilty of tax evasion and those aiding and abetting these tax cheats.

With the release today of many more names from the largest offshore tax avoidance scandal in history, why is the government still refusing to launch an investigation into the KPMG tax scandal?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, in its election platform, our government promised to crack down on tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance. These cases are currently underway, so I do not know what my colleague does not understand.

[*English*]

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION LEGISLATION

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government's budget bill is over 100 pages and amends 35 bills. As they say, if it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, then it is an omnibus budget bill.

Unemployed workers in Edmonton, southern Saskatchewan, and Winnipeg are hurting right now, and the Liberals are hiding measures they could take in this omnibus budget bill.

Will the government agree to split this bill so that changes to EI, veterans benefits, seniors support, and banking regulation all get the proper study they deserve?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we want to be very clear and open with Canadians. The measures in our budget are all in our budget implementation act. There are measures there that are just related to our budget. We know that is the appropriate way to move forward.

We have an ambitious plan that has measures that are going to make a real difference for Canadians, and that is exactly why the budget has the number of pages it does, which allows Canadians to understand what we are trying to do to improve our country.

* * *

MARIJUANA

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, thousands of Canadians will have criminal records because the Liberal government has refused stubbornly to immediately decriminalize marijuana.

Today we see former prime minister Jean Chrétien criticize the Liberal government and endorse the NDP's push to make sure no one again has a criminal record for simple possession.

If the government cannot admit that the NDP is on the right track on this issue, will it at least now listen to Jean Chrétien and immediately decriminalize marijuana?

Mr. Bill Blair (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to implementing a comprehensive and responsible regulatory framework for the effective control of the production, distribution, and consumption of marijuana. We do not believe that decriminalization is the right thing to do.

In fact, the hon. member for Outremont in 2012, when asked if he would decriminalize marijuana, said, "No...that would be a mistake." The hon. member for Outremont was right in 2012. It is still a mistake, and we are going to do the job right.

*Oral Questions***ETHICS**

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know that the Prime Minister brought 44 people as part of his personal entourage to Washington, D.C., which included his mother and his in-laws. So far, the initial cost of the trip is north of \$25,000 for three days in the fun. We understand that Liberals cannot go without their entitlements, but why does the Prime Minister think his family and friends of the Liberal Party are entitled to live so large on the taxpayers' dime?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister has said a number of times, and as I said a few minutes ago, this was a historic visit to the United States, the first opportunity since 1997 for a Canadian prime minister to be received at a state dinner. Significant progress was made on important issues to Canadians, like climate change, like pre-clearance at the border, like a shared vision of growing the trade between Canada and the United States. We are proud of the Prime Minister's visit to Washington, and we will make no apologies for defending Canadian interests in the United States.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is too bad there was nobody there to lobby for Keystone XL.

We know that the honeymoon is over, and it is time for the Prime Minister to start taking his responsibilities to the Canadian taxpayers seriously, which is not exactly easy for someone who has never had to work a day in his life. Taxpayers do work hard every day. They do not want to see entitled Liberals taking lavish trips with VIP access for their friends and family.

Why does the Prime Minister think that he is entitled to squander taxpayers' dollars in this way?

• (1430)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, just because my friend across the aisle keeps repeating the same phrase does not necessarily make it accurate. He knows very well that this government has been open and transparent with respect to all expenses. He also knows that the individuals he was referring to, but does not have the guts to name, travelled to Washington on their own expense, and the taxpayers assumed none of those costs.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we recently learned that the official delegation accompanying the Prime Minister to Washington was quite extravagant.

A number of Liberal bigwigs, as well as the Prime Minister's mother, were part of that taxpayer-funded delegation.

Why did the Prime Minister's mother travel with her son to Washington on the taxpayers' dime, and what was her role as a member of the Canadian delegation?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House are extremely proud of Margaret Trudeau. We are proud that the White House included her in its invitation.

We are very proud of Margaret and her important contribution to raising Canadians' awareness around mental health issues. President

Obama himself congratulated Margaret Trudeau during the state dinner and praised her significant contribution in this important area.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague forgot to mention how proud he was that the Liberal Party bagman also attended the dinner.

Not only did the Prime Minister's mother and some Liberal big shots take part in the official visit, but the Prime Minister's father-in-law and mother-in-law also attended the state dinner.

Were the Prime Minister's in-laws part of the official Canadian delegation, or were they there because they are related to him?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague is perfectly aware that Mrs. Grégoire-Trudeau's parents were also invited to the state dinner by the White House, an honour that Canada has not received since 1997.

I must say that we are extremely proud of this important visit to Washington and everything that the Prime Minister and several ministers accomplished during their historic visit.

[*English*]

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week, Canadians found out that the Prime Minister's nannies will cost taxpayers over \$100,000 a year. He gets this child care benefit while every other Canadian has to fight to pay his or her own way for child care. When asked, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons answered that the Prime Minister needed these nannies, yet the Prime Minister campaigned successfully against this.

The question is a simple one. Why does the Prime Minister feel that he is entitled to taxpayer-funded nannies?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has addressed this very issue on a number of occasions in this House, and again earlier today. The Prime Minister has a family of three young children. With the nature of his responsibilities, it is not inappropriate that two household staff, in addition to performing other duties, also act as secondary caregivers for the Prime Minister's family. Every prime minister's family has different needs and different circumstances, and the allocation with respect to our Prime Minister's family and the expenses of the house are entirely appropriate.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is hard to believe that the Liberals are justifying the fact that the Prime Minister of Canada is getting 12 times more than the average Canadian with three kids will be getting under their Liberal child care plan.

Oral Questions

Last fall, the Prime Minister said that millionaires like him do not need the taxpayers' help for child care. Now he thinks it is fine to take money from hard-working middle-class moms and dads so that he can get special privileges.

Why does the Prime Minister think he is entitled to Canadians paying over \$100,000 for child care while every other Canadian struggles to pay on his or her own?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is exactly the same question the member posed in the previous question. Therefore, I will give him exactly the same answer.

It is no surprise, given that the Prime Minister has three young children. Given the nature of his responsibilities, we think it is appropriate that two household staff, in addition to other responsibilities in the house, also act as secondary caregivers for the Prime Minister's children. All of the expenses of our Prime Minister and his family with respect to household staff are appropriate.

•(1435)

The Speaker: Order, please. I am hearing a little too much noise. I want to remind members that we each speak when we are recognized, and we speak one at a time. Besides, the folks out in TV land cannot hear members unless the microphone is on in front of them. Therefore, members should keep that in mind.

The hon. member for Saskatoon West.

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CANADA POST

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, during the campaign, the Liberals made a solemn promise to save home mail delivery. The Prime Minister himself said, "We are committed to restoring home mail delivery".

Seniors and Canadians living with disabilities have been counting on the Liberal government to deliver on its promise. Instead, the minister is now saying that everything is on the table. Meanwhile, Canada Post is raking in the profits. There is no excuse for this betrayal. Why are the Liberals breaking their promise to Canadians?

Hon. Judy Foote (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while the member opposite might have an issue with Canada Post being given a comprehensive, independent review, the Canadians who I am hearing from want to have a say. They are looking forward to this consultation process. They really want to know what we, as a government, will be doing in terms of roadside mailboxes. We put a moratorium in place on the installation of roadside mailboxes. People continue to get door-to-door delivery. However, we also need to make sure that we hear from Canadians from coast to coast to coast, and that is exactly what this independent, comprehensive review will do.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what people want is their mail delivered to their home. That is it.

[*Translation*]

The Liberals promised to restore home mail delivery, not to put everything on the table. We are talking about a basic public service. Moreover, it is profitable and does not cost a cent in taxes.

For seniors and people with a disability, the Liberal cuts will be hard to swallow. The Prime Minister himself promised to restore home mail delivery.

Why is the government going back on its word today and turning its back on all Quebeckers and Canadians who care about this important service?

[*English*]

Hon. Judy Foote (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have committed to a comprehensive, independent review of Canada Post. We have committed to putting an end to the installation of roadside mailboxes. The review is under way. Canadians want to have a say. They want us to know exactly how they feel about the services that are being provided. It is a comprehensive, independent review. Who can argue with Canadians having a say in terms of the postal services that they will continue to receive?

* * *

OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have heard from the Prime Minister and the Minister of Public Safety in terms of what the government is doing to help the people of Fort McMurray. However, we have not heard anything yet from the Minister of Natural Resources in terms of the effect the fires are having on oil production in Canada. In light of the fact that six of the largest oil producers have suspended operations, will the minister commit to quickly meeting with the CEOs to find out what they need to get their workers safely back to work?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the eyes of the country are on northern Alberta, and so many of us are looking at those who have lost their livelihoods and lost their homes.

We also realize that the oil sector has been impacted to about 1.5 million barrels a day, which is having an impact, but not on prices and not on supply because of the situation in the North American market.

Yes, I am meeting with industry leaders. I will be having a conversation later today with the energy minister from Alberta, and the most important point is that our hearts are with those who are suffering.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, absolutely, people's safety is of the utmost importance, but it is important that these people know that they have a job to go back to when they can go back home.

They also need to know that the Minister of Natural Resources understands the serious implications of these oil productions being shut down.

Oral Questions

Can the Minister of Natural Resources tell the Canadian public and the people of Fort McMurray what actions the government is willing to take, and take quickly, so that it can help oil producers who want to get back up and running and get these people back to work when they are able to go home?

• (1440)

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have had and will continue to have conversations with industry leaders. We are looking very closely at the impact of these fires on supply.

We understand very well that Alberta has been hit very hard this year and there have been serious job losses. That is why, as a government, we have responded to that reality.

We will continue to do so, and we will continue to do so knowing that the oil sector will continue to be a very important part of the Canadian economy.

* * *

DISASTER ASSISTANCE

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure how they responded to it yet. However, Fort McMurray has been home to economic infrastructure that has fuelled our Canadian economy.

In the past few days, oil companies have shut down. The Canadian economy is about to take a huge hit.

A household saves for times of disaster such as the loss of a job or family emergency. In his budget, the Prime Minister has left almost no wiggle room for disasters such as this.

Will the Prime Minister change his current spending habits to accommodate for this massive economic loss?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are aware, as are all members of the House, of the impact these fires are having on the people of northern Alberta.

The Government of Canada, through the leadership of the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness has found a way to assemble all of the resources of the Government of Canada in a unified effort, with the Government of Alberta and with Canadians who have given to the Red Cross, matched dollar for dollars by the Government of Canada, because we know what our responsibilities are.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): That hardly seems like an answer to my question, Mr. Speaker.

However, the fire of Fort McMurray has displaced more than 80,000 people, who are unsure if they will have a home to return to.

Organizations, businesses, and everyday people have come together unselfishly to raise money. In contrast to that, the Liberals took a non-partisan meeting with the official opposition and turned it into a Liberal Party fundraising email.

Can the Prime Minister explain how it is appropriate for the Liberals to take advantage of this tragedy for a partisan gain?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, from the very beginning,

the Government of Canada has been backing up the Government of Alberta every step of the way, together with all the first responders, all the private sector organizations, and the Red Cross, to make sure that every conceivable support was put at the disposal of Fort McMurray and the people of Alberta.

The government operation centre has been on the job from day one, and every agency and department of this government has been thoroughly engaged to make sure that all Canadians stand together, and surely it is a time for that, not this.

* * *

CBC/RADIO-CANADA

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after promising to clean up Liberal patronage scandals, the Conservatives decided rewarding bagmen and donors was the way to go: 80% of the CBC's board, all previous prime minister's appointees, are conservative donors, and just last week one board member quit so he could run to be the Conservative Party president.

The Minister of Canadian Heritage promised an independent process to appoint board members at the CBC, but so far we have nothing.

When will the government adopt a new, transparent, and accountable process for the CBC board?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his important question.

As mentioned in my mandate letter, we will make sure to propose a new independent, merit-based process, which will be sure to be open and transparent in order that the public trusts the board of CBC-Radio Canada again.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is all well and good, but it is a little late for the CBC.

Last week, a CBC board member resigned in order to run for the Conservative Party presidency. It is a little awkward.

Are there any others who want to get into politics, or maybe become a senator? There are a number of Conservatives on the board of directors. In about a week, that board will get together to make a decision on the sale of the Maison de Radio-Canada and where the millions of dollars of public money will go.

With that consultation about to begin, does the minister think it is morally acceptable that the Conservative Party hacks will be the ones to decide the future of our public broadcaster?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

We believe in CBC-Radio Canada. In our budget, we announced \$675 million over five years to support our public broadcaster. We are also going to reform the appointment process to make sure that our board members are appointed openly and transparently, on a merit basis.

Oral Questions

•(1445)
[English]

DISASTER ASSISTANCE

Mr. Darshan Singh Kang (Calgary Skyview, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today our thoughts and prayers are with the people of northeastern Alberta. The support of surrounding communities and the tireless work of public safety officials, including first responders, deserve nothing but praise. As the government, we also have a responsibility. I know the Prime Minister and the ministers have announced numerous measures to help support the people and the region.

My question is for the Minister of National Revenue. What other measures are being put in place to help the people of northeastern Alberta?

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

The safety and well-being of the people affected by the forest fires in Alberta are our top priority.

[English]

That is why the CRA immediately stopped all collections and all audit activities, cancelled all penalties and interest for those who are unable to file their tax returns or pay amounts owing. It is working with Canada Post to ensure that taxpayers expecting a tax refund or a benefit payment have secure access to their mail.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Dianne L. Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only reference to PPP Canada in Bill C-15 states that the Minister of Infrastructure can dispose or sell off assets and shares of PPP Canada. Yet when I was in the House last week and asked whether the minister plans to sell off PPP Canada, he refused to answer the question.

Therefore, I will ask it again. Will the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities tell the House whether the Liberals are planning to sell off this crown corporation, yes or no?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have no intention of changing the mandate of PPP Canada or selling off the assets of PPP Canada. We respect the local economy. We respect the decision of the local councils on how they procure their infrastructure and how they build the infrastructure, which they do on behalf of their communities, and we will continue to respect that. The hon. member understands that. As a former mayor, that is what she requested in the past, and that is what we have delivered on behalf of mayors across the country.

Ms. Dianne L. Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was not my question.

Last week, the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities stated: “I feel confused... There are so many buckets of infrastructure money within the federal government”.

Although the minister is confused, Liberals clearly have the money, so among his many buckets of money, where is the \$1.25

billion Conservatives left for PPP Canada that is not mentioned in the budget?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the amount the hon. member is referring to is within PPP Canada, and that is where it should be and that is where it is now. The buckets the member makes reference to were actually created by the previous government in multiple areas that we are actually trying to put together, so we can deliver results to Canadians in the way that Canadians expect us to do, to deliver the kind of infrastructure they need for public transit, for social housing, for green infrastructure, to build strong, sustainable communities.

* * *

GOVERNMENT EXPENSES

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, following the UN climate change conference, I asked the Liberals about the cost for each one of the hundreds of Canadian delegates who were flown to and lodged in Paris, all on the taxpayers' dime. At the time, the minister provided a list of expenses for each delegate, but refused to identify the name of each one.

I followed up with a further written request for the identity of the delegates. This time, the minister provided the names without attaching the expenses for each delegate. Canadians smell something fishy. What is the government hiding?

Mr. Jonathan Wilkinson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think it is fair to say that the Canadian delegation to COP21 had an enormous impact. In fact, the American delegation noted that the Canadians in Paris were extraordinarily effective. Our delegation was inclusive. We included youth, first nations and indigenous communities, business people, and social service organizations to start the process of developing a pan-Canadian consensus on the need to address climate change.

That is what we are continuing to do in our work with the provinces.

•(1450)

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when I first asked the minister for a list, it had 155 delegates on it. The second list had only 121 names. What happened to the missing delegates?

I remind the minister that her mandate letter says:

We have also committed to set a higher bar for openness and transparency in government.

Yet the minister refuses to tell us what the Paris vanity trip cost Canadians.

Again I ask the minister, what happened to the higher bar for openness and transparency, and what is she hiding?

Oral Questions

Mr. Jonathan Wilkinson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would start by welcoming the hon. member to the delegation that he actually attended in Paris. It was a delegation that actually was extraordinarily effective. It looked to bring together Canadians around a critical issue that we all know needs to be addressed. It is something that we continue to work on, and we will continue to work on in partnership with other members of this House.

* * *

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and his cabinet have spent a lot of time south of the border, yet we have not seen real action on some of our biggest challenges.

Softwood lumber is a crucial industry employing thousands of Canadians. The existing softwood lumber deal has expired, and Canadian companies could face massive duties and job losses.

With the government's 100-day clock ticking down, when will it tell Canadians what it is doing to negotiate a new agreement to protect these jobs?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government and I, personally, are very aware of the importance of the softwood lumber issue, and we are very focused on it.

On Friday, I spoke with my U.S. opposite member, Michael Froman, the USTR, about this specific issue. Later this afternoon, I am going to speak with Steve Thomson, the B.C. Minister of Forests, again about this issue.

We are negotiating hard, and on the state visit, I would like to remind members that one of the things we secured is a statement by President Obama, in public, in the rose garden, about the importance he personally attaches to—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Jonquière.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a statement is not enough.

We are now midway through the 100 days that the Liberals gave themselves to reach a new softwood lumber agreement, and negotiations are stalled. We are hearing that the United States wants quotas, but Canada has fought for years in the courts to reject this agreement.

The forestry industry directly employs over 60,000 people in Quebec, including more than 6,000 in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean.

Will the Liberals defend Quebec's forestry industry and confirm that all these jobs will be protected in the negotiations?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been clear from the beginning: this issue is an absolute priority for this government.

I am pleased to announce that the Prime Minister and President Obama have expressed their interest in a long-term softwood lumber

agreement. As I already said, I spoke with Mr. Froman about this issue on Friday.

Together with Quebec's forestry industry, we will continue to be in regular contact with stakeholders in Quebec and across the country.

* * *

[*English*]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals have indicated that they plan to immediately lift the visa requirement on Mexico, and by their own admission, they have not completed the standard evidence-based formal review to justify this decision.

Given this and given the upcoming three amigos talk, I am wondering if the minister can give a very specific answer on what security screening information the Liberals used to justify this decision.

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated before, this is a wonderful opportunity for Canada to reinforce our partnership with one of our two North American partners, an opportunity to expand trade, and get jobs for all those middle-class Canadians looking for work. At the same time, we are completely mindful of the issues which the member raises and we will be working hard to ensure that those concerns are met.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was a perfectly good opportunity to tell the House about that screening information, and he did not take it, so I will give him another chance.

In 2008 alone there were over 9,000 Mexican nationals who were scheduled for removal from Canada on the basis of inadmissibility. The cost of removing someone from Canada on this basis can range anywhere from \$1,500 to \$15,000.

Would the minister please specifically tell the House of Commons what safeguards the Liberals are going to put in place to ensure that we will not see another wave of inadmissible asylum claims?

● (1455)

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, juxtaposed with all the benefits I have mentioned, there are also concerns which my colleague has identified. I can assure her that we are in consultation with my colleague at public safety, with members of the Mexican government, to ensure that all the apparatus at our disposal regarding security, regarding dealing with asylum seekers, all of those matters, is in place to deal with the situation.

Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals have promised to remove the visa requirement on Mexico. The Liberals have also promised to base their decisions on evidence.

Since a visa requirement was imposed on Mexico, the asylum rate for Mexican nationals during the last four years has remained below 1%. In 2008, prior to the imposition of a visa, the asylum rate was above 25%.

Oral Questions

Would the minister tell Canadians why he is making changes when the evidence clearly does not back it up?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the evidence clearly does back up the fact that Mexico is an extremely important friend and trading partner, our second partner in North America. The evidence does back up the terrific importance of tourist dollars from Mexico, which were largely lost as a consequence of the action by the previous government. The evidence does back up the actions that we are taking to mitigate and deal with the concerns that the member has raised.

* * *

OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY

Mr. James Maloney (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the terrible tragedy in northern Alberta has raised concerns in regard to the strength and resiliency of the oil and gas sector in Canada going forward. As chair of the natural resources committee, I know all parties believe in the importance of those industries and want to work together on this file.

Would the Minister of Natural Resources please tell this House how it plans to support the sector during this difficult time?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. friend for a kinder, gentler way of posing a question that I had to answer earlier on.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Jim Carr: Mr. Speaker, we are working closely with industry and our government partners to protect critical infrastructure, minimize the—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. I am having trouble hearing the answer to the question. I am going to let the minister wrap up. Let us all listen carefully.

Hon. Jim Carr: Mr. Speaker, our government understands the important contribution of the oil and gas sector to Canada's economy, workers, and local communities. We will continue to provide support to the sector and the region to support the recovery from this tragic event.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last May, the health minister announced compensation for thalidomide victims, including a provision to help the so-called “forgotten” victims, those who do not have medical records to prove that their mothers took thalidomide. Now, one year later, with the application deadline approaching at the end of this month, those same victims are being victimized again by requirements that they cannot meet because of lost or destroyed records from 50 or 60 years ago.

How will the health minister rectify this?

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Thalidomide Victims Association of Canada

for its very hard work and collaboration with Health Canada on this matter.

As the member has indicated, the federal program for thalidomide survivors has begun to provide financial support that would help people to live for the rest of their lives with dignity.

I am pleased to report that the implementation of that program is on track. The ongoing annual payments have begun, as planned. Lump sum payments have been made to nearly all thalidomide survivors, and going forward, we will continue to work with individuals who have not yet been recognized in order to determine their eligibility.

* * *

TRANSPORT

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the people in the Downtown Eastside fought long and hard for Crab Park and now the port plans to infill seven acres of the waterfront, posing a real threat to the park.

The Conservatives gave sweeping powers to the port, allowing it to assess and approve its own projects, undermining accountability to Canadians. The port has even refused to meet with the mayor of Richmond on plans to convert agricultural lands into warehouses and shipping centres.

Will the minister take action to ensure there is real accountability from the port, which thinks it is not answerable to anyone?

• (1500)

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we know, the Canadian port authorities are shared governance authorities. They operate with a considerable amount of autonomy. They are the masters of their own destiny in the sense that they have to grow the port. This is the largest port in the country with over 140 million tonnes per year worth some \$200 billion.

Of course, we encourage the port authority to work with all the local communities, including the City of Richmond.

* * *

[Translation]

POVERTY

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, inequality among Canadians is becoming increasingly worrisome. Many people are struggling to make ends meet.

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development talk to the House about a poverty reduction strategy?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Toronto—Danforth for the question and for her passion on this issue.

There are a number of historic measures we have already taken to reduce poverty. To name a couple, we have introduced the Canada child benefit, benefiting nine out of ten Canadian families and lifting hundreds of thousands of children out of poverty. There will be an increase in the GIS for low-income seniors, benefiting 900,000 seniors to ensure that they can retire in dignity.

This is why we will be working with the provinces and territories and indigenous communities to develop a national—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Durham.

* * *

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness knows that many front-line members of the RCMP continue to have questions about Bill C-7 and how it will impact their workplace, yet the Liberals are limiting debate and they are not permitting members of Canada's police force to have their own say through a secret ballot vote on the formation of their own union.

Why are the Liberals denying the RCMP basic democratic rights when we charge them with protecting those rights for other Canadians?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the previous government adopted an abusive approach toward organized labour. It introduced Bill C-377 and Bill C-525, designed to undermine collective bargaining rights in this country.

By contrast, we have undertaken to do what the previous government failed to do, and that is to give RCMP members, for the first time in history, the opportunity to collective bargain through an agent that they choose for themselves.

* * *

*[Translation]***DAIRY INDUSTRY**

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Fédération des chambres de commerce du Québec is calling on this government to protect our dairy industry from diafiltered milk imports. It urged the government to enforce the spirit and the letter of the cheese standards and to treat diafiltered milk as a dairy ingredient. The Fédération is joining the Union des producteurs agricoles and the Quebec National Assembly to protect our dairy producers.

Will the government respect the Quebec consensus and enforce the letter of the existing regulations?

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

As we have said many times, we are well aware of the industry's concerns about the use of diafiltered milk in cheese manufacturing. I remind members that last Tuesday we committed to consulting with dairy industry representatives in the next 30 days to find sustainable solutions for the entire industry.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, environmental groups, citizens' committees, student groups, unions, universities, indigenous movements, political parties, and all sorts of activists have spoken out against the energy east pipeline, and now the Union des producteurs agricoles is doing the same.

At this point we have moved from opposition to energy east to a true consensus.

Will the government respect the consensus in Quebec and unequivocally put an immediate end to energy east?

[English]

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that project application has not yet been received by the National Energy Board, but a member of the House wants us to pronounce judgment on it before the regulator has even seen it. I do not think that would be a responsible way for us to proceed.

It is very clear to all Canadians the way in which we will proceed, which is principled with a predictability of timing and with meaningful consultation with aboriginal peoples. That is a better way forward.

* * *

• (1505)

*[Translation]***QUEBEC**

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec's largest institutions are united on the two critical issues of diafiltered milk and energy east, but this government is tuning them out. Canada's Parliament is completely indifferent to the consensus in Quebec. The 40 MPs from Quebec in government are the government's ambassadors to Quebec, but they are just as indifferent.

Are we to understand that by refusing to respect the consensus in Quebec, the government is saying that the only way for Quebec to have a say in what happens on its own land is to gain independence?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to respond to my colleague. Over the past 20 years, they completely destroyed the economy in remote regions like the Gaspé. I am very pleased that the 40 MPs from Quebec will work for Canada to represent the regions and develop Canada's economy.

[English]

The Speaker: I have a question of privilege. The hon. member for Hamilton Centre.

PRIVILEGE

DEBATE ON BILL C-210

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to take a couple of minutes to make a couple of personal comments.

Last Friday, the House had the historic opportunity to debate the words of our national anthem. It was historic in terms of the presentation of the debate and certainly historic in terms of our friend, the member for Ottawa—Vanier, who was able to come from his hospital bed directly here on Friday. That alone warrants special recognition.

However, I want to point to the camaraderie that day. We all know that the partisan fighting we have every day is part of what we do. However, we do have the ability to rise above that and when we do, it is important to underscore it. That is what this moment is.

I want to thank my colleagues in the Liberal caucus. Some will know that the member for Ottawa—Vanier and I are particularly close. I asked to go into the salon to say hi to him before he came in. The member for Don Valley West first expressed the opportunity, if I wanted, to join their caucus and sit behind him. The chief government whip, the member for Orléans, insisted that I also be given the opportunity to escort the member in. Lastly, my new BFF, the member for Hull—Aylmer, offered up that great seat of honour over his right shoulder. I appreciated it so much that I wanted to underscore it.

I thank my colleagues. I want them to know how much it meant to me and how much it—

The Speaker: I certainly appreciate things that bring us together, although that was not a question of privilege.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1510)

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration entitled “Main Estimates 2016-17”.

* * *

PETITIONS

PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED DEATH

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present two different petitions today on physician-assisted suicide signed by people from across Canada, from my area of Kitchener and from Quebec, British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, and Nova Scotia.

The petitioners call on the government to draft legislation that would include adequate safeguards for vulnerable Canadians,

Routine Proceedings

especially those with mental health challenges; to have clear conscience protection for health care workers and institutions; and protection for children and those under 18.

JUSTICE

Mr. Jim Egliniski (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the current federal criminal law, a preborn child is not recognized as a victim with respect to violent crime. Therefore, I am pleased to present a petition calling on Parliament to pass legislation that would recognize preborn children as separate victims when they are injured or killed in the commission of an offence against their mothers, allowing two charges to be laid against the offender instead of one.

[Translation]

GENETICALLY MODIFIED FOODS

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, today, I have the honour of presenting three petitions.

The first pertains to genetically modified ingredients and organisms. The petitioners are calling on Parliament to take measures to label all GMOs so that consumers have the information they need to make real choices.

[English]

PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED DEATH

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is very appropriate, as the committee moves tonight to examine the amendments to Bill C-14.

The petitioners from throughout my riding, as well as from as far away as Winnipeg, call for measures to ensure that through medically assisted death, Canadians can choose to pursue methods of death of their own choice with dignity.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, finally, hundreds and hundreds of petitioners ask that the government take steps to ensure the People's Republic of China and its government understand that it is time to recognize human rights and protect the rights and practices of practitioners of Falun Dafa and Falun Gong.

PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED DEATH

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I table a petition signed by many constituents who acknowledge the efforts of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Winnipeg, in particular St. John's Cantius Church on Burrows Avenue, for bringing forward a petition dealing with physician-assisted death.

In particular, the petition highlights the importance of increasing the availability of quality palliative care among many other things.

JUSTICE

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise again today with three more petitions from people across Canada calling on us to put forward a law to protect pregnant women and their preborn children.

Government Orders

●(1515)

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 ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2016, NO. 1

The House resumed from May 6 consideration of the motion that Bill C-15, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 22, 2016 and other measures, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about the budget implementation act.

Before I do so, I would really like to express my sympathies to the people of Alberta who are going through a terrible natural tragedy with the fire at Fort McMurray. I would also like to express my thanks to the Government of Alberta and our government here, which are extending help, as well as Canadians who are pitching in in ways we have never seen before to help people who have been dislocated and affected by this fire. Again, thanks to all involved and may it end quickly.

I stand today to speak about the Bill C-15, the budget implementation act. I would like to focus on my role here in the House, assigned by my caucus, which is to look after the issues of science.

There is not a lot of science in the bill, I must say. Bill C-15 clarifies funding and appointment processes for the Foundation for Sustainable Development Technology. There is some reference to science, and of course there is some funding and measures in the main budget when it comes to science, but there remains a big gap to fill when it comes to science in the act.

Although this is an omnibus bill and it does have many measures, I think that if the government is going to make a bill this size, perhaps it should have included a few more measures about science. In fact, I have to say that science is not even mentioned once in Bill C-15, which is surprising to me, since it is a 179-page omnibus bill, amending over 30 separate statutes and referring to nine different ministries.

Again, the government claims that science is front and centre in its agenda, yet it has not really said much about it in this implementation act, where one would think we would see it.

There are some positive things that the government has been doing in regard to science. I would like to touch on those before I move to things that I think it should do.

First, the government has shown some positive inclinations in terms of science so far in its mandate. There has been a substantive reinvestment in science-based departments. We see that in the budget, although, again, there is no mention specifically of how this money should be used in the implementation act.

Important stakeholders, like the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada, have said that many years of intense cuts under the previous government were so far-reaching that even more investment is needed to fully restore and position Canada as a global leader in science and research.

I did send a letter to the minister in charge of this file requesting that more funding be included in the budget for science. There was some extra funding included, but I do think that a lot more is needed when it comes to moving us ahead as a global leader, especially for the tri-councils, SSHRC, NSERC, and CIHR.

In fact, when we look at our investment in research and development, which is a good indicator of how a country is doing, our competitor countries, like the United States and most European countries, set a target of 3% of GDP to be invested in research and development. Here, our investment in R and D is around 1.5%, which is really pitiful, and dropping.

In the past, in the 1990s, we used to spend 2% of GDP on research and development, but now it has dropped to 1.5%. The government has not set a target in regard to GERD investment, which I think would have been a good idea. For example, it could have taken place in the bill, where at least we would have had a discussion of targets for investment in research and development.

Let us talk about the National Research Council. Again, there is a lot of speculation about what is happening with the National Research Council in Canada, one of our most well-known scientific institutions. It is a \$1-billion institution. We have had recent news in the media about the National Research Council, but again, nothing in the bill.

If the government is going to put forward an omnibus bill and it is going to pretend to be a champion for science, then this would have been a very good place to put this.

After being nearly dismantled by the Conservatives, I am disheartened to see that chaos still continues at the NRC. Even in this large bill, there is no pathway forward for this major institution. I am disappointed that this is not included in the bill.

●(1520)

The National Research Council president is on leave with no explanation, and morale continues to be low. I have talked to scientists who are either within the NRC or have left recently. They say that there has been a lot of confusion in the National Research Council and this is not going to help at all. Again, what I was hoping to see in the budget implementation act was more specific measures when it came to the National Research Council, but there is nothing at all.

Government Orders

What worries me is that we are now past six months into the Liberal government's mandate. We were promised 100 days of action when a lot of things would happen, but there really has been no mention of our most important scientific institution in Canada, which is the National Research Council. We owe our scientists much more than that and if we are going to send a positive signal to the world, the government has to show them that science is foremost in its mind, but again, there is nothing in the bill about that.

Regarding muzzling, there was a lot of debate in the House in 2011. Being charged with the science file for the NDP, as the official opposition, I spoke about muzzling about 100 times in the House. During the election campaign, the Liberals spoke a lot about unmuzzling scientists. However, there has been no concrete change in policy in science-based departments, and it could have been in the budget implementation act.

I do not think scientists will be fully unmuzzled until there is something in writing, either a policy directive within a department or perhaps something more broad that the government puts into the public service, which could easily be fitted into a budget implementation act to accompany some of the extra funding that the government has put in place for science. However, there is nothing.

Therefore, until there is an actual change in policy, I do not think the government has really acted on its pledge to unmuzzle scientists. It says it has unmuzzled scientists, but there has been no action and nothing in writing to say that this will not happen again in the future.

Another thing I was hoping to see in the budget implementation act that I do not see is the promise to establish a new chief science officer. There is no talk about funding for this new position. There are no new rules in place. My suggestion for the last five years has been that we have a legislated parliamentary science officer who would be an independent officer for science in Parliament and would be like an auditor general for science. In order to do that, it would have to be legislated, and a bill such as this would be a great place for that kind of legislation, but again, there is nothing from the government.

We hear that it may appoint somebody, but this is not an improvement on what we have had in the past. It is just the same old thing. Without any new measures to unmuzzle scientists, to make sure they can speak freely, and nothing about legislating a science officer, it does not seem like the Liberal government is taking science seriously, and I am disappointed to see that.

In terms of science, like I said, it is not mentioned once in the budget implementation act. From what we heard during the election campaign, we always kind of thought that science was a sub-theme in the campaign. There were promises of unmuzzling, there were promises of a new science officer, there were promises that the National Research Council would be revamped, there were promises for funding, and this was the place to do it. The bill was the place for the Liberal government to say that it was not just talk during the election campaign and it would actually put something in writing. We have not seen that.

We heard a lot in the throne speech and there were some extra funds put in the budget, which I think scientists are grateful for, but

in terms of long-term protections that would come through my idea of a parliamentary science officer or a directive issued by the government for protecting not just the voices of natural scientists but of social scientists, there was nothing.

I am quite disappointed. There is a lot of stuff shovelled into this omnibus bill, but not the things I was looking for. Perhaps the government can revisit that as we debate this. I look forward to hearing Liberal members' thoughts as to how we can move forward.

• (1525)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I must say that I am a little surprised that the member is advocating that we should have put more into the budget implementation bill. I would suggest that if his concern is with respect to the muzzling of science in Canada, I can tell the member that he can be rest assured that through our Minister of Science and this government, we have seen more freedom given to our scientists in the Government of Canada. The Liberal Party is very much supportive of our scientists, and one can see that realization in the budget itself.

The question I have for the member is specific to the budget implementation bill, which contains some fundamental principles that will benefit Canadians. I would ask the member if he would reflect on those principles. The principles I am referring to are the tax cuts to the middle class, the enhancement of the Canada child benefit, and the investments in infrastructure, all of which are very strong, progressive moves by this government through this budget implementation act.

Would the member not agree in principle that these are the types of measures the Canadian economy needs and what Canadians as a whole want to see?

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Mr. Speaker, what we see there is the rhetoric we have heard around science: scientists have been more free than ever, and there has been more done for scientists by the current government than any other government. However, nothing has been written down. There are no ethics directives for departments to ensure that muzzling will not occur in the future. Therefore, scientists and researchers are still ambivalent with respect to what is and what is not okay to do. We have heard a lot of comments about chief science officers from that side, but nothing has been written down. There are appointments and a mysterious appointment process, yet nothing is transparent. I thought that is what the Liberals said they would deliver, but so far, I am still waiting.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague a question with respect to the indirect costs of research. This typically refers to the fact that when researchers in Canada apply for grants and whatnot, there is often a lot of work that is associated with having to get that money. In my career prior to entering politics, I was a research administrator. In my office at the University of Calgary, I had scores of auditors all the time. I heard from researchers that they would spend up to half of their time filling out forms, and that there was a lot of redundancy. This is a big complaint with respect to research productivity in our country.

Government Orders

I note that in a previous science and technology strategy document by the former government, it committed to reducing the administrative burden on researchers through a very comprehensive review. I think that is really important. We should have accountability for public funds, but we should also be cognizant of the fact that our researchers should be doing what we pay them to do, which is to perform research rather than push paper across their desks.

I am wondering if the member would comment on whether or not he would support a review of the research compliance burden in Canada, and support subsequent amendments to make life easier for our researchers.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question and for her past work. In terms of the indirect costs, new research done by natural or social scientists would necessarily have to go through ethics reviews in universities. However, the indirect costs are usually operating costs, such as keeping the lights on in labs. Therefore, for that to have the same kind of burden seems unreasonable. I would definitely support a review of these costs.

The one thing that we are not seeing from the other side is any kind of comprehensive approach to science funding. It was promised throughout the election and we have not heard much about it. We heard that this mysterious chief science officer might do it. However, we really do not know how this person is being appointed, who he or she might be, or what his or her capacity is. I was hoping to see more of this in the budget implementation act, but there has been nothing. I hope there will be something coming this year because scientists are waiting.

• (1530)

[Translation]

Mr. Raj Saini (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before I begin my remarks, I would like to personally express my profound sadness for the tragedy in Fort McMurray. My heart goes out to all the people who have been affected by the forest fires that are still raging.

[English]

I also want to thank all Canadians who have offered their prayers and support to our fellow Canadians at this time. I also want to thank all of the first responders, citizens, and officials who are working day and night to confront this terrible situation.

The generosity of Canadians is never in doubt, and as a country we will do our best to support all of those who have been affected.

I want to begin my remarks by thanking the kind and generous people of Kitchener Centre for giving me the opportunity to be their voice in Ottawa. This opportunity has humbled me, and allowed me to grow as a person and become more aware of how beautiful my constituency is. It is beautiful because of the hard-working people who contribute to its vitality and growth.

I was elected to work for the advancement and betterment of my community. Our budget sets the tone and the framework for my community to achieve its potential without fear, limitation, or hesitation.

[Translation]

Budget 2016 is very clear in its approach. Our budget is for the middle class and those wishing to join it. Let me begin by sharing some highlights.

Firstly, our government, at its very outset, introduced a middle-class tax cut to help Canadians make their lives easier. Our approach will help nine million Canadians who will see an average tax reduction of \$330 for single Canadians and \$540 for couples.

[English]

This tax cut will put more money in the pockets of Canadians, who will be able to invest in the things that are important to them. Whether it be investing in their financial security or investing in their children, this middle-class tax cut will boost economic activity in the short term and put us on a more sure footing for the long term.

Second, our Canada child benefit plan represents a generational shift in social policy. The hallmark of our plan is that it will be better targeted to those who need it the most.

[Translation]

Low- and middle-income families will receive more benefits and those with higher incomes will receive lower benefits.

Our plan is fairer, more targeted, and much simpler. The strength of our plan is built on fairness. Any family that receives a benefit will not have to fear a clawback, because our plan is tax-free.

[English]

We know that raising children is expensive. Many families have to juggle their finances to make sure they can raise their children in the manner they choose. The child benefit plan will allow parents to make decisions that are best for their children. Our plan will lift almost 300,000 children out of poverty. That, in and of itself, is a pursuit that we must take.

Third, our infrastructure plan in budget 2016 will invest \$11.9 million right away to build roads, bridges, improve public transit, improve water and waste water facilities, and refurbish affordable housing.

[Translation]

This will create thousands of jobs and boost our economy.

[English]

We will invest \$3.4 billion over the next three years in public transit. We will invest \$5 billion over the next five years in green infrastructure, and over \$3.4 billion in social infrastructure, including affordable housing.

[Translation]

This will benefit seniors housing, community centres, and child care centres. This will also aid in the refurbishment of 100,000 affordable homes.

Government Orders

[English]

I cannot tell the House how happy the affordable housing community is in my riding. For the first time in a generation, we will see the homeless in our communities finally have a place to call home.

[Translation]

Housing is not the problem. It is the solution.

Fourthly, we have made specific proposals to help our most vulnerable seniors. We will roll back the age at which seniors can access old age security and guaranteed income supplement benefits from 67 to 65. We are also going to boost the guaranteed income supplement for 900,000 low-income seniors.

Our budget is about bringing dignity to those who have spent their lives making our country strong and prosperous. We are all beneficiaries of their hard work and our plan will help them live their lives with financial security, because we owe them our respect, appreciation, and loyalty.

• (1535)

[English]

I am fortunate to have begun my professional life in one of the most innovative and progressive communities in Canada. My region, Kitchener, Waterloo, and Cambridge, known as the golden triangle, is considered to be the heart of the innovation community in Canada.

With our collaborative nature and innovative ecosystem, the Perimeter Institute, the Quantum-Nano Centre, Communitech, Google, two universities and one community college, and our numerous start-up companies, our region has led the country in innovation. For us, it is in our DNA. Our clusters and our advanced ecosystem have distinguished us on the world stage. We are a key component in a new economic driver, the Quantum Valley corridor.

Our budget is defining a new approach for Canada's economy.

[Translation]

We know that other countries in the world are searching for ways to improve their societies. We must meet the challenge of a new economy.

[English]

Our citizens, who are the most educated and the most technologically advanced in the history of our country, are asking us to give them the tools to succeed. That is why in our budget, we have earmarked \$2 billion for post-secondary institutions. Making sure that our leaders of tomorrow have the best resources to study and innovate will help chart a course for future growth.

[Translation]

Research and innovation will be at the heart of our country's progress.

[English]

That is why we will invest \$30 million for the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, \$30 million for NSERC, and \$16 million for Social Sciences and the Humanities Research Council.

We know that helping our researchers will not only benefit our young, but it will strengthen our economy and make for a more progressive society.

[Translation]

We know that small and medium-sized businesses also need the tools to succeed.

[English]

That is why we will be strengthening Canada's network of accelerators and incubators. My region will definitely benefit from this visionary approach. We will also be supporting a strong and innovative automotive sector.

One company in my riding is already benefiting from this approach. Pravala Networks, in Kitchener, has received \$9.7 million to develop a platform that will provide uninterrupted Internet connectivity in vehicles.

We know that by helping small firms to innovate and grow, and by helping high-impact firms scale up, it will only strengthen our economy and provide the high-quality and high-paying jobs that our citizens need.

Finally, our budget sets the stage for the renewal and the re-emergence of our country.

[Translation]

The role of any government is to create the conditions for its people to succeed and prosper. However, a visionary government inspires its people to use their skills and advantages to help the world succeed. We are blessed to live in this wonderful country and that blessing comes with responsibility. Many have said that with power comes great responsibility. In my view, power comes with a greater responsibility to be generous.

[English]

My Canada does not seek comfort and wealth for itself; it seeks opportunity to help the world.

Whenever we discover a new medical breakthrough, we share it with the world. When our researchers discover new green technologies, the world will benefit. When we take care of our most vulnerable, we show the world how to live in peace and tolerance.

My Canada strives to make the world a better place. Our budget will not only make our country better, it will allow us to share our knowledge, research, and technology with the rest of the world. My statement may sound bold, and it is.

[Translation]

The 21st century is before us and belongs to us. Canada must claim its rightful place and lead the world in peace and development.

[English]

What we say matters on the world stage. How we take care of our most vulnerable will be noticed. How we navigate the complexities of the future will be emulated.

Government Orders

[Translation]

My Canada will be at the forefront and will not shrink from any challenge.

[English]

My Canada will lead the world in tolerance, innovation, generosity, and fairness, because better is not only possible, it is within our reach.

• (1540)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Kitchener Centre. We are neighbours in our ridings and have had the privilege of attending many events in the area on behalf of the Waterloo region. My colleague mentioned many of the issues and programs that his government is behind and in which it is investing.

There are two areas that my colleague failed to mention, and I think they are important. One is particularly important, based on his comments about caring for vulnerable Canadians. We have heard promises in the Liberals' platform about \$3 billion for palliative care, yet there is nothing in the budget for palliative care. That is certainly an area that we need to address in terms of vulnerable Canadians.

The other area that is missing from the budget is any mention of support for our agriculture sector. We know that agriculture is important for one in eight jobs in Canada, and certainly the Waterloo region is among the leaders in agriculture.

My colleague has the privilege of being a member of Parliament for the Waterloo region. I am wondering if he would urge his government to be sure that we fund palliative care, to the tune of \$3 billion, and explain why it is not in the budget. Second, why we are so silent on agriculture when it plays such an important part in the future of our country?

Mr. Raj Saini: Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the hon. member, because in our community, he does a lot of work on suicide prevention. I congratulate him for the work he has done.

He has raised two points. On the first point, palliative care, he knows that the health accord has expired and our Minister of Health is now negotiating with the provinces and territories. We do not want to prejudice those negotiations, but we will do the best we can for the health and safety of Canadians.

Second, for rural and agricultural Canada, we have made specific recommendations in terms of research, but more important, we will invest \$500 million to expand broadband.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government campaigned on a promise to help the middle class, and now speaks about helping the group that is hoping to be part of the middle class.

In my riding of North Island—Powell River, there are a lot of challenges in this new economy, which is without as much resource development as we have seen historically. Everyone agrees that the Liberals' so-called middle-class tax cut will benefit people earning more than \$200,000 a year the most. There are six out of ten Canadians who will get nothing from this plan.

Bill C-15 will not offer anything to help those who need it the most, like the people in my riding who are working hard every day.

Can the member explain how the Liberals can defend these policies?

Mr. Raj Saini: Mr. Speaker, it is very easy to defend these policies. With our middle-class tax cut, we know that 9 out of ten families will get a benefit. We know, through our child benefit plan, that more than 300,000 children will be lifted out of poverty.

I am very happy to stand by this budget, because I know that it will be effective and will truly help the middle class and those hoping to join the middle class.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague has spoken passionately about the Canada child benefit. I wonder if he could elaborate on how he expects the benefit to support people in Kitchener—Waterloo.

Mr. Raj Saini: Mr. Speaker, right now the world economy is facing the prospect of slow growth. Right now, the one way we can help the middle class in our communities is to make sure that we put more money in their pockets.

We know that raising children is very expensive. This is the best time to invest in our economy, and this is the best time to invest in our citizens. I know that for my region and my riding, helping middle-class families by increasing their child benefit will be more targeted, more focused, and more simple. More importantly, it will be tax-free and will help all Canadian children rise above the poverty level.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to rise in the House today on behalf of all the residents of my riding who have reached out to my office and spoken to me personally about their dissatisfaction with the first budget of the Liberal government.

Following the release of the budget, my office sent out surveys to every household and business in my riding, asking whether they supported the out-of-control spending of the Liberal government. Out of the responses I have received, over 90% of my constituents do not support these ballooning deficits and unnecessary spending.

Canadians know best, that we need to live within our means and take out loans or increase spending only in urgent situations. There will always be emergencies that require extraordinary measures such as major roof repairs, new pump in a rural water system or the replacement of a car that died without warning.

While most Canadians would agree that these might be good reasons to borrow, I doubt that many would consider it good money management to take out a new loan to pave the driveway or buy a new flat screen TV, especially if already paying down a hefty mortgage.

Government Orders

Along with many members on this side of the House, this is my first budget while sitting in opposition. I am not impressed that the government has already started to tear down the hard work that our Conservative government did to build a strong economy that Canada enjoyed. Nor are my constituents impressed.

The Liberals talk about slow growth in the past. They fail to recognize that Canada led the G7 in economic growth through some of the most challenging times the world has seen since the Great Depression. The current government will not even admit that we left it with a surplus of over \$7 billion. The Department of Finance, the parliamentary budget officer, and experts across Canada repeatedly remind the Liberals that they are wrong, but they simply continue to ignore the facts.

This is important because the almost \$30 billion the Liberals have decided to borrow is borrowed not out of necessity, but out of a desire to take the hard-earned money made by Canadians and spend it on pet projects for special interest groups. They have ensured that they can continue this out-of-control spending by including in their omnibus budget bill a clause that repeals our balanced budget legislation.

This balanced budget legislation, passed by the previous Parliament, would force future governments to restrict spending so we would not be borrowing on the backs of our future generations and we could incrementally pay down our national debt. However, the Liberals are now removing the hope we had of reducing our debt. Instead, they plan to increase it by another \$119 billion.

Many of us in the House have been blessed with children and some of us even with grandchildren. I am blessed with nine grandchildren, but these out-of-control spending budgets accumulated over time will gravely affect them. I want to ensure that the Liberals know that there will be consequences to their poor decisions today.

If we consider just debt charges alone over the course of the government's mandate, interest charges alone increase by almost \$10 billion. This is money that could be spent on more important infrastructure projects or increased health transfers. It could also be spent on funding a small business tax cut, or fulfilling the Liberal's promise to increase home care spending and invest in palliative care. Yet there is not one dollar earmarked in this budget for palliative care or increased home care.

Over the next five years, the interest costs alone rise from \$25.7 billion to \$35.5 billion. That is an increase of almost \$10 billion just to pay interest on the increased national debt.

The three topics that have been brought to my attention most often by my constituents are: first, the Liberals' broken promise to lower small business tax rate; second, giving hard-working farmers a cold shoulder; and third, no money given toward increasing access to palliative care for Canadians.

First are the Liberals' broken promises to small businesses. Waterloo region is home to thousands of small businesses and they were all excited to hear that every party in the campaign was going to lower the small business tax rate to 9%. Unfortunately, this promise, like many other promises made by the Liberals, was completely broken in their very first budget.

On top of that, the Minister of Small Business and Tourism, from the Waterloo region herself, has been defending this broken promise throughout the region and across Canada for the past number of weeks. The finance department has estimated that this broken promise will cost the small business sector \$2.2 billion over four years.

It is clear that when it really comes down to it, the Liberals fail to understand the crucial role that small business has to play in Canada. One has to wonder if the entire Liberal government agrees with the Prime Minister who stated publicly that small businesses were just "tax havens" for the wealthy.

● (1545)

The Prime Minister really is out of touch with Canadians. We know that roughly two-thirds of small and medium-sized business owners fall directly into the middle class. Employers are about four times more likely to be earning less than \$40,000 than they are to be earning more than \$250,000.

On top of the broken promise of lowering the tax rate for small business owners, small business owners know that we do not keep on spending money we do not have and are very worried about the direction the government is going.

Speaking on behalf of these small business owners, the president of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, Dan Kelly, says:

Small business owners across the country are deeply troubled by the ballooning deficit. What was proposed to Canadians as a short-term \$10-billion deficit plan to invest in critical infrastructure is now \$29 billion with no plan to get back to balance...Small business owners know that today's deficits are tomorrow's taxes.

Second, the budget is a complete disaster for all the farmers in my riding.

Growing up on a farm myself, I have a pretty good idea of the amount of work that these men and women put in every day to feed their families and thousands of other families across Canada. We should be supporting these people. However, the budget completely forgets about them. In fact, the only support for the agriculture industry in Canada is extra funding for bureaucrats in Ottawa, none for moms and dads who are up before the sun rises and finish work well after the sun sets.

In my riding, where there are over 1,200 farms, approximately 1,400 in all of Waterloo region accounting for \$473 million in gross receipts in 2010, farmers are professionals. They want to meet their social obligations in protecting the environment, in protecting the health of their animals, and in providing the best quality products for their families, for their communities, and for the world.

The Canadian agriculture and agri-food sectors account for more than \$100 billion in economic activity every year and employ more than two million Canadians. The importance of agriculture to our national interests cannot be overstated. In fact, one in eight jobs in Canada depends upon agriculture, those in primary agriculture, food processing, horticulture, and farm markets.

Government Orders

Under the previous Conservative government, farming families saw their taxes drop to the lowest level in 50 years and farmers gained access to more international markets than ever. However, today, with this budget, Canadian farm families are being left behind. The Liberals are borrowing \$30 billion to spend in other sectors. The Liberal government must make our farm families a priority.

Third is the government's failure to meet its commitment to increasing home care and palliative care.

As we in this chamber are considering Bill C-14, it is now more important than ever that the government make good on its promise to increase funding for home care and palliative care services. I have said it many times already during second reading of Bill C-14, but let me repeat it. Without proper palliative care options to give Canadians considering assisted suicide, they are not making a fully informed decision. We have all failed in protecting vulnerable Canadians.

Therefore, I would suggest that the Liberal government make four changes to the budget immediately, as it would be in the best interests of all Canadians.

First, the government needs to limit the size of its deficit and re-implement the balanced budget legislation that our government introduced. It needs to start realizing the money it is spending is not its money to spend without reserve, but is taxpayer money and belongs to taxpayers.

Second, the government should make good on its promise to lower the small business tax rate. This would be one of the single-best methods to help out the middle class and to grow our economy. These businesses would be able to expand, innovate and hire more workers, immediately helping our economy.

Third, the Liberals should rekindle their relationship with Canadian farmers and immediately include measures in the budget that would lower taxes for these hard-working Canadians who are the heart of our country.

Last, the Liberal government needs to provide funding for home and palliative care across Canada. Over 70% of Canadians who need this form of care do not have access to it. This is something that absolutely needs to be changed. Now, more than ever, we need to protect and care for the most vulnerable among us.

• (1550)

[*Translation*]

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member is talking about deficits with the authority of someone who is intimately acquainted with them.

In fact, it has been almost 150 years since the Conservatives posted a surplus. The Conservatives left us poorer and more in debt than when they came to power. Furthermore, they attacked supply management, which we are defending. They did not invest in most of the programs that my colleague mentioned today.

My colleague said that we must make more budget cuts, spend less and invest only if it does not create debt.

If he could go back to the Conservative Party's term in 2006, what would he do differently?

• (1555)

[*English*]

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, concerning investing for the future, the big difference in what the Conservative government did was we invested in infrastructure projects that would actually improve our economy. We did not not invest in program spending. We did not invest in niche markets, like the CBC or other things, that would not increase our economy.

The Liberals talk about the fact that the Conservatives increased the deficit. When we went into deficit, it was spending that was injected into the economy, and the Liberals wanted us to spend more. Now they say we increased the deficit too much. They are talking out of both sides of their mouths and they cannot have it both ways.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member should provide some clarity on the issue of deficits. The member knows full well that the former Conservative government added \$150 billion of debt on future taxpayers. When it inherited power back in 2006, it was handed a multi-billion dollar surplus and turned it into a deficit of billions of dollars. Why should a Liberal government take advice from the previous government that failed so miserably in managing the finances of our country? It makes no sense.

The member is putting forward recommendations for supporting family farms. Think about it. A tax break for Canada's middle class is very real and the member and his colleagues are voting against that. They are voting against the enrichment of the child benefit program. That is going to put hundreds of millions of dollars into communities in every region, including prairie farms and farms all over Canada. Why would he oppose that? Why did he support the Conservatives' massive deficit?

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, what I am voting against is found on page 234 of the budget. I would ask members to look at the figures. When we look at the public debt charges alone between 2015 and 2020, they rise from \$25.7 billion to \$35.5 billion. That is virtually a \$10-billion increase in debt charges alone. That is not even talking about starting to pay down the debt.

Only a Liberal would say that paying down \$40 billion of national debt in the first two years the Conservatives were in office is somehow squandering the surplus. The fact that the Conservative government injected money into the economy and then balanced the budget at the end of its mandate is a crucial difference from what we see now of deficit after deficit, with no plan to pay it down at the end of the Liberal mandate.

In their platform, the Liberals clearly promised a maximum deficit of \$10 billion per year and at the end of a four-year mandate, we would have a balanced budget. We are nowhere close to that, and Canadians know it. The constituents in my riding are not happy about the fact that we are spending money today that my children and grandchildren, and their children and grandchildren are going to have to pay back.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to stand in the House today and talk about the budget, which I am extremely proud to support.

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Before becoming an MP, I was the mayor of the great city of Kingston. In this role, I learned quickly the importance of having strong, thriving local communities. This is why I fought tirelessly for increased investment in municipal infrastructure and social services, something I am thrilled to see would come to fruition in this budget.

Some Canadian families and communities are struggling right now, and infrastructure investments are desperately needed. As some of my colleagues have pointed out in the past, spending on infrastructure when interest rates are low yields more in return of economic activity.

The legislation being debated today would do just that. Interest rates are at historic lows, and this budget would make meaningful and substantive infrastructure investments from coast to coast. This government has committed to building our communities by implementing a historic plan to invest more than \$120 billion over the next 10 years. These investments would help Canadian families by creating well-paying jobs and fostering long-term growth in Canada.

This budget would help Canadian communities by providing approximately \$3 billion each year for municipal infrastructure projects through the gas tax fund and the incremental goods and services tax rebate for municipalities.

Not only that, but the government would also transfer the remaining uncommitted funds from the older federal infrastructure programs to municipalities through the gas tax fund. This would ensure funds are directed toward high-priority municipal infrastructure projects.

These investments would not only help Canadians now, but the benefits would be felt by Canadians well into the future. Across Canada, more than \$3 billion would be invested in social infrastructure. This includes affordable housing, early learning and child care, and recreational facilities.

This budget also introduces the Canada child benefit. This new benefit would put more money directly into the pockets of the Canadian families that need it the most. The Canada child benefit would give Canadian families much-needed help with the high cost of raising children. Children are our future, and we cannot ignore their needs.

It cannot be denied that replacing the existing federal child benefits with a simpler, tax-free child benefit is the right way forward, as nine out of 10 families would now receive higher monthly benefits. More money in the pockets of Canadian families can translate into the ability to buy back-to-school supplies, or the ability to afford summer camp or hockey registration. It means healthier food on the dinner table, and lunch bags that are not empty. With the Canada child benefit, hundreds of thousands of children would be lifted out of poverty.

For our young Canadians like the students of the three outstanding post-secondary institutions in my riding of Kingston and the Islands—Queen's University, the Royal Military College, and St. Lawrence College—this budget would make post-secondary education more affordable.

It is no secret that the costs of post-secondary education have become burdensome, with school debt becoming a crippling factor for some Canadian students. This budget would boost grants for low- and middle-income college and university students by 50%, helping with the affordability of textbooks, residence, food, and other important expenditures that come with being a student.

More than 350,000 full-time students would receive more help as a result of these measures. This could be the difference between graduating and dropping out.

Furthermore, graduation day would no longer have to be tainted by the worries about student loan payments. I am sure many of us know students who are preparing to graduate in the coming weeks. The time around graduation should be exciting. These students have worked hard for their diplomas and degrees. This legislation would improve the ability for students to get a fair start.

With the new measures in this budget, students would not have to repay Government of Canada student loans until their income hits at least \$25,000 per year. These are some of the changes that are helping Canadian families and local communities thrive. These are the investments I worked hard to see when I was mayor. They would help grow our middle class, see more children lifted out of poverty, and provide the supports for young Canadians ready to enter the workforce.

• (1600)

Budget 2016 would ensure Canadians have enough opportunity to succeed. For too long, Canadians have been working hard without seeing any results. Like hamsters on a wheel, they have been running themselves weary without getting any further ahead. This is unacceptable, and this budget aims to fix this because, when middle-class Canadians have more money to save, invest, and grow the economy, everyone benefits. It is time for Canada to have a government that focuses on citizens of our country, a realistic government that is passionate and committed and based on evidence and optimism, not ideology and fear.

Before budget 2016 was released, I hosted a pre-budget consultation as part of a nationwide discussion launched by the Minister of Finance in January. I was able to meet with many members of my community and discuss how the government can make the right investments to ensure long-term growth in Kingston and the Islands. Members of my community brought forward a number of key concerns for Kingston and the Islands, including affordable housing and municipal infrastructure funding. I was happy to share their local feedback with the Minister of Finance, and I am even happier to see these concerns addressed in this budget.

This budget proves that government is working for all Canadians and is committed to making investments in infrastructure to grow the economy and help the middle class save and invest more. It is an ambitious plan that would strengthen the heart of Canada's economy, the middle class. It would set Canadians up for a prosperous and successful future.

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In conclusion, it is clear that the realities of today are vastly different from those 50 years ago. Back then, an individual could graduate from high school and have a realistic expectation of finding well-paying, stable work that could comfortably support a family. Today, Canadians are graduating from post-secondary school laden with debt without any security of finding a well-paying, stable job. This budget addresses these realities. The measures I have mentioned would help Canadians meet the challenges of today. By putting money in the pockets of Canadian families, growing the middle class, and ensuring Canadian students get a fair start, this budget would equip Canadians for success and invest in Canada's future.

• (1605)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague used the term “hamsters on a wheel” as it related to students paying back student debt. I do not think there could be any more appropriate metaphor than a hamster on a wheel when it comes to paying down the debt that the current government is taking on.

I have just a comment here from the *National Post* by Kevin Libin. He said:

At this rate of deficit and debt accumulation, it can only be a matter of time before the Liberals tax and spend all of us, the rich and middle class inclusively, into equal levels of misery.

On page 234 of the budget, it clearly outlines the increase in debt charges alone of \$10 billion per year. I would like my colleague to explain how we can possibly get out of this hamster-on-a-wheel rotation when we continue to add to the deficit year after year with no credible plan to come back to balance.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, let us not forget who put us on that wheel. It was the previous government, with \$160 billion of debt that we are paying back. The previous member talked about how we have to try to get out of this deficit situation. It is a deficit situation that his previous government put us into.

Furthermore, this particular member just spent 10 minutes speaking about changes that we need to make, and suggested further areas where we need to be spending more money. I beg the question of him. How do we possibly spend more on the projects that he supports, but at the same time lower the deficit?

I believe would invest the money in the right places in this budget, and at the end of the day we would see meaningful changes for Canadians that would build our economy and grow in the way we need to grow for the future.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two specific questions.

The member spent a fair amount of his time talking about affordability of education and the prospects particularly for young Canadians coming into the workforce.

There was a very specific commitment that we as New Democrats made, and the Conservatives made it, and the Liberals as well in the previous election, just six or seven months ago, about ensuring that small business taxes would be lowered. The Minister of Finance was asked about it, after he delivered the budget and reneged on that very specific promise. It was not nuanced, it was not contextual, it was

exact. He said that he looked at it again and thought it was a bad idea.

Well, that is a somewhat flippant answer, because the changing of that one policy by the Liberals for small businesses in Canada, which many of those young people will be seeking jobs in or themselves starting, will cost small businesses about \$2.1 billion over the next four years.

I was in small business before politics. However, it was not our suggestion as New Democrats that lowering the small business tax rate was to be considered a silver bullet, as there are many factors that go in, but it was an important gesture. We had seen the corporate or large business tax rate drop dramatically while the Conservatives racked up huge deficits, which we will be paying for many decades to come.

My question is specifically this. If it was not such a good idea, why campaign and promise to do it?

Now that the Liberals have broken that promise, not spoken the truth to Canadians about what they were actually going to do, when can we see the promise delivered, because if it was such a good idea to campaign on, clearly it must be a good idea to actually govern on as well?

• (1610)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, for clarification, the government has adjusted the way it is going to be handling the particular small business tax. It might not be as aggressive as my colleague would like to see, but let us not forget where we are investing and reducing taxes, and that is for the middle class.

We know that small business is the backbone of our economy. Therefore, if we want to grow an economy, we are going to do that by putting more money back into the hands of the consumers, which is what we would do by lowering taxes for the middle class. We are putting money back in their hands so that they can go out and spend it with these small businesses.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with a great deal of sadness that I rise in the House today. I speak for the people of London, Ontario, when I tell the people of Fort McMurray that we are thinking of them and that our prayers are with them. We in London and Canadians across the country are also thinking of any members opposite, specifically those members who represent Alberta ridings, who have friends and families who might be impacted.

Today I am pleased to rise in support of Bill C-15. Simply put, budget 2016 is a significant step in the right direction.

During the election our party promised to grow the middle class by working hard to deliver much-needed help immediately, instead of several years down the road. Canadians asked for assistance now in order to make life a bit easier, and that is exactly what the budget is delivering.

Government Orders

Different plans were put forward by the other parties during the past election campaign, plans that would have seen balanced budgets at all costs. These plans would have resulted in cuts instead of investments, stagnation instead of growth. Ultimately the proposals of the other parties would have left the middle class and those working hard to join the middle class struggling.

The results of October's election showed the idea of balanced budgets at all costs was clearly not supported by Canadians. Instead, Canadians voted for investment, growth, revitalization of the Canadian economy, and help for today instead of tomorrow.

Since being elected this past October, the government has implemented a great deal of positive change that will make the lives of everyday Canadians that much better. However, the program introduced in budget 2016 that I am most proud of is the Canada child benefit.

In my community of London North Centre, numerous constituents have told me that it is becoming harder to make ends meet. With prices increasing on a wide variety of everyday items and wages not keeping up, it is now more difficult to afford the extras in life. Whether it is sending their children to camp, affording a new pair of shoes for their son or daughter, or enrolling their children in organized sports, there is simply not enough money left at the end of the month to make these important purchases. The Canada child benefit would work to rectify this problem.

The benefit is an exciting change for several reasons. First, families who are eligible would receive a maximum annual benefit of up to \$6,400 per child under the age of six and up to \$5,400 per child aged six through seventeen. Payments moreover will happen monthly and start this July. Families who are eligible for this new program will see an average increase to their current child benefits of almost \$2,300 per year.

The Canada child benefit would ensure that nine out of 10 families would receive more money in their pockets than under the current system. This innovative and forward-thinking benefit would assist approximately 3.5 million families. Moreover, the benefit, and I emphasize this, would not be taxable.

Most importantly, the Canada child benefit would ensure that in 2016-17 approximately 300,000 fewer children would be living in poverty compared to 2014-15. In the London and surrounding area that would equate to approximately 9,000 fewer children living in poverty. These numbers will only continue to decline in the years to come thanks to benefits like this.

The path to a strong economy is to have a robust and vibrant middle class. By introducing the innovative, bold, and desperately needed Canada child benefit, the government will ensure that the middle class and those families working hard to join the middle class would have more money in their pockets. With that extra money these Canadians would have the opportunity to save, invest, and grow the economy. Canadians would be able to look forward to a better standard of living, one that will allow their children more opportunities for success. As previously stated, I am extremely excited about this benefit. My constituents have told me this will make an immediate difference in their lives, and I am here to fight for those constituents each and every day.

Another area identified in the budget that would have a significant impact on my community of London North Centre is support for seniors. The government has committed to increasing the guaranteed income supplement top-up by up to \$947 per year. This change would help 900,000 of the most vulnerable seniors. Four in five seniors in Canada live on low incomes and live alone.

•(1615)

The government will also help seniors by repealing section 2.2 of the Old Age Security Act, which increases the age of eligibility to receive this benefit.

We are also leaving in place pension income splitting. There has been much confusion surrounding this topic in my community. However, the government is committed to helping seniors with their finances. We know that they have worked hard their entire lives, and the government has a responsibility to ensure that they are not placed into a vulnerable financial situation. We are therefore aiming to ensure that during their retirement years Canadian seniors are given the sense of security, dignity, and comfort they deserve.

I am proud to have a strong contingent of Canadian veterans in London North Centre. Since being elected this past October, I have met with many of them at various events throughout the city and at meetings in my office. The amount of respect I have for their courage, patriotism, and sacrifice cannot be properly expressed in words. The freedom we enjoy today to have debates such as this in the House of Commons is because of the incredible sacrifices made by our veterans. As such, the government has a sacred obligation to ensure that these individuals have access to the programs and services they require. We owe them our sincere gratitude and respect. We must work to ensure that there is a relationship built on trust and collaboration.

With that in mind, the government will make changes to the Canadian Forces Members and Veterans Re-establishment and Compensation Act. These changes have been initiated due to concerns expressed by the government, the veterans ombudsman, Canadian Armed Forces members, veterans, and other stakeholders. It has been indicated that veterans who have been seriously disabled are not guaranteed financial security with the benefits currently in place. Therefore, those Canadian Armed Forces members and veterans who have severe and permanent service-related disabilities will see an increase to their benefits. This is a change that I think we can all be proud of in the House and beyond.

Before being elected to represent the community of London North Centre, I taught at King's University College at Western University. During that time, I watched the number of students who were struggling to make ends meet rise each year. I instructed students who were extremely intelligent, compassionate, and driven young people. However, they were graduating university with a crushing amount of student debt. These students worried about how they would pay back the money they owed, and it was becoming increasingly difficult to find meaningful work. This type of stress and burden is not what we want for our younger generation who have just finished post-secondary education and are looking to make important contributions to the workforce.

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With that in mind, I am pleased that budget 2016 will help students from low and middle-income families by making post-secondary education more affordable. In addition, the government will establish a system that makes it fairer and easier for students to repay their debt. I am pleased to see that students will not have to make any repayment on their Canada student loans until they are making at least \$25,000 per year.

However, the help for students will not stop there. This budget has also made investments to ensure that young Canadians can earn extra income, gain experience, and find quality jobs upon graduation. These changes have been lobbied for by Canadian student advocate groups for many years. I have met with these student advocates, and I am glad to see these changes coming to fruition within this budget. Help with student debt, providing access to funds to help with the rising costs of post-secondary education, and providing more opportunities for employment while in school and following graduation are measures we can all be proud of. The budget addresses these requests.

Finally, I have received a great deal of correspondence in my office asking that necessary steps be taken by the government to ensure more tax fairness in Canada. Constituents have told me that they are more than willing to pay their taxes and follow the rules. However, they want to ensure that all Canadians pay their fair share. They currently feel as though there are two different sets of rules in place.

With that in mind, it is exciting to see budget 2016 taking significant steps to ensure tax integrity and tax fairness for all Canadians.

I look forward to the debate on the budget to follow.

• (1620)

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech. I was especially interested in two things he touched on: the situation of Canadian students and that of seniors.

I want to ask the member a question about that. Increasing the guaranteed income supplement for our seniors is a good thing and a positive step, but would it not be preferable to automatically sign up people when their income is below a certain amount? In that way they would not lose out on any money because they did not receive the information telling them to apply for the guaranteed income supplement.

Could his government seriously consider increasing public pension plans? For example, the Canada pension plan, which is the most robust and solid plan, could lift many seniors out of poverty and ensure that they live their golden years with dignity.

[English]

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Certainly, Mr. Speaker, this government has spoken about the need to take pensions seriously, once and for all, in this country. We are looking at this in collaboration with the provinces and I would expect to see action on these sorts of measures.

In addition, I would emphasize that while it would be useful and helpful to have information circulated to seniors on how they can receive the guaranteed income supplement increase if they are eligible, it is also the job of members of Parliament to spread that message. It is part of our job to reach out to our constituents in that regard and I look forward to keep on doing so. I have been doing so up until this point.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are again ignoring the promise in the Liberal platform of reducing the small business tax rate.

I will quote the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, which stated:

We are disappointed at the government's decision to push back the small business tax reduction and we question the idea of contemplating increases to CPP at this point. As businesses struggle, this added pressure could slow down job creation and investment....

While it is fine to talk about the reduction in costs for student tuition and lower debt when students graduate, what help is it to students to graduate with a bit lower debt if there are no jobs to go to once they have graduated?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Mr. Speaker, as someone who saw his parents work 12 or 15 hours a day sometimes, I can say that what small businesses need most are customers. Therefore, this budget puts forward measures that would actually grow our economy and help small businesses grow their consumer base.

It is interesting to me how, on the one hand, members who were in the previous government can now suddenly be champions of small business, but not ones of actually improving the economy in such a way that it would grow the customer base of small businesses, and therefore, benefit the Canadian economy.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my friend seems to confuse the idea that he can only do one or the other in helping small businesses. I do not know why this is such a shocking idea. Liberals in a campaign six or seven months ago promised to do something, and the official opposition and the opposition are asking them to do it. If it was such a good idea then, why not now? I have yet to hear, in all the speeches by Liberals about the bill, why they think it is such a bad idea.

The parliamentary budget officer has estimated that this one broken promise is going to cost small businesses a little north of \$2 billion over the next four years. Some rationalization or justification for this would be welcome. The Liberals are spending all kinds of money on all sorts of things. Why not the small business sector? It is a simple question.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Mr. Speaker, it is always interesting to hear New Democrats present themselves as the champions for small businesses.

That said, I will say, as I just mentioned to the previous speaker, we are intent on making sure that small businesses have the customer base they need to grow. I would invite hon. members opposite to look at our infrastructure investments, our commitments to public transit, and all of the other measures, particularly on growing the innovation economy that we are going to need to make Canada a global leader once again.

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I would underline those points to my hon. friend and say that, once again, as the son of small business owners, I am ready to help the government in whatever way I can in that regard.

• (1625)

Hon. Alice Wong (Richmond Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, on behalf of my constituents in Richmond Centre, I wish to send our thoughts and prayers to those affected by the wildfires in Fort McMurray and the surrounding area. We are grateful to the firefighters and first responders who are tirelessly working together to control the fire and ensure the safety of those involved. The residents of Richmond Centre stand behind them.

Today, I rise to discuss Bill C-15, the budget implementation act. I wish to articulate my concerns with the bill. There are many troubling aspects of the bill, but I will be focusing on two primary ones. First, I will discuss the small business and employment provisions and changes outlined in the budget. Second, I will comment on the changes to small business hiring. Both of these areas are of great importance to me and my riding of Richmond Centre.

This being my eighth year serving as an MP, I have had the opportunity to work alongside our previous Conservative government and witness strong fiscal responsibility. Not only were we able to leave a surplus at the end of our term, but the debt-to-GDP ratio was lower than it had been when we took office. In addition, during the economic downturn and global recession, our Conservative government created 1.2 million net new jobs. However, such success is quickly being squandered by the new Liberal government.

Before my work in politics, I spent many years as a small business owner. I have experienced first-hand the hard work and dedication required of individuals to operate a small business.

Over 10 years ago, I worked with other business leaders to develop the Women's Enterprise Society of British Columbia, which has been supporting women entrepreneurs. I also founded the Ethno Business Council to encourage and engage business from various cultural groups.

Over the years, I have been hearing the same message: small and medium-sized businesses need lower taxes and support from the government.

Since small business is close to my heart, members can understand why the budget is so concerning for me. The Liberal government has decided to break its promise to continue the outlined small business tax cuts. This broken promise will cost the small business sector \$2.2 billion over the next four years. What this broken promise demonstrates is that the Liberal government believes our small business owners should be the ones to pay for its deficits, which is simply unacceptable.

Under this new budget and the proposed tax increases, the top tax bracket for over half of our provinces will be more than 50% of an individual's income. It is tax increases like this which will be punishing some of the most productive workers in our society.

What is worse is that the Liberals are accusing small business owners of manipulating the system to avoid paying higher taxes. This could not be further from the truth.

Two-thirds of small and medium-sized businesses fall directly into the middle class. In fact, there are nearly four times as many owners earning less than \$40,000 than those earning more than \$250,000.

By eliminating the proposed tax cuts, the Liberals are directly targeting our middle class and making its financial situation more difficult.

• (1630)

Over the past few months, I have met with numerous organizations and individuals who represent small business owners from across the nation. Every time I hear the same concern, that small business owners are being neglected by the government. The Liberals' abandoned promise of lowering the small business tax rate is affecting all small businesses. What is more, the government is increasing red tape and making it more difficult for owners to qualify for the small business tax rate. They claim these changes are to close loopholes, but in fact, the changes are affecting all kinds of small businesses, even though their revenues are well below the \$500,000 cap.

Dan Kelly, president of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, summed up the budget well. I will quote from a news release:

"Small business owners across the country are deeply troubled by the ballooning deficit. What was proposed to Canadians as a short-term \$10 billion deficit plan to invest in critical infrastructure is now \$29 billion with no plan to get back to balance," Kelly said. Most of the deficit is to cover a massive 7.6 per cent increase in program spending, which will do next to nothing to grow the economy. "Small business owners know that today's deficits are tomorrow's taxes," added Kelly.

The budget and Bill C-15 have one clear loser, and that is our small businesses. As a result, I will be supporting the motion put forward by our colleague from Nepean—Carleton to strike clause 34 from Bill C-15 altogether. I encourage all members of the House to support the motion as well.

Nowhere in Bill C-15 do we see a commitment to renew the small business job credit next year. In fact, what we see instead is another broken promise to reduce employment insurance rates to \$1.52. The new EI spending would put pressure on the premiums paid by both employers and employees and would cost \$2.4 billion over two years. We should be working to ease the premiums and hiring costs placed on employers rather than making it more difficult for them to hire workers. Once again, our small businesses are bearing the worst of all the Liberal government's irresponsible spending.

In conclusion, one thing is clear throughout budget 2016: the Liberals have demonstrated their utter disregard for responsible fiscal management and they have no plan to repay their extreme deficits. They have chosen to turn their backs on the job creators, our small businesses. The Liberals do not understand that borrowed money needs to be paid back, and instead of taking that responsibility upon themselves, they are placing it on our children and grandchildren.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I noted in my colleague's speech that at one point she said that small business owners fall in the middle class. Would she not agree then that because we are giving a tax break to the middle class, in fact we are helping small businesses and not hurting them, as she suggested?

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• (1635)

Hon. Alice Wong: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately these are not the people who would benefit from the Liberals' so-called tax cuts for the middle class. Their broken promise to reduce the taxes actually would be creating unemployment instead of employment. This is exactly what we are fighting against.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague's speech was interesting.

Something about it took me a little by surprise, however: the Conservative Party's sudden interest in helping small and medium-sized businesses. During its time in power, it did absolutely nothing to cut small business taxes as the NDP requested. It did, however, give hundreds of millions in tax breaks to banks, oil companies, and big corporations. Now, all of a sudden, the Conservatives are taking an interest in small businesses even though all they cared about before were huge corporations, not our small merchants.

[*English*]

Hon. Alice Wong: Mr. Speaker, it was the Conservative government which created 1.2 million net new jobs during the downsizing of the economy and it was the Conservative government that reduced personal taxes 120 times, putting more money into the pockets of families who then spent their money on building our economy. That is what our government did, but the broken promises by the Liberals have created \$2.2 billion of costs to our small businesses. That is not the way to do business.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on a great speech and a great analysis on the economic and tax fronts. I hope the member would share the same view on the subject of the middle class. Most Canadians are middle class. The Liberals use the term "middle class" as a political term to win votes here and there. We understand that the Liberals played that game.

How will the borrowing habits that are going to become an ongoing thing in the next four years by the Liberal government be such a dangerous thing for the Canadian economy and for Canadian businesses?

Hon. Alice Wong: Mr. Speaker, I would like to reiterate what the president of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business said. He said, "Small business owners across the country are deeply troubled by the ballooning deficit". At the end of his quote he said, "Small business owners know that today's deficits are tomorrow's taxes". Instead of bearing the responsibility, the Liberals are now putting their responsibilities on our children and our grandchildren.

I know that the Minister of Finance said it is good for his children and his grandchildren, but I am afraid it is not to the benefit of all our children and our grandchildren.

Ms. Gudie Hutchings (Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague and I both share a passion for small business. I am sure she would agree with me when I say that many small businesses are in the tourism industry. I was in the tourism industry and I would have appreciated lots of marketing money being invested in the economy to bring in more customers.

Does the member not think that the investment we are making in destination Canada, the investment we are making into broadband, the investment in infrastructure which is all going to support businesses, does that all not support small business at the end of the day? We all know how important tourism is for every riding in our country.

Hon. Alice Wong: Mr. Speaker, I would remind the member opposite that it was our government that got the approved destination status from China which brought in lots of tourists and helped us to grow tourism. It is our government that did the job, not the Liberal government. It took them 30 years and failed.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, Innovation, Science and Economic Development; the hon. member for Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, Employment Insurance; the hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway, Health.

Resuming debate. The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities.

• (1640)

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to start by telling our brothers and sisters in Alberta that the people of Honoré-Mercier stand with them. They have our support.

I am very pleased to have an opportunity to participate in this debate on a budget that clearly shows that we plan to honour our commitments. These commitments will make Canada more prosperous, fairer, greener, and more open to the world. These commitments were at the heart of our election platform and are now at the heart of our budget.

In other words, we are doing exactly what we promised to do. We promised real change, and we are keeping that promise. To do so, we must strengthen the middle class and revitalize our economy. These two issues go hand in hand. They are inextricably linked.

Our approach is clear: support those who need it most, while laying the foundation for sustainable economic growth. That is exactly what we are doing with our budget. For example, we are lowering the tax rate, which will benefit nine million Canadians. This measure will improve the quality of life of millions of people who work hard every day to earn a living. These men and women do their best every single day, and they deserve this support. This measure will put more money in their pockets, which will then help them contribute more to our economy.

I would also like to talk about our support for families and young children. We are introducing the Canada child benefit, the largest-ever family benefit. Unlike the previous benefit, our benefit is tax-free. Gone are the days of giving with one hand and taking away with the other.

This benefit will help lift hundreds of thousands of children out of poverty. This is exactly how to fight for a just society. If we truly believe in equal opportunity, then we need to start in early childhood.

It is also important to support those who want to study, and for as long as possible. In that regard, the measure of success is clear: education should be available and accessible based on each student's determination, desire, discipline, talent, and dreams, and not based on the size of their parents' wallets.

That is why our budget proposes to considerably increase Canada student grant amounts. This measure is especially directed to students from low-income families. It is a fair, generous, responsible, and forward-looking measure that gives young people a better chance, for they represent the Canada of the future.

At the same time, we also owe so much to our seniors. They are the ones who built the society we enjoy today. We are here thanks to them. Unfortunately, however, far too many seniors are still living in poverty. We must be there for them, and we will be. That is why we are increasing the guaranteed income supplement top-up benefit by up to \$947 annually. This tangible measure will improve the quality of life of over 900,000 seniors living in every province of the country.

• (1645)

We will also invest in upgrading, renovating, and building affordable housing for our seniors because we know that quality of life has a lot to do with the dignity of access to decent housing. That is fundamental, and we know it. That is why we are going to take action right now.

That brings me to a key component of our budget: infrastructure investment. Our government promised to double infrastructure spending over the next 10 years. We are planning to spend over \$120 billion, which is an absolutely historic commitment. That includes \$60 billion in new money for public transit, green infrastructure, and social infrastructure. Sixty billion in new investments out of a total of \$120 billion over the next 10 years is absolutely unprecedented.

These investments will happen in two phases. Phase one starts right away, today, with \$11.9 billion: \$3.4 billion for public transit, \$5 billion for green infrastructure, and \$3.4 billion for social infrastructure. That is happening today. Those are major investments.

In the coming months, our government will work closely with our provincial, territorial, and municipal partners to present phase two of our long-term plan. We want this phase to begin as quickly as possible. We do not need to wait for phase one to end before phase two begins. Why are we doing this? We believe that investing in infrastructure means investing in our future; it means building the Canada of tomorrow. It means taking action today for a better tomorrow.

Maintaining and improving our roads, public transit, and water systems are crucial aspects of what we are doing. This is what we are doing, and we are doing it right.

However, there is a lot more to infrastructure than just that. It is also about protecting our environment, building recreation and cultural centres where people can learn, have fun, and grow. It is

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about providing affordable housing to those who need it. Investing in infrastructure also means building quality facilities for our children. It is about providing a safe shelter for women and children who need to flee domestic violence. In other words, our infrastructure plays an absolutely crucial role in supporting our communities.

Let us think about everything we can do and everything we can do together. With our partners, we are going to invest significantly in public transit. An additional \$20 billion is going to public transit. That will help us reduce commuting time, take cars off the road, and reduce pollution. We are going to make our communities more sustainable through environmental infrastructure. We are going to make communities more inclusive by adding more affordable housing and facilities for our children. We are also going to improve and speed up the approval process for projects to ensure that the money is released as soon as possible.

As hon. members can see, our government has big ambitions for our country. We offered real change to Canadians, and that is what we are delivering. We are going to strengthen the middle class, improve Canadians' quality of life, create jobs, and stimulate the economy to make Canada more prosperous and inclusive.

I could go on, but I will stop there and simply say that our budget is more than just an economic statement. It is a beacon that guides our commitment to a Canada that is more prosperous, fairer, greener, and more open to the world.

• (1650)

[*English*]

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would ask the member about the comment “supporting those who need it most” with regard to the middle-class tax cut. Statistics show that 66% of Canadians who pay income tax make below \$45,000, which is not at all addressed in the middle-class tax cut.

How would it help those who need it most if the government is excluding two-thirds of Canadians?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Speaker, I invite my colleague to read the entire budget, which outlines tax cuts, of course, but also the Canada child benefit. Infrastructure investments for social housing are also included in the budget.

I said earlier that the budget is a substantive and inclusive document that allows us to reach out to all Canadians and improve their quality of life by implementing a series of measures.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech, which was full of hope and enthusiasm for the future.

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With regard to the fight against inequality and lifting people out of poverty, the NDP proposed setting the minimum wage at \$15 an hour. A recent study by IRIS in Quebec showed that this would allow people working full time to rise above the poverty line. It is a simple measure that would show leadership on the part of the federal government. However, this measure is not in the budget, and I do not understand why.

My colleague will remember that in September 2014, the NDP moved a motion in the House to set the federal minimum wage at \$15 an hour. The Liberal Party supported the motion, but it does not seem to have any recollection of it today. Why is this not in the budget?

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Speaker, I want to tell my colleague that the government has shown leadership in this budget. It has made courageous decisions, and they include making historic investments in infrastructure, increasing the guaranteed income supplement for seniors, and lowering taxes for the middle class. Once again, this budget sets out a series of progressive measures to give our children and our workers a better quality of life than they had before.

[*English*]

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I heard some great words from the member for Honoré-Mercier. He talked about building the type of Canada that we all want, a more just society. He talked about the Canada child benefit. He talked about student grants. He talked about a fair society for our seniors, affordable housing, infrastructure.

All of these promises, for the type of Canada we want to build today, cost a lot of money. We had the courage during the election to ask Canadians if they would be prepared for Canada to run deficits to afford the type of Canada that we want today.

I would ask the member if he believes that one of the most important things we are doing in this budget is repealing the Federal Balanced Budget Act. It will allow us to move forward, assume some of the responsibility for building the Canada that we want now, without putting the burden of growth solely on the taxpayers. It will allow the Government of Canada, in its better position, with its better borrowing rate, its ability to step forward and find some low commodity prices, to finance the type of productive infrastructure that we need today.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

He is correct in saying that sometimes, it is important to invest in social programs and our economy, in addition to supporting job creation, through controlled deficits.

What is important when running a deficit is to ensure that the deficit has a productive impact on the economy. The Conservatives ran six consecutive deficits, and that number will soon be seven. They added \$150 billion to the debt, with no impact on the economy. All they left us were two gazebos, one fake lake, and a few fake ducks.

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before resuming debate, I would like to remind members again, if they are

going to talk among themselves or make comments, please try to whisper. It is not very nice to have that loud noise when a member is trying to answer questions. We really do want to hear the answers or comments coming from either side.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Avalon.

Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I first want to remember all those who have been impacted by the fires in Fort McMurray. We have many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians living and working in Alberta, and our thoughts and prayers are with them all.

I welcome the opportunity to speak on budget 2016, and more specifically, Bill C-15, an act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 22, 2016.

• (1655)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): We have a point of order. The microphone was not working, but it is working now.

The hon. member for Avalon.

Mr. Ken McDonald: Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to stand and support this fiscal plan that would strengthen the middle class, help the most vulnerable seniors, and build stronger communities to meet their future demands and opportunities.

I want to speak for a moment about my riding and my home province of Newfoundland and Labrador. I want to thank my family, friends, and supporters who gave me this wonderful opportunity to represent them in this prestigious House and in the great riding of Avalon. I am thankful and remain humble to represent the residents in the riding of Avalon. I am so lucky to represent very diverse communities in my riding, which have diverse and unique backgrounds and economies. I am proud to represent my home town of Conception Bay South, the largest town in the province, and the town of Paradise, the fastest growing community in Atlantic Canada.

I also have the pleasure to represent smaller rural communities that have populations of less than 100, like Patrick's Cove, St. Shotts, and Aquaforte, and larger rural communities like Bay Roberts, Harbour Grace, and Carbonear. Many of these communities depend on the fishing industry, tourism, and small and medium-sized businesses.

I also have the relatively new Vale Long Harbour processing plant, which began operations in 2014 and employs about 475 people at peak production. The plant and the Voisey's Bay mine and concentrator are an integrated operation. Nickel concentrate from Voisey's Bay will be shipped to Long Harbour to be processed into finished nickel and associated copper and cobalt products.

Just recently, I distributed a Newfoundland and Labrador tourism guide to all members of the House, and the amount of feedback from my colleagues has been remarkable; some looking for an extra copy for friends, and others expressing an interest to visit soon. We are proud of our heritage, proud of our people, and proud of our tourism showcase.

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As a result of the well-known decrease in the oil and gas markets, Newfoundland and Labrador is in the middle of significant financial challenges, and no doubt residents will be negatively impacted. We can argue that it is from years of mismanagement and overspending, or that the current fiscal restraints go too far for low-income families. No matter what, the situation is unprecedented and all my federal colleagues from the province are attentive to the immediate needs. I want to especially thank the regional minister for her help and ongoing co-operation on this very important matter.

As a former municipal mayor, I understand the importance of and need for community infrastructure, improved and new infrastructure that is affordable to communities. That is why I am delighted that this government's infrastructure plan proposes to provide \$11.9 billion over five years starting right away. Budget 2016 would put this plan into action with an immediate down payment for the plan, including \$3.4 billion over three years to upgrade and improve public transit systems across Canada; \$5 billion over five years for investments in water, waste water, and green infrastructure projects across Canada; and \$3.4 billion over five years for social infrastructure including affordable housing, early learning and child care, cultural and recreational infrastructure, and community health care facilities.

This government is also taking action to ensure that Canadians benefit from the better services that modern, efficient, and sustainable federal infrastructure can provide. Budget 2016 proposes to provide \$3.4 billion over the next five years on a cash basis to maintain and upgrade federal infrastructure assets in ridings like mine, including such things as national parks and small-craft harbours.

In addition to the new funding announced in budget 2016, the government would support the infrastructure priorities of communities across Canada. The government would continue to make available approximately \$3 billion each year in dedicated funding for municipal infrastructure projects through the gas tax fund and the incremental goods and services tax rebate for municipalities.

As a former mayor, I know how important it is for our government to work with provincial, territorial, and municipal partners. We are committed to get projects under way by accelerating spending from the \$9 billion available under the new building Canada fund's provincial-territorial infrastructure component.

• (1700)

I am very happy to say that we are working co-operatively with Newfoundland and Labrador to ensure it is able to maximize its infrastructure investments. The Minister of Infrastructure and Communities has listened and has taken action. We are pleased with the improvements to the 2014 new building Canada fund, which provide provinces and territories greater flexibility to commit all remain funding within the next two years.

The minister heard from municipal leaders about concerns with how the previous government designed the new building Canada fund. He listened and is now committed to ensuring the programs work for Canadians and has made important changes.

Under the provincial-territorial infrastructure component, we have modified the highways and roads category to eliminate the small

communities fund minimum traffic volume thresholds in order to reflect varying needs in provinces and communities across Canada.

In addition, we have added five new categories: tourism, culture, recreation, passenger ferry services infrastructure, and civic assets and municipal buildings. Budget 2016 also announced funding for local governments to support stronger stewardship through asset management planning activities and climate change resilience investments.

The following two programs would be managed by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to provide funding for capacity-building directly to municipalities: \$50 million to increase municipal capacity for asset management, including funding to develop and implement infrastructure asset management planning practices and support more reliable and comprehensive data collection on infrastructure assets; and \$75 million to support enhanced municipal planning for climate change resilience, including funding to support municipal projects to identify and implement greenhouse gas reduction opportunities, assess local climate risks, and integrate climate change impacts into asset management planning practices.

I am very proud of our investment in community infrastructure, but I am equally proud of our investment in improving the well-being of the middle class. As we have always known, a strong economy starts with a strong middle class. Our constituents understand this, and I am so pleased this government does as well. That is why building an economy that works for middle-class Canadians and their families continues to be the government's top priority.

I am delighted with our investment in the Canada child benefit. This is a new benefit that would be paid monthly to eligible families. This initiative would see nine out of 10 families receiving more under the Canada child benefit than under the current system of child benefits.

Overall, about 3.5 million families would be receiving the Canada child benefit. These families would have more money to help with the high cost of raising their children, by replacing the current complicated system. The Canada child benefit would be simpler, tax-free, better targeted to those who need it most, and much more generous. This tremendous initiative would see 300,000 fewer children living in poverty compared with 2014-15 numbers. Most importantly, the Canada child benefit would continue to support poverty reduction in future years.

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Six months ago, our government was elected by Canadians to bring change for our youth, the middle class, and vulnerable seniors. Canadians want a change in openness and accountability, and they want a government that will listen and care. I am pleased that Bill C-15 contains key initiatives and benefits that further our commitment to Canadians, commitments that would further grow the middle class and help strengthen our economy.

It has been my pleasure to speak on Bill C-15 and stand in support of all the positive initiatives that it contains today.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured today to fill in on House duty for the hon. member for Fort McMurray—Cold Lake as he is working with his community, trying to bring things under control there. It gives me great pleasure to rise in his place today and ask a question that might be appropriate.

With all of the spending that this budget is promising and the debt we are going into, have there been any discussions regarding additional funds going into infrastructure? “Infrastructure” was a big word during the campaign. We saw that word change in the throne speech to “transit”. They need more than transit in Fort McMurray now.

I am wondering if the member might be able to shed a little light on what might be going back into infrastructure on the ground for communities such as Fort McMurray.

• (1705)

Mr. Ken McDonald: Mr. Speaker, if I recall properly, the hon. Prime Minister just a few days ago here in the House mentioned that the government was looking at every aspect of help that is needed for Fort McMurray in the devastation by matching donations to the Red Cross and as well by looking at direct infrastructure needs that will follow. There will be meetings continuously with Premier Notley of Alberta, as well, to discuss those very initiatives.

I am sure the country and all parties are on side to see that proper funding is provided to make sure Fort McMurray and the surrounding areas are rebuilt properly.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I recall some of the speeches that our colleague Jack Harris used to make in this place about employment insurance, which was an issue of grave concern to many in Newfoundland and right across the country.

One of the fundamental flaws with the way the program had been tweaked, ripped off, or stolen from over the years was that the federal government could raid the fund anytime it wanted, and previous governments did, to the tune of more than \$50 billion. The federal government took money that one could easily argue never belonged to it in the first place. The EI fund is paid into by workers, with employers contributing as well. It is insurance for individuals who lose their jobs. There are some proposed changes to employment insurance in Bill C-15 but not that fundamental change, not that change that says that the fund can no longer be ripped off by a federal government. The government is always dipping its hand into the EI jar and taking but rarely ever giving, and this is a constant concern for the seasonal fishery on the west coast and other groups.

Would my colleague advocate for such a change to prevent that from happening ever again in the future? Why is it not in Bill C-15?

Mr. Ken McDonald: Mr. Speaker, as a member on this side of the House, I am pleased with the proposed changes to the EI program announced in our budget, especially the increase in the length of time that people can get employment insurance, which is an additional five weeks in many areas, as well as the wait time being cut to one week instead of two.

With regard to the funding, it is always interesting to hear somebody say that money was taken from the fund. I would be more concerned if there were no money in the fund to pay out a claim. I have never heard of one incident yet, regardless of what government was in power, where claimants were told the government was broke and could not pay their unemployment claim.

I look forward to future changes and improvements to the EI system as we go forward.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, before I get started, I want to acknowledge my mother since it was Mother's Day yesterday and I was not able to join her. I also want to acknowledge all the mothers in Fort McMurray and Alberta who could not be with their families yesterday. We need to honour them.

As the NDP spokesperson for small business and tourism, it gives me great pleasure to bring our voice and concerns about Bill C-15. Primarily, I will focus on the Liberal promise to reduce taxes for small business from 11% to 9%, and to help those who are not in the middle class to join the middle class.

Before I talk about the tax for small business, I want to touch a little on incorporate taxes in Canada, and the history of that.

Consecutive Liberal and Conservative governments have been reducing taxes over the last few decades. We have seen corporate taxes go from 28% in the late 1990s and 2000s to 15% today, which is a significant tax decrease. During that time, it has shifted the tax burden to the people. It is a reckless way to promote a healthy economy, and it is a failed experiment. It failed in Japan and Hong Kong, and it has resulted in what I believe is an unfairness in delivering taxes.

The result has created huge inequality in our society. The gulf between the wealthy and the majority is growing faster and more widely in Canada than in any other developed nation. The richest 100 Canadians now hold as much wealth as the bottom 10 million combined. However, when we look at small business taxes in comparison, they have remained at about 11% since the 1980s. While Canada's largest corporations have had record profits, they have a lot of dead money. We talk about dead money that is leaving our communities, sitting, and not circulating in our economy.

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Recently, over the last few days, while we have been debating the bill, and on Friday notably, there was a lot of Liberal rhetoric about small business. The Liberals painted small business as tax cheats. They talked about small business as being bad fiscal money managers. However, these are the volunteers in our community. These are the people who donate to our local charities. They are the people who serve on our boards. They are the cultural innovators of our communities in Canada. Therefore, it is really disappointing to hear this rhetoric from a government that went across Canada and promised a small business tax break from 11% to 9%.

This proposal was put forward by the NDP in the last parliament, which the Conservatives supported and on which the Liberals ran. All parties ran on a platform to help small business, and this is a group of individual businesses and a business community that are the job creators in our country. They are the economic drivers of our country, and the government has failed them. Promises have been made for decades and we have constantly failed them. As a result, there is a lot of mistrust with small business.

This is a very important time. This is an opportunity for Ottawa to create trust with small business, to create that intimate relationship with it. Small business people are at the front line of our communities. They know when the economy is changing quicker than any other business group in our community.

I will link back to my experience as a previous executive director of a very successful chamber of commerce and as a business owner. I remember in 2008 when the greatest economic downturn since the 1930s happened in our country. There was a huge bailout for Canada's largest corporations, but small business people were left behind. They were left with no bailout and no help from the federal government. They felt betrayed. The distrust with Ottawa was apparent.

I was picked up by a taxi driver the other day and he brought up his story about how he had a car dealership. As he ran his business, he watched all these corporations being bailed out while he struggled to make ends meet. Finally, just a year ago, he lost his business as a result of the recession. He was hanging in there, trying to get behind the big mess that was created, and the government did nothing to help him. He felt no one in Ottawa, in the House, was standing up for him. We had failed to deliver promises to small business, and we are doing it again.

• (1710)

The cost of not delivering this tax break to small business, as we know from the parliamentary budget officer's report, is \$2.2 billion over the next four years. On average, that is approximately \$3,529 per small business. People were counting on this. I talked a little earlier about how 78% of all new jobs were created by small business. Medium-size businesses create 12.5% of all new jobs, while big business creates less than 10%.

When we talk about their role in economic development, small business plays a key role. We really need to start talking about what kind of economy we want. We want local ownership, we want local jobs, and we want to keep money in our communities.

There's an organization in British Columbia called LOCO BC. It does some great work. It has talked about money recirculating in the

communities. It did some research and found that if \$100 was spent at a business in the local community, \$46 would be recycled in the community versus \$18 at a multinational corporation.

We talk about economic development and doing it differently. If we invest the \$2.2 billion that were promised for small business, that money will circulate 2.6 times, rather than what is spent on giving tax breaks to multinational corporations. This is an opportunity.

Instead the government has chosen to do the reverse. It told small business that it would get a tax break, then failed to deliver on that promise. This, instead of plugging the economic leakage in every riding across the country, and really keeping money in our communities.

Many small business owners were counting on that tax break. They were relying on it to buy new equipment so they could grow, maybe even give someone a raise in their small business. This is an opportunity right now for us to build trust with small business people, show them that Ottawa is listening, and start tackling inequality.

We keep hearing about the middle class, helping to grow the middle class, helping those who are not in the middle class to join the middle class. We saw in Bill C-2 that anyone earning less than \$45,000 would get nothing. We know that a lot of small business people do not earn \$45,000 a year. While we talk about helping those to join the middle class, it is not being delivered by the Liberal government.

I read a quote from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, from the vice-president for B.C. and Alberta. He calls the budget about as close as it can come to a betrayal as is humanly possible. He said that the Canadian Federation of Independent Business was hoping and expecting to see the tax cut, and the fact that the government had put it on hold was extremely disappointing.

This is, again, a tax break that was promised, door to door, city to city, community by community across the country. The government is failing to deliver on this promise, but it is clear that it is doing what Liberal Parties have done in the past. It is about big business and about protecting CEO stock options instead of taking care of the people who have built our communities.

Are the government members in the House willing to go home and ask their small business owners if they are okay that the government is not going to deliver the tax cut promised, 11% to 9%? I would like them to ask them how they feel about that broken promise.

In survey after survey, the number one thing small businesses have asked for is fairness in tax breaks, so they can get the same fairness that big corporations have been getting for decades.

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• (1715)

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to highlight the last point on small business owners. I am working closely with small business owners. I am deeply concerned and working closely with Canada's nearly two million small and medium-sized enterprises across the nation. They want tax fairness, and the government is doing that. We believe in tax fairness, and we believe in tax fairness for all Canadians. It is important that we create the conditions for small business owners to succeed.

This budget would do that. Budget 2016 puts investments into infrastructure, into incubators and accelerators, into the IRA program, \$15 million to Destination Canada. We know the backbone of the tourism industry is small business. We know that small businesses are the job creators.

Does the member agree that small businesses need a long-term plan, that they need a robust economy to succeed, that they need strong customers, so they can sell the good products and services they have to offer? We know they deserve better.

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Speaker, yes, we need healthy communities. We know we need conditions for healthy communities to build a robust economy, things such a national child care plan. This does not deliver enough support for people to have child care. The Liberals take pride in the child tax offer they are making.

However, what I brought forward today is that the Liberals made a promise to Canadians that they were going to cut taxes from 11% to 9% for small business. There is not one member who has said, yes, we apologize for breaking our promise.

It is one thing to talk about building healthy communities, ensuring infrastructure is in place. However, did the Liberals make the promise and planned never to deliver on it, or did they make the promise and they still cannot figure out how to deliver it? I can give them some ideas.

Maybe you could take a look at corporate taxes, increase them by 0.6% and shift that over to cover the \$2.2 billion shortfall for small business. Because that is an easy solution. We need fairness and balance. People are waiting for it. Small business people in our country are ready, and they need that help.

• (1720)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I just want to remind the hon. members to speak through the Speaker, not directly across. This is just a rule that was put in place 150 years ago.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Edmonton Manning.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague for a great speech that speaks for small business and speaks to the concerns of Canadians who own businesses, which are the backbone of our economy and will be the backbone for the future economy.

I would like to comment on the statement made by the hon. Minister of Small Business and Tourism about short term versus long term.

Small businesses need short-term and long-term strategies. Long-term strategies will not give them the survival they need. We may see a shutdown of those many businesses due to a policy the government presented in the budget, which takes away the extra percentage of tax cuts at which small businesses were looking.

Has the hon. member found mention anywhere in the budget about the number of jobs the budget will create?

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Speaker, I agree that we cannot have a healthy economy without healthy business. We need to put forward initiatives that will create jobs and help drive the economy.

I talked earlier about the multiplier effect of spending money locally and keeping money in the hands of small business. This is proven. We need to do everything we can to keep money in our communities.

Rather than approaching this through an omnibus bill, it should be separated out because it is such an important topic. Many members in the House have talked about the failed Liberal promise to deliver the tax cut to small business. This should be separated out so it can be looked at, at committee because there are solutions to ensure we can deliver on this promise, as a House, as members.

I hope the government is listening and government members will go back to their communities and consult with the owners of small businesses.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Gatineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, I would like to thank the people of Gatineau for placing their trust in me and sending me here to represent them. It will always be an honour. Quite humbly, as the member for the most beautiful riding in Canada, I am very pleased to be here to talk about current and future developments in my riding.

Of course, I too would like to acknowledge the situation in Alberta and send my thoughts and prayers to the people of Fort McMurray and surrounding areas.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to talk about the wonderful things in the 2016 budget. After 10 years of a government that apparently had no interest in solving problems, we, a Liberal government, are tackling many problems at once. That is what we promised in our election platform, the throne speech, and the budget speech delivered by my colleague, the Minister of Finance.

We are choosing to invest in the future. We are choosing to invest in huge segments of Canadian society.

First, the measures in this budget will help those who need it most. Second, this is a long-term plan based on wise investment. Third, this is a step forward for huge segments of Canadian society and takes a decisive and visionary approach to problems we will be facing.

I am proud to be part of a government that made growth and a stronger middle class its priority. I am also proud to see a budget that reflects the reality of Gatineau families who are having a hard time making ends meet.

During the election campaign, I knocked on the doors of many families who told me about the countless challenges they are facing: diminishing job security, salaries that are not keeping pace with the cost of living, or exorbitant child care fees. We listened to their concerns and that is why budget 2016 provides direct help to Canadian families through the Canada child benefit.

Under this new benefit, nine out of 10 Canadian families will receive more money than they would under the previous government's system. Canadian families will receive up to \$6,400 per child under six and up to \$5,400 per child aged 6 to 17. Furthermore, this benefit is not taxable at the federal or provincial levels. This is a real change in our country's social policy that will lift hundreds of thousands of children out of poverty.

• (1725)

[*English*]

A strong economy starts with a strong middle class. This government has already taken steps to help the middle class make ends meet. We have already reduced the middle income tax rate from 22% to 20.5%. We will continue by investing in the effective administration and enforcement of tax laws. We will propose actions to improve the integrity of Canada's tax system. These changes will give middle-class Canadians more money on their paycheque and provide a fairer tax system. No Canadian should struggle to get the assistance he or she desperately needs.

Changes to eligibility rules to Canada's EI program will make it easier for new workers and those re-entering the workforce to claim benefits. Changes to Canada's employment insurance program will provide economic security to Canadians when they need it most.

This is a choice. Whether it is investing in the middle class, investing in our parents, parents of children, or investing in Canadians who need the help because of a change in circumstance in their employment status or whatever, these are choices that this government is making. These are choices that we are able to make because Canada is now in the business of looking forward, of attacking the inequalities we have seen sprout up all over the world, and making the kind of choices that will favour the Canadian population well into the future.

[*Translation*]

As far as the future is concerned, I am the proud father of three teenagers, so I am well aware of the challenges that young Canadians are facing. We must invest in the future.

Now more than ever, it is important that post-secondary education remains affordable and accessible, and that young Canadians have access to meaningful work at the beginning of their careers. They should not have to bear the burden of crippling student debt.

Budget 2016 will make post-secondary education more affordable for students from low-income families and will make it easier for them to pay back their student debt. Canada student grants will be enhanced, which will help students cover the costs of their education while keeping student debt loads manageable.

A flat-rate student contribution will be introduced, which will allow students to work and gain valuable labour market experience

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without having to worry about a reduction in their level of financial assistance.

Finally, the loan repayment threshold under the repayment assistance plan will now be \$25,000.

[*English*]

Moreover, budget 2016 proposes to invest an additional \$165.4 million in the youth employment strategy, for a total investment of \$495.4 million. That is almost \$500 million invested in our future, invested in the youth of Canada. The funding would be used to create new green jobs for youth, increase the number of youth who access the skills link program, and increase job opportunities for young Canadians in the heritage sector under the Young Canada Works program.

This funding is in addition to the \$339 million for the Canada summer jobs program, to be delivered over three years, starting in 2016-17.

• (1730)

[*Translation*]

In the riding of Gatineau alone, these investments in the Canada summer jobs program total over \$730,000. Budget 2016 will allow for the creation of 229 student jobs this summer. I therefore thank the government for this wise investment.

We must not forget those who contributed to our country for many years, our seniors. Budget 2016 provides for a 10% increase in the total maximum guaranteed income supplement benefits available, which will help more than 900,000 low-income seniors. That is another measure that will help fight poverty in Canada.

The age of eligibility for old age security and guaranteed income supplement benefits will go from 67 back to 65. The budget also provides for increased funding to support the construction, repair, and adaptation of housing for seniors in order to improve access to safe and affordable housing. These are significant new investments that will improve the quality of life of seniors.

[*English*]

The relationship between the Canadian government and indigenous peoples is in need of renewal. Budget 2016 proposes to invest \$83.4 billion over five years to expand opportunities for indigenous peoples. These are unprecedented investments in education, infrastructure, training, and other programs, and would help to secure a better quality of life for indigenous peoples and build a stronger, more unified, and more prosperous Canada.

[*Translation*]

Lastly, budget 2016 makes historic investments in infrastructure and innovation. Investments totalling over \$120 billion in public transit, green infrastructure and social infrastructure will transform Canadian communities.

Government Orders

My riding, Gatineau, could really use a little help when it comes to infrastructure. As I have explained in the past, Gatineau's population grew by nearly 10% from 2005 to 2011. With growth comes certain challenges. Gatineau estimates its infrastructure needs at \$1.3 billion. This deficit is undermining our growth and our quality of life. Gatineau needs support for basic infrastructure, such as water and sewer systems, public transit, and roads.

I am confident that Gatineau will get its fair share, thanks to our co-operative efforts and the agreement that now exists between our municipal and provincial partners regarding public transit.

In closing, I am confident that the Liberal government's budget is the best plan to help the people of Gatineau, as well as all Canadians.

[English]

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Madam Speaker, it seems that the government is in the money printing business. The Liberals cannot give all these goodies to everyone. They cannot satisfy everyone. It is too early to be buying votes. We need investment. This is not an investment. This is a buying votes strategy.

Investment, by any business means, is not like this. Investments take money. There is a plan on how to pay it back, and to tell Canadians truthfully how many jobs are to be created out of it.

Money does not grow on trees. It is an irresponsible act. The government must stop trying to take advantage of people or insulting the intelligence of people across Canada.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Madam Speaker, the member talks about investment. Does he know what was not an investment? It was the \$150 billion, \$160 billion, \$170 billion, \$180 billion that was borrowed over the close to 10 years prior to this government being elected. It gave us the anaemic economic growth that we have inherited, the infrastructure deficit, such as the \$1.3 billion infrastructure deficit that my community faces, and so many communities across this country face.

There was a lack of economic result, and the kind of unemployment and so on, that got this country to the point where it needs the kinds of strategic investments that I outlined in my speech. These are investments in our human resources, our youth, our communities, our infrastructure, in the environment, and in aboriginal peoples.

Those are investments, and those are things that will pay off.

• (1735)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, I was a bit worried about my Liberal colleague there for a moment. It sounded like he was in an auction about the debts they were running: \$150 billion, \$160 billion. I was getting terrified because the Liberals are kind of doing that right now. It will be a \$10-billion deficit, or maybe \$20 billion, \$30 billion. It is like the worst kind of auction, after 10 years of these guys running up massive debts that have left us with a weak economy.

My question is for my friend. Liberals seem somehow shocked in the House when we are asking them about their promise to cut the small business tax. They somehow feel offended that we would dare

hold this up. They have all of these other answers, so the question will again be simple for them.

Budgets are always about making choices. It is still about making choices. The Liberals chose to keep a \$750-million tax loophole for stock options for CEOs. I do not know about the rest of the middle class in Canada, but most of my friends who are middle class do not get paid in stock options.

The Liberals chose to keep that stock option loophole for CEOs, yet said to small businesses that they choose not to give them the \$2 billion over four years that they promised them. They thought that there were better uses for the money, whatever that happens to be.

It is a simple question. Did the Liberals sit down and say that this is not worth it, that this is a bad idea? Was cutting the small business tax rate in Canada a bad idea and they chose not to do it, yes or no?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Madam Speaker, I know it was hard from outside this place, and probably from inside this place, to keep track of Conservative borrowing over the years, so the member will forgive me for not being able to peg it.

Indeed, we have outlined a very solid plan to grow this economy, to grow the ability for Canadian consumers to have confidence in the economy, to help grow our small businesses, and to innovate.

I find it particularly ironic that the member, in the same breath, asks about a tool that venture capital companies use to ask employees to invest to get equity and growth, so we can have new and innovative companies in our economy that will create jobs, create the kinds of jobs that Canada will need in the future. It seems that he would have us amputate that very necessary tool for companies to use as they grow and incubate. The Ottawa-Gatineau area is one of Canada's high-tech hubs, so it is a particularly important place.

More generally, we propose to help Canadian consumers, help the Canadian middle class. Small businesses are telling us that is what will help them succeed into the future.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in this place on behalf of the people of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke to speak to Bill C-15, an act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 22, 2016, and other measures.

Government Orders

On behalf of the over 3,000 CNL employees in the upper Ottawa Valley, their families, and the communities they live in, as well as the small businesses that rely upon the economic activity that happens when those employees spend locally, I would like to thank the Minister of Natural Resources for the science-based decision that was made in announcing an \$800-million investment over five years in the Canadian nuclear industry, specifically, in the ongoing refurbishment and modernization of the capital assets at the Chalk River location of Canadian Nuclear Laboratories.

While I would like to be hopeful about the construction of a new version of Canada's success story, and I am referring, of course, to the NRU, Canada's nuclear research reactor, the longest successfully operating research reactor in the world, I understand that with this \$800-million announcement Canadians will see more infrastructure construction like the \$60-million hydrogen lab our Conservative government built.

What was most encouraging when I read the Minister of Natural Resources's comments with the \$800-million announcement was the support for all the work our Conservative government did in building a new business model for the nuclear industry in Canada.

Canadians can see the \$800 million being invested over five years as an expression of confidence in the future of the nuclear industry in Canada. I am referring to the government-owned privately managed GOCO model that has currently been in place since September 2015 at Chalk River Laboratories' site at Chalk River.

When our government first came to power, there were two immediate challenges that directly affected the constituents of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke: the decade of darkness of underfunding our military, which we witnessed every day at Garrison Petawawa, and the neglect of Canada's research assets at our world-class nuclear research facility in Chalk River.

I am appreciative of the employees at Chalk River who responded positively to my call to create a grassroots bottom-up effort to provide a new vision for Canada's nuclear industry. The CREATE committee issued a report that I had the privilege of personally presenting to guide our deliberations to support the 50,000 workers in Ontario who work in Canada's nuclear industry.

As thoughtful Canadians who are informed about the environment understand, nuclear plays an important role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions as being a reliable economic way to generate electricity without producing greenhouse gas emissions. Today, nuclear accounts for 62% of the electricity generated in the province of Ontario. Nuclear is the only bright spot in an otherwise failing and corrupt Ontario energy policy.

The fear among many of my constituents was that with a Liberal budget Canada's nuclear industry would return to the decade of darkness they experienced under Paul Martin. AECL operated for years without a budget from the government.

It is publicly known that a number of the political refugees from the corrupt government of Kathleen Wynne in Toronto have fled to hide in government offices in Ottawa. These include environmental extremists like the Prime Minister's principal secretary, who played the same role for Dalton McGuinty to earn the nickname of Rasputin from the Ottawa press as an author of the Green Energy Act. Their

left-wing, ideological policy has gutted the manufacturing sector in Ontario with the highest electricity prices in North America. The carbon tax on electricity is called a delivery charge on hydro customers' bill statements in Ontario.

Environmental extremists like the principal secretary choose to deny science-based facts about clean, greenhouse-gas free nuclear-generated electricity. The European experience has shown massive job losses for every so-called green job with no tangible benefit to the environment. Still the Liberals push their extreme left-wing agenda on unsuspecting Canadians.

What was surprising about the April 11, 2016, \$800-million announcement was that it was not in the federal budget. There was silence from the Minister of Finance on budget day. It was not in the main estimates. Canadians learned about the \$800 million in a planted question by a government member, which was asked in a parliamentary committee. What is that all about?

• (1740)

Canadians can only assume that the \$800 million over five years is accounted for in the government infrastructure line of public spending. I was told it was an accounting trick, sort of like when one cuts \$3.7 billion in military capital spending and pretends it is not a cut. The fact is that Canadians do not know.

This goes back to the problem of transparency, which has become a real and growing problem with the government. According to the former non-partisan parliamentary budget officer Kevin Page, the budget is heavy on spending programs for government consumption and lacking in details, including when the federal budget would return to balance, which is how the Conservative government left the nation's finances. "It could be better in transparency. It's kind of a budget without a fiscal plan", according to Page. "I think there's going to be pressure to raise taxes with this kind of spending in the budget", he said.

The budget office went on to observe this was the least transparent budget, certainly when compared to Conservative budgets or even the previous Paul Martin budgets. As an example of that lack of transparency, the bank recapitalization bail-in scheme being proposed on page 223 of the federal budget should have seniors worried. It would allow the government to convert a bank's eligible long-term debt into common shares in order to recapitalize the bank. In addition to being concerned about bank deposits, any retirement savings that included bank shares would be exposed also.

Canadian chartered banks would be expected to lend some of the money required to cover the projected \$30-billion annual deficits announced in the March 22 federal budget. In addition to financing the federal spending spree, Canada's banks are holding billions of dollars of debts from the oil sands. The depressed price of oil has already caused tens of thousands of jobs to be lost. Internationally, there are at least five countries teetering on insolvency due to low oil prices.

Government Orders

There is a lack of confidence that started the day after the federal election. According to Statistics Canada, since the 2015 federal election, billions of dollars have been transferred out of the country by Canadian investors, the largest recorded flight of capital since records began to be kept. Maybe we will find some of that money in Panama or on one of the Caribbean islands so favoured by the Liberal inner circle. It would appear well-connected insiders got all their cash out in time.

Canada, in contrast with other countries that have seen central banks become net buyers of gold since 2010, has sold off all its official gold holdings. The Bank of Canada, on February 23, 2016, showed gold reserves at zero. Canada now stands as the only G7 nation that does not hold at least 100 tonnes of gold in its official reserves. Out of 188 member countries of the International Monetary Fund, 100 countries hold gold as part of their monetary assets. Canada is now among the 88 countries that have no gold, countries such as Angola, Belize, and Tonga.

As the member of Parliament for Garrison Petawawa, I share the pride we all feel when we see our soldiers in action. Our women and men in uniform put their lives on the line every day for us. We need to ensure that members of the Canadian Armed Forces have the tools, training, and equipment they need whenever we require them to go into harm's way. It is therefore very disturbing to see the Liberal government reallocating, postponing, or cutting \$3.7 billion over the next five years for necessary equipment procurement.

Canadians remember what happened the last time a Liberal government interfered in equipment acquisition processes. In Afghanistan, the casualties would have been lower had the EH-101 contract not been cancelled. We do not know what tomorrow will bring. It is a dangerous world. We need to be prepared. Large-scale purchases are not a simple process. We need to ensure funding is available, not taken away. Is Canada preparing for financial disaster? Are savings protected? Those are the questions being asked of this first budget since the last federal election.

Not since the disastrous budget of former finance minister Allan J. MacEachen, when five-year mortgage rates spiked to over 21%, have Canadians been more apprehensive about their own personal financial security. It has to be a Canadian record for breaking campaign promises. The first budget deficit is not \$10 billion each of the first three years of the mandate, as promised; it has jumped to \$30 billion each of the first three years, with no plan to get out of debt.

• (1745)

[*Translation*]

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will try to lead her back to the matter we are discussing today.

She seems to be ignoring the fact that it was her government that sold Atomic Energy of Canada Limited at a loss. I really do not know what she is talking about. It really makes no sense whatsoever. At least the other Conservatives stay on topic when falsely criticizing us and ignoring the Conservative deficit that we inherited and that we have still not eliminated, as we have all the other times that the Conservatives left us a deficit.

Despite all these debts, they did not make the investments needed to improve our regions. I would like to know whether my colleague is aware of the fact that the Conservatives have not managed to eliminate a deficit since the 19th century, and that they have never left a surplus even once upon ceding power, whereas all Liberal prime ministers who tabled a budget have managed to balance at least one.

Therefore, historically, which party has been able to manage national budgets, stimulate economic growth, help the middle class, and address the infrastructure deficit?

[*English*]

The only real wealth the Conservatives left us is the rather rich description of their legacy.

• (1750)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Madam Speaker, I can well understand why the member is confused. There is so much missing out of the 2016 budget that it is difficult to track down. There is a lack of transparency. The Liberals do not know the difference between transparency and being invisible. In fact, most of the new spending in the federal budget has very little or anything to do with economic growth or promoting it. Any spending on infrastructure is a holdover from Conservative budgets.

It is a budget intended to buy votes with the money of Canadians based on election promises in 2016, promises that were made to be broken by the Liberal government.

To be clear, there is a debt, and there is debt. However, the Conservatives left the Canadian treasury with a surplus of several billion dollars. No amount of saying otherwise in this chamber will change that fact.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am not sure where to start. There was a moment in the member's speech, specifically the aspect that was just talked about, with respect to governments running debt, where listening to the Conservatives talk about debt was like listening to an arsonist lecture us on fire safety. The amount of debt that the Conservatives mounted on top of this country under their watch was \$160 billion. They then come in and properly lecture, I suppose, the Liberals because the Conservatives, having run so much debt, are well-practised at it and know what bad debt looks like. They would be authorities on what the Liberals are now doing, so perhaps that is a healthy criticism.

My question for my friend is this. She has this conspiracy scheme put together that the plight of the world is due, in her words, to "extreme environmentalism", which tries to do such radical things as bring in the polluter-pay principle and notions that we should have a cleaner, greener economy, which all of the studies from Europe, the United States, and Canada show are more productive, less wasteful, and bring about more employment, not less. Therefore, I am wondering how she is able to square that particularly strange circle she has drawn to suggest that having a less polluting economy is somehow bad for Canadians and our economy.

Government Orders

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Madam Speaker, certainly with respect to the economy and the Green Energy Act that we have in Ontario, blissfully, the member is from a province that has not experienced what we have in Ontario, such as putting up wind turbine farms and generating more electricity than Ontario can possibly use, to the point where it is selling it to the United States at a discounted cost. It is costing Ontario consumers more to generate electricity that is provided to our competitors at a lower cost.

I am very proud that when we experienced the economic world financial distress, the worst economic depression since the Great Depression, our government forged ahead, and by the time the 2015 election came we were in a surplus situation. Even by the end of the financial year, with all of the billions that were spent by the new government after election day, we still remained in a surplus.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Pickering—Uxbridge, Lib.): Madam Speaker, let me also offer, as my colleagues have, my thoughts and prayers for the residents and community of Fort McMurray, Alberta.

It is an honour to rise in this House today to speak on our government's first budget bill, Bill C-15, on behalf of my community of Pickering Uxbridge.

I am very proud to support budget 2016, because this is a budget that is making investments in Canada and Canadians. The investments outlined in budget 2016 focus on growing the economy and ensuring that we are making decisions that not only help Canadians in the short and medium term, but with a focus on also securing long-term growth for future generations.

After 10 years of working on budgets at the municipal level, I can proudly say that, not only is this a budget for middle class and working Canadians, it is a budget that finally provides support for cities and towns across the country.

Our immediate infrastructure investment of \$11.9 billion will build roads, improve waste water facilities, and ensure that municipalities are ready to withstand the new challenges that climate change present. These investments will create tens of thousands of jobs, boost the economy, and send a strong message to municipalities that after a decade of having their issues and priorities ignored, they have a strong partner in this federal government.

Budget 2016 delivers on so many areas that will help our communities and residents. As a community with a high number of young families, the new Canada child benefit will help thousands of my constituents back home, and millions of Canadians across the country, with the high and rising costs of raising a family. The CCB will provide more money. It is tax-free and income-based. This is important because it means more money for families that really need the help.

Budget 2016 will also invest in social infrastructure projects, which include child care centres that will improve access to high-quality child care spaces for Canadians. In my region, this investment is critical, as we have thousands of residents on waiting lists for child care. Investments in this type of infrastructure is long overdue.

Budget 2016 is also better at weaving rural Canada into our shared economy. Our government is making a \$500-million investment to

bring in high-speed Internet to rural communities like Uxbridge and north Pickering.

We know that in our ever globalized economy, reliable Internet service is critical to every business, and that includes farming. A broken piece of equipment, like an alternator or a propeller shaft, could shut down production and cause economic losses. However, with reliable, high-speed Internet access, those losses can be minimized, as acquiring that new part could be as easy as one click away.

A stable Internet connection is needed not only for businesses in our rural communities, but it is critical to our everyday lives, from paying bills online to students doing homework assignments, or someone applying for a new job. We often take for granted how much our daily lives rely on the Internet. For rural communities, this lack of a reliable connection can mean missed business opportunities or time away from family.

As a member of the Standing Committee on Finance, we heard testimony last week from representatives of KPMG, as well as Commissioner Treusch of the Canada Revenue Agency, in regard to the Isle of Man tax avoidance scheme. I am proud that budget 2016 is making a historic investment, of over \$440 million, to the CRA to combat such tax evasion and avoidance schemes. Testimony last week in committee showed why that investment is so important.

During Mr. Treusch's testimony, while referring to the previous decade under the last government, he stated that "Obviously, we have come through a period of considerable fiscal restraint, but during that period, we redeployed as best we could".

This period of considerable restraint is highlighted in a November 16, 2012 press release from the Treasury Board, which said that nearly 3,000 jobs were eliminated under the former government. In the 2013 budget, there was \$259 million, over five years, of cuts from the CRA.

I am sure we have all heard the horror stories from constituents who needed some questions answered but had to wait months for a response. It is no wonder that the service levels suffered, with such massive cuts. This also affected the CRA's ability to go after tax avoidance schemes, like the Isle of Man program offered by KPMG.

● (1755)

In October 2010, an internal audit by Canada Revenue Agency expressed concerns that:

Cases that could potentially represent significant criminal non-compliance can be rejected by a specific TSO enforcement group because of limited resources.... offices are choosing smaller cases of a lower dollar value that do not necessarily represent the greatest risk.... This supports the observations by some program staff that offices are choosing smaller cases that represent "quick hits".

Government Orders

I believe these budget pressures from the previous government led to an unfair enforcement system, where Canadians owing money who happened to be wealthy and could afford accountants and lawyers were less likely to be pursued than those Canadians who owed much smaller amounts but were viewed as easy to collect from because they could not hire lawyers or professionals to work on their behalf with CRA. I think we can all agree on both sides of this House that every Canadian needs to pay his or her fair share in taxes, and that the choices CRA makes in enforcing these collections should not be determined by who can pay the litigator. However, the CRA can only operate in a fair manner if it has the tools and resources to do so. This is why I fully support the investment in budget 2016 that would provide these tools and resources to the CRA.

Speaking about this investment, Commissioner Treusch stated:

The new budget gives us an enormous reinvestment that will be a return for the Crown and will...move us forward in addressing the concern that I know Canadians have...

After all, the unpaid taxes that are owed are a loss to all Canadians, as it means lost revenue to invest in things that would strengthen our economy, like infrastructure and transit improvements, as well as innovative health care research.

Budget 2016 would also ensure that seniors are able to retire with financial security. This includes providing increased benefits that would allow more seniors in Pickering and Uxbridge to have a dignified, comfortable, and secure retirement. This budget would follow through on a number of commitments we made to seniors during the last election. We promised to roll back the age at which seniors can access their OAS and GIS from 67 to 65, and we have delivered on that pledge. Our government also recognized the importance of ensuring seniors have access to high-quality affordable housing. That is why we would boost funds for construction, repair, and adaptation of affordable housing for seniors across the country. Canadians work hard their entire lives with the expectation that they will retire in comfort and security. I am proud to say that budget 2016 would make that goal a reality for thousands more seniors.

Although my riding of Pickering—Uxbridge does not have a large indigenous population, the investments in budget 2016 regarding this issue are important to all communities. We are all aware of the living conditions some of our indigenous populations face, and it is outrageous that some communities do not have access to clean drinking water. I am proud that this budget would invest \$2.2 billion in clean-water infrastructure to finally end on-reserve boil-water advisories. This is on top of other investments, including \$2.6 billion that would boost first nations K-12 education, and \$40 million to ensure that an inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women and children is as comprehensive and thorough as possible.

I recognize that this budget would not fix all the wrongs of the past, but as a parliamentarian and as a Canadian, I am proud that we have a Prime Minister who is deeply committed to ensuring a better future for indigenous peoples and fostering better relationships, nation to nation. To be part of a government focused on bettering the lives of our indigenous populations is extremely meaningful to me. Budget 2016 and, by extension, Bill C-15 would fulfill the

commitments we made to Canadians. This is why I am so proud to rise today in this House on behalf of my constituents to lend it my support.

● (1800)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The government House leader is rising on a point of order.

* * *

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2016, NO. 1

BILL C-15—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

I know colleagues were impressed with my colleague from Pickering—Uxbridge's speech and will want to make positive comments and ask questions. However, before we get to that I would like to advise that an agreement could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Orders 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to the second reading stage of Bill C-15, an act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 22, 2016 and other measures.

Under the provisions of Standing Order 78(3), I give notice that a minister of the crown will propose at the next sitting a motion to allot a specific number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of proceedings at the said stage.

* * *

● (1805)

PUBLIC SERVICE LABOUR RELATIONS ACT

BILL C-7—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, an agreement could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Orders 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to the report stage and third reading of Bill C-7, an act to amend the Public Service Labour Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board Act and other acts and to provide for certain other measures.

Under the provisions of Standing Order 78(3), I give notice that a minister of the crown will propose at the next sitting a motion to allot a specific number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of proceedings at the said stages.

* * *

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to inform the House that because we could not arrive at a conclusion to Bill C-15, the supply day designated for tomorrow, Tuesday, May 10, unfortunately has to be redesignated to Friday, May 13.

*Government Orders***BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2016, NO. 1**

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-15, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 22, 2016 and other measures, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to clear up something about the CRA. The biggest drop and the lowest number of CRA employees in the last 15 years came under the Liberal government of Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin many years back. They slashed it 24% in the last two years of their mandate.

The budget is full of broken promises with the biggest one being a promise of \$3 billion added for at-home health care, which was regurgitated as \$3 billion for palliative care. This came up during the debate that ended in closure for the assisted suicide legislation.

Where is this money? The Liberals promised it in the election. They promised it during the debate on assisted dying. Could the member please tell me where this money is?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Madam Speaker, this government is doing things differently than the previous government in that we work with the provinces and we respect their jurisdiction.

Our minister has been clear—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Madam Speaker, if members are interested in the answer I am providing it.

Our minister has been clear that she is working with the provinces to uphold the health accord and make improvements. Our government is committed to that. It is important to all Canadians.

Unlike the previous government, we do not impose our will on other jurisdictions. We work with people.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind individuals here in the House that if they want to ask a question to please stand up as opposed to yelling the questions or yelling across the way.

The hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, never accuse Liberals of not having any sense of irony. I just heard my friend say that the Liberals are proud that they never impose their will just minutes after their House leader stood in his place to shut down debate, not on one bill but on two bills that have been introduced. He suggested that because opposition House leaders could not get along he was going to punish the Conservatives with one of their opposition days and stick it on a Friday, which is a short day. No, the Liberals do not impose their will.

What is more ironic is that when the House leader for the Liberals stood up to do this, the Liberals actually cheered and laughed. They found it funny that they were shutting down debate on Bill C-15 and Bill C-7, which precludes future negotiations with the RCMP allowing RCMP members to talk about things like sexual harassment. That is what the Liberals just did.

With respect to this procedure that we just saw introduced, the member said she was proud to be part of a government that at just this moment invoked a form of closure that will come tomorrow. Is she proud of this? That is exactly what the Liberals campaigned against seven months ago when the Conservatives were doing it.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Madam Speaker, very clearly, I am proud of my government. In fact, we were elected in October to deliver legislation. If my hon. colleagues wish to hold up the government and make every effort to not work with us when it comes to the appropriate amount of time for debate, at the end of the day, we were elected to bring forward legislation, and that is exactly what we intend to do.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Once again, I would just ask members to please respect others who are speaking.

I have time for a very brief question. The hon. member for London North Centre.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, on the matter of pride, I am extremely proud to have a colleague who has served in local government and has served her community proudly.

I would ask my hon. colleague if she could comment on infrastructure and the investments our government is making in infrastructure, and how they will help municipalities.

• (1810)

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Madam Speaker, at the end of the day, there is only one taxpayer. By investing in infrastructure, that is going to help municipalities, and the taxpayers will pay lower taxes. This will benefit small businesses and the community at large.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Madam Speaker, six or seven months ago, we were all busy campaigning, and the Liberal candidates were visiting all of the ridings with suitcases full of promises. Then, in the throne speech, they tried to give us what seemed like a wide range of measures.

In the budget, the next step, they started being more specific and they realized that they would likely be unable to keep all of their promises or even most of them. As a result, today, we find ourselves dealing with what is quite frankly a rather sad budget implementation bill. What makes the whole situation even sadder is that we have just learned, this minute, that time allocation will once again be imposed on the House. I am having an increasingly difficult time distinguishing between the Conservatives and the Liberals. Good God. If only we could go back to the polls, but I know that that is not going to happen any time soon. In the meantime, I would like to make a few comments about this budget implementation bill.

Not everything about the budget implementation bill is bad. The Liberals are taking the Conservatives' usual approach, and so once again I am having a hard time distinguishing between them. The Liberals introduced an omnibus bill that forces us to vote either yes or no. There is not really any other name for this sort of bill. I would like to give an example of one of the dilemmas I am facing, which will ultimately force me to vote against this bill.

Government Orders

Let us talk about employment insurance, for example. I fully support getting rid of the old 910-hour eligibility requirement for new workers eligible for employment insurance benefits. However, considering that fewer than four out of 10 workers who have contributed to the plan end up being eligible when disaster strikes, such an insubstantial measure is just not enough. I am also disappointed that there is nothing in the budget, the implementation bill, or even the Liberal promises about the universal 360-hour threshold that all stakeholders have called for. The Liberals seem to be taking a piecemeal approach by scattering bits of funding here and there to give people the impression that everyone is going to be happy. Most likely, nobody will be happy.

Seniors are a particularly important segment of the population in Trois-Rivières because the proportion of people over the age of 65 there is significantly higher than in Quebec ridings as a whole. When it comes to seniors, I can say that enhancing the guaranteed income supplement has my full support. However, strangely, even though this measure should be a priority, it will only come into effect on July 1 of next year, which is a bit late considering that seniors' needs have been pressing for quite some time now.

If the government truly believes that the solution is to improve the guaranteed income supplement, restore the age of eligibility for old age security to 65 from 67, and maintain income splitting for seniors, then it must also work with the provinces to improve the Quebec pension plan and the Canada pension plan.

According to a recent Broadbent Institute study, the programs designed to provide some relief for vulnerable seniors are woefully inadequate. To combat marginalization and poverty among single seniors, the guaranteed income supplement needs to be increased by more than 10%.

As in many regions in Quebec, the populations in Mauricie and Trois-Rivières are aging. According to a projection by the City of Trois-Rivières, by 2031, the number of seniors will increase by 52.2%, which means that there will be 23,469 people aged 65 and over. The median income, not the average income, of seniors in Trois-Rivières is estimated at \$18,702. Needless to say, the tax cuts promised and implemented by the Liberal government will do nothing for them. Statistics aside, during my term, I came to meet with hundreds of seniors and I witnessed for myself how vulnerable many of them are.

• (1815)

We could also talk about the promise made regarding Canada Post, which was fulfilled late or only partially fulfilled. Postal service was supposed to be restored in certain areas that were considered among the most important ones. All of that is on hold, waiting for the findings of a task force that was just created.

Once again, not only did a great deal of time pass after the election campaign before the promise was kept, but the promise itself was watered down. Given the Machiavellian choices the Liberals want to impose on us, there can be only one clear answer when the time comes to vote: a resounding no.

Furthermore, except for a few miserly measures, this budget does nothing to help the pyrrhotite victims or Canadian workers, and it

will hurt our regional economies, especially in the Trois-Rivières area.

Although I applauded the appointment of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance as the government spokesperson for the pyrrhotite file, I must admit that the disappointment I feel today is just as deep as that of the victims. Let us be clear: the final offer is \$10 million a year for three years.

During the election campaign, the Prime Minister, a candidate at the time, told us that the Liberals understood the human and financial plight of Mauricie families, who account for roughly 4,000 homes. He later said that the Liberals' final offer was \$10 million a year for three years, for a total of \$30 million. We might hope to support approximately 75 victims a year, or 225 by the end of the term. What about the thousands of others? The answer is simple: the government is shirking its responsibility.

Clearly the Liberals are truly out of touch with the human and financial distress that the families in Mauricie are experiencing daily. For five years, the NDP has been calling on the federal government to acknowledge its share of responsibility, and after four and a half years of categorical refusal by the Conservatives, the Liberals are going a step further and contradicting themselves.

Here are some examples that are very clear and very easy to understand. The Liberal member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain recently said that pyrrhotite was a provincial concern. We have heard that one before.

However, a few weeks after the election, he said the exact opposite. I quote: “We will help the victims because human misery knows no borders or jurisdictions.”

How can we trust a politician who changes his mind like he changes his clothes? Therefore, I will continue to point out the contradictions in the positions of the Liberal member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain and his government.

SMEs are the economic heart of all of Canada's regions, including the Trois-Rivières and Quebec City areas. After promising SMEs that they would reduce their tax rate, the Liberals are breaking their promise. However, this government is keeping its costly and unnecessary subsidies for its friends, the big banks and major corporations.

Is the Liberals' disdain for SMEs really surprising? After stating that small businesses are tax shelters for the wealthiest Canadians who want to pay less taxes, the Prime Minister could also have added that that also holds true for large corporations such as Bionest in my region, which approved payments to a shareholder through a tax haven.

The current Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, who sat on Bionest's board of directors, approved these legal but, to say the least, questionable practices. There is more to come.

In my region, SMEs are vital to job creation. I would have liked to talk about a small business in my riding, Innovations Voltflex. Unfortunately, I do not have enough time left to speak to such a broad topic.

•(1820)

I hope to have the opportunity to continue during questions and answers.

[English]

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise to take this moment to talk about small businesses.

I hear a lot of points being raised when it comes to our job creators. We know that we support our small and medium-sized business owners.

Do the investments in budget 2016, the \$11.9 billion in infrastructure that we are hearing about, actually support and benefit our small business owners? The \$500 million in broadband, for rural and remote areas, to allow them to be competitive; the \$800 million for innovation; the \$50 million to the industrial research assistance program; the \$50 million to Destination Canada; and the list goes on: do these investments support our small and medium-sized businesses?

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Madam Speaker, the fact that Internet infrastructure is included in the measures to help SMEs shows how little the government understands their immediate needs. Of course that is important, but it will not directly help SMEs balance their budgets. I would also like to quickly mention that a study conducted by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business indicated that one-third of small business owners earn less than \$33,000 a year. That means that even the tax cuts and other measures for the middle class will not affect small business owners and will not support that industry.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Trois-Rivières for his excellent speech. He still had more to say, but he was not able to do so.

Every budget is a matter of choice. I would like to talk about one of the choices that the Liberals did not make, and that is the choice to seriously address the problem of tax evasion and tax havens. We have a Liberal government that regularly pats itself on the back in the House by saying that it is investing money in the Canada Revenue Agency to uncover fraud.

What the Liberal government never says, however, is that all the bilateral agreements that Canada has with tax havens are still in effect. That means that most tax avoidance and tax evasion is not committed by fraudsters but by people who are backed by laws and protected by the Liberal government.

Does my colleague think that the government should seriously tackle this problem and put an end to the bilateral agreements that Canada has with tax havens?

Mr. Robert Aubin: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie for his extremely relevant question, which essentially answered itself. The answer is in the question, but if I could take it one step further, I would bet that we will soon hear the government telling us that this is a virtually impossible situation,

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that we need to look at it from an international perspective, and that every country would have to be on the same page.

For every country to agree, we need a leader, and we do not seem to have found one yet.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to know whether the member for Trois-Rivières, who spoke about the importance of keeping promises, which I am proud to tell him is what we are doing, still agrees with his party's position that governments should not run deficits and that austerity is the solution to our economic problems.

NDP members talk about their ideal and about their idealistic promises, which are not right, left, or forward. Their promises are nothing but dreams and symbolic gestures, but at the end of the day, they promised austerity, which does not work. It involves telling the most vulnerable that they must do more with less and that they must not invest. They are talking about what they will do in five or ten years and hope that their policies will have perhaps helped us.

Does the member still stand by his promise of austerity, or is that a broken NDP promise?

•(1825)

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

I understand where he is coming from because, during his election campaign, he had to focus on his platform and never read ours. We never said anything about austerity. We talked about balancing the budget for one very good reason that he forgot to mention, unfortunately: in the NDP's budget, our revenue column included new revenue sources that the Liberal government would never dare contemplate, such as getting big corporations to pay their fair share of taxes.

Our plan was to raise taxes on big corporations by a few points, which would have covered the cost of our promises.

[English]

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise in the House today in support of Bill C-15, an act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 22, 2016 and other measures.

The much-needed budget 2016 is an essential step to growing the middle class and revitalizing the Canadian economy. Budget 2016 has received positive responses from my constituents.

I have received some questions, and I will address these to begin.

The first measure I will be speaking to is the elimination of the children's arts tax credit and child fitness tax credit. These tax credits only benefit families who can afford to enrol their children in arts and fitness programs. It is that simple. This is not the case for many Canadians, including many of those in my constituency. When families do not have money, the tax credit does not matter. We are committed to taking an approach that will help working families. The cost of raising a family was the top issue during the campaign, and it continues to be the top priority in my riding. The bill offers true help to nine out of 10 families.

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I will now speak to some of the positive elements of the bill that resonate with my constituents. The Canada child benefit is one of those key positive pieces of the budget. It is a new measure that will begin in July 2016 and will provide simpler, tax-free monthly financial benefits to eligible families. The Canada child benefit will help those who cannot afford to put their children in extracurricular programs. It will give them the option of enrolling the children in programs that would otherwise be financially out of reach. Families who could not enrol their children in arts and fitness programs will now have that chance.

Our government's measures for families with children, combined with the middle-class tax cut, will provide these families with additional net after-tax benefits of approximately \$14 billion during the 2015-16 to 2020-21 period. The Canada child benefit will replace existing federal child benefits to provide Canadian families with the additional help that is required with the high cost of raising children. The Canada child benefit will provide a maximum benefit of up to \$6,400 per child under the age of six, and up to \$5,400 per child aged six through 17, for families who need it the most.

High-income earners will have their assistance reduced, even eliminated. This is good public policy. Approximately nine out of 10 families will receive more under the Canada child benefit than under the current system of child benefits. Ultimately, about 3.5 million families will benefit from this new Canada child benefit, with an average increase of approximately \$2,300 annually.

As stated by Rob Carrick of *The Globe and Mail*, "The new Canada Child Benefit is a solid win over existing programs in both dollar terms and ease of use. The money is tax-free, so it won't have to be accounted for when completing your income tax return every year." That is good news.

In addition, the Canada child benefit will help raise nearly 300,000 children out of poverty by 2017. However, it does not end there. Budget 2016 will continue to support poverty reduction in future years. As stated by Anita Khanna, the national coordinator of Campaign 2000, "This is a historic step forward in the battle against child poverty in Canada that is long overdue and long called-for by Campaign 2000 and other groups."

In line with providing support for the majority of Canadians, budget 2016 proposes to eliminate the income-splitting credit for families. This initiative provides a better solution for helping those who need it the most. We learned during the campaign that many couples did not benefit from this initiative. Our programs are more equitable, and I must note that income splitting for seniors remains.

The second aspect of budget 2016 that I will be speaking to is the introduction of the school supplies tax credit. Educators, often at their own expense, purchase supplies for the benefit of our children, so it is only fair that they are compensated for it. Budget 2016 introduces a 15% refundable income tax credit that will apply on up to \$1,000 of eligible supplies. Teachers and early childhood educators will be able to use this credit for the purchase of eligible supplies for use in a school or a regulated child care facility for the purpose of teaching or otherwise enhancing students learning in the classroom or learning environment. This initiative will provide a benefit of about \$140 million over a five-year period.

● (1830)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I regret that I have to cut your debate short at this point, but you will have a little over five minutes when the issue is brought back before the House for debate.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[English]

INNOVATION, SCIENCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Madam Speaker, earlier this year in question period, I asked the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development to launch an inquiry into Ontario electricity rates. I asked this question in the context of the acquisition by the recently privatized Ontario Hydro monopoly, now called Hydro One, of a competitor and whether the public interest was being served by having the competition bureau review this purchase behind closed doors.

My supplementary question, which was not acknowledged, is what I am looking for a response to today.

I, along with all Canadians, am quite willing to give the Competition Bureau time to complete its work, if it has not really done so, and report its findings. If that review does not include an analysis of what that purchase would do to the constantly rising cost of electricity in Ontario, Canadians have a right to question the Competition Bureau.

As this purchase will, if it has not already, trigger a hydro rate increase that consumers and industry cannot afford, I requested a federal inquiry into the Ontario hydro crisis, a request the government chose to ignore.

The government promised to be open and transparent, an election promise that was promptly broken with its first budget.

The decision to ignore Ontario residents who are suffering from the highest electricity rates in North America by ignoring this request is another broken promise from a government that took power with less than 40% of Canadians voting for it.

As a minister whose portfolio includes economic development, the minister needs to understand the importance of the price of electricity is a federal issue. The loss of 350,000 good, well-paying middle-class jobs in the manufacturing sector in Ontario because of the high electricity rate policy of the Liberal government of Toronto is a federal issue.

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The rise of energy poverty in the province of Ontario, when seniors, students, and people on fixed incomes must spend a greater and greater percentage of their savings and income on electricity costs, people in Ontario being faced with the decision of heat or eat, is a federal issue.

When a legal NAFTA challenge is issued against the practices of the Ontario regulated electricity monopoly for hundreds of millions of dollars for corruption in wind turbine contracting policy, and it is the federal taxpayer who is expected to pay the penalty, it is a federal issue.

When yet another criminal investigation is launched by the Ontario Provincial Police into the energy policy of the Toronto Liberal Party, it is a federal issue.

When the chief executive officer of Fiat Chrysler Automobiles, one of the largest car and truck manufacturing companies in the world, states that Ontario's hydro costs mean that Canada is losing opportunities for multi-billion-dollar auto investments and the good, well-paying jobs that come with that private sector investment, it is a federal issue.

There is no passing the buck off to the Province of Ontario on this issue. The high cost of doing business in Ontario is a federal issue.

Of the many problems constituents bring to my attention, the one that brings the most complaints is the out-of-control cost of electricity. The definition of "energy poverty" is when a household is spending 10% or more of its disposable income on energy costs. For too many households, this has now become a reality, with the latest increase in hydro rates coming just this past week.

With the increase effective May 1, 2016, and the prior one of November 1, 2015, the added cost is \$400 million annually to residential taxpayers' bills for electricity. This represents an increase of 8% in just that short period. The increase in seven years is 108%. That is well above Ontario's inflation rate.

•(1835)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to once again respond to the comments made by the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, who is calling on the government to hold public hearings and open consultations under the Competition Act regarding Hydro One's acquisition of Great Lakes Power.

Under the act, mergers of all sizes and in all sectors of the economy are subject to review by the Competition Bureau to determine whether they will likely result in a substantial lessening or prevention of competition.

As part of the bureau's normal approach in examining a merger, and in order to ensure that decisions are made while taking into account the opinion of those who might be affected by the transaction, the Bureau consults with a wide range of industry participants, such as suppliers, competitors, industry associations, customers and industry experts.

The bureau considers many different factors, including the definition of the relevant market and the level of competition

between the merging parties. The bureau's work is guided by its mandate, which is to ensure that Canadian businesses and consumers prosper in a competitive and innovative marketplace.

As an independent law enforcement agency, the Competition Bureau is required by law to conduct its investigations in private. It is bound by the confidentiality provisions of the Competition Act. Accordingly, it is not possible for the Competition Bureau to hold public hearings.

However, as I said, the Competition Bureau holds broad consultations with the affected stakeholders and Canadian consumers. Anyone who wishes to express their views on matters of competition is invited to do so through the Competition Bureau's website, or by contacting the Competition Bureau directly.

[*English*]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Madam Speaker, anything that contributes to another excuse to raise hydro rates in the province of Ontario is a cause for alarm.

Ontario Hydro, now Hydro One, has been changed by the Liberal Party in Toronto into an unaccountable monopoly, privatized so it is no longer under the scrutiny of the legislature. Energy policy decisions are the subject of criminal investigations.

We learned this past week that the Ontario Provincial Police has launched another investigation into allegations that provincial government officials illegally destroyed documents concerning an aborted contract to supply electricity to the provincial grid in the Kingston area.

The federal Competition Bureau has a responsibility to protect Canadians, as does the federal government. Only by operating in an open, public, transparent manner will Canadians know that their best interests are being served.

As has been noted in an excellent analysis by the Consumer Policy Institute, it has been a bad nine years for electricity customers in Ontario. Hydro prices for residential customers have increased at a faster rate than anywhere in North America.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Greg Fergus: Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague knows that the merger review process under the Competition Act is extremely rigorous, informed by the opinion of affected stakeholders, and conducted independently. As far as Hydro One's acquisition of Great Lakes Power is concerned, the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke can rest assured that this rigorous standard will be upheld.

As we know, the Competition Bureau must conduct its investigations in private, in accordance with the legislation. The Competition Bureau is also bound by the confidentiality provisions of the Competition Act.

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• (1840)

[English]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise in the House today to follow up on a question I asked a few months ago, referring to the unacceptable situation unfolding in Norway House, a community in northern Manitoba.

Commercial fishers in Norway House feel that they have been targeted by employment insurance, and the situation is getting worse by the day. There are 50 commercial fishers in Norway House, as well as a number of fishers' helpers, and a majority of fishers and their helpers have been cut off by employment insurance.

While everyone understands the importance of accountability, what has taken place in Norway House is an unnecessarily aggressive approach, leaving first nations fishers feeling intimidated, angered, and deeply disrespected. In fact, worse yet, commercial fishers and their helpers have not been given a chance to make their case, whether at an individual level or at a collective level.

Many feel they have been treated aggressively and have been disrespected, including the demand to receive records from fishers who have since passed on. Many have been put in situations where they have been interrogated with little supports pertaining to language and others, at a very difficult time for them and their families. They were called on without any sense of personal empathy to present their cases and, in fact, reported very difficult situations as a result.

We have to be clear about what this means. In a community like Norway House, commercial fishing is probably one of the best jobs one can have. Approximately 200 people are employed through the commercial fishery in Norway House, directly and indirectly. Over the years, millions of dollars have been pumped into the local economy. In fact, a labour market study conducted a short while ago indicated that 80% of fishing dollars stayed within Norway House. The Canadian Council of Professional Fish Harvesters conducted that study.

It is also important to note, like many first nations in northern communities, that many people in Norway House struggle with poverty. Therefore, when there are good jobs and job opportunities, it is important that we support them. What fishers, their families and leaders in Norway House are asking for is an ability to come together and find a resolution at this difficult juncture.

My question some months ago for the minister, which I will reiterate, calls on the minister to work with Norway House commercial fishers and the people of Norway House to find a resolution to this unacceptable situation.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my friend and colleague, having gone through the last Parliament, knows the last government had a very peculiar approach to dealing with the employment insurance program and the recipients of insurance benefits. It was one that did not cast any fine light on people who worked in seasonal industries, or people who found themselves unemployed through no fault of their own.

We had our own case in Cape Breton, up in Bay St. Lawrence, where there seemed to be a net thrown around an entire community. About 80 individuals had been cut off benefits. The investigation took place. They even held the interviews at the RCMP station, which was a further aspect of the anxiety brought upon those who were being interviewed at the time. Our government does not feel that is the way to go about business.

My colleague is a long-serving member. She knows I cannot speak specifically about the Norway House situation because of issues around confidentiality and privacy.

She will also know that it is imperative for the Government of Canada and those who administer the program do so with an absolute commitment to the integrity of the program. The Employment Insurance Act is being administered by the Government of Canada. It is a duty that the Government of Canada takes very seriously, but it is imperative that the integrity of the program is upheld. When we see any signs of abuse or misuse, then it is imperative that we draw issue with it.

Over the past eight years, Service Canada has identified \$1 billion in fraudulent claims for EI benefits and recovered about \$600 million, or 60%. However, that is a significant amount of fraudulent claims or abuse of the system.

Employers and employees who pay into that fund want to know it is being administered properly. There could probably be a more respectful approach as far as the investigation goes, but I do not think we can compromise on the integrity of those investigations. It is imperative that as a government we stand and defend the principles of the Employment Insurance Act and ensure the act has the integrity that Canadians expect.

• (1845)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Speaker, I certainly appreciate my colleague's reflections on the need for a more respectful process. What is clear in this case is that people have felt deeply disrespected by the treatment they have received. We are talking about a community where a number of commercial fishers and others for whom English is not their first language. They had no services made available to recognize that.

People in precarious health situations expressed their situation and no consideration was given to that fact. Ultimately, people were hauled into the RCMP offices. The records of people who were dead were requested, which is of course deeply disrespectful to the families and the colleagues of those who are still alive.

Therefore, what is being asked for is a respectful process. There is no question that the Employment Insurance Act needs to be—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Madam Speaker, my colleague and I can agree on pretty much all of what is being said here. It is incumbent on the government to ensure these investigations are thorough and that their integrity is not compromised. However, it has to be done in a timely and respectful manner. I believe the points that the member brought up should be taken under advisement.

HEALTH

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to the question that I asked the Minister of Health with respect to Bill C-2, the former Conservative government's so-called respect for communities act.

I want to begin by taking a moment to commend the minister for her decision to visit Insite, Vancouver's life-saving safe injection site, in January. This visit was an important symbol of the welcome and necessary change in tone from the Liberal government with respect to evidence-based, harm-reduction policy within our health care system.

I myself have visited Insite and can attest first-hand to the incredible work that it does to reduce overdoses, lower the transmission of infectious diseases, provide essential health services, including addictions treatment, and most importantly, save lives.

However, words are not enough. Communities with individuals suffering from addictions, serious mental illness, and infectious diseases need a better, more responsive and more caring health care system. Therefore, I was shocked by the minister's statement in March that she has decided not to repeal Bill C-2. This harmful legislation runs diametrically against progressive health policy, and erects unnecessary barriers to the opening of new life-saving safe consumption sites in communities that need them across Canada.

Upon the passage of Bill C-2 in June 2015, a coalition of 65 health, patient and harm-reduction advocacy groups from across Canada issued a public declaration condemning this legislation. They broadcast a clear warning to the Canadian public about the serious problems with this legislation. The following are a few quotes that sum up their position:

Bill C-2 will put the lives of...vulnerable Canadians at risk by establishing excessive and unreasonable requirements for health authorities and community agencies looking to open or continue operating supervised consumption [sites]...

This bill...establish[es] 26 new requirements applicants must meet before the federal Minister of Health will even consider an approval to operate a [supervised consumption site].

The barriers this bill...presents to accessing [supervised consumption sites will] allow a public health emergency to [be treated] under a law-and-order agenda...expos[ing] patients and communities to infection, suffering, and death.

Among the prominent signatories to this declaration are Toronto Public Health, the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS, the Association of Ontario Health Centres, the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, and the BC Centre for Disease Control. Calls for more harm-reduction facilities are only growing as overdose deaths continue to rise across Canada.

Just last month, British Columbia provincial health officer Dr. Perry Kendall declared a public health emergency after more than 200 overdose deaths were reported in my province in three months. Nearly 300 Albertans died of overdoses in 2015, more than double the 2014 death toll. Similarly, Ontario has seen a 72% increase over the last decade. Health authorities in Montreal, Toronto, and Victoria are now working to open life-saving harm reduction facilities as they struggle to save lives. Unfortunately, the onerous provisions of Bill C-2 continue to delay the opening of new safe consumption sites.

Adjournment Proceedings

It is time for the minister to move from symbolism to action in harm reduction and commit to repealing Bill C-2 once and for all. Will she do so?

● (1850)

Ms. Kamal Khera (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to address the concerns raised by my colleague the member for Vancouver Kingsway regarding the federal process to allow for the operation of supervised consumption sites.

I would like to start off by acknowledging the alarming rise in opioid-related overdose deaths occurring across the country.

Drug use is a significant public health and safety issue in Canada that can have wide-ranging impacts on individuals, their families, and communities at large. One of the most devastating impacts is losing a family member or friend to a preventable drug overdose.

That is why our government strongly supports a comprehensive public health approach to addressing problematic drug use, one that is based on compassion and collaboration, and is guided by scientific evidence. In this case, the evidence is absolutely clear: such an approach must include harm reduction.

Our government is working hard to ensure that harm reduction measures are part of our approach to drug policy, to help prevent the transmission of infectious diseases, overdose deaths, and stigma.

We have also shown support for supervised consumption sites, which provide a controlled space whereby people who use drugs can bring their own substances to consume under the safe supervision of health care professionals, and at the same time gain access to other health and social services, including drug treatment.

In January of this year, after a thorough and rigorous review, Health Canada granted an exemption from the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act for the Dr. Peter Centre, a leading HIV/AIDS treatment centre, to provide supervised consumption site services as part of its programs. On March 16, Health Canada granted Insite an unprecedented four-year exemption.

Insite is one of the most established and well researched supervised consumption sites in the world. It is an excellent example of what an integrated public health approach to problematic drug use can look like. Earlier this year, the Minister of Health had the privilege of visiting Insite and speaking to the staff and clients there. There is a reason why people from all over the world look to Insite for advice on implementing their own sites.

Adjournment Proceedings

Yes, Insite provides a clean and supervised space for injection drug use, but it is so much more than that. It offers a holistic program where disease is less likely to spread, overdose deaths are averted, and individuals are more likely to access health and social services including immunizations, counselling, and drug treatment.

Our government anticipates receiving more applications for supervised consumption sites in the future. We will ensure that they are diligently assessed, so that informed and evidence-based decisions can be made.

In closing, it is our government's belief that effectively addressing problematic drug use requires a comprehensive and compassionate public health approach that is inclusive of evidence-based harm reduction measures, including supervised consumption sites.

• (1855)

Mr. Don Davies: Madam Speaker, as drug overdoses continue to kill more and more Canadians, the minister has failed to act proactively on another serious issue.

In recent weeks, the minister decided to abandon new regulations to require tamper-resistant forms of powerful opioid prescription drugs.

The minister has stated that she believes these regulations will not solve the problem because they are only applied to a single opioid drug, OxyContin. However, the solution to that is obvious: we need to bring in tamper-resistant regulations across the entire class of opioids, as the U.S. FDA has done.

Canada is in the midst of an opioid overdose crisis. Hundreds of people are dying, and British Columbia has declared a public health emergency. More people will die, so why will the minister not introduce tamper-resistant regulations to the entire class of opioid drugs and help save lives?

Ms. Kamal Khara: Madam Speaker, to operate legally, a supervised consumption site requires an exemption under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, Canada's drug control framework. The purpose of the act is to protect public health and maintain public safety, and it is the federal government's responsibility to ensure that this is upheld in all circumstances where activities with controlled substances are taking place.

Health Canada requires sufficient information upon which to base any decision allowing an exemption. For this reason, requirements to demonstrate that a supervised consumption site will be properly established and managed pre-date the Respect for Communities Act.

I acknowledge the concerns being voiced by the member. However, the recent approval of exemptions for the Dr. Peter Centre and Insite demonstrate that existing legislation does not preclude sound and evidence-based decisions regarding supervised consumption sites.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The motion that the House do now adjourn is deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:58 p.m.)

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