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(HANSARD)

Tuesday, April 24, 2018

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, April 24, 2018

The House met at 10 a.m.

[English]

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[Translation]

COMMISSIONER OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The Speaker: Pursuant to subsection 23(5) of the Auditor General Act, I have the honour to lay upon the table the spring 2018 reports of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development to the House of Commons.

These reports are permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development.

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INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Sudbury, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the delegation of the Canadian branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie concerning its participation at the meeting of the Political Committee of the APF, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on April 10 and 11, 2017.

* * *

PETITIONS

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition signed by several Quebeckers who want money in the employment insurance fund to be used exclusively for employment insurance benefits. They want the fund to be shielded from partisan manipulation. They want more flexible employment insurance criteria so that precarious and seasonal workers are provided fair, equitable coverage. Lastly, they want the employment insurance program to include better training opportunities and job search assistance.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table a petition that was initiated in my riding of Perth—Wellington by Tanner Bergsma, a student at Stratford Central, a school in Stratford.

The petitioners call on the government to increase environmental protections in the resource industry.

[Translation]

FOOD INSPECTION

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to table.

The first is an e-petition signed by hundreds of Quebeckers. Canada imports large amounts of fish and seafood from Vietnam, and only about 3% to 5% of it is verified by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. The Formosa steelworks dumped large amounts of toxic waste in the ocean in 2016, killing a huge number of fish and damaging the Pacific marine ecosystem along the coastline of central Vietnam, and despite this ecological disaster, Vietnam's exports of fish and seafood totalled \$7 billion last year, which is why the petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to pay special attention to inspections of fish, seafood, and derived products from Vietnam in order to ensure they are safe for the Canadian public to consume.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition has been signed by about 100 people from Soulanges. Given that more than 80% of Canada's original wetlands have disappeared and that global warming is increasing, they feel that the importance of protecting wetlands has become very clear, and that the municipalities have no choice but to embrace ecological trends. The signatories therefore call on the Government of Canada to ensure compliance with the 1996 federal policy on wetland conservation, which aims to improve and preserve the environment so as to prevent increasing natural disasters by designating the wetlands bordering Lake Saint-François as protected areas.

Business of Supply

[English]

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—ILLEGAL BORDER CROSSINGS

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC) moved:

That, given the government's failure to address the crisis created by the influx of thousands of illegal border crossers travelling across our southern border between ports of entry, that the agencies responsible for dealing with this crisis have found gaps in security screening for newly arrived refugee claimants, as well as a backlog in both scheduled hearings and carrying out deportation orders, and that this trend is expected to increase over the summer months; the House call on the government to:

- (a) ensure the agencies responsible for our borders are properly equipped so that they can continue to do their jobs effectively and that those arriving at Canadian borders go through the appropriate processes;
- (b) admit the Prime Minister's irresponsibility of tweeting #WelcometoCanada to those seeking to enter Canada through illegal means;
- (c) take responsibility for the massive social services costs burdening the provincial governments; and
- (d) table in the House no later than May 11, 2018, a plan to (i) stop the influx of people illegally entering Canada from the United States, (ii) take appropriate measures to handle those who have already claimed asylum.

She said: Mr. Speaker, today I want to lay out what exactly this problem is, why it is a problem, how the Liberals got Canada into this situation, the failure of the Liberals to manage the problem, and potential fixes that the Liberals could undertake to stop the flow but have elected not to do.

What is the problem? First of all, in the last year we have seen a massive influx, and by massive I mean tens of thousands of people illegally crossing the border from the United States into Canada and then claiming asylum. This is, of course, precipitated because Canada has an agreement with the United States called the safe third country agreement, which I am going to speak to later. Essentially, the agreement says that if someone claims asylum in one of the countries and then tries to enter the other country, that person should not make an asylum claim in the other country because we respect the fact that our asylum claim systems are mutually generous. They are run free of political interference, and they are regarded as some of the strongest in the world.

The problem is that the agreement is silent on what happens when someone illegally enters the country. Because the agreement is silent on that, this loophole allows people to illegally enter the country and claim asylum. Of course, when someone claims asylum in Canada, that person is automatically entitled to all the generous social benefits Canada has, including our health care system, social programs, welfare, and many other things that are designed as a social safety net in Canada but are also extended to those we are

bringing in as humanitarian immigrants. The point is that this massive influx is not planned and it is not orderly. Therefore, the government has been scrambling to throw hundreds of millions of dollars at this, rather than looking for a way to solve the issue and bring Canada's immigration system back to order.

Briefly, the statistics show that last year there were 20,593 persons who illegally entered Canada and claimed asylum. This year, these months alone in 2018, which includes the winter months, there have been 6,373. Government documents project over 400 persons a day this summer. Certainly, based on those projections, we could see anywhere between 50,000 and 70,000 persons. This number of people means that we now have more people illegally entering the country and claiming asylum than those legally entering the country and claiming asylum. There is no plan to deal with this.

Very briefly, this is why it is a problem. Canadians are compassionate, but they want a planned and orderly immigration system. These numbers are not accounted for in the government's immigration levels plan. This means that, because the government has not accounted or planned for this, provincial governments are unable to budget for the impact on social services. The government is unable to understand the cohort that is coming through illegally and claiming asylum, and adequately budget for integration services. It does not understand the impact this might have on the Canadian economy one way or the other, because it does not understand the cohort. It does not understand how people might or might not be able to contribute to the Canadian economy.

This makes integration support much more difficult, and certainly we are seeing provincial governments saying it is impacting them. In fact, the Government of Quebec made a major push over the last couple of months, saying that the federal government owes it because of the federal government's inability to manage the borders. Certainly, the federal government did capitulate and had to spend hundreds of millions more of Canadian tax dollars to give a transfer to Quebec to manage the flow, rather than try to stop the problem.

It also renders us less able to help the world's most vulnerable. There is an immigration plan for a reason. The government should stipulate how many people we allow to enter the country through humanitarian means so we can do all those things I just talked about, such as plan for integration. Because the government has had to redirect resources to processing illegal migrants, we see massive wait times in other streams. The private sponsorship refugee stream has a backlog of over 45,000 cases. Across party lines, we all have cases where people are waiting. I have seen cases of people who are trying to privately sponsor people from Eritrea. There is an 89-month wait for that now. Let us think about that. A privately sponsored refugee from Eritrea has to wait over seven years. Does that not defeat the purpose of a refugee program?

Business of Supply

•(1010)

Furthermore, regarding Immigration and Refugee Board government documents, and again, the government refutes this is the case, *The Globe and Mail* published an article in June 2017 which showed a government report which stated that based on the current track we are on for the increase year over year for the number of illegal migrants, the IRB is on track for an 11-year wait time for processing asylum claims.

Mr. Speaker, if my colleague could shut off his phone, that would be lovely. It is quite distracting.

The 11-year wait time means people who are making asylum claims after they illegally enter the country can then stay in Canada, claim social assistance benefits, and have expedited work permits. They can do all of these things, which are unplanned and unbudgeted, while we do not even know if their claim is valid. To me, that is not fair. Many people who are trying to legally enter the country think it is not fair.

The Liberals' failure to manage our border has created a demand and placed a burden on the Immigration and Refugee Board. The head of the Calgary Catholic Immigration Society was quoted in a *Calgary Herald* article a few months ago talking about how it is unfair to people who have come into the country legally, made asylum claims, and who are then forced to wait for years to learn whether they can stay in Canada. While he did not say this to me, that could also create a disincentive to work, to put down roots, and to establish any sort of commitment to integration over time because they do not know if they will be able to stay here. To me, that is absolutely ridiculous. There is a burden on the IRB system.

My colleague who is our shadow minister for public safety, the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, is going to talk later today about the impact this massive influx of illegal migrants coming into the country has had on screening and border security. He has statistics he is going to speak to today about how the CBSA has said that it has reduced by 400% the amount of time spent screening people entering the country. I do not think any Canadian would be satisfied with the fact that the government is accommodating people illegally entering the country by reducing the amount of time our border agents spend on screening them for security. Certainly this is a burden on the system.

We have heard the Canada Border Services Agency talk about how it has placed a great strain on its resources and it does not feel it has enough. Again, the government's response has been to throw hundreds of millions of dollars at the problem, but all that has done is make things worse. It has made our border services and the IRB less effective because of the demand being put on the system.

A Liberal response to a crisis like this is to throw money at the problem and not look at ways to stop the problem. In fact, what I think the government has done here by doing things like creating a refugee camp at the U.S.-Canada border, and to pay for heated tent trailers, has actually incited more people to come into the country through this mechanism. That is very irresponsible.

Also, I am concerned about the fact that the government has basically said to come hither through this mechanism and that might incite people in terms of human smuggling and crime. We have

certainly seen cases in the media of things like a child pornography ring that was busted up. We need to put more control on this situation.

As well, my colleague is going to talk about the fact that while we have seen a great increase in people illegally entering the country, we have also seen removal orders steadily increase, but the ability of the government to execute those removal orders has diminished. What I am trying to say is that when people have been found to have no reason to be in the country and a removal order has been issued for them, the government actually lacks the capacity to remove them. Someone can come into the country illegally, make an asylum claim, and claim social benefits for a long period of time without having his or her claim heard. After that time passes and after the person has claimed all these benefits, even if the person is found to not have a legal reason to be in the country, the person will have to wait a long period of time to be removed. That is unacceptable. Placing more demand on the system this way is unacceptable and, frankly, it is not fair.

•(1015)

Canada is a country where everyone will proudly say that they support immigration. It is not a matter of "if"; it is a matter of "how". We want to be compassionate. However, the government has turned a blind eye to this, and people who have legally come to this country and other Canadian taxpayers are sitting here and looking.

The Prime Minister stood in Edmonton only a few short months ago, looked at a Canadian veteran, and said, "You are asking for more than the government can give." We then had the immigration minister stand up in the House of Commons and talk about the hundreds of millions of dollars that the government has proudly thrown at people who are illegally entering the country.

That is not fair. As someone who supports compassionate, planned, orderly migration, and sees it as a key to sustaining the Canadian economy over time when done properly, legally, and safely, I worry that by abdicating the responsibility to do this, it is actually the Liberal Party that is creating divisiveness in the country, because people are starting to talk about "if" rather than "how". People start talking about "if" when the government abdicates its responsibility to get the "how" right, which is why we put this motion forward today.

Again, let us think about this. This has been going on for 18 months. We are going into another summer. Report after report has been issued by government officials saying there is a problem, it is happening, and here it is. All the government has done is throw hundreds of millions of dollars at the problem, and it has gotten worse. The analogy I used in the House yesterday is that it is like having a big hole in the roof during a rainstorm and planning to replace the hardwood every day. It does not make sense to me.

Also, the fact that the Liberals have done nothing to structurally close the problem is irresponsible. It is taking away that social licence, and that is irresponsible, not just in the expenditure of money and the prioritization of tax dollars, but also in terms of sustaining Canada's hope in immigration over time.

Business of Supply

Why do the Liberals need to table this plan? They knew that this was happening. They are projecting 400 persons a day, starting now. They need to table a plan that does not say they are going to spend hundreds of millions of dollars. They need to table a plan that does one of two things, or both: close the loophole in the safe third country agreement that I mentioned earlier, or designate the entire Canadian border as a technical official point of entry in order to stop the flow of people illegally entering the country to claim asylum.

I want to spend my last few minutes talking about the safe third country agreement and some of the things the Liberals should be including. I hope they support this motion today when they table their plan, as this motion requests, by May 11.

I should note as well that I tried to raise this issue in the citizenship and immigration committee last week. I asked committee members to study this at the citizenship and immigration committee in terms of developing a plan. The committee members voted that down, which is very irresponsible. I encourage anyone watching today to write or phone the members of the immigration committee who voted against that motion.

I want to talk about the safe third country agreement, very briefly. I gave an outline of what it was, but I want to read an excerpt from an article called “The meaning of borders: Lessons from the last world war”. It was written by Howard Anglin and published on March 12, 2017, in iPolitics. It states:

One of the most contentious debates during the drafting of the 1951 Convention—

—this is on refugees—

—was between the United Kingdom and France over the scope of what would become Article 31, the provision that deals with the circumvention of national borders. Recognizing that “[a] refugee whose departure from his country of origin is usually a flight, is rarely in a position to comply with the requirements for legal entry ... into the country of refuge,” Article 31 exempts persons who enter a country seeking refuge in violation of that country’s laws from the normal consequences of their illegal entry and presence.

Worried about large numbers of refugees in the countries bordering France, the French delegate to the drafting convention sought assurances that if those refugees crossed the border from a country where their lives were not in danger, France would be able to return them to the frontier. According to one account of the deliberations, the French delegate observed that, “[t]o admit that a refugee who had settled temporarily in a reception country was free to enter another, would be to grant him a right of immigration which might be exercised for reasons of mere personal convenience.”

That is what I see happening in the situation at the Lacolle border crossing right now, because we know, with even the very few cases that have been processed by the IRB, certainly not a majority of them are being found to be valid. This argument prevailed in the drafting of article 31, so there is an argument saying we have international obligations. In fact, legally the safe third country agreement is based on the exact provision that I just mentioned.

• (1020)

I will quote some Liberals. After the safe third country agreement was negotiated, to pre-empt American talk of increasing security at the U.S.-Canada border, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien dispatched then deputy prime minister John Manley to Washington to ensure that the legal flow of goods and people between the two countries was not interrupted. The resulting agreement, the safe third country agreement, was signed by then immigration minister Denis Coderre,

who personally predicted that it would allow Canada to turn back 15,000 people a year to the United States.

In his article, Howard Anglin quotes John Manley, who at the time was the deputy prime minister, as explaining, “it’s not a matter of shopping for the country that you want, it’s a matter of escaping the oppression that you face.” To build on this quote, I think anybody here would be hard pressed to say that people are fleeing oppression from the United States of America. I would be fairly offended if somebody said that, and our foreign affairs minister would have a great deal of difficulty trying to explain that statement in her negotiations with NAFTA.

If that is the spirit of the safe third country agreement, and the immigration minister and the Prime Minister have said they support its application, it begs the question why they have not approached the Americans about closing the loophole I mentioned earlier. I have asked the immigration minister many times at committee. He says they simply have not raised it with the Americans. Is it a lack of character, a lack of conviction, fright, or something else? I do not know.

However, the fact that they have not raised this with the Americans begs the question why they would support the application of the agreement in the first place. They cannot suck and blow. They cannot say they support the application of the safe third country agreement and then say they will do nothing to close the loophole that lets thousands of people into the country. My former colleague Jason Kenney tried to do that. He is on the record saying he feels that the Americans under the previous administration saw this as a way for people to self-deport into Canada.

What can we do here in Canada? The immigration refugee protection regulations define ports of entry as “(a) a place set out in Schedule 1” and “(b) a place designated by the Minister under section 26 as a port of entry”. Schedule 1 identifies more than 70 land ports. Section 26 refers to the authority to designate points of entry by the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, and says the minister “may, on the basis of the following factors, designate a place as a port of entry as well as the port of entry’s dates and hours of operation”. It goes on to list a series of criteria.

There might be some legal requirements around putting infrastructure into place. That could easily be changed so that the entire Canadian land border could be defined as a technical application for the safe third country agreement, so that it would apply. Then we would not need to set up tent trailers. Then we would not need to add hundreds of millions of dollars to the RCMP and CBSA for the sole purpose of managing illegal immigrants.

The spirit of the agreement would apply. Frankly, as we see needs in legislation, we should be seeking to solve problems. That is what we do here. If we are going to see this agreement apply, then we should be looking to a solution like that. I would love to say we would do that if we were in government. However, it is the government’s responsibility to table a plan, and that is what the spirit of this motion is today.

I want to close by again saying how we got here. Members will remember that when the Americans issued an executive order around immigration, the Prime Minister tweeted, “#WelcomeToCanada”. Of course, we saw an article in the *National Post*, dated April 3, 2018, based on information obtained through access to information. It describes the confusion of embassies with respect to citizenship and immigration, because all of a sudden they were inundated with requests from people saying, “I can just come in, right?” This is when we started seeing the spike in people illegally entering the country.

We know that the Prime Minister has never taken responsibility for this tweet, and he certainly has done nothing to rectify the problem it caused. It is incumbent upon him to solve it before the summer, before we have another 45,000 to 55,000 people enter the country illegally, which creates all of these issues.

Therefore, I ask my colleagues to support this motion and I call upon the government to table a concrete plan that does not just replace the hardwood but actually solves this issue, so we can get back to the principle of compassionate, planned, orderly immigration.

• (1025)

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we see again today the Conservatives' strategy to create a climate of fear.

I took some notes as the hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill was delivering her speech. Let me first assure all Canadians that we check the identity and criminal record of any person that crosses the border irregularly. If they do not pass this security check, they are sent back.

The Conservatives say that the immigration system is broken, but we inherited it from the previous government. We put our immigration system back on track. In her speech, the hon. member said that we threw money out the window, but that is not true. We made investments of \$174 million, \$74 million of which are being used to process asylum claims as quickly as possible. The previous government cut more than \$400 million from the immigration budget.

The hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill said several times that she asked us to include more investments in budget 2018. That is what we did. We invested \$174 million.

My question is quite simple: is there or is there not more money for the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada to process claims more quickly?

• (1030)

[English]

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, for those who might be listening to the floor feed and could not understand my colleague, he started off his speech by saying that I was fearmongering.

We have a Liberal Prime Minister who stood in Halifax last week and talked about divisive politics, yet the number one thing the Liberals put forward when we say we would like to have a planned, orderly, compassionate immigration system, and that we encourage

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immigration but it should be done fairly and safely, is that we are fearmongering. Let us think about how irresponsible that is. I am not going to go into what fearmongering means, but anybody listening knows what it means. Let us think about the fact that they bring up the concept of fearmongering, as opposed to coming up with a plan. That is such a Liberal, leftist tactic. Rather than deal with the problem, they say we are fearmongering. Canadians are rejecting that en masse. Canadians are rejecting that sort of divisive politics.

My colleague also defended this by saying we are spending \$1 billion, or \$2 billion. I do not know. I would just push back and ask him to look at the metrics. What is it, a 100% increase over the last three months of last year, with tens of thousands more people coming in? The problem is not being solved. Canadians who understand that tax dollars have a prioritization do not think this is the best expenditure of money.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will first say very clearly that I absolutely agree there needs to be a study on this issue so that we can work on a plan. The Conservatives claim to want this to be compassionate and orderly, yet with this motion they insist on misrepresenting the situation, using words like “illegal”.

The member sits on the immigration, refugee, and citizenship committee, and she knows the file. Therefore, from that perspective, she ought to know that in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, sections 117 and 133 specifically indicate that a person could cross to Canada irregularly, and that by crossing over irregularly, the person is not committing a crime under the Criminal Code.

Given the facts of the case, and given that Canada accepts people who come over irregularly within the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, why would the member and the Conservatives insist on fearmongering with the term “illegal”?

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, if people come to the United States border, they will see a large sign saying in effect not to cross or they will be arrested. When people do that, including those who are entering the country to claim asylum, what happens to them? They are arrested. Therefore, it is illegal.

We are arguing semantics over the fact that people are illegally entering our country instead of coming up with a plan to encourage orderly, planned migration. Why do members of the NDP want to do this? It is because they, with the Liberals, do not want to see a plan in place to encourage people to enter the country through planned, orderly migration.

That is the fact here. News outlets have used this term. I am not going to sit here and argue semantics. What I am asking for is action on the fact—

An hon. member: It is misleading people.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order. I am not far from the member who is speaking, but I am having a hard time hearing her with all the shouting. I will let the member proceed, please.

Business of Supply

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, for some reason, the Liberals will not table a plan to stop this problem. If the policy of the Liberal government now is to encourage people to illegally enter the country and claim asylum, then just say that. People will hold them to account in the next election.

That is not the immigration system that I envision for our country. I want to ensure that the world's most vulnerable have priority access into our country, and that we have planned, orderly migration that meets the needs of the Canadian economy, not billions of dollars of unaccounted federal money that we do not have that makes the problem worse.

• (1035)

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague gave an amazing speech. I know she worked long and hard on that one.

In my riding and particularly in my hometown, there is a church community that has been waiting for four years for a Syrian refugee family which it has been trying to settle. I know that each time the backlog gets longer and longer, and groups like that church community that have been waiting for Syrian refugees are continually told that it is going to be a longer and longer wait.

Would my colleague have any comments on that?

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, as a country we should celebrate the fact that we have so many families and so many groups across the country that privately raise money to sponsor people to this country, to start new lives and to contribute to the Canadian economy, people who are fleeing areas of persecution. That is something we should be promoting, encouraging more of, and be supporting more robustly.

Let us think about the hundreds of millions of dollars the government is spending to accommodate illegal migrants into this country. That money could go to ESL programs in small communities or to processing privately sponsored refugees. I know there are 45,000 cases where people have raised money to bring people into the country legally, and what the government has been doing is redirecting and processing resources from those streams to Montreal to process illegal border crossers.

What kind of a message does that send to people who are trying to support this wonderful process that we have in our country? What kind of a message does it send to somebody who is trying to reunite with one of their family members?

The priorities of the government are backward. We are arguing semantics. We are arguing about spending hundreds of millions of dollars when there are very easy legal fixes that could restore order to our immigration system, and yet the government does not even want to talk about them. The government does not even acknowledge that they exist. To me, that is divisive. That is what is going to cause a loss of social licence in this country for immigration. That is what is really irresponsible.

The government should table a plan. It should be concrete. It should have legal actions to stop the flow, not just accommodate people coming here. That is what our focus should be. Certainly, that is what a Conservative government did and would do in the future.

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage (Multiculturalism), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have three brief comments.

First, in the context of a robust debate, my response to the member for Peace River—Westlock is that it is precisely because of people like his constituents who are trying to privately sponsor Syrian refugees that we have quadrupled the amount of private sponsorship that is available in this country, as compared to the number that was put forward by the previous Conservative government under its tenure at the head of this file.

Second, I find it quite astounding that the member for Calgary Nose Hill, who moved this motion, has raised former immigration minister Jason Kenney as some sort of paragon of proper stewardship or administration of the immigration portfolio, a man under whose watch health care for refugees was cut, a man under whose watch refugee selection from the Middle East during the height of the Syrian refugee crisis was done on selective minority religious grounds only, and a man under whose watch processing times ballooned to the point where waiting times were two to three years.

Third, specifically for the member for Calgary Nose Hill, is with respect to the myth that her and her party continue to propagate in this House and outside of this House, which is that somehow inland asylum seekers are queue jumping. Clearly, there is a humanitarian category and there are separate categories for people who come here for permanent resident status under family reunification or economic migration. The two categories are distinct and disparate.

After two and a half years as the opposition critic, I would have thought the member for Calgary Nose Hill would have an understanding of that specific differentiation.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party is in for a big wake-up call, because people are going to be aghast at everything the member just said.

Very quickly, on health care, many Canadians would say that those who legally enter the country should have priority access to our generous social programs, and that we actually have to talk about the sustainability of our social programs in terms of our immigration system through the concept of planned, orderly migration.

With regard to the selection of refugees, it took me over a year to convince the Liberal government to bring in Yazidi genocide survivors through its Syrian refugee initiative. It was that member opposite who sat in a committee meeting with me and disgustingly for an entire summer tried to argue why they should not come here. Those are the principles of the Liberal government.

We will always stand proudly and support planned, orderly migration as opposed to the disaster that the government has shamefully turned our immigration system into.

• (1040)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Ajax.

Business of Supply

I appreciate this opportunity to have an important debate on Canada's approach to addressing irregular migration. The world is facing an unprecedented movement of people, with 65 million children, women, and men on the move. Canada is not immune to the challenges presented by a rise in displaced people, nor must we turn our backs on our humanitarian tradition.

I am proud of our government's record and leadership on this file. Most of all, I am proud of Canadians' kindness, generosity, and commitment to human rights both at home and abroad.

At the same time, our government believes in an orderly rules-based and efficient immigration system. Make no mistake. We are steadfast in our commitment to protecting the safety and security of Canadians and our border.

That is precisely why we are investing the appropriate resources into our border security agencies, with a further investment of \$173.2 million announced in budget 2018.

While the Conservatives like to talk a good game on border security, their record is abysmal. In fact, the Harper Conservatives cut nearly \$400 million from the Canada Border Services Agency. They devastated the asylum system and left asylum claimants waiting for years to get a hearing and a decision on their cases. They callously cut off refugee health care. Refugees, including pregnant women and victims of torture, were told they had no access to health care. This was a practice that Canadian courts ruled as cruel and unusual treatment.

All of those policies failed to provide timely protection to vulnerable people. The Conservatives' policies failed to ensure well-supported border operations. Their policies failed to minimize the impact on provincial health and social services. They failed to live up to what Canadians expect of their government, which is courage, strength, leadership, and compassion.

Now the Conservatives are arguing against our investments in border security and against our investments in faster decision-making processes of asylum claims. Instead, at various times, they have proposed to deploy the military against families fleeing conflict and persecution. They have suggested that we break international law by preventing people from making asylum claims.

They have incredulously suggested that we turn the entire 9,000 kilometre stretch of the border into one continuous official border crossing. I am eager to hear my colleague from across the way explain how she intends to have enough border agents stationed continuously along 9,000 kilometres, while at the same time eliminating the additional funding that we have invested into our border security agencies.

Designating the entire border as an official border crossing would also mean that all legitimate travel, such as business travellers, tourists, and trucks carrying goods, would be allowed at any point along the border. The Conservatives cannot decide if they want to close down our borders completely or open a 9,000 kilometre border.

These are not real solutions. This is throwing everything against the wall and hoping something sticks.

Even more irresponsibly, the Conservatives are now trying to pit immigrants against refugees. The asylum system, as they should

know, is fundamentally different from all other areas of our immigration system. There is a completely separate process in place for asylum claims, one that has absolutely no bearing on wait times for immigrants.

This is especially rich coming from a party whose failed immigration policies kept families apart for years, forced vulnerable women to stay in abusive relationships, refused to act in the face of the world's largest refugee crisis, and failed to secure and rescue Yazidi women and girls.

Our government is laser-focused on protecting the safety and security of Canadians, securing our border, upholding our humanitarian obligations, treating people with dignity and compassion, and following the law. I will explain how our government is doing just that.

Our primary priority is the safety and security of Canadians, and we are making investments into strengthening border security. Let me be clear. Every individual is carefully screened, and no one is released into our communities until the individual has cleared security checks.

● (1045)

Canada is a signatory to international conventions and we have legal as well as moral obligations to assess asylum claims and not turn away people who have legitimate fears of persecution, violence, and risk to their lives. However, irregular crossings do not provide a free ticket to Canada. We have gone to great lengths to ensure that asylum seekers are well informed about the robust assessment process in place. We have undertaken an extensive outreach program to reach potential migrant communities to ensure they understand Canadian immigration laws and the consequences of crossing the border irregularly.

We also know that quick decision-making on asylum claims is vital for minimizing pressure on social services, while ensuring that asylum claims are not in limbo for years. That is why we are investing an additional \$74 million into the Immigration and Refugee Board to speed up asylum claims.

We have worked with the provinces and other partners to take what we learned last summer and develop a national operations plan to manage possible scenarios and any fluctuations at the border. We have established an intergovernmental working group of federal and provincial ministers to address emerging issues quickly and ensure a coordinated approach.

Business of Supply

We have reviewed our operations and developed more flexible and nimble procedures that can adapt to shifting movements. This includes cutting processing times for work permits from three months to three weeks, deploying mobile processing teams to the border, expanding our footprint in locations such as Montreal, and working with our partners in Quebec and Ontario on innovative solutions.

Finally, we have continuously engaged with our U.S. colleagues, including a meeting just yesterday between my colleague the Minister of Public Safety and the U.S. Secretary for Homeland Security, to ensure seamless co-operation in managing our common border. This includes working together to understand movements, share information, and address issues such as visa granting in source countries.

I would like to emphasize that all of our actions to date underscore our commitment to a well-functioning process that protects Canadians. Independent observers such as the UN refugee agencies have praised Canada's handling of the situation. Just last week the head of the UNHCR in Canada said that Canada's border is secure, that Canada is very well equipped to respond to any increased number of asylum seekers in Canada, and that the Government of Canada adapted to the increase with measures that reduced congestions at land ports of entry and strengthened asylum processing capacity.

Our government is unwavering in its commitment to protect Canadians while supporting a strong asylum system and meeting its obligations to provide due process to persons seeking protection.

I have appreciated the opportunity to participate in this important debate.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been trying to get some information from the minister for months and months, so I would love the opportunity today to ask for this information. I know many Canadians are watching and would like this simple piece of information.

Between the increases in demand at the IRB in terms of processing, the demand on the social programs of the provinces, including health care and affordable housing, how much per year is the government forecasting that the increase in illegal asylum claimants, or people who are entering the country illegally to claim asylum from the United States, is going to cost? Is this included in the federal budget? How much is this going to add to the federal deficit?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Speaker, we have made investments in budget 2018 to address precisely what the hon. member is addressing. Budget 2018 contained an investment of \$173.2 million for border security operations, as well as an investment of \$74 million in the Immigration and Refugee Board.

In addition to that, to minimize pressures on provincial social services, we have invested heavily as a department to fast-track the issuing of work permits. This is important because when work permits are issued for asylum seekers, they are less likely to rely on provincial social services. They will rely on themselves by getting a job and supporting themselves while they wait for their asylum case to make it through the Immigration and Refugee Board, which we

have also invested in, as I said, so that asylum claims can go through faster.

This is precisely something that the Province of Quebec had asked us to do last year, because the province said it was concerned about the numbers, and wanted us to equip asylum seekers faster with work permits. We listened and responded.

That is how we are addressing this situation.

● (1050)

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I note that in today's speech the minister is now using the word "irregular", which I am glad to hear. On March 19, at committee, the minister, under aggressive questioning from the Conservatives, conceded to the word "illegal" and in fact said that he was "happy" to use the term "illegal" to describe these asylum seekers. Perhaps the minister has now had a chance to review the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, sections 117 and 133, and has realized that under the act, those individuals who cross over through irregular crossings are doing it within the law. If that is the case, would the minister please apologize to the asylum seekers for using the word "illegal"?

Second, on the investment in the IRB, the government is providing \$74 million for the processing of claims. The minister must know that there are some 46,000 cases in the backlog and that it is increasing by 2,100 cases every month. The \$74 million will not reduce even half the backlog that exists. Will the minister also commit to increasing dollars to the IRB so it can do the job effectively to protect the integrity of our immigration system?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Speaker, on the IRB, we made that initial investment of \$74 million for faster processing of refugee claims. We feel that this is an important investment, because when refugees claimants have a legitimate claim for refugee protection, the faster they can get the decision, the faster and better it is for them not to have their lives in limbo. They can integrate faster into the community and move on with their lives. For those who do not have legitimate claims for asylum, they can be removed from Canada faster, which is something we would like to do.

In addition to that, the hon. member should know that the IRB, prior to this investment, achieved productivity growth of 40% in its ability to finalize cases. That is very encouraging news, and it shows that the IRB's efforts to find efficiencies to improve processing internally, before we even made the budget investment, were working and are working. We have an independent review of the IRB, which was launched by our government. That report is coming soon. We will see what further recommendations are contained in the report so we can see what additional resources the IRB may require in addition to the internal efficiencies it was able to achieve.

Business of Supply

Mr. Mark Holland (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I recently had the opportunity to visit Lacolle and to speak to the men and women who serve in the Canada Border Services Agency, in immigration, and with the RCMP. They do a remarkable job every single day not only keeping our borders safe but making sure that we are fair and that we uphold Canadian values. I had an opportunity to speak with the people who live on the border and to local officials, either municipal or local leaders, about their experience of what is happening in Lacolle, how we can do better, and what we are doing right.

First let us be very clear about the process. Canada is a signatory to the UN convention that guarantees that when people land on our soil, we will ensure the veracity of their refugee claims. That is something that should be baked into the DNA of our country because of the experience globally of people arriving in another country's land when their lives are in peril, when they are the most vulnerable people in the world. We have an obligation to ensure the veracity of those claims. If those claims are not valid, if they are economic migrants or their lives will not be in peril as a result of being sent back to their countries of origin, then obviously they are going to be turned away. There are no free tickets.

The idea that we not attest to the veracity of a claim is abhorrent and frankly is an aberration of all-party consensus that has existed on this issue for a great length of time, because while Canada has done great and proud things when it comes to refugees and people who have landed on our shores, so too have we made mistakes. While we have done well dealing with situations like the Vietnamese boat people, or the Congo, or Sri Lanka, or most recently Syria, there have been other examples, such as Jewish individuals who were sent away.

We have to separate those two things. It seems that the picture being painted by the Conservatives is that people walk onto Canadian soil and somehow evade the rest of the system. There is even talk that it is going to slow down the rest of the system, when across the board, as the immigration minister was just saying, we have reduced wait times. The result of the investments we have made to make sure that we are able to process those volumes were seen first-hand in Lacolle.

We can go in and target the communities that are coming in large numbers. Last year we saw a huge number of Haitians. This year it is a large number of individuals from Nigeria. We are looking at the specific reasons that large migrations of people from those communities are happening and specifically target them, because frankly, it is an enormous waste of their time and our resources to just send them back.

When we look at some of the proposals from the Conservatives as alternatives to how we are dealing with this issue, they makes no sense.

The number of migrants who come across our border, the number of refugee and asylum claimants in any given year, varies greatly from year to year. We have fluctuations. In different periods in the 2000s, it was very high. At some points it was even higher than it is now, and we have had years that were lighter.

The MP for Beauce suggested that we militarize the border. It makes no sense, and I do not see how it would in any way improve the situation. Cutting transit funding for municipalities to try to help asylum seekers makes absolutely no sense. Maybe the one that makes the least sense of all of them is the MP for Calgary Nose Hill's suggestion to declare the entire border a port of entry. The only way that could be effective is if across thousand and thousands of kilometres of our border, we had border agents standing shoulder to shoulder effectively turning people back. The effect of that would be that some of the most vulnerable people would be pushed into even more vulnerable, dangerous circumstances.

If we have any doubt about that, we only need to look at the actions taken on the American border. When the Americans created a situation where it was harder and harder to cross, we saw a spike in deaths. There were perhaps 10,000 deaths. They have an enormous problem.

● (1055)

The solution is not pushing people deep into forests and crossing lakes in the middle of the night with children. If that is the suggestion of the Conservatives, it is one I wholeheartedly reject.

When they talk about a hole in our system, the hole that was cut into the Canadian fabric was the \$390 million the Conservative cut from the Canada Border Services Agency. It was the cut they made to the IRB and the cuts they made to immigration. The hole the Conservatives talk about was when they said that they were going to deny refugees health care. The hole cut in our fabric was when we all watched the crisis unfolding in Syria and we saw absolutely no action from the previous government, a complete departure from the historical norms of what our country would do.

We have more than doubled the number of refugees we have taken into this country. We have more than quadrupled the number of private sponsorships. That is because we understand that we have an obligation to protect the most vulnerable people. When people think of Canada, they see us as a nation that ensures that we protect and assist those people who are most in need. The reality is that most of those people crossing at Lacolle do not fit into that category, and where they do not, they are turned back.

What we need to be doing is dispensing information, collaboratively, in a bipartisan way, to help folks understand that the futile journey is not going to work for them and that there is a process that exists to make an application. That is something we should be doing together.

Business of Supply

While there is no magic solution, we know that the answer lies in working within the context of the existing process. Personally, I think this is an issue that deserves a lot more than talking points. There is no question that when people see people crossing the border, they become concerned about the abuse of process and how it might work. Distorting the facts and trying to propagate false information about what that system is, how it works, and how different categories of refugees or different categories of immigrants are moved through different processes creates confusion that can be exploited politically. This is far too important for that. Making sure that we do the right thing to protect the world's most vulnerable people, making sure that we do the right thing to uphold the international conventions we have signed, and making sure that we turn back those individuals who do not have legitimate claims should be goals we all share.

Solutions that are fantastical and that members absolutely must know would not work in any practical sense must be rejected. On that basis, I find it unfortunate that this motion is in front of us, but I also find it fortunate, because it gives us a chance to illuminate the facts.

• (1100)

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member outlined the government's position on this issue. If he does not agree with the member for Calgary Nose Hill's suggestion that the government work with the United States to amend the safe third party agreement to declare the entire 9,000 kilometre border a port of entry, why does the government not simply declare Lacolle, Quebec, where he has visited and talked to local officials, a port of entry? If people are coming through that point irregularly, why not just declare that point, and other points in the country where people are coming through, ports of entry so that these persons will be treated the same as every other person who tries to enter Canada through an official port of entry?

Mr. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's question. However, my concern is based on international experience on this issue. If we were to turn Lacolle into a legal port of entry, then, very simply, they would go elsewhere. These are people who are seeking to cross irregularly. They are seeking to evade the current system.

I would bring this back to an example in the United States. In the United States in El Paso, when the decision was to effectively create a blockage on the entire border and border agents were literally lined up for miles and miles in every direction to block people, what ended up happening was that those migrants moved into the desert. The U. S. still has the same movement of migrants and has not fixed the problem at all. In fact, the number of illegal migrants is just as large, but the difference is that about 10,000 migrants have died in the desert. They had simply been forced into more dangerous, more vulnerable positions where women and children were dying in dangerous places.

Canada is no different, in the sense that we have a very formidable wilderness. What we need to do instead is get into the places where misinformation is being disseminated in these communities to stop them from making this futile journey, because if their claim is not legitimate, they will be turned back. Second, we need to work with our American counterparts to ensure that people who are coming

into the United States are not just coming with the intention of trying to jump to Canada. Obviously, that is something that we are working on with the United States as well.

It is a complicated situation, but there is firm international evidence that if we take inappropriate action, it will lead to a continuation of the problem and loss of life.

• (1105)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his speech, which really focused on the region of Lacolle, where migrants are entering Canada through Roxham Road. Lacolle is located in my riding. Its residents have come together on multiple occasions to ask questions, find out just what was happening, and learn about the safe third country agreement. We know that this situation stems from the immigration orders signed by Mr. Trump south of the border. Another wave of migrants may be on the way, because many have temporary permits that are going to be revoked or simply not renewed.

As a result, many members of immigrant groups who are in the United States want to come to Canada irregularly. That is not a crime, as my colleague says. This is why groups like Amnesty International, local organizations like Bridges Not Borders, and 200 law professors are calling for the safe third country agreement to be suspended, as the NDP has been demanding for the past year and a half.

Furthermore, my colleague has repeatedly said that everything is fine and dandy and that services are working well. However, it can take over 20 months for an application to be processed, and there is a backlog of 46,000 claims at the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada. Obviously, everything is not fine and dandy. We need a structured plan. We need investments to be made in the right places, investments in border services officers and in the board, for example. I hope the government has a response for this, because otherwise the problem will only get worse.

Mr. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, I mentioned Lacolle because I recently visited the area. The situation is exactly the same across Canada and at the borders. Clearly, the situation is definitely not perfect. We have to continue working on this issue and making investments. That is why we are allocating almost \$200,000. I hope that we will be working with the member on this issue.

[*English*]

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for 15 months now I have been raising the issue around irregular border crossings in this House, at committee, and in the public. As members may remember, it started with your granting my request for an emergency debate on this very subject in January 2017.

Since that time, we have seen the influx in irregular border crossings and asylum claims. Back on April 10, 2017, at the immigration and citizenship committee, I moved a motion for the committee to study the issue of irregular crossings. Unfortunately, the Liberal members of the committee saw fit to adjourn debate on my motion repeatedly. Not only did they want to study the issue: they refused to even have a debate on the need to study the situation.

Business of Supply

Fast-forward to April 17, 2018. I once again tried to advance the need to study the issue at committee. Again I was impeded from doing so. It was not until last Tuesday that I was able, despite attempts to shut me down, to make mention of a motion I would like to see pass at committee. That motion was for the committee to look at the impact of the increase in asylum claims on the RCMP, CBSA, IRCC, the provinces, and the NGOs that provide settlement services in areas where these crossings are more frequent, and for the study to hear from both the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship and the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

Note that my motion to study the issue differs from that of the Conservatives. It does not aim to misrepresent a situation, create fear, or further inflame anti-refugee sentiments. Since the Trump administration took office, I have called for the Canadian government to condemn Trump's discriminatory anti-immigrant policies and to work with the international community to devise a plan to address the fact that we now have a powerful leader in the free world—our next-door neighbour, no less—openly targeting the immigrant and refugee community, striking fear in their hearts and minds, and creating an unstable environment for their well-being.

It is truly a shame that many developed nations, including the United States, have seen a significant rise in anti-immigrant and anti-refugee rhetoric and policy implementation. As a result, despite an unprecedented need for refugee resettlement, many of the world's wealthiest nations are turning their backs on people in desperate need.

I am proud to say that Canadians have gone against this trend, but their compassion and humanitarianism cannot be taken for granted. That is why I first brought this issue up in this place over a year ago. We must ensure the integrity of our system is world class and that Canadians trust it. That is why provinces must not be left to fend for themselves.

In 2017, we saw 20,593 individuals make an inland asylum claim through an irregular crossing and 22,140 individuals make an asylum claim through a regular border crossing. That is a total of 42,733. In 2018, so far we have seen 6,373 irregular crossings. The vast majority of them—5,609, to be exact—crossed over in Quebec. Even though about 40% of them say that they are planning to settle elsewhere in Canada, there is no denying the impact is significant for the province to manage. That is why we need to have leadership from the federal government.

Globally, the United Nations estimates there are over 65 million people forcibly displaced. Of those, 22.5 million are refugees and 50% of the refugees are under the age of 18. These levels are unprecedented. To put everything into perspective Canada's resettlement effort contributions to the global stage, including the Syrian refugee initiative, is only 0.1%. Before anyone jumps up and down and shouts for us to close the borders, we should keep these figures in mind.

• (1110)

That does not mean to say that Canada should not seriously study the issue and devise a plan. The New Democrats have been calling on the Liberals to develop a comprehensive, durable solution that will protect the rights of asylum seekers, maintain the integrity of our system, and ensure this influx does not result in a strain on border

communities. I am sad to say that instead of a proactive approach, the Liberals have resorted to a reactionary approach, taking action only when absolutely forced to. This failure to lead is giving oxygen to those who want to misrepresent and fan the fears of division. In fact, the Conservatives' motion before us today positions themselves as champions for exactly that kind of an approach.

To be clear, I support the call for a study, but the deliberate words chosen to misrepresent the situation in the Conservatives' motion is not an approach I support. At the right time, I will move an amendment to the motion, but before I do that, let us fully examine the Conservative motion.

First, on the use of the word “illegal” in the motion, there is no question the Conservatives are intentionally labelling irregular crossings as “illegal” crossings. That is plain wrong. To be clear, asylum seekers crossing at unofficial border crossing are making irregular crossings, not illegal crossings. Crossing the border at a point not designated as a port of entry is not an offence under the Criminal Code. On the contrary, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act states specifically in section 133 that:

A person who has claimed refugee protection, and who came to Canada directly or indirectly from the country in respect of which the claim is made, may not be charged with an offence under section 122, paragraph 124(1)(a) or section 127 of this Act or under section 57, paragraph 340(c) or section 354, 366, 368, 374 or 403 of the Criminal Code...

The regulations for the act also state in subsection 27(2):

...a person who seeks to enter Canada at a place other than a port of entry must appear without delay for examination at the port of entry that is nearest to that place.

That is exactly what is happening.

Just so everyone is clear on the process, after crossing irregularly, individuals are taken into custody. They are questioned, and their identity is checked. Once cleared by the RCMP, they are handed over to the CBSA for processing. They are interviewed about their personal history and how they got to Canada. They are fingerprinted, photographed, and asked to fill out paperwork. A background check is done. If the person is deemed admissible, their case is transferred to the IRB to adjudicate their refugee claim. No one is jumping the queue, and individuals found not to have met what is prescribed to be a refugee under Canadian law, his or her claim would be rejected by the IRB. That is how the system works and how it should work. These asylum seekers are following Canadian law.

I was deeply troubled by how quickly the Minister of Immigration capitulated to aggressive questioning from the Conservatives at committee on March 19 about the use of the word “illegal” to describe irregular crossings. In fact, he said he was “happy” to use that term. It is as if the Minister of Immigration is ignorant of sections 117 and 133 of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. He is the minister responsible for the act. If the issues were not so serious, it would make a good joke.

Business of Supply

Second, the motion raises the issue of gaps in screening. The way in which the motion is worded, one would think every irregular border crosser has failed the security screening. To be clear, with the influx in irregular crossings, the government should address gaps in screening where they may exist. However, we should take care not to smear all asylum seekers with the same brush.

• (1115)

Currently only 1% of all asylum seekers, regular and irregular, are detained for security reasons. Officials will use extensive information-sharing with allies around the world to determine an individual's admissibility to Canada. Individuals could be inadmissible for security reasons if they had committed serious crimes, or for other financial or health reasons. People who are deemed inadmissible must leave Canada and may be detained pending removal. That is the current process. Everything is done by the book. To suggest otherwise is simply wrong.

Third, on the point of the Prime Minister's #WelcomeToCanada tweet, when I saw that, I was proud to be a Canadian. The issue here is not the sentiment behind the tweet, but the fact that the Prime Minister's rhetoric does not match his actions.

The Liberals have failed to ensure adequate resources are provided to the provinces and agencies working on the ground to deal with the influx of irregular crossings. In fact, the federal government provides no resources to NGOs in support of inland refugee claimants. Provinces and agencies should not be abandoned by the federal government when it comes to inland asylum seekers. The federal government needs to take a leadership role and be a true partner with them.

The NDP is therefore calling for the government to match its words with action. Let us talk the talk and walk the walk. The vast majority of Canadians take pride in Canada's compassionate stance in welcoming refugees to Canada. We saw that through the Syrian refugee initiative, when Canadians overwhelmingly stepped up to volunteer and to privately sponsor refugees to Canada. Even today, Canadians continue to call on the government to lift the cap on the privately sponsored refugees to Canada. The failure of the Liberals to match actions with words will only give oxygen to those who want to instill division and fear in the hearts and minds of Canadians. This needs to stop.

Fourth, the Conservatives suggest that this is somehow a loophole in the safe third country agreement. They are wrong. The Conservatives are taking a page out of the Trump discriminatory anti-refugee rhetoric by advocating for Canada to apply the safe third country agreement to the entire border, thereby effectively erecting an invisible wall on Canada's border. At a time when there is an unprecedented number of people in the world who have been forcibly displaced, Canada must continue to do its part.

To put things into perspective, even with the Syrian refugee initiative, Canada's resettlement effort to this global crisis is only 0.1% of the total need. Instead of pandering to the alt-right, the Liberals need to stand strong and reaffirm that Canada is a fair and compassionate country that respects and celebrates our diversity. Canada can afford to continue to be a beacon of hope on the international stage.

For those who are wondering where the money will come from, if Canada closes the stock option loopholes for the ultra-rich and shuts down access to tax havens, we can reinvest those lost revenues to the most vulnerable. To show leadership, the Liberals should not allow this hateful and divisive approach of pitting the vulnerable against the vulnerable to win the day. Canada needs to show leadership and live up to its obligations under the international law as signatories to the 1951 UN refugee convention and its 1967 protocol.

When the Prime Minister on November 23 took a dramatic departure from his original #WelcomeToCanada tweet and started to parrot anti-refugee rhetoric by stating, "Would-be Canadians need more than just a desire for a better economic future if they expect to be granted refugee status in this country", I was truly ashamed. By insinuating that refugees are trying to cheat the system and jumping the queue is the textbook far-right anti-refugee rhetoric and a level that I did not expect the Prime Minister would stoop too.

• (1120)

If the Prime Minister can reduce himself to that level of rhetoric, no wonder the Conservatives are now suggesting that we close our border to irregular crossings with an invisible wall by declaring the entire border an authorized port of entry. No doubt the Conservatives are inspired by the Trump's overblown obsession to build a wall.

When the Conservatives suggest that irregular border crossings are a loophole in the safe third country agreement, they are deliberately misleading Canadians. Sections 117 and 133 of IRPA clearly show that assertion is false.

The New Democrats and experts agree that the problem on orderly crossings is the safe third country agreement. For over a year now, I have been calling on the government to invoke article 10 of the safe third country agreement and to provide written notice to the United States that we are suspending the agreement.

If the safe third country agreement is suspended, asylum seekers can make safe, orderly crossings at designated ports of entry. This will protect the rights of the asylum seekers, provide safety and stability to Canada's border communities most impacted by this influx, and allow for the government agencies, such as the RCMP, CBSA, IRCC, and the IRB, to strategically deploy personnel and resources necessary to establish border infrastructure instead of this ad hoc approach. This is the rational, reasonable response to this situation.

Furthermore, immigration is in the federal jurisdiction. The federal government has a responsibility to provide leadership on this issue, and to ensure that the situation does not negatively impact provincial governments and services.

Business of Supply

Quebec has seen the overwhelming majority of irregular border crossings. The situation is having an impact on its budgets and service provision. That is not right. When the Quebec government reached out for assistance, the Minister of Immigration opted to chastise it instead. That is not acceptable.

In addition to suspending the safe third country agreement, the NDP has long been calling on the government to provide the needed resources to provincial governments impacted, government agencies, such as the CBSA, RCMP, IRCC, and IRB, and resettlement agencies on the ground.

It is unacceptable to pit vulnerable groups against vulnerable groups and to allow for an asylum claim influx to negatively impact Canadians' access to vital social and health services. Quebec should not have to fight the federal government for resources it needs to help with the influx. Its request should have been met immediately.

Aside from the support for the provinces, the government also needs to show leadership and ensure that the IRB has the appropriate resources.

I wholeheartedly agree that the government has mishandled the situation, but I cannot support this motion. The Liberals are ignoring the situation and the Conservatives are engaging in fearmongering hyperbole to stoke anti-refugee sentiment. Neither party is approaching this situation responsibly. Suspending the safe third country agreement is the way to go forward.

At this point, I would like to move an amendment to the motion: That the motion be amended by: (a) replacing the words “crisis created by the influx of thousands of illegal border crossers travelling across our southern border between ports of entry, that the agencies responsible for dealing with this crisis have found gaps in security screening for newly arrived refugee claimants,” with the words “situation created by the influx of thousands of irregular border crossers travelling across our southern border between ports of entry, that the agencies responsible for dealing with this influx should address gaps in screening where they may be found”; (b) replacing the words “irresponsibility of tweeting #WelcometoCanada to those seeking to enter Canada through illegal means” with the words “irresponsibility of tweeting #WelcometoCanada to those seeking to enter Canada through irregular means without following rhetoric with action to maintain the integrity of Canada's asylum system;” and (c) deleting all of the words in subparagraph (d)(i), and substituting the following: “address the influx of people irregularly entering Canada from the United States, through the suspension of the safe third country agreement.”

I hope my amendment will be accepted so that we can have a rational debate about the impact of irregular crossings without fearmongering and determine what actions should be taken to address the issues without violating Canada's international commitments.

• (1125)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): It is my duty to inform hon. members that an amendment to an opposition motion may be moved only with the consent of the sponsor of the motion. Therefore, I ask the hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill if she consents to this amendment being moved.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: No, Mr. Speaker.

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

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, most Canadians would agree that this government in particular has improved our country. We have demonstrated that we are open and welcoming to those in need of protection.

I cannot help but think we have it right when the Conservatives accuse us of not doing enough with respect to security and the NDP accuse us of not doing enough with respect to affording those protections to people who are in need of it.

I take issue particularly with the comment that was made by my colleague from the NDP when she said that this government was demonstrating what it was willing to do in a reactionary measure. The reality of the situation is that we have invested \$173 million to strengthen security operations. We have worked with provinces and territories to develop operational plans. We have extensive outreach into potential migrant communities. We have expanded the processing capacity in Montreal. We are continuously working with our U.S. colleagues on how we can ensure this happens in a proper fashion and everything is dealt with appropriately.

How can that member say we are reacting instead of proactively taking measures, which we are doing? I have illustrated a few of the ways we are doing that.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to note that the Liberals always say they are adopting the right decisions because the Conservatives are leaning to the far right and the NDP is going too far left when we put forward reasonable suggestions and solutions to an issue.

The reality is that when people are forced to cross our border through irregular crossings, they are risking life and limb. When they are being forced to do that, they are putting border communities under enormous pressure and stress. That is exactly what is playing out right now before our very eyes.

We could alleviate that if we stopped forcing people to go through irregular crossings. By suspending the safe third country agreement, we would have orderly crossings through the border. This would alleviate the problems.

The member said that the government was doing everything it could. If it is doing everything it can, then why is the IRB only receiving \$74 million in this year's budget? That \$74 million will not even address half of the backlog already in the system, in which there are some 46,000 people. At the rate of 2,100 new claims a month, that budget will not address the issue. How will this ensure that the public has confidence in the government to address this issue?

All the government is doing is creating legacy 2.0, an environment where people's lives are stuck in limbo. That is not good for Canada, it is not good for asylum seekers, and we need to fix that.

Business of Supply

• (1130)

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the majority of my colleague's time was spent on talking about how she would suspend the safe third country agreement, which would essentially take away any ability for the CBSA to control our border. She talked about the many millions of extra dollars that she would spend rather than trying to encourage people to enter the country through planned and orderly migration.

The member also used an amendment to talk about the word “illegal” rather than really offering anything substantive to the debate on today's motion.

To a lot of folks across the country, and certainly those in Quebec right now, this is an acute issue. A lot of representation by both the Liberal Party and the NDP has already failed on this matter.

Just to clarify for the people who are watching, what would she do as immigration minister to address this issue?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Speaker, if the member had actually listened to my speech, she would know that I spent the majority of the time criticizing the Conservatives' motion and stating my reasons that I would not support the motion. The Conservatives' motion is a misrepresentation of the issue and is not helpful to the situation. Frankly, it is not helpful to all of us as Canadians who pride ourselves on the fact that we welcome the vast diversity that makes up Canada's demographics.

In response to my question earlier, the member said that using the word “illegal” versus “irregular” was just semantics. It is not just semantics. As elected officials, we do our jobs by talking, and we need to choose the right words. When we deliberately choose a word that inflames an issue, is not accurate and is factually false, it is not just semantics. The word “illegal” versus “irregular” makes a substantive difference. The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, IRPA, clearly states that there are provisions for people to cross irregularly and that it is not against the Criminal Code.

However, suspending the safe third country agreement would in fact address the issue the member herself indicated is key here, which is orderly crossings. Stop making people cross irregularly, which is creating the disorder that exists today. Let us start with that. Suspend it temporarily and engage with the international community on how to deal with Trump's discriminatory policies that are striking fear in the hearts and minds of the people from America so that we can move forward and provide the level of leadership that is required and which I think people want to see from Canada.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague for her passionate, fact-based speech.

She stated that the Liberals are not talking about suspending the Canada-U.S. safe third country agreement even though that is the main reason why we find ourselves in this situation. With President Trump, immigrants are not welcome in the United States and many orders and agreements concerning temporary permits used by several communities will not be renewed. Quebec is receiving 90% of this irregular immigration. That is why the National Assembly made a unanimous request to the federal government for an additional

\$146 million to manage the situation by helping organizations that provide services to irregular migrants.

Bridges Not Borders and Amnesty International have organized a number of public meetings in my riding, with a focus on prevention. This is what the government should be doing. Would it be a good idea for the federal government to work on prevention, especially when the majority of migrants who are trying to cross the border irregularly from the United States have documentation, since they have already applied in the United States? These people have already prepared their files and are coming here in good faith with all of the required documentation. They are not trying to enter illegally. Most of these cases are documented.

The government should continue to provide resources to the CBSA, which lost 1,300 officers. The government should also invest in the Immigration and Refugee Board so that it can deal with the backlog and ensure that cases are processed in less than 60 days. There is currently a 20-month wait, which is completely unacceptable.

What does my colleague think about this backlog, in light of the fact that 90% of these migrants are crossing into Quebec?

• (1135)

[*English*]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Speaker, indeed, the irregular crossings in Quebec are impacting the member and her community in a very significant way. The government needs to step up to ensure that the resources are there for all of the agencies, provide them with the kind of support they need, be a true partner with them, and resource them accordingly.

On the question around processing claims, it is absolutely critical that resources be put in place. When the Conservatives were in government, they did not provide adequate resources to the IRB so that these cases could be processed in a timely fashion. When the Liberals came into office, they also did not do that. The sum of \$74 million will not do the job. We need to increase the funding if we want to ensure that the integrity of the system is protected.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to speak to the very important motion moved by my colleague from Calgary Nose Hill.

I want to begin by saying that this is about our country's sovereignty and the control of our borders. Much has been said on the issue. The parties have been throwing around all sorts of ideas, but what is important to me, as the shadow minister for public safety, is that sovereignty and border control be made the top priority.

Business of Supply

The Liberal government seems unable to address the crisis created by the influx of thousands of illegal border crossers travelling across our southern border between ports of entry. What is more, the agencies responsible for dealing with this crisis have found gaps in security screening for newly arrived refugee claimants. They have indicated that there is a major backlog in scheduled hearings and in carrying out deportation orders, and that this trend is expected to increase over the summer months.

In our motion, we are calling on the government to ensure that the agencies responsible for our borders are properly equipped so that they can continue to do their jobs effectively and that those arriving at Canadian borders go through the appropriate processes.

We want the government to admit the Prime Minister's irresponsibility in tweeting #WelcometoCanada to those seeking to enter Canada through illegal means and take responsibility for the massive social services costs burdening the provincial governments. We also want the government to table in the House no later than May 11, 2018, a plan to stop the influx of people illegally entering Canada and take appropriate measures to handle those who have already claimed asylum.

Now that the weather has warmed up, the Canada Border Services Agency, CBSA, is reporting significantly higher numbers of illegal migrants crossing at non-designated ports of entry, in this case, Saint-Bernard-de-Lacolle in Quebec. The number of illegal entries has grown considerably since the Prime Minister's infamous and irresponsible January 2017 tweet in which he told the whole world, "To those fleeing persecution, terror & war, Canadians will welcome you, regardless of your faith. Diversity is our strength. #WelcomeToCanada".

No matter what the Liberals or anyone else says about it, that is at the root of the problem we are discussing today. That extremely unwise and potentially disastrous tweet was heard loud and clear by foreign nationals residing in the United States illegally who know that the U.S. government will take temporary protection status away from hundreds of thousands of them in July 2019. Worse still, the Prime Minister's tweet was heard around the world by people who are not refugees, just people looking for a country where they can make a better life for themselves. CBSA officers told my office that quite a few of the illegal migrants crossing into Quebec at the non-designated port of entry are from Nigeria. As everyone knows, Nigeria is not a poor country. Its GDP is one of the highest in Africa. However, the Liberals want Canadians to believe that all illegal migrants are refugees and that anyone who does not agree with their position is heartless and lacking in compassion. This is really a big problem. With their ideology, the Liberals want everyone to believe that we Conservatives are heartless because we want to protect our border and we want immigrants to come to Canada legally. I would like that to stop. There comes a point when enough is enough.

This crisis is entirely on the Prime Minister. We are talking about the most important elected member, the one with the most power in Canada: the Prime Minister of Canada. This problem is his doing. The Canada Border Services Agency has been swamped by this crisis. To date, more than 20,000 illegal migrants entered Canada through Quebec in 2017. What I am about to say next is important. Border officers are reporting that upper management is pressuring

them to drastically reduce security processing. Security processing usually takes eight hours. The process now takes less than two hours.

The Liberal government has been known to give these illegal migrants expedited work permits, health care, and housing services at no cost to them, while those attempting to immigrate to Canada through legal channels have to wait longer and pay immigration fees.

• (1140)

The government has yet to take any steps to stop the influx of these migrants. In 2018, an estimated 400 illegal immigrants will enter Canada daily during the summer at a non-designated point of entry in Quebec. This has already started. Four hundred immigrants a day is 12,000 a month. If we multiply that by the next three or four months when the weather is nice, we get 50,000 immigrants. It adds up quickly.

The \$146 million that the federal government owes Quebec for the cost of dealing with illegal migrants in Quebec is nothing compared to the anticipated cost in 2018. The Liberals are also guilty of playing with words, since the \$85 million that was announced for the Canada Border Services Agency to deal with these new illegal migrants is not even enough to cover overtime pay and other costs related to this crisis.

Meanwhile, the situation at the border is getting increasingly chaotic. It is becoming painfully clear that the safety of Canadians is not a priority for the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister needs to understand that Canada's immigration laws were not written and passed by one particular political party. They have been written over a number of years by the Parliament of Canada. This legislation has been introduced by Liberals and Conservatives alike over the years. Immigration procedures in Canada have been administered by all political parties that have been in power for over 150 years.

The same holds true for public safety. Every party that has been in power has worked on developing public safety rules, and we have a duty to enforce them. All of this is in the best interests of Canadians. When they get up in the morning, Canadians need to know that their various governments are there to protect them and ensure that they live in a trouble-free country.

Business of Supply

On weekends, when I am out and about in my riding of Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, everyone talks to me about the massive fiasco the Prime Minister created with his now infamous tweet. Migrants are flooding into Lacolle, and people are worried, with good reason. I receive a lot of information. I get it from border services officers; they say they want to talk to me but are prohibited from doing so. There are confidentiality issues to consider, of course, but the situation we are in defies belief. These people just want to make sure someone in the opposition knows what is going on. They have tried, in vain, to talk to their bosses and to someone in the government. Border services officers do not feel that the government understands or accepts their concerns.

Officers have a duty to perform. I was in the same situation when I was a soldier. We have an obligation to serve our country as efficiently and professionally as possible. We are sworn to do our duty. The same goes for border services officers and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. They are there to enforce the law. When they are asked to do less and to let things slide, they do not understand. It is not in their nature. That is not why they chose this line of work. These people are worried and cannot agree to such a request.

It is still a sensitive subject, but there is one case I could talk about. An officer contacted me and told me that he was baffled, that he was not supposed to be telling me this, but that someone needed to know. I will read out part of what he wrote to me about the migrants coming in right now. On the subject of illegal migrants, the officer wrote:

They land at JFK in New York and head for Roxham Road. Everything is planned in advance. The government says it is monitoring them, but it is not. We are being pressured to minimize detentions. We let in guys from Sudan without a passport, without any ID besides a library card, and they do not get detained. We got a known murderer from Senegal, and we had a really hard time hanging on to him. They want us to exhaust all other options before considering detention...but a murderer?

It is clear that the situation is serious.

• (1145)

Our border services officers question people whose identity is not clear, who have committed crimes in their country, but the government is pushing to not jail them. The government does not want people to say that it is putting people in jail and is asking officers to leave them in the wilderness. Do my colleagues believe that is what Canadians want and that all parties accept this type of situation? I do not think so. Border services officers are getting tired of this.

This is a chaotic situation. Chaos arises when officers are asked to do things that run counter to what they were hired to do and to the pledge they made to serve our country well. On the one hand, the safety of Canadians is at stake. On the other, there is chaos, the cost, and the social impact, especially in Quebec at this time.

What prime minister with a modicum of common sense would allow our border and immigration laws to be flouted by foreigners? Furthermore, what prime minister would allow these abuses to happen and reward them with better service than that actually afforded to genuine immigrants? We often hear about George Soros. Is the Prime Minister really going to swallow what this man says? That is worrisome. Does he not know about the chaos in other countries where lax border policies have left communities in

shambles with drastic increases in violence? More importantly, is the Prime Minister imposing his vision of Canada on the Quebec nation?

Quebec signed an immigration agreement with the federal government. By allowing illegal migrants unrestricted access to Quebec communities, the Prime Minister has found a very creative way of undermining Quebec's authority. In other words, the existing immigration agreements between the federal government and the province of Quebec are now void. Actual immigrants and refugees attempting to come to Quebec legally are forced to wait longer because the Prime Minister decided to reward law-breakers first. That is a real shame.

Furthermore, since immigration resources are already stretched so thin, we must consider the other costs for Quebec and the other provinces. The Prime Minister's odd decision to allow illegal immigrants to enter Canada unimpeded puts enormous pressure on provincial social services. Let us be honest. The provinces are responsible for the vast majority of government services provided to newcomers in Canada. Provinces provide income support to newcomers. Food banks, housing, schools, and health care services are all under provincial jurisdiction. As we have seen, Quebec has had a lot to deal with.

Using simple arithmetic, we have a pretty good idea of how much Quebec will have to pay as a result of the Liberal Party's new border policy.

Do my colleagues know that the Prime Minister is setting up a committee to examine the situation and ask illegal immigrants where in Canada they want to live? That is unbelievable. Quebec has said that it has done enough, and rightly so. Rather than resolving the problem and putting a stop to illegal immigration, the Liberals are going to set up a bus stop of sorts, which says "Quebec is full. Where do you want to go? Ontario is this way. Alberta is in the same direction, but a bit farther away." What is that all about? Is the government saying that people just have to line up and they will be redirected when they arrive in Canada? That will not work. It is unbelievable.

Meanwhile, every week, my colleagues from every party and I are meeting with legal immigrants in our riding offices because they have a problem. Some have been here for three or four years. They submitted their application but, somewhere along the way, one of their documents was lost somewhere in the public service, and they are being threatened with deportation. I am not joking. There are at least 100 immigrants per year in my riding alone who encounter this sort of problem and are constantly worried about being deported because of administrative issues. Meanwhile, illegal immigrants are streaming across our borders and are being directed to different areas of Canada. What is more, the provinces are required to give them money and everything they need.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, an NDP colleague disagrees with what I am saying. She will have her chance to talk later.

Business of Supply

•(1150)

Quebec has done enough, and everyone knows that. We need to continue working to protect the other provinces and put an end to this problem immediately.

We therefore have a choice to make as a society. We must choose to enforce our sovereignty, which is what Canadians expect, and especially the sovereignty of our borders. That is why we are calling on the government to adopt a plan, because right now all it is saying is that it will send money, millions of dollars. At the end of the day, the problem will persist. Even if we rehire thousands of border officers and hire hundreds of immigration officers, until the issue of border management is resolved by changing the safe third country agreement, the problem will persist. People will continue coming to Canada, because they know that they can cross into Canada without any problems through the back door.

The government therefore needs to step up, come up with a plan, issue a clear directive, and ask the United States to amend the safe third country agreement to fix the loophole. This message must be sent around the world. The Prime Minister could then tweet something intelligent, telling the world that Canada will continue welcoming them and we are still open, but people must cross our borders legally and stop using roundabout ways to come to our country, because it will not work.

A crisis is brewing. At least eight out of the 10 people arriving here currently do not meet the requirement to be deemed a refugee. These people will have to be deported. At some point in time we will have to track them down because they will try to run and hide. They do not want to be deported. We will be facing a crisis trying to deal with families that have to go back to their country of origin. That will be another problem with its own set of costs, including the human cost.

The Conservatives are accused of being heartless, but that is not so. We do think about things. That is why we want to fix the problem. We see the big picture. We think things through. We currently have a government that simply reacts to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars instead of saying that we have a problem on our hands and we need to address it. It is time to take action. That is all there is to it. If the government could take immediate action then we could come back here in a year and see that everything has changed. People will keep coming to Canada legally and we will gladly welcome them.

•(1155)

[*English*]

Mr. John Oliver (Oakville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his remarks, although I do not necessarily agree with them.

I want to make this debate more personal. My wife and her family are refugees from Poland. In 1980-1981, they fled Poland and ended up unexpectedly and unplanned in Austria. The Austrian people took them in. They provided shelter, health care, and food, and they provided my wife with education. They did this for six months, until the family was relocated to Canada.

Interestingly, my wife's younger sister married a very fine young man from Vietnam who, when he was a young man, fled Vietnam

with his family and ended up here in Canada. When I sit down with my wife's family for dinner, I am the only non-refugee at the table.

When will it be Canada's turn, like Austria, to accept unexpected refugees? Under what circumstances would he ever think that Canada would accept unplanned and unexpected refugees and provide generous accommodation, as happened with my wife's family's experience in Austria?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, my colleague gave a perfect example of how Canada has been welcoming real refugees for decades, maybe even a hundred years. I know many refugees who fled Vietnam in the 1970s. People come to Canada from all over. We happily welcomed Syrian refugees last year. The Conservatives even set the targets, to help out and to bring in Syrians. We have never been against refugees. We are talking about real refugees, not people who buy a plane ticket to New York. They are making a detour to come to Canada through the side door. This is our problem. We have never been against refugees. On the contrary. We have no problem happily welcoming refugees, like my colleague's friends, who file legal claims and come here.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am absolutely appalled by my colleague's speech.

With all due respect, I think that his comments were completely irresponsible. He said that border services officers and Royal Canadian Mounted Police officers were letting criminals cross without checking their identification, passports, or documents, and that people could freely walk into Canada. I do not know where he got the figure that eight out of 10 people do not meet the refugee criteria and that they are free to go anywhere in Canada and take advantage of our services. Come on.

A public speech like this from a member of the House of Commons is shameful. I cannot believe he said this in the House of Commons. He is saying that the people of Lacolle who welcome Nigerian migrants coming from the United States are worried. Indeed, they are worried. They are worried about whether they will be able to provide services to the people who need help.

I do not know whether the member is aware that even though Nigeria is a rich country, Canada is discouraging people from travelling there because of the political instability. It is dangerous to go there. Therefore, when the member gives a speech, perhaps he could be better informed about what the Canada-U.S. safe third country agreement is all about and why so many migrants are crossing into Canada irregularly. It is because there is an agreement that prevents them from entering legally—

•(1200)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, I can show my colleague the evidence outside the House.

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I would never dare come to this place and trot out falsehoods just to give a speech. I have proof from people on the ground. Everything I said is based on facts. I would be pleased to share the evidence with my colleague. My main goal is to solve the problem.

[English]

Hon. Kent Hehr (Calgary Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his speech, yet I found it long on rhetoric and very short on solutions. I note that he is highly concerned about some of the gaps that are emerging, the backlogs, and he calls for a reinvestment in being “properly equipped”. I think those words are code for investing in the CBSA.

I would like to ask the member if he looks at some of the issues that may be arising as having been caused by his government's cutting \$400 million to the CBSA and not preparing for an immigration system that works.

Another thing is that if we look at situations like this, we see the difficulty of people throughout the world when they struggle to find places to go that have reasonable immigration systems in place. Canada is an example of that.

Does the member not think that having a compassionate system that recognizes this great difficulty is important to our nation?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Right now, the government's favourite argument seems to be that the Conservatives made \$400 million in cuts to border services when we were in office. Yes, action needed to be taken. Budget cuts were made in every federal government department. However, we had not had any problems at the border for 150 years. Our border services officers were doing their job and making sure that things were running smoothly at our border crossings.

Now, the Prime Minister has created an unusual situation and things are completely different. The government needs to make new investments, but the problem was not caused by the budget cuts the Conservatives made in every department to balance the budget, something the Liberals do not know how to do. The Prime Minister is the one who created the problem. That is the difference. They can repeat their argument 100,000 times, but that is the truth.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am somewhat disappointed in the approach the Conservative opposition has taken on this issue. When I reflect back, it was not that long ago that we had the apology given by the Prime Minister with regard to the *Komagata Maru* and the horrible historical incident that took place here in Canada.

We have seen political parties of all stripes being more sympathetic and wanting to assist refugees and those who are unplanned refugees, but my concern is that the Conservative Party is moving even further to the right and trying to portray an untrue image of refugees as being difficult for Canada to manage. In large part, Canada is what it is today because of refugees who have come to our country over the years.

Yes, we recognize that we are a little high this year or last year with regard to numbers, but we have had high numbers in the past. Is it now the Conservative policy to see a reduction in the overall stream of refugees who want to come to the country and completely reject individuals who are unscheduled? Is that the direction the Conservative Party wants to take our country?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure I understand the substance of the question, but what I can say is that Canada has targets for workers, family reunification, and refugees. There are people all over the world who want to come to Canada as refugees, but those who enter illegally are corrupting the system, and as a result we can no longer accept people from other places who are anxiously waiting for their turn to come to Canada legally. That is the problem. Let us focus on the people who follow the rules and refuse entry to those who do not.

•(1205)

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Mr. Speaker, when my colleague uses words like “corrupt” and “illegal”, is he aware that, under the Canada-U.S. safe third country agreement, those arriving from the United States cannot do so legally and must therefore enter irregularly? I hope the Conservatives know that this is not an offence under the Criminal Code. These people are not committing a crime when they cross the border irregularly between official ports of entry.

These irregular entries are creating a serious backlog and, consequently, a lack of resources. The Conservatives cut 1,300 border officer positions when they were in office. We therefore need the federal government to come up with a plan and to make investments. Unlike what the Conservatives are calling for, if we want the people arriving from the United States to be able to enter Canada legally, we need to suspend the Canada-U.S. safe third country agreement.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, we are debating the issue and it is up to the government to make that decision.

My colleague from Calgary said that I spoke for a long time. I spoke for 20 minutes, but the situation could be resolved in two minutes. The NDP is calling on the government to suspend the Canada-U.S. safe third country agreement. We are asking that it be amended so that it applies to the entire border.

When people cross the border at Saint-Bernard-de-Lacolle, RCMP officers tell them that it is illegal to do so and put them in handcuffs. If it were not illegal, the RCMP would not do that. These people are breaking the law. That is what the RCMP is saying. The signs say that it is “illegal”, not “irregular”. Members need to stop playing with words.

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I want to say that I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the member for Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill. Our government is committed to protecting all Canadians. Our government is also committed to maintaining border security. However, our government is also committed to respecting its national and international obligations.

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Before I go any further, I want to thank all of our partners in the field, including border services officers; the RCMP; employees of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration; our settlement services; all of our partners on the ground; the members of Parliament from Quebec who are being very helpful; and all of the other MPs who participated in missions abroad to address communities, for example in the United States, to ensure that people are familiar with our laws and regulations before they come to Canada.

We are going to continue to manage irregular immigration in accordance with Canadian and international law. We are going to continue to handle refugee claims in accordance with our values as an open and welcoming nation. We are also going to continue to manage immigration applications in keeping with our status as a world leader on immigration. Let me be clear, Canada's national security is our number one priority. Anyone wishing to enter Canada must demonstrate that they meet our requirements.

Let me say a few words about how claims are handled. I want to assure my colleagues that Canadian authorities rigorously enforce the acts and regulations that maintain the integrity of our borders and keep our country secure, while offering asylum to those who need protection. Asylum seekers face a very strict and rigorous process to determine their eligibility. There is no guarantee that an asylum seeker will be allowed to stay in Canada. People who enter Canada between ports of entry are stopped by RCMP officers or local law enforcement. They are taken to an immigration officer at a port of entry. A Canada Border Services Agency officer will then verify their identities using both biographical and biometric data.

I should note that it is thanks to our government that the Canada Border Services Agency has the resources to manage our borders effectively. Even though the members of the previous government do not want to bring it up, I want to point out once again that it was the former Harper government that cut \$390 million from the service responsible for protecting our borders.

Asylum seekers go through a thorough screening process, including a criminal background check and security screening. Their records are then examined for any immigration, criminal, or security concerns against Canadian and international databases, as well as our partners' databases. No asylum seeker leaves the port of entry without undergoing very strict security screening.

Not everyone is eligible to make an asylum claim, and not all asylum claims will be accepted. The Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada decides whether to accept or reject each asylum claim. The board is the largest administrative tribunal in Canada. It is an independent, impartial, quasi-judicial immigration tribunal. Its decisions are based on the evidence submitted to it and the applicable legislation and comply with the principles of natural justice.

Each case is decided on the basis of its specific circumstances. When an asylum claim is rejected, that triggers the appeal process. After spending a decade sabotaging the immigration system, the opposition party had the nerve to move a motion calling on the government to provide tools to the organizations that handle that process. The Immigration and Refugee Board had a huge backlog and had been utterly neglected. That is why we worked with the

board to boost its productivity and invested more money to build on that progress.

Once those people have exhausted all legal avenues, they are required to obey the law and leave Canada or be deported. Asylum claims are governed in part by the international treaties to which Canada is a signatory. As such, we have a legal responsibility to assess asylum claims made under these international conventions. This makes the asylum system fundamentally different from all other types of immigration.

As to the measures in place, our government is working very hard on this file. Despite the challenges we are facing that were bequeathed to us by the former government, we have taken concrete steps toward real progress on this file.

● (1210)

The 2018 budget will invest \$173.2 million in managing irregular migration to support security operations at the border and speed up asylum claim processing.

The Immigration and Refugee Board will also receive an additional \$74 million over the next two years to process asylum claims. That \$74 million was announced when the government tabled the budget on February 27.

One factor that contributed to the massive influx of irregular migrants last summer was the fact that false information was circulating abroad. As soon as we learned that false information was being disseminated in certain communities in the United States, we contacted them to dispel the myths. We also reached out to those groups to make sure they had a proper understanding of Canada's asylum system. We sent a clear message that irregular border crossings do not mean guaranteed entry into Canada.

There are very strict immigration and customs rules and regulations, and we will rigorously enforce them to protect our communities from security risks. This communications work has paid off. The number of asylum seekers from the targeted communities has decreased considerably. This success has encouraged us to continue on the same path. Together with MPs, we continue to educate these communities and to set the record straight on our asylum system. We have also been working closely with our missions in the United States and we are spreading the message on social media.

In this context, I want to reiterate that the government is committed to ensuring both orderly migration and the safety and security of all Canadians. By law, every person seeking asylum in Canada has the right to due process even if that person entered illegally between two ports of entry. However, there is no guarantee that an asylum seeker can stay in Canada under the asylum process.

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Our government is following this matter very closely and we are working with all our partners on the ground to resolve this situation. Summer 2017 was unique in that Canada saw an unexpected increase in irregular migration. Thanks to our close collaboration with the provinces, Quebec and Ontario in particular, we were able to welcome thousands of migrants without compromising the safety of Canadians.

Contrary to what is being widely reported, it is impossible to predict the influx of asylum seekers this summer. However, in cooperation with the provinces, territories, municipalities, and non-government agencies, we have implemented a national emergency preparedness plan that every federal department can follow in the event of a significant increase in the number of irregular entries and asylum claims.

We continue to engage with different communities, especially in the United States, in order to better inform them of Canada's laws and procedures, and to prevent the dissemination of false information about Canada's asylum system. Once again, we will continue to work closely with our American colleagues on this file because it concerns migration throughout North America. Above all, we will continue to work with the provinces of Quebec and Ontario.

We will continue to work very hard. We have had meetings with the task force, which proposed concrete solutions, and we are also considering what it is asking for.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for recognizing me and allowing me to speak to this important issue, which we want to manage properly. That is what we are doing.

• (1215)

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his remarks.

During his speech, he mentioned that false information was being spread, particularly in the United States, about Canada welcoming refugees. Does the member acknowledge that this was the result of the Prime Minister's impetuous tweet right in the middle of this crisis?

As was reported by the *National Post* just a few weeks ago, the first secretary at Canada's embassy in Mexico sent a message to Ottawa asking for guidance not long after the Prime Minister's tweet. He stated that the embassy was receiving an increasing number of refugee enquiries following the publicity around the Prime Minister's tweet on welcoming immigrants.

Will the member acknowledge that the Prime Minister played a key role and, unfortunately, an unfortunate one in this situation?

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Speaker, as I said in my speech, false information was being disseminated.

This is why we took all the necessary steps to address the problem. For example, some of our MPs travelled abroad to clearly explain to targeted communities that if people irregularly crossed the border into Canada, they would not be guaranteed to stay. These missions abroad were successful.

We also have partners in the United States who are doing this work for us, which helps us get accurate information to these communities. Once again, we want to manage this migration at the

borders in an orderly fashion, and this is what we are doing. We have a task force on migration, but we also have various partners who are helping us manage this irregular migration. We will do everything we have to in order to make our laws known abroad and in Canada, and to ensure that the safety and security of Canadians remains the priority.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

We know the situation we are dealing with was caused by Mr. Trump's immigration orders and the decision not to renew the temporary status program for people who belong to a number of communities living in the United States. Those people make up the bulk of the illegal migrants crossing the border because of the safe third country agreement.

Does my colleague agree that it is time to suspend that agreement so that people who want to enter Canada through the United States can do so at designated ports of entry?

Amnesty International, the Council of Canadians, and a number of law professors have taken the government to court to have the agreement rescinded because it violates the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.

In light of all this information, the influx of migrants coming to Canada, the Canada Border Services Agency's projections, and the problems of the past year and a half, should we not suspend the safe third country agreement?

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is talking about experts.

I am going to talk about experts too. Just last week, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees' representative in Canada said that the safe third country agreement continues to apply and that Canada has the situation well in hand at this time.

If we are going to bring up experts, the UNHCR is the expert on refugees' rights. I am quite amused to hear the NDP contradicting this body, which is recognized as the top expert in Canada. Evidently, the NDP does not believe what the UNHCR says about refugees and the safe third country agreement.

The UNHCR representative said that it would be highly irresponsible to withdraw from this agreement. We are going to continue our discussions with our American counterparts. Only yesterday, as we all know, the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness spoke with his American counterpart about all the border issues we are currently facing.

Business of Supply

• (1220)

[English]

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to extend my sincere condolences to all those who were affected by yesterday's tragic attack at Yonge and Finch. As the member of Parliament for Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill and as a Canadian who lives so close to this area, I am disheartened and appalled at what happened. I would like to thank the Toronto police and the first responders who worked so bravely at the scene. I want Canadians to know that we should not live in fear. We are united in supporting the victims of this attack, and we will remain strong together.

I am privileged to be able to continue this important debate on the motion with respect to irregular migration. We have heard many inaccurate portrayals of the situation, in part because there is a misunderstanding as to exactly how our system works. Therefore, I would like to take a moment to review that process and reaffirm why we offer protection to asylum seekers from around the world.

Key to this discussion is understanding the objectives of our asylum system. The objectives of Canada's asylum system are to save lives, to offer protection to the displaced and persecuted, to meet our country's international legal obligations with respect to refugees, and to respond to international crises by providing assistance to those in need of protection.

As the chair of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association, I have the privilege of working with parliamentarians from 29 other NATO countries who are committed to the defence and security of their nations. Like us, they are also committed to the values that we cherish, and a long-standing and well-respected international reputation for generosity and humanitarianism.

In my riding of Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, we are a vibrant community of many different cultures, backgrounds, and religions. Some are newcomers and others have been here for generations. However, what we share is the love for a Canada that is welcoming regardless of our differences, and a commitment that it is our diversity that builds our society, culture, and economy. That is why it is so important that Canada has an asylum system that is highly respected globally, and defined by a model that is fair, secure, and efficient.

As members are aware, asylum claims are governed in part by the international treaties that Canada has signed. As such, we have a legal responsibility to assess asylum claims made under these international conventions. That being said, crossing into Canada irregularly between designated ports of entry can be dangerous.

[Translation]

Canada remains an open and welcoming country to those in need of protection, but our government is committed to orderly migration.

[English]

Our government is unwavering in our commitment to protect Canadians while supporting a strong asylum system and meeting our obligations to provide due process to persons seeking protection. Individuals who are intercepted by law enforcement after crossing the border irregularly are brought to an immigration officer, who will

conduct an examination to determine the identity of the person and his or her admissibility to Canada. An initial security screening is also conducted to ensure that the individual does not pose a security threat to Canada and to determine whether he or she is eligible to make a refugee claim. All eligible claimants have access to a full, fact-based hearing before the Immigration and Refugee Board, which provides a fair and independent hearing.

I am a member of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, and we are currently reviewing the appointment, training, and complaints process of the Immigration and Refugee Board to ensure that a fair and independent hearing is provided. Decisions are made at that hearing on the merits of the specific facts presented in an individual case and in accordance with Canada's immigration laws. As we have heard from members of the RCMP and the CBSA, many of these individuals are at risk of persecution and turn to Canada to help them in their time of need.

• (1225)

It is our duty under international laws to afford them the opportunity to have their case heard. If they have a valid claim, they can stay, and if they do not, they will be, and are, removed from Canada.

That being said, we are working closely with our partners and many government agencies to ensure our asylum system remains effective. In budget 2018, we invested an additional \$173.2 million to support security operations at the Canada-U.S. border and for the processing of asylum claimants.

We are managing the system responsibly. The head of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees here in Canada, who is the international authority on the issue of asylum, has said, "One thing which has also been noticeable is the effort of the Government of Canada to respond to this crisis. Very rapidly, the authorities, the Canadian authorities, both at the federal level and at the provincial level, took responsible measures to make sure that people will be processed in a fair manner and in a rapid manner. So therefore, we should not cry wolf. Canada is very well equipped to respond to any increased number of asylum seekers."

The government is committed to ensuring the security of Canadians and to upholding our international obligations and commitments to provide due process to persons seeking protection. We have re-established Canada's presence on the world stage, restored refugee health care, invested in our border integrity, led on refugee resettlement, cut processing times for family reunification, and addressed the backlogs for so many different immigration streams.

As has been our tradition throughout our country's history, Canada will continue to abide by international laws. We will continue to provide protection to vulnerable individuals and ensure they undergo rigorous security screenings and fact-based hearings at the Immigration and Refugee Board. We will ensure that Canada's asylum system remains globally respected with a fair, secure, and efficient model.

Business of Supply

I have appreciated the opportunity to speak about this important topic, and to highlight some of the measures our government has undertaken to ensure security while also addressing effectively the recent influx of asylum seekers in our country.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Canada is upholding its international agreements, if we are a country based on the rule of law and we want to see those rules applied fairly, if someone presents himself to a port of entry from the United States, having already claimed asylum in that country, he would be turned away at the border, based on our international safe third country agreement with the United States. If that same asylum seeker who has already claimed asylum in the United States was to then cross, as many illegal border migrants have, into Quebec or Manitoba, he would be allowed to under the government's system.

How is that not circumventing a fair process being applied and meeting our international agreements? I would like an explanation from the member on how she can say that, in light of my example.

• (1230)

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Mr. Speaker, it is very important to note that no compromise to the process has been made. We have incredible people involved in the security industry, in the refugee system, and all of our government departments. We are ensuring they are able to do the job. Further to that, they are professionals and are accustomed to dealing with an increase in volume, and it would be unfair to think that they are unable to do so.

We have invested \$173 million in our security and border processes, so the punchline is that no compromise has been made to Canadian security, and we are addressing our international commitments and laws in doing so.

Hon. Kent Hehr (Calgary Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when I look at the Conservative motion, it is essentially asking for things like having the Liberals move on an improved border process and having claims investigated in a reasonable fashion. I note our government's investments in this process.

Could the member comment on how the Conservative government ran its immigration program and how some of the cuts maybe led to some of these incidents arising?

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question and for the incredible work he has been doing on this file.

The important thing to note is that we are always focused on making improvements. We are making the investments, but we have to determine whether there is anything significantly broken. There simply being a higher volume does not in fact mean that the process or the people involved in the process or the outcome of the process are in any way compromised.

There is an increase in volume, and we need to make investments to address that increase and to make sure that the resources are there to deal with that increased volume, which is what we have done. However, it does not in any way call into question the process. At this point we have not heard any evidence that the process, and therefore the outcome of that process, is in any way flawed.

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, I will go back to my question, which the member did not answer. How is it fair that someone who

has claimed asylum in the United States who goes to a Canadian port of entry to try to gain entry is turned away, because Canada has signed a safe third country agreement, yet that same person could go right to one of those areas in Quebec and Manitoba that we hear about so often in the news and are discussing today and be allowed access?

How is that fair? How is that safe?

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Mr. Speaker, we have to go back to first principles. We have to ask ourselves what our responsibility is as a nation and what our responsibilities are as Canadian citizens. We have made a commitment, not only to Canadians but to international organizations and international laws, that when asylum seekers knock on our door, it is our responsibility to provide them with due process and to give them the protection they are seeking, as we can.

That is the role of our asylum system. That is the role and responsibility of Canadians. That is what we must do when the world's most vulnerable knock on our door. We have to address our commitment in that regard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform you that I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the member for Richmond—Arthabaska. I am sure his speech will do justice to his enormous talent, and we look forward to hearing it.

As this is the first opportunity I have had to address the House since the terrible tragedy that occurred in Toronto, I want to take a moment to talk about it as the member for Mégantic—L'Érable. The people of Lac-Mégantic, who went through their own unimaginable tragedy nearly five years ago now, send their full support. We know how hard it is for everyone directly or indirectly affected by such an event. For the families of the victims and people in general, when a tragedy, attack, or unexpected and incomprehensible accident strikes, one that no one ever wants to experience in their lifetime, the event remains etched in their memories and hearts for a very long time, whether they were directly or indirectly affected.

I wish to extend to all the families, to everyone in Toronto and across Canada, our deepest sympathies to the families and especially to everyone directly affected by this tragedy. Our understanding, our love, and our hearts are with them to help them through this very difficult time.

We are here to talk about the migrant crisis. The official opposition has moved a very important motion. I will read the motion we are debating today for the benefit of those watching and listening to us. This motion was moved by my colleague from Calgary Nose Hill and by my colleague from Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles:

That, given the government's failure to address the crisis created by the influx of thousands of illegal border crossers travelling across our southern border between ports of entry, that the agencies responsible for dealing with this crisis have found gaps in security screening for newly arrived refugee claimants, as well as a backlog in both scheduled hearings and carrying out deportation orders, and that this trend is expected to increase over the summer months; the House call on the government to:

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- (a) ensure the agencies responsible for our borders are properly equipped so that they can continue to do their jobs effectively and that those arriving at Canadian borders go through the appropriate processes;
- (b) admit the Prime Minister's irresponsibility of tweeting #WelcometoCanada to those seeking to enter Canada through illegal means;
- (c) take responsibility for the massive social services costs burdening the provincial governments; and
- (d) table in the House no later than May 11, 2018, a plan to
 - (i) stop the influx of people illegally entering Canada from the United States,
 - (ii) take appropriate measures to handle those who have already claimed asylum.

As members can see, this is a simple motion that simply reiterates the position that Canada should take with regard to this crisis. We can honestly say that the government has done a very poor job of managing this situation since the Prime Minister sent out his infamous tweet.

In November 2015, Canada was prepared to welcome nearly 40,000 Syrian refugees who were fleeing the war in their country and inhumane living conditions in refugee camps across Europe and the Middle East. Canada's provinces had set up the facilities necessary to receive those refugees.

However, what is currently happening at our borders is quite the opposite. With just a few words, the Prime Minister completely disrupted the security conditions and economic situation of Quebec, and Canada by extension, by tweeting #WelcometoCanada.

Since he posted that irresponsible tweet in January 2017, refugee claims from migrants coming from the United States have skyrocketed. This has placed a considerable burden on Quebec, since this crisis is costing not just money, but also the time and hope of those who are filing legal refugee claims. The repeated postponement of their hearings is causing them stress and distress. The legal time limit of 30 to 60 days is no longer being met. Migrants who have filed private sponsorship applications are also being forced to deal with long delays.

To add to the confusion of the Liberals' immigration strategy, in 2017, the government limited the number of privately sponsored refugee claims from Iraq and Syria. These limits were imposed by the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship in order to "reduce the backlog of spousal applicants by 80% and shorten processing times to 12 months".

• (1235)

However, when we look at Quebec's borders, we see a sieve that lets everything through without restrictions. We should bear in mind that the first thing these people do when they illegally enter Canada is commit an illegal act by breaking Canadian law. Instead of being reprimanded, they are welcomed with open arms, which only further weighs down Quebec's and Canada's health system and budget.

It is beyond comprehension and unacceptable that the first thing these potential future Canadian citizens do is break the law. What they are being shown is that by breaking the law when they arrive in Canada, they are rewarded with housing, a job, and health care more quickly than those who go through the proper channels. That is the message we are sending them. Illegal migrants are entitled to expedited services whereas regular refugees waiting in countries

where they face danger every day must nonetheless comply with the process from start to finish.

For example, in August 2017, in the Saguenay, a host family had been waiting more than a year to welcome a family of eight Iraqi refugees, who only landed in Chicoutimi on March 28. There is a long wait. This family finally made it to Canada, but throughout this process they had an incredible amount of stress in their country of origin. Compare that to certain asylum seekers who illegally crossed the border at Saint-Bernard-de-Lacolle in recent months and, today, are already working. We must speak out against this two-tier system that does not reward those who do things the right way, but those who choose the quick and illegal way to enter Canada.

All of my colleagues have immigration cases come across their desks. We hear different stories every day, and each case represents a different human being. For example, a young pregnant woman in my riding was recently sent back to her home country because she had not filled out her documents in time, even though she had been in Canada for several years. Meanwhile, the government is accepting illegal immigrants and will give them jobs and money so that they can meet their needs while they are going through the process. Our country's security is also in jeopardy: 1,200 people who were admitted to Canada were found to be criminally inadmissible and were sent back to their home country. These people are currently in this country.

I also want to talk about the economic burden that Quebec is shouldering as a result of the government's mismanagement of this wave of migrants. The province can no longer cover the costs of basic income support for migrants, food banks, housing, education, and health. We are talking about an unexpected \$146 million in expenses in a single year. How much will it cost next year if, as experts are predicting, the number of illegal crossings into Canada continues to increase in the coming months?

According to figures from the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, the number of pending asylum claims doubled in March 2018, when there were 48,000 claims, compared to 21,000 claims in March 2017. In one year, 2,500 children irregularly and illegally arrived in Quebec, and they must obviously have access to education. Teachers in the Montreal area, where the vast majority of these families settle, do not know how they will welcome the next waves of children as the influx of migrants continues to increase. Five Montreal school boards have sounded the alarm.

The Government of Quebec has been dealing with this crisis for over a year now, and yet it was only a few days ago that the Liberal government began accepting its responsibility regarding border management and agreed to have a discussion on the expenses incurred by Quebec, rather than just fixing the situation.

I share the frustration of people back home who have had to speak up and appeal to their federal counterparts for support. The financial assistance might bring some relief for Quebec, but these payments are not a long-term solution. The Liberal government has to get its act together now and create a new system so that the cases of migrants who cross the border illegally are dealt with as efficiently as possible.

Business of Supply

• (1240)

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the speech by my colleague from Mégantic—L'Érable. Of course, being a Quebecker, as I am, he knows that this is a very important issue. We are working with the Quebec government. As I am sure he is aware, Quebec has different agreements with respect to immigration.

I want to make one thing clear: we are talking about irregular crossers, not illegal crossers. It is not the same thing. That is not what we mean. I imagine he knows that we have put together a task force on irregular migration made up of the federal and provincial ministers involved, including the Quebec minister. The task force has regular meetings to promote collaboration, coordinate the response, and address the problems that everyone wants to solve.

As for people with work permits, wait times have dropped from three months to three weeks. With the very low unemployment rate we have right now, these people will at least be contributing to the economy. I want to hear my colleague's thoughts on that.

• (1245)

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, we have been dealing with this problem for a year. One year ago, the Prime Minister caused this crisis by sending a totally irresponsible tweet, by throwing the doors wide open and telling everyone to cross into Canada illegally, that they would be welcome. It seems we will be clearing the way for them, too; as we have just heard, the government will allow these migrants to work, and after only three weeks, rather than three months.

I have not seen any of these migrants in the riding of Mégantic—L'Érable. I have not seen any of them working in the factories and businesses back home. Why? I do not know. No one knows where they are, even. There is the problem. I would like those across the way to acknowledge that they are the ones who created this problem we are dealing with today. I would like them to understand the damage that this is causing to all those seeking to come to Canada through proper channels.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I only agree with two things my colleague said in his speech. First, it is true that the Liberals have handled this situation poorly. They should have seen it coming given the U.S. president's comments and the tweet. They should have known to provide the necessary resources. Second, I agree that this puts a great deal of pressure on the Government of Quebec.

However, when the people of Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot ask me about this, I explain to them that these refugees have to make an irregular crossing because the safe third country agreement remains in force and that we need to suspend it. What these migrants are doing is not a crime. Approximately two-thirds of asylum seekers who crossed the border irregularly had a successful board hearing. In Saint-Hyacinthe, entrepreneurs are telling me that these people are helping them meet labour requirements. They are happy to have them.

Should these people be accused of breaking the law when they have met all the board's criteria?

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, I imagine there are hundreds of people around the world who would like to come live in Canada. Hundreds of workers want to come work in Canada, and our businesses need those workers. Unfortunately, pressure on the system has created unacceptable delays that force our businesses to wait weeks and months before they can get those workers.

The problem is the direct result of the Prime Minister's irresponsible tweet telling people everywhere that they are all welcome in Canada. Because of that, people are entering Canada illegally. When there is a loophole in the system, honest people are not the only ones who benefit from it. Other people who want to come to Canada for all kinds of other reasons will seize the opportunity and may end up in this country in the coming weeks and months because of this loophole. That worries me.

[English]

Ms. Kamal Khera (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would have to disagree with the remarks of the member.

Our government has been dealing with this situation responsibly. We have increased the investment in our borders by \$173 million, yet the Conservatives criticize us for spending that money. However, that is not surprising, coming from the Harper Conservatives who cut \$390 million from the CBSA.

I find it hard to figure out how members opposite are proposing to staff a 9,000-kilometre border while not spending an accordant amount of money. How will they do that?

• (1250)

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, I do not think I need to take lessons from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, who cannot even come up with enough money to balance the budget.

The fact is, they cannot come up with enough revenue to balance the budget and they are going to leave us mired in debt for years to come. It is unlikely even my children will ever witness a balanced budget, yet someone who cannot even find enough money to manage her own affairs sees fit to lecture us.

Managing this crisis will cost millions, and all because of a tweet from the Prime Minister. That never happened before, but now it is happening. Unfortunately, they cannot deal with the crisis.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in the House today to talk about a critically urgent issue that Canada's Parliament needs to address. That issue is the crisis involving refugees currently crossing our borders illegally.

It is important that those tuning in understand how this situation came to pass, because it is a rather sensitive subject. Things often get mixed up. We know that Canada has a labour shortage and needs a certain level of immigration to meet its needs and support diversity. However, there is another problem, namely that some people are not following the rules.

Business of Supply

If we look back to the not-too-distant past of January 2017, we see that one person did something very irresponsible. That person was our Prime Minister. In January 2017, he posted a tweet in response to what was happening on our southern border. As we know, tweeting can be a very powerful tool to send a message to the entire world. He tweeted, “To those fleeing persecution, terror & war, Canadians will welcome you, regardless of your faith. Diversity is our strength. #WelcomeToCanada”.

Imagine all of these people that we are seeing crossing the border on the news every evening coming with their cellphones displaying the message from the Prime Minister that says, “welcome to Canada” without any note or link to tell them the proper procedure for coming to our beautiful and magnificent country. According to the Canada Border Services Agency, in 2017 alone, over 20,000 refugee claimants crossed the border “irregularly”. That is the term some members are using to downplay the situation, but the truth is that those people crossed the border illegally. Nearly 90% of them crossed the border into Quebec.

Canadians expect their immigration system to work efficiently in a orderly, safe, and predictable manner. It is also important that the system be fair. Immigrants who cross the border illegally are clogging up the system. A government analysis indicated that it may take the Immigration and Refugee Board up to 11 years to process all of the claims and supporting the system could cost Canadian taxpayers \$2.9 billion.

The worst part is that there is no funding in this government's budget for the Immigration and Refugee Board. There is a serious lack of organization and planning on the part of our Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance, and the Minister of Immigration.

The vast majority of people who enter Canada illegally are deported, but only after having used the services meant for refugees or legitimate asylum seekers. In fact, under the Liberal government's previous rules, 50% of Haitian refugees were rejected. Therefore, despite everything, and after all the mixed messaging, the government has to send the migrants back, no matter the human cost of it all.

The worst part is that our Prime Minister is doing absolutely nothing to change the message he is sending in order to fix the situation. There has been nothing but inaction from this government, this Prime Minister, and this Minister of Immigration.

Journalist Claude Villeneuve described the Prime Minister's conduct as dangerous for Canada and its interests.

Now, here is the situation in Quebec. Schools in the Montreal area are currently having difficulty dealing with the situation. Five school boards raised the alarm with the Quebec government. The schools are already overflowing. There is simply not enough room for these new arrivals who are adding to all the hard work of Canadians and Quebecers to accommodate those who really need to be here and who respect the rules for entering the country.

Last summer alone, an additional 2,500 children entered the school system, the equivalent of five large elementary schools in Quebec. They require more space, professional resources, teachers, principals, and managers, not to mention the extra burden they place on the health care system.

● (1255)

The province's reception services have reached a level of saturation, and Quebec does not have the resources to continue accepting asylum claimants right now. The opposition parties are often told that they never have anything to propose and that all they do is criticize the government, but that is not true. We have made proposals, and the government needs to take action.

First, the government must find a solution concerning the Canada-U.S. safe third country agreement, particularly with the United States. We believe that, by setting up a system that would designate our entire border a border crossing, we would avoid having all these people try to manipulate the system and cross between official ports of entry along the border. That would solve the problem quite simply by giving border officers the legal tools they need to do their job.

This is not just poor Liberal management of our immigration system, although we should not be too surprised, considering the way in which they manage the country's finances, but a serious lack of compassion on their part for human beings who are being given the wrong information and who will, in the vast majority of cases, have to return to their country with all the hopes the Prime Minister gave them dashed.

Instead of helping people who really need help, this government allows its programs to accumulate huge backlogs and then refuses to manage the influx of refugee claimants entering Canada. We are at a point where obeying the law is a mistake for some people and where people are better off entering the country illegally.

Here is a bit of history. In 2017, although the situation was in the news almost all summer, there was no immigrant crisis, according to the federal Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship. We want to solve a problem, and the Minister of Immigration is denying the very existence of the crisis. In my opinion, he is one of the only Canadians who cannot see it, along with his Prime Minister and Liberal colleagues.

In December 2017, not too long ago, during the last holiday season, financial assistance to the asylum seekers arriving by the thousands in Quebec skyrocketed and reached \$41.6 million for the previous 11 months.

In January 2018, more than 40,000 asylum seekers were awaiting their hearing before the board, and the Customs and Immigration Union indicated that the Prime Minister's government was not prepared to meet the needs of Salvadorean migrants.

In February 2018, public servants started dealing with asylum seekers on a first-come, first-served basis, since the number of applications had been increasing steadily for four years. This was just two months ago. More than 47,000 new cases were filed with the board in 2017 alone.

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In March 2018, Ottawa decided not to reimburse the Government of Quebec, which was asking for \$146 million in response to the Prime Minister's and his government's decision to open all of the major crossings instead of putting applications through the legal process. In April 2018, we hit 49,000 applications. This is just getting started and the numbers are increasing.

I spoke about 2017. However, today, there are 20,000 claims in the system for a total of 90,000. This year alone, people who have crossed the border illegally have made 6,373 claims, including the more than 5,600 from Quebec. At this rate, the number of claims will double.

This is what we are asking of the government in this motion:

That, given the government's failure to address the crisis created by the influx of thousands of illegal border crossers travelling across our southern border between ports of entry [I want to point that out], that the agencies responsible for dealing with this crisis have found gaps in security screening for newly arrived refugee claimants, as well as a backlog in both scheduled hearings and carrying out deportation orders, and that this trend is expected to increase over the summer months; the House call on the government to:

- (a) ensure the agencies responsible for our borders are properly equipped so that they can continue to do their jobs effectively and that those arriving at Canadian borders go through the appropriate processes;
- (b) admit the Prime Minister's irresponsibility of tweeting #WelcometoCanada to those seeking to enter Canada through illegal means;
- (c) take responsibility for the massive social services costs burdening the provincial governments;

• (1300)

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): That was yet another absurd speech, Mr. Speaker. It was laced with misinformation. I lack the pages in my notebook to write down every piece of misinformation the hon. member across the aisle has just shared with us.

What I want people to remember is that the Conservative government cut \$400 million. That explains the situation we are in today. We have no choice but to deal with it. There are other important things to consider. When the Conservative government eliminated the interim health program, the Canadian courts called it cruel and unfair.

Some Conservative members have even suggested that the army should be deployed to the border, and yet, they ask us not to invest. The Conservatives want to designate the entire border as a point of entry. We are talking about more than 9,000 kilometres. How would we possibly have the necessary resources to monitor it given that they so clearly do not want us to allocate any resources? The Conservatives also want us to terminate the safe third country agreement despite the experts, including an official from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, telling us that the agreement was being complied with. We know how the Conservatives feel about experts. They cut expert positions and gagged scientists. They do not want to listen to experts.

My question is as follows—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Mr. Speaker, I tried not to laugh when I heard my colleague say that the information in my speech was inaccurate.

Every fact I stated is eminently observable and verifiable. I invite the member to come see me later. I will be happy to share my sources with him. All of the numbers I mentioned are real and come from government agencies, unless he is trying to say that our government agencies, our public servants and the journalists who research stories are telling falsehoods. The information is accurate.

Before 2017, there were no problems like this. Before 2017, when we were on the other side of the House, we had a responsible government. We will be there again soon. Our government took responsibility, made sure its laws were respected and did not provide false information.

It was a government that did not have people in my riding waiting three, four, or even 10 years in some cases to become Canadian citizens. These people are stuck in the system. Today, when they watch the news, they see people crossing the border on the Prime Minister's invitation. That is what is irresponsible. I hope that the government will wake up.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am outraged by the message the Conservatives are sending on the issue of irregular migrants crossing into Canada from the United States.

The Conservatives keep saying that migrants are crossing the border illegally, and that they are corrupting the system, but they are unable to tell us which laws these migrants are breaking. There are none; that is why they cannot name any.

Canada's Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and the U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees both stipulate that refugee claimants are not to be punished for entering a country under irregular circumstances. Under sections 117 and 133 of the act, they are in no way violating the Criminal Code of Canada. What laws are the Conservatives talking about when they say these people are not following the rules?

When the Conservatives say that the Liberals have not invested in the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, that is not true. They are investing \$74 million. It is true that this is not enough and that there is a shortfall. There are 46,000 cases currently awaiting processing, and 2,100 additional cases each month. There is not enough money. The Conservatives still managed to cut 1,300 border service officer positions when they were in power, however.

Both sides need to do better. We need to work together to find a solution instead of trying to scare everyone.

• (1305)

Mr. Alain Rayes: Mr. Speaker, I will try to start at the beginning. First, we are not trying to scare anyone. We simply want people to obey our laws.

Business of Supply

What I would like to tell my colleague is that I am the son of immigrants. Fifty-five years ago, my parents decided to come to Canada. They went through the process like many of the people who knock on our doors, contacting our offices, Service Canada and immigration services. They want to come to Canada to contribute in their own way to its development. We are not refusing refugees or immigrants; on the contrary. What we are saying is that we want a proper immigration process. We want the government and the Prime Minister to act responsibly.

If my colleague wants to know where I got the information on the word “illegal”, I encourage her to visit <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship.html>, where it says that it is illegal to enter Canada between official ports of entry. I will be happy to give her a copy of the document if she is interested.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault (Edmonton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate being given the opportunity to contribute to this important discussion and to present some of the measures taken by the government to resolve this matter. I am honoured to be sharing my time with the member for Scarborough—Rouge Park, who will speak when I am done.

Our government believes that it is very important to collaborate with its various partners in managing the increase in irregular crossings from the United States recorded in the past year. We recognize that these irregular border crossings have a major impact at the local level, and that this requires thorough consideration and ongoing co-operation with the provinces and territories affected. We have made considerable progress in recent months in preparing for possible future influxes.

[*English*]

Our government is taking real action by expanding its overall outreach efforts to inform people and provide the facts about Canada's asylum system. In doing so, we are working closely with our missions in the United States, engaging with communities in the U.S., and issuing messages on social media channels to provide accurate information.

I travelled to Miami to speak with communities about the risks involved in crossing the border and the need to proceed through proper channels. I have personally delivered a message that is crystal clear: entering between ports of entry is not a free ticket into Canada. There are rigorous immigration and customs rules to be followed, and we enforce them to safeguard our communities against security risks.

We have also made it clear that by entering into Canada and making an asylum claim, individuals could be risking their ability to return to the United States. In fact, I have made it very clear that if their asylum claim in Canada is rejected, they may not be able to return to the United States, as U.S. officials would determine who is eligible to enter their country.

Our government is also proactively engaged with the United States government and the U.S. Embassy in Canada on these issues, as our two countries continue to co-operate to address irregular migration across our shared border.

[*Translation*]

For example, the Minister of Public Safety meets regularly with his American counterpart to discuss this matter. Also, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship met with the new U.S. Ambassador to Canada to talk about this specific situation.

[*English*]

Our missions have engaged more than 120 American decision-makers, including members of Congress and governors, and have met with more than 460 diplomatic representatives, organizations, community leaders, and municipal, county, and state-level officials across the United States. We have organized round tables and outreach and information sessions with immigration organizations, Hispanic civil society organizations, cultural and academic associations, media, and the diplomatic community, and we have conducted proactive outreach to West African, Haitian, and other communities.

The Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, members of Parliament like myself, and Canadian consular officials have participated in numerous interviews with U.S. media outlets, including Univision regional in Miami, Houston, and Dallas, and Univision national from Ottawa.

Between December 18 and March 17, we also ran a targeted advertising campaign, using search engine marketing to reach key populations in the United States located in select cities. Stakeholders and leaders in the communities with which we have engaged have told us they understand and appreciate the importance of countering misinformation, and they are willing to work with us to help disseminate the facts about Canada's asylum system.

Our government is preparing for further outreach in the United States and continuing our engagement with our American counterparts.

I feel for this debate, and it is important for me to inform this House on what I heard in Miami when I spoke with the Haitian and Latin American diaspora communities.

There is misinformation being proliferated in Miami, suggesting that once a person is in Canada, they can automatically stay. This misinformation is not only incorrect, but an incredibly cruel manipulation of scared or confused individuals who are looking simply for a better life. It leads to dangerous risks being taken by these individuals. The solution to the spread of misinformation is truth, and the members of this government and this caucus are taking real action to get the facts and the truth out about proper process for entering Canada.

I met real people on my mission, people who want to come to Canada and become a part of the greatest country in the world. I spoke to them, spoke with them, heard their stories and hopes, and I had the privilege of sharing with them the correct process for achieving those goals if they wish.

Our government will continue to be proactive to address the recent influx of asylum claims between our ports of entry. We will continue to work with partners to ensure that correct information is spread about the dangers and risks of crossing the border for asylum in this manner.

Business of Supply

•(1310)

We remain committed to upholding Canada's proud tradition of offering protection to people seeking refuge and doing so responsibly and effectively. Canadians are rightly proud of our strong international reputation for humanitarian leadership.

The assertion that fulfilling our international obligations to process refugees is slowing down other immigration processes is an utter fabrication by the Conservative Party, and once again the only counter to misinformation is truth. The truth is that our government actually knows how to walk and chew gum at the same time, and for decades, Canada has received and processed refugees in addition to regular immigration claims. We have processes in place, and every member of the House assists in those processes in their constituency offices. My team has worked on over 1,500 immigration cases since we started on this work in 2015. Our government has put additional resources in place, and we are addressing these claims.

Fearmongering helps no one. Misinformation helps no one. It does not help Canadians and it does not help asylum seekers. It does not help us solve anything.

I wish the opposition would work with us to implement the steps we have taken and stop spreading misinformation. Sadly, I will not hold out hope for the party of barbaric cultural snitch lines, the party that says opposing Islamophobia is sharia law, the party that said "too many Syrian refugees", the party that slashed funding to immigration services—which actually created the backlogs—and then turned around and suggested refugees and asylum seekers are the problem. Once again, the opposition would like to play politics; once again, our government is taking and will continue to take real action.

[Translation]

Our country is open and welcomes people who need protection. However, our government is committed to orderly immigration. We will continue to work closely with Quebec, the other provinces and territories, and various partners to resolve the irregular immigration issue and maintain the effectiveness of our refugee system.

We also wish to pursue Canada's noble tradition of offering protection to people seeking refuge and to do so responsibly and effectively.

I would like to mention once more that I am happy to have been given the opportunity to participate in a debate on such an important issue.

[English]

Before I close, I think it is important to share an anecdote about people who are facing difficult circumstances in the United States. I looked in their eyes and said, "An irregular crossing puts you at risk of going back to Honduras or El Salvador or Haiti or the country that you first came from. You may have been in the United States for five, 10, 15, 20 years, but if you risk an irregular crossing as an asylum seeker and our processes do not honour that or do not allow you to seek asylum, you may be sent back—not to the country that you just came from, but to your original country of origin."

That clear message was shared among human beings who just want to see people have decent lives, and it made an impact. Communities are mobilizing. The real truth about the asylum system is getting out.

It is our duty as members of the House of Commons to take that solemn responsibility seriously, to share the truth and the facts. There are other matters on which we can all play politics, but the lives of people seeking the basic dignity of a place to live and call home is not one of them.

I am honoured to share this debate by turning things over to my hon. colleague after questions.

•(1315)

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today the NDP is still saying that the solution is to suspend the Canada-U.S. safe third country agreement, which forces migrants who try to cross over from the United States do so irregularly, that is to say between official ports of entry. If we suspended the agreement, these people could enter the country at the official ports of entry, and they would be processed through the system. We should also increase the number of border services officers so that they can keep up with demand.

Both these factors are essential for applications to be orderly processed through the system and with sufficient diligence to ensure cases are comprehensively and effectively processed. This is what the Liberals have been refusing to do for the past year and a half, although Amnesty International, 200 law professors, and a lawyers' association have asked them to. The Canadian Council for Refugees and Amnesty International even took the government to court for failing to suspend the safe third country agreement.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his passion on this file.

It is important to note that we have procedures for processing refugee claims, and we have improved everything surrounding border services. The Minister of Public Safety has been following this issue very closely.

We also made a solemn promise to Canadians when we said that we must welcome more people. We are therefore going to increase the number of new Canadian immigrants to 340,000 by 2020. All of our systems, namely the asylum system, the refugee system, and the regular immigration process, are all enhanced by the excellent work done by our border officers. This guarantees our prosperity while also enabling us to meet our obligations under international law.

[English]

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his speech. What I found most interesting is that he spoke of the need for truth in talking about our border system and our asylum system, yet he seemed to gloss over the fact that the spike in illegal crossings really occurred after the Prime Minister's grandstanding tweet suggesting that anyone could come and just cross in and be welcomed to Canada.

Business of Supply

The member talked about hiring an agency to send emails and to use social media to correct incomplete information in the United States about the asylum process. The government has sent ministers of the crown down to U.S. cities to try to correct the lack of knowledge about how immigration works in Canada. However, the Liberals will not ask the Prime Minister to actually provide clarity. Canadians know that he did it following a decision in the United States that most of us disagreed with, but the Prime Minister decided to grandstand.

Will that member commit to going into the Liberal caucus meeting tomorrow and saying, “Prime Minister, given what the provinces are absorbing, will you finally clarify or retract that tweet?”

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his passion on the file and for his clever use of the English language.

I will say that I will stand in this House and defend the Prime Minister, his actions, his commitment to diversity, and his commitment to pluralism. Diversity is a fact. Pluralism is a choice. This country has made a choice to be a pluralistic society that requires new Canadians, 340,000 new Canadians by 2020. Other than indigenous peoples, this whole country was built on newcomers, his family and my family included.

When the Prime Minister of Canada says to the world, “You are welcome to come here through legitimate channels,” that is something I will defend to my last day in this House. The spike in traffic on our Canadian government website was a direct response to the administration to the south ending the temporary resident program for people who had been in that country for up to 20 years. If I lived in a country as a temporary resident and saw my status ending after having been there for 20 years, I would look for a great place to live too.

• (1320)

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to first acknowledge that we are gathered here on the traditional lands of the Algonquin people. I would also like to pay my respects to the people of Toronto who were victimized about 24 hours ago.

I stand here with a very heavy heart, for my city is wounded today. The towering pride of Toronto, the CN Tower, by Lake Ontario, often seen as a symbol of our city, was dark last night. Our hearts ache with pain when we think of the 10 people who died and the 15 who were wounded. People from across six former boroughs of Toronto mourn together as one, as do Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

Yonge and Finch is a place I have frequented often. Some of my best friends live, work, and study there. My grade eight geography project was on this particular block of Yonge Street, which at the time comprised many rundown storefronts. The North York Civic Centre of today is vibrant and full of life and was bustling on a warm spring day like yesterday.

All across Canada, we mourn the senseless loss of lives. While we do not know the answers today to the many questions we may have, we can be sure that our law enforcement and emergency responders

are doing everything they can to help. I want to thank them for their dedication and selfless deeds. Our police, fire service, paramedics, and hospitals have responded with a sense of duty and professionalism that we have often seen. We are so thankful for their efforts.

I have worked with Mayor Tory in many times of tragedy, and I know of no better leader to lead the city, to heal the wounds, and to make sure that we continue to live in a peaceful, united, and loving city. As a government, the Minister of Public Safety and the Prime Minister have extended the federal government's full support of the efforts undertaken by the City of Toronto and the Province of Ontario. I know that I speak for all of us in this House when I say that we will do whatever it takes to work through this tragedy as one nation.

Turning to the discussion at hand, the opposition motion proposed by the member for Calgary Nose Hill essentially calls upon our government to close our border, a border that has been open and free since 1812.

The Canada-U.S. border is the longest undefended border in the world, and while we have designated ports of entry where we can process those who come across, there are non-designated border points that can give rise to people seeking refuge through inland claims for asylum. We have seen recent increases in these numbers. In 2017, from February to December, we saw 18,149 people cross through irregular channels. We have early indications that people will continue to cross the border through irregular entry ports this year through the spring and summer months.

We obviously do not want people to come to Canada through these irregular border crossings, and we encourage orderly migration. We would much rather have people processed in a third country or through the UNHCR referral process. However, the nature of migration patterns in the world today and the desperation of those who are fleeing for safety and security means that Canada must do its part.

I will like to give members some information about refugees in the world today. There are 65.6 million forcibly displaced people; 22.5 million are refugees, and of this number, 17.2 million are UNHCR refugees. Only 189,300 refugees were resettled in 2016.

Business of Supply

Our country has relatively few refugees compared to some of the world's developing countries. According to the World Refugee Council, despite the focus on refugees in Europe and North America, the UNHCR has reported that 84% of refugees worldwide are hosted by developing countries. Turkey has 2.9 million refugees; Lebanon, one million; Uganda, 940,000; and Bangladesh, close to one million. These are all developing countries, but they have not collapsed because of the massive number of refugees they face. In fact, they have stepped up to do their part in helping those who are most vulnerable and need assistance or who are fleeing war. The UN High Commission for Refugees in Canada has said that Canada is very well equipped to respond to this crisis.

• (1325)

I travelled to Cox's Bazar in January of this year, and I saw firsthand the incredible generosity of the people of Bangladesh. Bangladesh is an impoverished country in South Asia. It is now host to close to one million refugees from Rakhine State in Myanmar.

The world has responded in an incredible way to help those who are in need. Bangladesh in particular, in the last 30 years, has hosted anywhere from 100,000 to one million people. These numbers are repeated around the world, as many countries in the developing world are burdened with their unfair share of those who come to their borders.

Unlike what our friends opposite suggest and create Conservative sound bites with, this is not a crisis in Canada, and we must keep this in perspective. While we are dealing with a spike in irregular border crossings, we are not dealing with a calamity.

Our government has undertaken a number of initiatives to ensure that there are orderly border crossings. First, we have invested \$173 million in further strengthening security operations at the border and in faster processing of asylum claims. This includes \$74 million for faster decision-making on asylum claims at the Immigration and Refugee Board. We have worked with provinces and other partners to develop a national operations plan to manage possible scenarios to ensure that we are prepared for any fluctuations.

We have undertaken an extensive outreach campaign to reach potential migrant diaspora communities in the U.S. to ensure that they understand, under Canadian immigration laws, the consequences of crossing the border irregularly. We have established a task force on irregular migration that includes key federal and provincial partners. We have expanded processing capacity in Montreal to make eligibility decisions faster. We have established a faster process for issuing work permits to minimize reliance on social assistance, and we have cut processing times from three months to three weeks and have issued 13,000 work permits to asylum seekers in Quebec.

We are working with Quebec and Ontario to explore further options to allow asylum seekers to meet labour shortages as they await hearings for their asylum claims. We are continuously engaging the U.S. on issues to manage migration and our shared border.

I believe that the government is doing its part to address the temporary issue of increases in irregular arrivals. What we will not

do is panic. We will not overreact, and we will not treat those who come to our borders as criminals.

Let me give an example. In 2009, 76 Tamils came to our shores fleeing persecution in Sri Lanka aboard the MV *Ocean Lady*. They landed in Vancouver. In 2010, 492 men, women, and children came on board the MV *Sun Sea*. Both boatloads of refugees fled violent armed conflict in Sri Lanka and had nowhere else to go. They took extraordinary risks and took their lives in their own hands, coming in decrepit boats to our western shores.

The previous Harper government reacted to this by targeting these refugees as illegals, terrorists, and undesirables. Every single one of those who arrived on those two boats was detained, most for well over three months and some for upwards of a year. I was astonished to see 49 young people, all under the age of 16, who came with their parents detained, essentially jailed, for weeks on end. The Burnaby youth detention centre housed these children, and many parents of the children as well. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights called out Canada for its treatment of refugees in 2009-10, particularly for the detention of children.

The opposition would treat those who irregularly arrive at our borders seeking safety and refuge the same way they treat criminals. The question I have for them is this. Are we proposing to detain everyone who comes to our borders? If so, would we detain the children as well? Should we have armed personnel secure the borders and shoot those who come across? This is the day we have taken to address the issue of irregular arrivals in a reactionary way, not looking at the longer term and broader perspectives.

I want to conclude by saying that this weekend I was at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, in Halifax, and I saw an exhibit called *Refuge Canada*. It is an exhibit that gives us the best and worst of Canadian immigration history. It gives examples of Ismailis landing in the 1970s, the Vietnamese boat people in the 1980s, and Syrians who resettled in the last two years.

There are also images of people from the *Komagata Maru* and the SS *St. Louis*, the *Ocean Lady*, and the MV *Sun Sea*, and they all speak of our difficult past.

• (1330)

The question for us today is what path we want to go on. Are we going toward a path where we will continue to be vigilant but still compassionate, or are we going toward a path where we close our borders and become part of a one-man island where we do not allow others in?

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for his comments about the attack in Toronto yesterday. My brother lives there. It is fair to say, on behalf of everyone in the House, that the victims and first responders are in our hearts and in our prayers today.

Business of Supply

I would like to ask the member to clarify what he said at the beginning. It seems he did not read the motion. He said that we wanted to close down the borders. There are four parts to the motion. The first is to ensure the agencies responsible for our borders are properly equipped. That is reasonable. The second is to admit that the Prime Minister's irresponsible tweet has caused this problem. The third is to take responsibility for massive social services costs burdening the provincial governments. We have heard from Quebec, and it needs help. The fourth is to table in the House, no later than May 11, a plan to address this issue.

It seems as if some of the Liberal speakers do not understand the difference between illegal refugees and a properly functioning immigration system. They are intentionally misrepresenting the two. Does the member understand the difference between illegal refugees and a properly functioning immigration system? Does he see how unfair it is to people who play by the rules to see this queue-jumping?

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the comments with respect to Toronto.

This has come up a number of times. "Illegal refugees" is a term that is somewhat problematic, because by nature refugees are not illegal. Perhaps the act of crossing the border could be deemed to be illegal, but refugees themselves are not illegal.

This is what I speak of when I speak of criminality. When we talk about refugees and we speak about them in the context of the previous Harper government, it is often in the context of criminality. They are referred to as terrorists, criminals, queue jumpers, and undesirables. I illustrated what happened with MV *Sun Sea* and *Ocean Lady*. I was in Vancouver when those boats came. I did a lot of work around dispelling the myths of the previous government. The problem is that it is the same tone in the Conservatives' motion, which is to look at refugees and those who come here as somewhat undesirable. While there are some legitimate concerns, it is important we also understand the tone and tenor of what we are talking about, because we cannot continue to vilify people.

There are 65 million refugees around the world. A country like Bangladesh is housing a million refugees right now. We have to put that in perspective and in the context of the broader issues with respect to refugees around the world.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I find it quite hypocritical when the Conservative Party talks about strengthening the borders and giving CBSA the tools and resources it needs to do its job. The Conservatives cut \$390 million from the agency not too long ago.

Our government is investing \$173 million into the CBSA and the Conservatives have been complaining about us spending that money.

Could the member for Scarborough—Rouge Park give his insight into how he feels about that, and does he agree with me?

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Speaker, absolutely, I would concur with my colleague. This is just one aspect of it. There are a lot of proactive things our government has done, including having our members, who are from different diaspora communities, go to the U.S., to places like California and Florida, to speak to people who might potentially be targets for those who may want to bring

them across the border. We are very vigilant in addressing that in a proactive way. It is the funding, it is the partnership with the provinces, and it is a collaborative approach. This includes a great element of education toward those who may want to cross the border.

• (1335)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to share my time today with the hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent, my friend and colleague.

[*English*]

It is an honour for me to speak to this opposition day motion. I will echo the comments made by my friend from Scarborough—Rouge Park. As a greater Toronto area member of Parliament, I was horrified by the attack yesterday. Our prayers and thoughts go out to the families that were affected, the people who were tragically killed, and the 14-plus who were injured. It struck home. The perpetrator was stopped, most effectively, by the Toronto police in front of the building I used to work in, at Yonge Street and Sheppard Avenue, for five years when I was with Procter & Gamble. Fortunately, the people on the team I worked with are fine. However, there are families that have been struck by such a horrific act. I think we all echo those sentiments today.

Moving on from shared sentiment, my speech will be directed to the disaster at our border, over which the government is presiding. We hear ridiculous language, such as Canada is going to be closed off like an island or that we are demonizing people, which is highly divisive and unfair. Allowing our system and the trust of Canadians to be eroded over time by not enforcing our border laws will mean that fewer Canadians will have confidence in our immigration and asylum system. What the Liberals could be presiding over is a period when fewer Canadians would see this as the positive. To suggest that following the rules is somehow unreasonable shows how devoid the government is of leadership. I will use my few moments to talk about that.

Last year there were about 23,000 illegal crossings. The minister admitted to the committee that it was illegal. However, the Liberals are bending over backward not to suggest that. We have a process for asylum claims and refugee resettlement. All sides have worked on that and have followed the rules, until the Liberal government.

The exceptional work done by friend, the MP for Calgary Nose Hill, brings this issue to the House for a solid debate. That is what Canadians expect. They do not expect buzzwords like "welcome to Canada". They do not expect suggestions that we are trying to turn Canada into an isolated island. We all see the tremendous benefit of immigration in Canada, of our fair and rules-based refugee and asylum process. What is happening now is an erosion of that.

Business of Supply

My colleague mentioned four different ways to ensure our agencies are properly equipped, because they are not. I will show how the minister has allowed that to happen. She mentioned the Prime Minister's irresponsible tweet. In trying to show the world that he is not the President of the United States, he has caused such a problem that the Liberals are now sending ministers to cities in the U.S. to try to rectify it, rather than the Prime Minister providing any responsibility with respect to clarifying our fair and rules-based process. That was irresponsible grandstanding by the Prime Minister. She mentioned the social services costs, which I will show are in the billions of dollars. The Quebec premier has put the Liberals on notice that the province needs millions of dollars more because of this inaction.

My friend from Calgary Nose Hill wants a plan tabled by May 11. As members will see from my remarks, and from the government's own information, there has been no plan, other than hashtags and the faulty suggestion that somehow by saying it is fair to follow the rules, we are going to close Canada off like some isolated island. That is hyperbole of the highest order and it is hiding the failure of the Liberals with respect to this file.

In September 2017, when there were already problems with people not going to proper border checkpoints in accordance with the safe third country agreement, which the Liberal government of Jean Chrétien negotiated between Canada and the U.S., my colleague asked a simple question with respect to updating the loophole in that agreement. The minister said, "the safe third country agreement works fantastically well for Canada." However, it is not working fantastically well, because it is being exploited. Not even a year ago, when we were already seeing the provinces of Manitoba and Quebec struggling with the challenges of people not following the rules, the Liberals suggested there was no problem. The minister has not even raised it as something that needs to be updated with his counterpart in the United States, the Homeland Security secretary.

• (1340)

This shows the minister's incapable hands on this file. His own department, a few months before he said that in the House to my colleague, suggested in a memo from his deputy minister that "despite strong collaboration among Canadian agencies and with United States counterparts" a "major humanitarian or security event could create an urgent need to revisit existing policies." The safe third country agreement is those existing policies.

The documents from the minister's department are leaking out, contradicting what he is telling Parliament. The department said that it was talking to its U.S. counterparts, that things were not working too well, and if it saw another surge, it would have to be revisited urgently. However, the minister in the House of Commons said "fantastically well". I see his parliamentary secretary is here. I hope he reports back on this, because I do not have confidence in the minister.

My colleague from Calgary Nose Hill, in October 2017, had the minister at committee. She responsibly, because she knows the file very well, talked about a backlog of 40,000 cases at the Immigration and Refugee Board. Those people, many of them legitimate refugees, were now waiting because of the backlog caused by

inaction at the border. Therefore, my colleague asked about that and asked if there were enough resources.

In fact, the previous speaker, the member for Scarborough—Rouge Park, asked the minister if "mechanisms, timelines, and resources are in place" to handle the surge of illegal crossers. The minister at that time reassured everyone. He said, "We've done it with the resources we have. It's been a question of being a little more efficient, finding innovative ways to deal with this", which basically suggests there was no problem, and it was being handled. At another point he said in an interview that we had to be a little more nimble but that we could handle the surge, that we did not have to change anything.

In fact, in the October 5, 2017, meeting, my colleague, the capable MP from Calgary Nose Hill, asked the minister if he had spoken to the United States about closing the loophole in the safe third country agreement, and the minister once again said, "We haven't done that."

Therefore, the Minister of Immigration has been told repeatedly over the course of a year by his department that there is a problem. When the minister appears before parliamentarians, there is no problem at all, that it is working fantastically fine, that we just need to be a little more nimble. I suggest that it is not accurate and I will show why.

Here is perhaps the most damning piece of information about which I would like the minister to tell the House. It is a briefing memo from his deputy minister. While the minister was reassuring parliamentarians and Canadians that there was no problem and to move along, his deputy minister said, "With no new funding allocated to the IRB in budget 2017, the RPD will be unable to keep up this volume of claims, even with the anticipated efficiency increase of 20%." His deputy said that by the end of 2021, this would lead to a 133-month delay, which is an 11-year wait time.

How is 11 years fair to any Canadian, any asylum seeker, any refugee family, or any family trying to use the system in the way it is meant to be? Eleven years is an admission of failure at the highest level, while the minister is telling the House of Commons and committee that everything is working fantastically well.

The kicker that Quebec is already worried about and that Canadians should be worried about too is that the same note then suggested:

Individuals waiting in the backlog can still continue to utilize social supports, including education, social assistance, and Interim Federal health...For 2016/17, these were calculated...600 per month per claimant. Therefore, in the above scenario, social support costs for the inventory could climb to...\$2.97B from 2017 through 2021."

If we use the 11-year wait time that the minister's own department has warned us about, the cost to the treasury of many provinces would be \$8.2 billion.

Business of Supply

• (1345)

That money would pay for some of the national pharmacare program they are talking about. It is a sign that the Liberals are not running the system fairly. It is time for them to be honest with Canadians.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative member repeatedly referred to confidence in his speech.

I think Canadians have expressed their confidence. What Canadians no longer have confidence in is the former government and its party. We are going to make sure our immigration system is strong and robust, and we are going to address this situation.

I know the member talked a lot about investments, but again, we have invested over \$173 million through this budget, including \$74 million for the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada.

The Conservatives say they are citing facts and telling the truth. I would like my colleague across the aisle to tell me where he got the information that the asylum system and the regular system we have in place for people who come to Canada, our system for economic immigrants and our system for refugees, are a single system rather than two separate systems. Every Canadian knows that the asylum system and our regular system for immigrants to Canada are two separate systems. I would like my colleague to explain where he got that information.

[English]

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the parliamentary secretary's department for giving me the information I quoted to the House. The trouble is the backlog in refugee cases. The deputy minister seems to have a better handle on the file than that member and the minister do. That \$8.2 billion is because of the rise in cases. This is from a briefing note from the deputy minister of the department. Perhaps after the debate I will bring the minister up to speed with the size of their problem.

Premier Couillard is asking for many more millions of dollars because of the inaction on the safe third country agreement. As I said, we have documents from the department warning the minister to save it. Some members want me to answer the question, but they should read this report. They are saying to act, and the minister is saying "fantastically well". I guess that is the sunny way.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I must admit, as I said a few minutes ago, the hypocrisy flowing from the other side is quite rich today.

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Just today?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, it is not just today. I thank the member for that clarification.

The truth of the matter is that the previous Conservative government cut \$390 million from the CBSA. How can the member possibly sit there and talk about strengthening our 9,000-kilometre-long border, when his party took the resources away from the CBSA?

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, at committee today, the member spoke with fondness about Flora MacDonald. I would like to remind him that the best member for Kingston and the Islands was Flora MacDonald.

The Liberals do not even understand the file. The backlog I am talking about is an 11-year wait-list that the deputy minister of that parliamentary secretary's department is warning about. That is the Immigration and Refugee Board, not CBSA. The former Conservative government actually gave CBSA additional powers. We armed its officers because of illegal weapons. We gave them the tools they needed. This is a case of non-border stops. In the safe third country agreement, the loophole is non-border stops. Maybe the Liberals should actually get to know the file. Obviously, the minister is not heeding the advice of his own department. That is why Canadians are fortunate that the MP for Calgary Nose Hill has brought this debate to hold the government to account.

• (1350)

Hon. Alice Wong (Richmond Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring attention to what is happening in my riding. I have already heard a lot of people who come to my office complain about delays. Actually, of the refugees who have already been admitted through the legal process, one woman has to beg people to teach her English, and some of them are lining up at food banks. These are the people who are with us already. What has the government done for these people? The government does not even look after them when they are here, and they are legal immigrants and refugees we allow in. What is the priority of the government? Does it just let everybody in and dump these people to the rest of us?

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for highlighting the question. It shows the lack of confidence we will now have because of the incompetence of the minister and the government.

As I said, the government's own department is warning of a risk of an 11-year backlog. That is in the deputy minister's own briefing note. While the government is saying that, the minister is before committee and before this place saying in his remarks that everything is fine, that it is working "fantastically well". Does he have the resources? In fact, in 2017, he told the committee on supplementary estimates that he needed less money.

Here is the kicker. What Premier Couillard and other provincial premiers are beginning to realize is that, if they allow their inaction to continue, there is the potential of an \$8.2-billion social cost. The minister's own department is saying that. The federal health transfer is a tiny portion of that. In fact, after the federal money runs out, things like education, social assistance, and housing supports will be up to the provinces.

It is about time the minister and the government start to get back to a fair, predictable, rules-based system that Canadians can have confidence in.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: Before we resume debate, I must inform the hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent that he will have six or seven minutes to deliver his speech before we move on to members' statements.

The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

[English]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to pay my respects and send thoughts and prayers to the people of Toronto. The tragedy that happened yesterday hurt me and hurt all Canadians. When something like that happens, it is not only regional or provincial; it is national. All Canadians are with the people of Toronto.

[Translation]

This debate goes to the heart of Canadian identity and what we want to do as Canadians. We all know that Canada is the product of an absolutely extraordinary human collaboration. Canada has always been populated by first nations. I know what I am talking about because Wendake is in my riding, and people have been living on that land since the dawn of time. Beginning in 1534, the first nations have welcomed millions of immigrants from all over the world to Canada.

On August 22, 1958, at around 4:00 a.m., the *Arosa Star*, a ship from Le Havre, France, docked at the Port of Quebec. On board were some 60 people who wanted to live in Canada, including my father, my mother, and my brother. They set foot on Canadian soil nearly 60 years ago and were welcomed here on August 22, 1958, as recorded in a document at the Port of Quebec. Sixty years later, my parents are still here, and I am here to carry on the family tradition with my children, my brother, my niece, and all the rest of the family.

Canada was built by immigrants. My parents, like millions of people over the centuries, came to Canada by obeying the rules. My mother spent nearly a week at the Canadian embassy in Paris trying her best to convince Canada to welcome my family. Her efforts paid off, to say the least.

In order for Canada to truly prosper, the rules must be obeyed. For over a year now, the situation in Canada, in human terms, has been totally unacceptable. Unfortunately, Canada has simply been allowing thousands of people to enter the country illegally, which is utterly disrespectful to the millions of people around the world who dream of legally immigrating to Canada and contributing to its success. Those who wait in embassies, those who wait in their home country, those who follow the rules have to wait while others enter illegally. I am not talking about two or three people. I am talking about tens of thousands of people.

This completely unacceptable situation was created by the Prime Minister of Canada. He made the ill-advised decision to post a tweet on January 28, 2017, at 3:20 p.m., saying that anyone who wanted to come to Canada was welcome, that Canada was a safe haven. He told them to come and that Canada was expecting them. He just forgot one little thing, and that is that anyone coming to Canada must do so in accordance with our rules and laws. As a result, thousands of people around the world decided that they could and would come to Canada. It threw Canadian embassies around the world into chaos.

On April 3, Marie-Danielle Smith of the *National Post* quoted a public servant from our embassy in Mexico who said that they needed to know how to respond to the many refugee claims they had received following the Prime Minister's tweet.

A few days later, the first secretary at the Canadian embassy in Mexico said that they were receiving an ever-increasing number of refugee claims as a result of the media attention garnered by the Prime Minister's tweet welcoming immigrants.

It is not Conservative supporters who are saying this. It is employees of our foreign embassy who have to deal with people who want to come to Canada on a daily basis. They are wondering what to tell these people who are watching television and seeing thousands of people going along a narrow path to cross into Canada while others are being asked to go to the embassy to fill out forms so that their claim can be processed. That is the reality. The current government is the one that created this problem.

What happened is that more than 20,000 people came here along the little path by Lacolle last year. Ninety-one percent of them entered via Quebec. Quebec has had to pick up the tab for all that. I will talk more about that later. When they realized what a mess the Prime Minister's tweet had made, the Liberals reacted, but it was too late. They decided to send the members for Bourassa and Honoré-Mercier to meet with people in Miami, Los Angeles, New York, and Dallas and tell them to follow the rules and obey the law. It was very nice of those two MPs to do that, but the problem is that they did it because the Prime Minister had created the mess in the first place by sending a message to the world telling people to come here and everything would be fine.

As a result, over 21,000 people entered Canada illegally, which led to untold grief, untold problems, and untold numbers of sad, deplorable humanitarian cases. In Quebec alone, provincial authorities had to accommodate 2,500 children. Schools had to make room for 2,500 new children. That is like opening five elementary schools from one day to the next. Premier Couillard himself said it was a ridiculous situation.

The same goes for four ministers who came during the past week, and I am sure I will have a chance to say more about that in a few minutes, right?

• (1355)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent will have four minutes to finish his speech when the House resumes debate on the motion.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

Hon. Hunter Tootoo (Nunavut, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, *qujannamiik uqaqti*.

Statements by Members

Key social determinants of health, such as housing, education, infrastructure, health services, and food security, play a significant role in the well-being and quality of life of Canadians. Unfortunately, access to these factors is not the same across Canada, and anyone who has been to my riding has seen this first-hand.

The WHO has stated that social determinants of health are shaped by the distribution of money, power, and resources. I have stressed several times in this House that the per capita system fails the Government of Nunavut and Nunavummiut.

While I was touring my riding, many Inuit told me that they feel forgotten. They believe new Canadians get treated better than they do.

It is time to change the per capita system to more of a needs-based approach. It is time to address these inequities and work to ensure that Inuit can enjoy the same quality of life as other Canadians.

Nunavummiut are hopeful that the language used thus far has not been just talk.

* * *

• (1400)

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES WEST

Mr. Doug Eyolfson (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise and share with the House the important work Equal Opportunities West is doing to assist persons with disabilities to secure meaningful employment. Its staff is dedicated to making sure each individual in its program is given the opportunity to succeed, and I am proud to support its efforts in the community.

Earlier this month, Equal Opportunities West received \$450,000 from Western Economic Diversification to help entrepreneurs with disabilities succeed and thrive.

I want to share with the House that I will host my second annual community BBQ and e-waste drive in support of Equal Opportunities West. In 2017, we were able to collect over 3,500 kilograms of e-waste, and we are looking forward to topping that number this year.

I encourage everyone in Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley to stop by on June 9, drop off their e-waste, pick up a hot dog, and say hi to the amazing staff, volunteers, and participants at Equal Opportunities West.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government's omnibus justice bill, Bill C-75, misses the mark completely. This bill is an attempt by a government falling behind in the polls to pass legislation in order to keep promises it has been failing to uphold. Bill C-75 is a huge overstep by the government. I think it is incredibly important to protect the rights and freedoms of Canadians, but this goes above and beyond.

Under the proposed legislation, a number of serious offences, including child abduction, would be classified as hybrid offences. This would mean potentially lighter sentences for people accused of

these serious crimes. Reducing these sentences would be a grave mistake.

I am not confident in the ability of the government to overhaul the justice system when it cannot even appoint judges on time, creating a backlog that allows criminals to walk free after long court delays.

Bill C-75 is another attempt by the government to parade its social justice agenda while jeopardizing the safety of Canadians.

* * *

PROPOSED POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTION

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week was a good week for Brampton.

Minister Hunter and Minister Malhi from the Ontario government, along with Mayor Jeffrey and Brampton city council, announced the much anticipated location of Brampton's future university in collaboration with Ryerson University and Sheridan College. Soon to be located in the heart of the city just off Main Street, this new university will rejuvenate the downtown core, support local small businesses, and revamp the city's cultural scene. It will be situated steps away from the downtown Brampton GO and transit terminal.

I am excited to see the significant investments the federal government has been making into my city—for example, the Riverwalk—and the major funds it is providing for public transit, which will work in conjunction with the university to breathe new life into Brampton's downtown core.

I look forward to continuing advocating for federal involvement in this project and others because this university will be a game-changer.

* * *

[Translation]

ARMENIA

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on September 15, 1915, the minister of the interior of the Ottoman empire sent the following telegram to the prefecture of Aleppo:

The government has decided to destroy all Armenians living in Turkey. Their existence must come to an end, however tragic the means may be; and no regard must be paid to either age or sex, or to conscientious scruples.

The message is terrifying and clear. The stage was set for the first genocide of the 20th century. A total of 1.5 million men, women, and children would be massacred, executed, or sent into the desert to die.

The House of Commons recognized this genocide in 2004, and the Government of Canada followed suit two years later. Over a century later, it is still vital to fulfill this duty of remembrance. We owe it to the victims, as well as to our own humanity, to confront the atrocities of the past so we can do everything in our power to keep them from happening again.

Statements by Members

Together, let us build a world of respect, tolerance, and peace.

[*Member spoke in foreign language.*]

* * *

JOB FAIR EMPLOYMENT IN GRAND FALLS

Mr. T.J. Harvey (Tobique—Mactaquac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to highlight an event coming up in my riding in the rural community of Saint-André in the Grand Falls area.

[*English*]

This event will bring together various economic stakeholders in an effort to support Dr. Oetker's employees during their difficult transition period due to the unfortunate closure of the Grand Falls facility.

[*Translation*]

I wish to extend a thank you to the Valley Chamber of Commerce for their efforts to put together a working group involving municipal representatives from the four major communities in this area, as well as business and provincial representatives, and to their MLA, Chuck Chiasson, for his hard work. This working group will educate constituents on resources for retraining and job opportunities available to them with employers in the region who plan to be present at the upcoming job fair.

[*English*]

My office looks forward to being present at the event and, alongside representatives from Service Canada, providing constituents with any federal resources they may need.

Job creation and growing the economy are priorities not just for our government but also for the provincial government.

I commend the local chamber of commerce for spearheading this event.

* * *

● (1405)

ORGAN AND TISSUE DONATION

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we saw yesterday in Toronto, our world is faced with tragedy on a daily basis. My thoughts go out to the victims of this horrific act and their families. I wish a speedy recovery to those injured in this attack.

April is Organ and Tissue Donation Awareness month. In the wake of the horrible tragedy that occurred in Humboldt, Saskatchewan, I have been deeply encouraged by the outpouring of support we have seen for organ and tissue donations thanks to Logan Boulet's selfless act. The lives saved due to Boulet's generosity stand as a testament to the good that organ donation can do.

I also believe that the federal government has a role to play in providing coordination with the provinces. This is a national issue that needs a national solution, with a national organ donor registry.

In honour of the Humboldt Broncos and the victims of the attack yesterday in Toronto, I encourage all Canadians to register to be a donor.

[*Translation*]

CHAMPLEURY RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

Mr. Yves Robillard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the 10th edition of the run organized by the Association des résidents de Champfleury, a key organization in my riding, was held on April 22. The association's members are real leaders in sports and recreation in our community, and their quest to achieve their goals also helps young families. The mission of the Association des résidents de Champfleury is to create a healthy environment and promote healthy living.

This run brings together families, neighbours, and friends from Laval, the north shore, and Montreal. It is becoming increasingly popular and now attracts nearly 1,500 runners. I have been following the organization's success for years, and I am proud to encourage it in its future projects, especially because they are also environmentally responsible. The Association des résidents de Champfleury is a young, dynamic, and vibrant organization that—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Mississauga—Lakeshore.

* * *

[*English*]

MARY ELIZABETH NEEDHAM

Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with profound sadness, I pay tribute to Mary Elizabeth Needham, a constituent in my riding who passed away earlier this year.

A graduate of the Ontario Ladies' College, McGill, and the University of Toronto, Mary was accomplished, selfless, and compassionate.

Mary was committed to improving the lives of vulnerable people and was a strong proponent of social justice. She was an active member of the Unitarian congregation in my community and cared deeply about children's and women's issues.

As a grandmother, Mary worked tirelessly through the Stephen Lewis Foundation's Grandmothers to Grandmothers campaign, which supports grandmothers in Africa who are singlehandedly raising orphaned children.

Mary's steadfast devotion to improving the well-being of others was an inspiration to those whose lives she touched along her path. She truly left an indelible mark on our community and around the world. She is sorely missed.

For all those who knew her, Mary's legacy will live on as we strive to help the least advantaged among us and work toward a better tomorrow.

* * *

ARMENIA

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, beginning on April 24, 1915, the Armenian people were subjected to suffering and death at the hands of the Ottoman Empire, a tragic event in history that our Parliament in 2004 and our Conservative government in 2006 recognized as the Armenian genocide.

On Sunday, I joined the Armenian community in Waterloo region to reflect on the suffering endured by thousands of Armenians and the 1.5 million whose lives were lost in the first genocide of the 20th century.

Today, hundreds of thousands of Armenians will gather in Yerevan to commemorate the genocide. As a member and former chair of the Canada-Armenia Friendship Group, I have been honoured to travel to Armenia and to witness the prosperous democracy that has emerged. I have been privileged to meet Canadians of Armenian descent who contribute so much to my home community of Waterloo region and to all of Canada.

By remembering the Armenian genocide, we should all be motivated to do everything in our power to ensure that such a terrible tragedy never happens again.

* * *

• (1410)

VOLUNTEER AWARD

Mr. Churence Rogers (Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Barbara Penney from Glovertown in my riding. Last week, Barbara received the Sovereign's Medal for Volunteers from the Governor General.

Barbara has been a loyal and dedicated volunteer with the Canadian Red Cross for more than 40 years. Her commitment to the Red Cross has transcended local, regional, national, and international levels.

Barbara's involvement with the Red Cross began as a Junior Red Cross volunteer. In 1975, she became a teacher sponsor, a role she continued in every school in her teaching career. She has been an active member ever since.

Barbara Penney is an inspiration to all Canadians. Her humble approach has created generations of youth who have grown to support the Red Cross at all ages.

I want to thank Barbara Penney for her service to the Canadian Red Cross and for making our communities, province, country, and world a better place for all.

* * *

COMMENDATION FOR HONESTY

Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the tragic event in Toronto has saddened us all, but we need to remember that there is so much goodness in our people that truly defines our nation.

Recently a taxi driver from my riding found in his car \$4,000 in cash in small bills. Tajamal Rana came to Canada about 16 years ago from Pakistan and has raised his family, his wife, and three young children on the wages of a cab driver. His first thought on finding the money was that it did not belong to him and that he must return it. He eventually traced the person and returned the money.

When I learned of this, I asked him to my office where, in a brief ceremony, I handed him a certificate that says in part "You are to be commended for setting such a remarkable example of honesty and truthfulness and making our community a better place."

Statements by Members

A humble Pakistani Canadian, Tajamal Rana is a reminder to all of us of the decency of our people.

* * *

DONNA RICHARDSON

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I want to pay my respects to a special friend who lost her life last week after a four-year battle with cancer.

Donna Richardson was known to many of us on Parliament Hill not only as the wife of our former parliamentary colleague John Duncan, but for her dedicated work in the Senate and the House.

Many of us watched as Donna showed up to work almost every day while she underwent surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy. Typically, she had a giant smile on her face, a laugh that would brighten the room, and a passion for politics. She was an entrepreneur, an avid athlete, and a dedicated worker whose faith guided her throughout her life.

Donna and John found each other later in life, but it was a match that was meant to be. Their time was too short, especially in their new home on the island, but we were all witness to the joy, love, and support their marriage provided through many challenges.

I would like to express our deepest condolences to John and Donna's family. Donna faced her illness with bravery and determination. She is now without pain. Rest in peace.

* * *

[Translation]

ARMENIA

Mrs. Eva Nassif (Vimy, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with a heavy heart that I rise once again to acknowledge the anniversary of the Armenian genocide, which took the lives of countless innocent people beginning on April 24, 1915.

I have had the honour of getting to know the Armenian community in Vimy, Laval, and Montreal. They are a strong, proud, and determined people, and today we remember their perseverance in the face of overwhelming obstacles and past atrocities.

We recognize and condemn the Armenian genocide, for we must never forget the injustices inflicted upon these people if we want to continue to move forward together, hand in hand, and create a fair, multicultural society.

[English]

I invite my colleagues to join me today in remembering and commemorating the lost lives, as well as in celebrating the continued bonds we share with our Armenian brothers and sisters.

[Member spoke in Armenian and provided the following translation:]

Never again.

*Statements by Members**[English]*

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ATTACK IN TORONTO

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday's tragic attack in Toronto is cause for all Canadians to pause and remember the 10 lives that were taken and the 15 who were injured.

[Translation]

Our thoughts are with the victims of this tragedy, as well as their families and loved ones. You are not alone, and our hearts go out to you.

[English]

Canadians are deeply grateful for the heroic work of first responders and those aiding the injured. Their courage and determination is the embodiment of the values Canadians hold dear.

Constable Ken Lam's bravery deserves special recognition. His restraint and calm in the face of chaos is an example of professionalism and courage. I have no doubt that this intervention will be held as an example for those training for the police forces.

[Translation]

We will not let this attack sow hatred or division among us.

• (1415)

[English]

Like Canada, Toronto is strong, diverse, loving, and courageous. Nothing that happened yesterday will change that. We will come together, we will mourn, we will see justice, and we will remain strong.

* * *

ATTACK IN TORONTO

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, a busy street in Toronto became the scene of a horrible crime.

A peaceful, sunny day in spring was marred by senseless brutality, taking the lives of 10 innocent people and sending many more to hospital.

[Translation]

Today, we mourn with the loved ones of those who lost their lives, and our prayers are with those recovering in hospital.

[English]

In the midst of these horrors, there were still moments to inspire our faith in humanity. We have all, by now, seen how this cowardly attacker was confronted and subdued by a single brave Toronto police officer, exemplifying the best of Toronto's first responders.

It is but one of the many acts of selflessness of which we have learned, showing the bravery and kindness of Torontonians as they confronted a devastating act of murder on their streets.

I would like to also commend Mayor John Tory and Toronto Police Services for their calm guidance in the midst of a shocking

and chaotic situation. Toronto is a strong city, and its residents will have our support as they rally together not just in anger or grief, but in solidarity.

* * *

ATTACK IN TORONTO

Mr. Marco Mendicino (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the people of my hometown of Toronto are grief-stricken today in the wake of a senseless, horrifying, and criminal act that took 10 innocent lives and left many more injured, shattering a peaceful city.

[Translation]

To the victims and survivors, especially those who lost loved ones, know that all Canadians are with you. The people of Toronto are honourable and generous, and you will have our full support as you heal from this tragedy.

[English]

To our first responders, we are profoundly grateful for their service and courage. In the moment of truth, they stared down danger with professionalism and bravery that without question saved lives, prevented further injury, and kept our city safe.

The day after some might say that Toronto has lost its innocence, however, let me assure this House that we are proud, we are resilient, and we are strong.

I hope all members will join me in expressing support and solidarity for the good people of Toronto, especially the mothers and fathers, spouses and children, who lost someone they love. We are with them, and together we will emerge from this more united than ever.

* * *

ATTACK IN TORONTO

The Speaker: All too soon, we find ourselves once again offering condolences on the tragic and unexpected loss of life many of our fellow citizens have had to bear.

The families and friends of those women and men killed or injured in yesterday's attack have suffered the cruelest blow. Theirs is a deeply personal loss that can only be imagined by those of us who did not know their loved ones.

[Translation]

However, like all Canadians, we are shocked and saddened by these events. At the same time, we take comfort in the courage and compassion of those who came to the aid of the victims.

[English]

I now invite members to observe a moment of silence as an expression of our sorrow.

[A moment of silence observed]

ORAL QUESTIONS

• (1420)

[*Translation*]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week, the Government of Quebec stated that Ottawa's initial response to its request for help with the crisis created by the illegal crossings into Canada shows that the federal Liberals have no idea what is happening at the border.

The federal Minister of Immigration's response was to criticize Quebec, which is not very impressive. Quebec only received assistance after going to the media.

Why must provincial premiers go to the media in order to get this government to take action?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, from the moment we came into office, we have been building bridges with premiers and with provincial and municipal governments. We believe in co-operation and in open and engaged collaboration, and Canadians see this in many files.

With regard to asylum seekers, I am very proud of the work that the intergovernmental task force has done with stakeholders at all levels in order to address this important issue as Canadians expect us to do.

[*English*]

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the number of illegal border crossings to Canada has increased 128% over the same time period last year. This has been an issue for well over a year, but the Prime Minister has failed to take any concrete steps to address the situation. In fact, it was the Prime Minister's own words that encouraged this crisis to start in the first place.

What was he doing that prevented him from addressing this crisis for a whole year?

[*Translation*]

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our system must show compassion and guarantee that only those who should be in Canada stay here.

[*English*]

In contrast to the Harper Conservatives, who cut \$390 million from the CBSA and cut refugee health care. They created massive backlogs and processing delays, which we are still working to fix.

They want to know concrete actions. We have invested \$173 million, which includes \$74 million to ensure faster processing of claims. While Conservatives continue to vote against funding for our security agencies, we will make sure they have the resources they need.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have no doubt that their plan is more expensive. Our problem is also that it is less effective. We are getting the worst of both worlds: a higher cost for a less effective border system.

Oral Questions

According to an anonymous briefing from government officials reported by Global News, the plan to address the illegal migrant situation is still "days and weeks" away from being ready". This situation has been going on for over a year. Meanwhile, families here in Canada who are waiting to be reunited with a loved one or refugees facing real danger have to wait longer because of the government's inaction. Why?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think people will be forgiven for rolling their eyes when the Conservatives talk about supporting refugees or accelerating the process for family reunification. Their cuts left us with significant backlogs. They tried to get rid of backlogs by using the delete button.

Instead, we invested significantly in ensuring that we have a robust immigration system that is able to handle asylum seekers and irregular arrivals. We will continue to make sure that Canada is a strong and open country that applies the rules of its immigration system.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is just so patently false. The reality is it is completely unfair and unjust to tell people who have waited years to come to Canada that their family members now have to wait longer just because some people want to jump the line.

The Conservative government had a generous and welcoming immigration policy that was based on rules to ensure that legitimate refugees facing real danger and those waiting to be reunited with their families could do so.

Why is the government prioritizing those who skip the line?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives cut funding for refugees and immigration processing. The Conservative government cut funding for refugee health care. On top of that, this supposedly law and order party actually cut \$400 million from the CBSA in their capacity to police and control our borders.

We will take no lessons from them. What we will do is continue to ensure the integrity of our immigration system, of our refugee system, and of our borders.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is no surprise that a government that has an \$18-billion deficit has as the only metric for success how much money it is spending. The reality is, the Liberals' system is broken. They are forcing people who want to come to Canada the right way to wait even longer as they prioritize those who are skipping the line. Why are they doing nothing after this situation has been building up for over a year?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, the families who have been waiting for years are waiting for years largely because of the cuts in processing and immigration services that the previous Harper government brought in, which they are continuing to double down on.

We have made significant investments of hundreds of millions of dollars in improving our immigration processing times and accelerating family reunification, all the while ensuring that we live up to our international commitments to treat asylum seekers with the rules-based approach they need to have.

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NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we now have a media report claiming that the process to approve Kinder Morgan was rigged, following lobbying from a Texas oil company. The report quotes government officials as saying that after the resources minister met with Kinder Morgan, the government rushed the review process and instructed staff to find “a legally sound basis to say ‘yes’” to the Trans Mountain pipeline.

Was the Prime Minister aware that members of his government pressured officials to rush the review and produce a positive result for Kinder Morgan?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we still have a political situation in which two of the parties in this House think there is a choice to be made between the environment and the economy. We were elected on a commitment to both grow the economy and protect the environment at the same time, because, quite frankly, 10 years of the previous government not protecting the environment actually left us with the lowest economic growth rate since the depths of the Great Depression.

We are moving forward on both building pipelines and bringing in protections for the environment at the same time. It is what Canadians expect of this government, and it is what we are delivering.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do not think the Prime Minister understood the question. Officials from his government have publicly said that the government had to find a way to expedite the process or find legal ways to say yes. The Prime Minister promised us a new, more rigorous environmental assessment process, but it is becoming clear that Kinder Morgan was able to get on the inside track. It is as though the CEO of Kinder Morgan had a direct line to the Minister of Natural Resources.

How can the Prime Minister continue to lead people to believe that this was a balanced process when it is becoming increasingly clear that the dice were loaded from the start?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what is interesting about the NDP is that its members and their leader cannot even agree on this project. The NDP leader said that he might be able to agree to the project, while the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie has said that his party could never agree to it. We made a decision in the national interest that includes a

world-class oceans protection plan, because we know that the environment and the economy go hand in hand. While the NDP is trying to decide what position to take, we will act in Canada's national interest.

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● (1430)

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for over a year now, we have been asking the government to suspend the safe third country agreement so that asylum seekers can go to official ports of entry, which would be safer for them and for Canadians. The government needs to come up with a concrete plan to manage the situation, and suspending the agreement has to be part of that plan if it is going to work.

Will the government finally suspend the safe third country agreement?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are committed to supporting a sound refugee system and protecting the integrity of our borders and the immigration process. We are investing \$173 million, \$64 million of which will be used to speed up refugee processing. Wait times for work permits have been reduced from three months to three weeks, and we are looking at other ways to enable asylum seekers to fill labour shortages. We will not do what the Conservatives did, which was to slash funding and create unnecessarily long delays.

[English]

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, border communities are bracing for another spike in irregular crossings. We know what the Conservative plan is. It is to follow Trump by shutting down the border and turning away refugees. However, we have not seen any plan from the government.

People are risking life and limb to cross the border, but the Prime Minister has refused to suspend the safe third country agreement. We are seeing troubling comments from the Prime Minister, suggesting that some migrants are trying to game the system. Will the Prime Minister stop trying to look like a global humanitarian and just act like one?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Party has continued to play its games of division, and I am worried that the NDP might be trying to stoke fears as well.

The fact is, we have a rigorous immigration system that we are able to apply. We are ensuring the security of Canadians with our controls at the borders and within our borders through the work the RCMP is doing. Canadians can have confidence in the capacity of both our immigration system and our border agents and security services to ensure the safety of Canada and its communities, while remaining open.

Oral Questions

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, weeks and months are going by and nothing is changing. The number of people crossing the border illegally continues to rise, and so do the costs associated with that.

Meanwhile, refugees across the country who are following the rules have been waiting for their turn for months and, in some cases, years. It is now crucial that the Prime Minister offer Canadians some solutions to address this problem, which, I would remind members, has been ongoing for over a year.

What does the Prime Minister plan to do to solve this problem, which he himself exacerbated with his now infamous tweet in January 2017?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our position is clear: we will always be a welcoming country, but we have also put eligibility rules in place. I also want everyone to know that anyone who crosses the border irregularly will be arrested and subjected to a criminal background check. As many experts have pointed out recently, I would ask my opposition colleague to choose his words carefully, because misinformation and inflammatory language only fan the flames of fear and—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to tell the minister opposite that I got these words directly from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration website.

Although unsustainable pressure is being placed on border officials in Quebec, this situation is not even close to being resolved. Summer is coming, and right now, over 400 people are crossing the border illegally every day, as indicated on the Department of Citizenship and Immigration website. This was a problem last year, and it is a problem again this year. It is not going away.

What is the Prime Minister waiting for? When will he clarify the rules?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as Mr. Leman-Langlois, the director of Université Laval's international security centre, said, the message that is currently being sent by political parties lends credence to the myth that immigrants are treated better than Canadians. He said, and I quote:

I think it is rather dangerous.... They are normalizing the attitude that there is reason to be suspicious of immigrants and that it might not be a good idea to let a large number of immigrants come into Quebec in a short period of time.

I encourage my colleague opposite to choose his words carefully.

•(1435)

[*English*]

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): This is bananas, Mr. Speaker. All we are doing here is standing up and asking the Prime Minister to run a planned, orderly, and safe immigration system. Over 50,000 people are projected to illegally enter the country this year. That is not planned, that is not safe, and that is not orderly.

The Prime Minister has spent hundreds of millions of dollars on this issue and has only made the problem worse. This raises the

question of whether the Prime Minister thinks it is wrong to illegally enter the country. If so, can he unequivocally state so here today?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite is calling for Canada to withdraw from its international obligations with respect to refugees, she should come out and say so instead of beating about the bush.

We are making the necessary investments. When her party was in power, it was against making investments to protect vulnerable people; it was against making investments to secure our border, and it was against making investments to fast-track refugee processes.

When we decided to make those investments, the Conservatives voted against them. They voted against additional resources for border security. They voted against additional resources for refugee processing. Finally, they voted—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister cannot even bring himself to utter the words, “it is wrong to illegally enter the country.” If he cannot even do that, how can anybody trust him to put forward a plan that is going to maintain Canada's immigration system?

All we are asking to do today with our opposition motion is to have a safe, orderly, planned immigration system. I am going to ask him a very simple question, which I think would fix this problem. Will the Liberals designate the entire Canada-U.S. border as a technical official point of entry for the purpose of enforcing the safe third country agreement?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the proposals emanating from that party are simply not credible. Its members at times have called for the Canadian military to be deployed at the border. Now they are calling for the entire border to be made an official port of entry but have not presented a plan to ensure that there would be adequate resources for that process.

We are dealing with this issue responsibly. We are making the necessary investments, putting money in place for more border security operations, and processing refugee claims faster. The fact of the matter is the opposition members can run from their record, but they cannot hide.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister seems incapable of addressing the crisis created by the influx of thousands of people illegally crossing into Quebec.

His failure to take action is jeopardizing Canadians' safety and undermining the Canada-Quebec immigration agreement. Furthermore, genuine immigrants are being bumped to the back of the line by people who are not obeying our laws.

Will the Prime Minister finally propose a plan to deal with the chaos at our border?

Oral Questions

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am going to quote someone else. According to the executive director of the Centre for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence, it is completely irresponsible to make Quebecers believe that they are threatened by a huge influx of migrants.

A rigorous process is in place to protect those fleeing persecution and to ensure that those who abuse our system are turned away.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is odd. The minister is quoting an academic, but the people working on the ground tell me that security screening times at the border have been drastically reduced in an apparent attempt to clear the backlog.

This government should make the safety of Canadians its priority instead of providing first-class service to those who do not obey our laws. If the Liberal government does not know who is entering our country, it cannot know how to ensure the safety of Canadians.

Why is the Prime Minister hiding the truth from Canadians?

• (1440)

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, I recommend that my colleague choose his words carefully, because false information and incendiary rhetoric only fan the flames of fear and division.

In Canada, we have a refugee system that we are proud of, but it very clearly comes with eligibility criteria that we respect. Anyone who comes here irregularly is arrested and subjected to a criminal background check.

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[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Parliament received yet another audit decrying failed leadership with respect to delivering on Canada's 2020 biodiversity targets and the United Nations' sustainable development goals. The Commissioner of the Environment's audit is deeply critical of the current government's fixation on holding meetings, finding that it is basically all talk and no action. She reports a 43% decline in threatened mammals, including the iconic caribou, and a 44% decline in bird life.

When will the government set aside the rhetoric and start taking action to protect threatened species and ensure sustainability?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite must have been very pleased to see the budget, with its historic \$1.3 billion to invest in protecting biodiversity and species at risk. We are absolutely committed to meeting our international targets. We met our marine targets of 7% last year. We are continuing to move forward. We are working with the provinces and territories. I encourage the member opposite to work with us and to work with the provinces and territories so that we can protect more of our land and marine areas.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when the time comes to build the Kinder Morgan pipeline, the Prime Minister is prepared to do anything from getting out the bulldozer to imposing his will on the provinces, and even breaking his promise to apply a credible environmental assessment process. Apparently, this is in the national interest.

Meanwhile, the commissioner of the environment is reporting that the Liberal government is more focused on organizing meetings than on taking concrete action to preserve and protect our biodiversity.

Can the Prime Minister explain how not protecting our biodiversity is in the national interest?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would be very happy to repeat my answer.

Our government announced a \$1.3-billion investment to protect biodiversity and wildlife. This is a historic investment. We have already met our 2017 target for marine protected areas. We are all here because we know we have a duty: Canadians want us to protect our environment and species at risk, and that is what we are going to do.

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FINANCE

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Parliamentary Budget Officer released a report saying that we are going to get something “more” and something “less”. The something “more” is that the Liberal government is going to add \$8 billion more to the deficit. The something “less” is that there will be \$10 billion less in the economy because of the Liberal carbon tax.

Why is the government creating a situation that is going to erase \$10 billion a year from the Canadian economy?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in 2015, Canadians made a choice. They chose a government that recognizes the need to protect our environment and fight climate change, and we can do that while growing our economy.

I am confused, because putting a price on carbon was a Conservative initiative. It means putting a price on something we do not want, namely pollution, in order to grow our economy, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and seize the opportunity to promote clean growth. Canadians want us to grow our economy and fight climate change—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, they certainly are attacking change, because they are attacking taxpayers' wallets and the Canadian economy. The economy is going to shrink by \$10 billion.

Yesterday, the Parliamentary Budget Officer said the policy will generate a headwind for the Canadian economy.

Oral Questions

My question has to do with the economy, so it is for the Minister of Finance.

Will the Minister of Finance stand up and protect taxpayers' wallets and the Canadian economy?

• (1445)

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not know if you—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[*English*]

The Speaker: Order, order.

[*Translation*]

The hon. Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

Hon. Catherine McKenna: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise because the environment and the economy go hand in hand. I have some questions for my colleagues opposite.

Do they acknowledge that climate change is real?

Do they acknowledge that we are paying the price in the form of floods, forest fires, and the disappearance of the Arctic?

Do they want to work together to tackle climate change? I do not know. They do not have a plan.

We have a plan, and we will make sure we grow our economy, which is what the Minister of Finance has done. We have good jobs and we are growing the economy.

[*English*]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the finance minister. It is about the 200 pages in his budget that relate to the carbon tax and the carbon tax cover-up.

His government is asking Parliament to empower him to impose this tax without telling Canadians what it will cost them. It is kind of like a big blank cheque from Canadian taxpayers.

In the finance minister's budget, how much will the carbon tax cost the average family?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to respond to the question from the member for Carleton, and to tell him and his colleagues that in fact we will continue to make investments that will grow our economy.

Canadians can see that the program our government has put forward has had a really important, long-term impact on Canadians, so that we are in a much faster growth situation, with many more jobs. The next measures we are taking are going to ensure that in the very long term our environment is strong because we are going to price carbon, ensuring that we have a long-term approach to the environment that continues with great jobs for Canadians.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all right, we are making some progress. We actually got the right minister to stand. Unfortunately, he said that he is making investments to grow the economy, while the Parliamentary Budget Officer says that his carbon tax will actually shrink the economy by \$10 billion. Ten billion is one number we do know, but we do not yet know how much this carbon tax would cost the average Canadian family.

Maybe the finance minister will tell us right now.

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what I can tell the House is that the idea that we are making progress, an idea acknowledged by the member for Carleton—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Carleton just asked the Minister of Finance to tell the House something. I would ask members to let the Minister of Finance say what he has to say, and then the members on the other side will have a turn in the future when it gets to be their turn again. Each side has its turn, and we listen.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Speaker, as the member for Carleton acknowledged, we are making progress. I think the kind of progress we are seeing in this country is truly astonishing. We have taken from the previous government an economy that was moribund, with stubborn unemployment and very challenging growth rates, and we have turned it around. We find ourselves in a much better situation across the country: more jobs, a better economy. We will keep on this plan.

The Speaker: I get the impression that the hon. member for Edmonton West, and some others as well, did not hear what I said a moment ago. I am serious. I ask members not to interrupt when someone else is speaking.

The hon. member for Victoria.

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ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday a media report revealed that there are almost 3,500 federal employees who work on messaging for the Liberal government, 10 times the number of reporters on the Hill. One would think that with so many people, the government would be more transparent. However, access to information requests about important matters of public interest take months, often years, to be processed, and what we get is often so blacked out as to be useless.

Will the government acknowledge the mess it has created and truly modernize, rather than gut, the Access to Information Act?

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after 34 years, we are the first Canadian government to act to modernize and strengthen the Access to Information Act. It is important to recognize that we are the first government to actually give the commissioner order-making power and to apply the Access to Information Act to ministers' offices, to the Prime Minister's Office, and in fact to 240 government organizations. Furthermore, we are going to ensure that it never becomes out of date again, with a mandatory review every five years. We are an open and transparent government.

Oral Questions

● (1450)

[Translation]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, five months ago, a CBC/Radio-Canada investigation showed how easy it is to hack a cellphone, track a person's movements, and eavesdrop on conversations.

Telecommunications companies and Public Safety Canada now refuse to answer Canadians' questions. They prefer to meet behind closed doors.

What does the government have to hide, and why is the minister refusing to publicly reassure Canadians?

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we take the security of our nation and of our citizens seriously, as well as the threat to the privacy of Canadians. The Communications Security Establishment, in coordination with its partners, has been actively working with Canada's telecom industry and critical infrastructure operators to develop best practices, advice, and guidance that can help mitigate the risks associated with SS7. That is why we propose to commit \$155 million over five years for the creation of a new Canadian centre for cybersecurity.

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INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Randy Boissonnault (Edmonton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since taking office, our government has been a strong supporter of the province of Alberta and of Albertans. This has been true on extending EI benefits, on providing fiscal stabilization, and especially on federal infrastructure investments. The evidence is clear. We have invested in more than 150 projects, including the long-awaited upgrade to the Yellowhead freeway, and we are not stopping there.

Can the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities update the House on the latest infrastructure investments our government is making in the great province of Alberta?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. Members are not always going to like what they hear, but they should not interrupt.

The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan should know that he should not be talking throughout the time when someone else is asking or answering a question, or otherwise speaking in the House.

The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Edmonton Centre for his continued advocacy on behalf of Albertans.

We were both proud to announce that our government will invest more than \$3.4 billion in Alberta to build a better public transit system, build recreational and cultural facilities, provide clean drinking water to communities, and provide dedicated funding for small communities.

These, along with other investments, will continue to grow Alberta's economy and create middle-class jobs.

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NATURAL RESOURCES

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 99% of Canada's oil exports go to the U.S., but the U.S. is ramping up its domestic production and will supply 80% of growing global oil demand in the next five years.

The Liberals are destroying Canada's competitiveness. A major mid-stream operator, Keyera, warns, "Canada is not looked upon as a good place to invest when it comes to oil and gas... U.S. investors are particularly negative about Canada [and] the U.S. environment is quite positive."

When will the Liberals stop helping the United States steal Canadian jobs, innovation, and investment?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am glad the member opposite agrees with us that having 99% of our export of oil and gas go to one country, the United States, is not a very good idea, which is why we want to expand our export markets. It is too bad that, in 10 years of government, the Conservatives did not do that. They did not build one kilometre of pipeline to access export markets.

In a way, the hon. member is helping us make the argument that we need to do exactly that to get a better price for our oil and to create good jobs for Canadians, and that is what we intend to do.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals, of course, vetoed the only new opportunity to tidewater and risked the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of Canadians. The Bank of Canada says that next year new energy investment in Canada will drop to zero.

Ninety-seven per cent of Canada's oil is in the oil sands, but the Prime Minister keeps telling the world he wants to phase it out. Each oil sands job creates two and a half jobs in the rest of Canada. However, since 2015, over 55,000 oil sands workers have lost their jobs. More than twice the people have lost their jobs in oil and gas across Canada, not including contractors.

When will the Prime Minister actually champion energy investment in Canada and jobs for Canadians?

● (1455)

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the hon. member is as pleased as we are that there have been 50,000 new jobs created in Alberta. I am sure the member opposite is also very pleased, because she is an Albertan, to know that Alberta is going to lead the country in GDP growth.

Members on this side of the House continue to be optimistic and bullish about the growth of the western Canadian economy, and all the members opposite talk about is doom and gloom.

Oral Questions

We believe in entrepreneurship and innovation, and in the spirit of the people of Alberta.

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Jocelyn Bamford, founder of the Coalition of Concerned Manufacturers and Businesses of Ontario, is troubled that another failed energy project would hurt Ontario's manufacturers. Three hundred families in Peterborough understand that warning all too well, since they lost their jobs at General Electric when the Prime Minister allowed energy east to fail.

When will the Prime Minister realize that his plan to phase out Canada's energy sector would be catastrophic for jobs right across this country?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member knows that the proponent backed out of energy east because the price of oil had tanked and because there had been no pipelines approved. Since then, three pipelines have been approved, so it is pretty clear that business conditions have changed.

It is also clear that the government understands very well that we want to move our resources to market sustainably. We understand that in 2018 the economy and the environment go hand in hand.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the Liberals like to say that the environment and the economy go hand in hand, it turns out they do not know how to manage either of them.

The Prime Minister wants to phase out Alberta's energy sector, and he has put in place a carbon tax that would knock \$10 billion off Canada's GDP while doing absolutely nothing to reduce emissions. The Liberals have purposely created regulatory uncertainty, killing projects like energy east and northern gateway.

Why are the Liberals so dead set against the oil and gas industry, and all the jobs that come with it, while also doing absolutely nothing to help the environment?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we understand the environment and the economy go together. Under the previous government, the Conservatives could not get any pipelines built. We are working very hard. We have approved major projects.

At the same time, we know we are in a transition to a cleaner economy. That is a \$30 trillion opportunity. Do we want to turn that down or do we want to take advantage of it? We want to take advantage of it.

I was in New York where I saw Alberta companies shortlisted for the Carbon XPrize. Members should be impressed, because that is pretty amazing. This is where the future is going, environment and economy going together. Those members should get with the program.

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[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, back in 2016, the Liberals promised to review employment insurance sickness benefits. Two years later, we are still waiting. Recently, a single mom battling cancer was forced to go back to

work, despite being in poor health, after exhausting her 15 weeks of benefits. That is unacceptable.

I am asking this question on behalf of all those who are being forced to go back to work instead of taking the time they need to recover from illness: when is this government going to take action and review EI sickness benefits?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for her interest in this important issue. She knows as well as I do how much the Canadian government cares about families, parents, and children going through tough times. She also knows how much money we have invested in the quality of the services and benefits we offer to Canadians who are facing challenges.

Since it is important to us and to them too, we are going to continue to do our utmost to achieve the objectives of greater compassion and greater inclusion for everyone.

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[English]

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 18,000 low-income seniors, largely from Atlantic Canada, received their notices and filed their taxes on time last year. Then their desperately needed GIS cheques were suspended. When one has very little, this money can make the difference between paying one's rent and being out on the street, a place no Canadian should ever be, especially when it is a CRA error.

When will the government automatically enrol all low-income seniors for GIS so this never happens again?

● (1500)

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is improving the services provided by the Canada Revenue Agency to make it easier for Canadians to file their taxes and give them access to the benefits they are entitled to. Our government is concerned when someone does not receive his or her benefits. This is why the CRA has implemented measures to improve services to the public. I urge anyone who is not receiving the guaranteed income supplement to contact the Canada Revenue Agency.

Oral Questions

[English]

HEALTH

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the justice minister stated she was open to decriminalizing all drugs. It is not bad enough that thousands of Canadians are dying from the opioid crisis, which the Liberal government is not adequately addressing, now it wants to add crack and heroin to the mix. There are not enough treatment centres as it is.

Parents across the country deserve to know if the Prime Minister is serious about this absurd idea.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are in a national public health crisis when it comes to the opioid crisis and our government is treating this as a public health issue, not as a criminal one. We understand that stigma and barriers to treatment need to be reduced and our government has taken initiatives to address this matter.

While decriminalization would not ensure quality control for drugs, we have made it easier for health professionals to provide access to opioid substitution therapies, and supported the good Samaritan act. Through budget 2018, investments of \$231 million have been made, and we will continue to develop innovative approaches to turn the tide of this national public health crisis.

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the truth came out at the Liberal convention this weekend. The Liberals have yet to decriminalize marijuana, and now they want to open the door to all drugs, like cocaine, crack, and heroin.

We knew that the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour and the member for Beaches—East York were opposed to banning drugs. We now know the Liberal Party's position. It wants an open bar. Health Canada says that these drugs are deadly. What do they have to say to parents?

I have a simple question. What kind of bad trip are the Liberals on?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the opioid crisis is a national public health crisis. Our government is committed to treating this issue as a health crisis and not as a criminal problem. We understand that we need to reduce the stigma and the barriers to treatment. Our government has taken a number of initiatives to do so. Although decriminalization will not guarantee the quality of the drugs, we have made it easier for health care professionals to access opioid substitution therapies, and we supported the Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act.

[English]

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it looks like the Liberals are open to decriminalizing heroin, cocaine, ecstasy, and other illicit drugs. Legalizing marijuana has not even passed, the Liberal plan to deal with the opioid crisis is not working, yet here they are, the justice minister and the Prime Minister, unveiling their next big idea of being open to decriminalizing illegal drugs.

I ask the justice minister once again. Is this really a path we want Canada to go down, and when did she get the mandate from Canadians to make illegal drugs legal?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unlike the Harper Conservatives, our government is treating this as a public health approach.

Our government is committed to reducing unnecessary regulatory barriers to treatment. We are not looking to decriminalize or legalize any drugs aside from cannabis, and we will await further result about the impact of its legalization.

With decriminalization, there would still be a risk of—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I ask the member for Elgin—Middlesex—London and others to wait their turn. Each side gets its turn, and we listen whether we like what members say or not. We get our turn when the microphone is on and people can hear us back home. Therefore, we should each wait our turn and we should listen to what others have to say whether we like it or not.

The hon. Minister of Health has the floor.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Mr. Speaker, our government is proud that we will be launching a public education campaign to address stigma and reduce barriers for those seeking treatment.

We will continue to develop innovative approaches to turn this tide on the national public health crisis our country is facing.

* * *

● (1505)

EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has doubled the number of jobs for young Canadians through the Canada summer jobs program, making it our priority to ensure young people have the skills they need to succeed.

In my riding, I have heard first-hand the positive impact of this program for youth and employers, like the Oakville Soccer Club, Old World Stone, and St. Luke's Anglican Church. It helps youth save money for school, gain valuable skills, and contribute to their communities.

Could the minister update the House on Canada's summer jobs 2018?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for Oakville North—Burlington for her advocacy for young people across Canada.

A strong middle class and a growing economy depend on young Canadians getting the skills and experience they need to succeed. That is why our government has doubled the Canada summer jobs program, something the previous government would not do.

Oral Questions

In fact, we have created meaningful paid work experience for almost 70,000 students this year. Today we launched the hiring season for Canada summer jobs employers, meaning employers across the country are now ready to hire young people.

Therefore, I encourage young people to apply. We are looking forward to—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: The hon. member for Yorkton—Melville has been heckling both the question and the answer. I would ask her not to do that and not to interrupt. We wait our turn to speak.

The hon. member for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola. It is his turn.

* * *

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, small businesses across Canada, including Innov8 from Kelowna, have joined together to launch a campaign, called “Let Me Compete”, to fight the Liberals' latest attack on small businesses. Under new printer procurement rules, the Liberals are shutting out small and medium-sized bidders in favour of the largest suppliers.

These businesses employ thousands of Canadians and now those jobs are at risk. Less competition also means higher prices for the taxpayer.

Why are the Liberals always attacking Canadian small businesses? Why not let them compete?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unlike the previous government, we are committed to a modern, sophisticated procurement program, one that delivers results and lower costs for taxpayers. We are delivering a modern, secure, and reliable platform for the digital delivery of programs and services to Canadians.

The scale, scope, and complexity of the modernization that Shared Services Canada is implementing is unprecedented. After extensive industry engagement, we are undertaking a fair, open, transparent, and competitive procurement for office equipment.

* * *

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Fin Donnelly (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in a scathing report, the environment commissioner confirmed what we have been saying for years. The aquaculture industry is exposing wild salmon to disease and harmful pesticides.

In fairness, how would the Liberals know? They are not even monitoring the health of wild salmon. The minister claims to be licensing salmon farms based on “scientific evidence”, but clearly he is not. Further, the report confirms the Liberals place farmed over wild salmon every time.

When will the minister commit to a just transition to safe land-based, closed containment?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we want to thank the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development for her report. I had a chance to meet her yesterday and discuss the recommendations. The government has accepted all of her recommendations. In fact, a number of the things she has suggested are already under way because of our government's historic investments in science and marine protection and ocean protection.

For example, we are completing key disease risk assessments for these fish. We are clarifying the roles and responsibilities for managing emerging diseases. We are communicating more effective the precautionary approach. We will continue to do a lot more on this important issue.

* * *

[Translation]

AEROSPACE INDUSTRY

Mr. Ramez Ayoub (Thérèse-De Blainville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in Thérèse-De Blainville, many people work directly or indirectly for the aerospace industry. A significant number of businesses and families have close ties with this sector. There are also many institutions and organizations that do research and development work for the aerospace industry.

My question is for the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development. Can you explain what measures the government is taking to ensure the continued growth of our aerospace sector?

The Speaker: I would remind the hon. member to direct his comments to the Chair.

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his question. He is right, the aerospace industry is very important for Canada. That is why we have invested roughly \$50 million.

[English]

This investment is for the aerospace consortium led by Bell Helicopter. This will help create 300 good-quality middle-class jobs. It will add an additional \$178 million to our GDP. It reaffirms our commitment to the aerospace sector.

Once again, I would like to thank the member for his advocacy and hard work on this very important issue.

* * *

● (1510)

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fisheries minister claims that he stands with the people of Grand Bank. Now that is a whale of a tale if I have ever heard one. The minister is the one killing jobs in Grand Bank, taking away their Arctic surf clam quota and giving it to his Liberal buddies.

Business of Supply

The people of Grand Bank have launched grandbankplan.ca to fight for their jobs, because MPs in Newfoundland and Labrador will not.

Will the minister finally put the good people of Grand Bank ahead of his Liberal insiders and support their plan to save Grand Bank jobs?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday, our government is committed to working to support the hard-working people of Grand Bank. That is why they are so ably represented in the House of Commons by a member of Parliament who has met me a number of times about initiatives that will increase the work potential not only for that plan, but for other economic opportunities in Grand Bank.

Forgive me for being somewhat surprised by the feigned indignation from the Conservative Party, which had a process three years to bring a new entrant into this important fishery. At that time, the Conservatives did not worry about the people of Grand Bank. We worry about the people of Grand Bank and we will support them.

* * *

[Translation]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, GPQ): Mr. Speaker, in Quebec, as of April 17, fully 15,000 asylum seekers are waiting for their claim to be processed by Ottawa. No one knows if they will be accepted or not, but in the meantime we know that they need housing, health care, work, and schooling for their children. What has the Minister of Immigration done since last Wednesday evening to speed up the application processing?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last summer we set up a task force to answer that important question and I am proud to say that the federal and provincial governments, including those of Quebec and Ontario, are working very well together. We met last Wednesday and we made several announcements to respond to the issues and challenges we are currently facing. It is a team effort by the province and the federal government and a fine example of how a country should work.

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, GPQ): Mr. Speaker, all the Liberals do is talk, talk, talk. They have meetings and blah, blah, blah, but never take any concrete action. The migrant crisis is a humanitarian crisis. There are 200 asylum seekers a day, and there will be 400 a day this summer. What do the Liberals do? They talk.

When will the minister finally hire extra staff to process the backlog of claims? It is a simple question.

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the response is very simple: we invested \$173 million in budget 2018, including \$74 million that will go directly to the Immigration and Refugee Board to speed up the process. I hope that response satisfies my colleague.

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I wish to draw the attention of members to the presence in our gallery of His Excellency Alassane Bala Sakandé, Speaker of the National Assembly of Burkina Faso.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1515)

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY**OPPOSITION MOTION—ILLEGAL BORDER CROSSINGS**

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent has four minutes to finish his speech.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, please excuse my haste. It usually takes half an hour to resume debate, so you have caught me a little off guard. However, when we are well versed in our file and especially when the issue is so important, the words flow freely.

We were talking about illegal immigrants who cross the border on a small path while hundreds of thousands of people around the world obey the laws and rules, go to our embassies, work with officials, and wait years to have the privilege and pleasure of coming to Canada to enrich our country. For more than a year, because of the Liberal government's inaction and complacency, tens of thousands of people have been illegally crossing our border. We condemn that.

Even Quebec's Liberal government recently hit the roof. It is not often that we see four ministers hold a press conference where they slam the federal government for leaving the Quebec government to fend for itself. The federal government was refusing to pick up a \$146-million tab, even though everyone recognizes that the illegal migrant crisis was caused entirely by the Liberal government's poor decisions and by the tweet the Prime Minister sent out one Saturday afternoon on Twitter.

Liberal ministers had some harsh words to say. David Heurtel, Quebec's minister of immigration, diversity, and inclusion, said, "The new reality with respect to migrants calls for a new approach.... The status quo is unacceptable."

Jean-Marc Fournier, the minister responsible for Canadian relations and the Canadian Francophonie, said, "Today is the first time a claim submitted 20 months ago is being heard, never mind being decided on." Wait times are far too long.

The Liberal premier, Philippe Couillard, added, "This is a serious warning, not just a negotiating tactic."

Business of Supply

The federal Liberal government, for its part, reacted with an arrogant response from the Minister of Immigration, who said we should “avoid causing undue suffering to families who are seeking protection” and “creating delays at the border and triggering an unacceptable humanitarian situation.”

The Prime Minister created this unacceptable humanitarian situation and the suffering of these migrants with the tweet he posted and his total lack of responsibility in this regard. That is why we are now faced with a situation that requires immediate action.

It is ridiculous that 21,000 people illegally crossed the border last year, 91% of them in Quebec. It is ridiculous that, since the beginning of 2018, over 6,373 people have crossed the border illegally. Unless something changes, it is expected that approximately 400 people will illegally cross the Canadian border every day.

It is time the government took action and came up with a plan. We are all proud to be Canadian, and we are all descended from immigrants or first nations people. Most Canadians are descended from immigrants. I am the son of immigrants. My parents came here on August 22, 1958, almost 60 years ago.

If we want our country to continue to move in the right direction, people need to follow the rules set out by the government. We need to send a clear message to the world that we welcome people from around the world but that they cannot gain privileged access to our big, beautiful country through a little path in the woods.

That is why we are calling on the government to come up with a clear, specific plan to facilitate immigration and help immigrants in Canada.

• (1520)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening all day to Conservative members talk about this motion. One would think there had never been irregular crossings by Americans during the Harper era. Every year individuals cross the Canada-U.S. border irregularly. That has been going on for many years.

My concern is that we continue to see the Conservative Party going further to the right. Today we are seeing the Conservatives promoting something that I do not like in politics. We should be very welcoming in terms of the value of refugees who contribute to our country. The use of the word “illegal” as opposed to “irregular” is being done intentionally by the Conservative Party. It causes a great deal of concern.

Would my friend across the way, at the very least, acknowledge that even when Stephen Harper was prime minister, we had thousands of people cross the border irregularly? Maybe the member could tell us specifically what the Conservative government of Stephen Harper did that was different from what we are doing.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, I would remind my Liberal colleague from Winnipeg North that when we were in office, we were not talking about tens of thousands of illegal people. We were talking about 200.

This is quite normal. We have a border of 9,000 kilometres. It is quite normal to see people trying to dodge their responsibilities and dodge the laws. That is part of life. However, it was not the meaning of the government. The meaning of our government was clear. If people wanted to come to Canada, they had to follow the rules, and we would welcome them as soon as possible. The meaning of the Liberal government is, “Welcome to Canada, whenever you want, and wherever you come from.” That is exactly the signal that was sent from the Prime Minister in a tweet.

I am not the only one to say that, as we learned three weeks ago, thanks to the *National Post*.

[*Translation*]

A few days after the Prime Minister posted his tweet, the first secretary at the embassy in Mexico said, and I quote, “We are receiving an increasing number of enquiries from the public about requesting refugee status in Canada, and a number clearly having links with our Prime Minister’s tweet this weekend.” Public servants who work at the Canadian embassy in Mexico were complaining about what the Prime Minister had done that caused this whole problem.

[*English*]

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, earlier today the Conservative critic for immigration said on the record that there is no category within the Liberals’ plan to accommodate and process asylum claimants. That, of course, is not true. Under the Liberal plan, there is the protected persons category. The number is not as high as it should be to address this issue, but that being said, will the Conservatives stop spreading misinformation? We want to have a rational discussion about how to address the issue. Will they stop spreading misinformation?

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, we will continue to tell the truth.

The truth is that nearly 29,000 people crossed the line, not at the official border but elsewhere, and 91% of those people came into Quebec. I know what I am talking about. I had to deal with that all summer. I listened to people in my constituency, in my riding, talking to me about that.

Speaking for myself, my parents arrived here 60 years ago by boat, on August 22, 1958. They were going to Quebec City. They were very pleased, very proud. It took them five years to get their citizenship. They followed the rules.

We are asking the government to please follow the rules.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to the comments from across the way all day. They keep talking about providing more funding. The truth of the matter is that the government did provide more funding, an increase of \$400 million through the Canada-Quebec accord, and the Conservatives voted against that. Why would they vote against that if they had been asking for it the whole time?

• (1525)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, I do not remember asking for funding, but I do remember asking for justice and compliance with the law.

Business of Supply

In this case, out of 22,000 people, nearly 18,000 entered Quebec illegally. The upshot is that there are 2,500 extra children in our schools. That is like opening five new schools. It is not me saying this, it is the Premier. Ottawa should definitely be footing the bill, because the Prime Minister is the one who created this problem.

[English]

Mr. Marc Miller (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will preface my speech by saying that I will be sharing my time with my friend, the hon. member for St. John's East.

In the spring of 1847, Montrealers got word of a mass emigration on an unprecedented scale from Britain, mostly from famine-stricken Ireland, devastated by potato crop failures in the previous two years. Of the 100,000 who sailed to British North America, an estimated 70,000 landed in Montreal, instantly more than doubling its population. A local paper, the *Montreal Witness*, warned that “our shores are likely to be thronged with emigrants, chiefly of a class who will have little or nothing left when they arrive”, and urged the population to prepare.

However, nothing could prepare Montrealers for what arrived. Overcrowded “coffin ships” that brought the migrants to the new world were the perfect breeding ground for typhus. While fear gripped parts of the population, many more stood up to help: Protestant clergy, nuns, and priests, as well as regular citizens. Among them was the then mayor of Montreal, John Mills, who would later succumb to the disease. They all disregarded their own safety for the newcomers. As well, the Mohawks of Kahnawake, much like their ancestors did several hundred years earlier for the new immigrants, brought food for the starving.

The events of the mid-19th century shaped our nation. Indeed, 40% of Quebec now claims some Irish heritage and, with the exception of indigenous peoples, we are a country built by immigrants and their descendants. This fact has shaped our history. It makes us an open and welcoming country that is the envy of the world. It has shaped our policies and laws.

[Translation]

Canada is an open and welcoming country to those in need of protection, the most vulnerable people whom we have a legal and moral duty to protect. Case in point, we recently took in Syrian refugees and gave them a welcome everyone in Canada could be proud of. In return, these people are going to help shape our country.

However, in any modern country that cares about protecting its citizens, immigration needs to be done in an orderly fashion, in collaboration with all orders of government. Based on our recent experience with the influx of irregular migrants, the government feels it is very important to work more closely with its partners in managing the marked increase in border crossings from the United States over the past year.

These irregular border crossings have major local effects, which call for meticulous consideration and ongoing collaboration with the relevant provinces and territories. Although these irregular crossings are happening at various locations across the country, we recognize that Quebec is receiving a disproportionate number of asylum seekers, especially at the Lacolle border.

That is why we are working very closely with Quebec in order to ensure that we respond to their concerns. We gave our support to the work of the ad hoc intergovernmental task force on irregular migration, which provides a point of convergence to federal ministers and our colleagues in Quebec and Ontario, ensuring a coordinated approach across all levels of government.

To date, the task force has met nine times and continues to meet regularly to discuss the latest developments and the coordination efforts that are under way. During the most recent meeting of the task force, on April 18, in Ottawa, members agreed to take concrete measures to ensure the coordinated and effective management of irregular migration.

To that end, members announced that they will work together on assessing the details of Quebec's request for additional funding, including money for housing. Although housing is a provincial jurisdiction, Quebec has asked for help, and our government is working with its counterparts on determining the best way to provide assistance. We are exploring several options not just in Montreal, but also in the regions.

We are also working with Quebec on finding ways to help screen asylum claims and facilitate travel for those wishing to go outside Quebec.

● (1530)

As for preparing for another possible influx in the future, I want to emphasize the considerable progress made in recent months.

I also want to point out that these recent commitments are part of a series of measures taken by our government and are on top of the \$3.2 billion Quebec will receive as part of the 2018-19 Canada social transfer and in addition to an increase of \$112 million to support the settlement and integration services offered in the province under the Canada-Quebec accord.

Moreover, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada is expediting the processing of work permits for all asylum claimants in Canada and has committed to a service standard of 30 days. These people also want to work and contribute to the Canadian economy.

In addition, as soon as a refugee claim is found eligible and referred to the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, the federal government covers the cost of all eligible health care services under the interim federal health program, which provides short-term, limited health care coverage to resettled refugees, asylum seekers, and certain other groups, including victims of human trafficking and individuals detained under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.

Business of Supply

Given the extraordinary circumstances and delays in the processing of asylum claims as a result of the increased volume of irregular arrivals last August, we are currently issuing certificates for the interim federal health program to asylum seekers in Lacolle, immediately after security screening, background checks, and setting the date for the initial interview to determine eligibility.

[English]

It should also be noted that in addition to working collaboratively with provincial counterparts, the Government of Canada is also engaging with the Government of the United States and the U.S. embassy in Ottawa on this issue as our countries continue to cooperate in the management of irregular migration at the border. The Minister of Public Safety meets regularly with his American counterpart and discusses these issues in depth. In addition, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship met with the new American ambassador in Ottawa recently specifically to discuss this issue.

As we work with our diverse immigration partners, we remain strongly committed to orderly migration and the safety of all Canadians. That is why, in the context of the 2018 budget, following the Harper government's major cuts in its last few years, \$173.2 million has been invested into the management of irregular migration. These funds will be used to provide short-term support for border security processing and to support decision-making capacity at the Immigration and Refugee Board.

Canada is a beautiful country shaped by immigrants. We often hear talk stigmatizing a whole group by calling it "illegal". While the unlawful crossing of the border is not advised, and at times is dangerous, stigmatizing a whole group has a pernicious effect and sends signals to a certain party's base, which we find highly despicable. If someone crosses the border in an irregular fashion and is deemed to be an asylum seeker and a refugee protected under the conventions, that crossing is not illegal at all.

As descendants of the wretched masses yearning to breathe free, children of the wretched refuse from the teeming shores, we must not only ensure the health and safety of our people but remain open, free, and welcoming to those who seek our protection in accordance with the rule of law.

• (1535)

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, there have been arguments about the wording of all this. Setting that aside, it is clear that there are a lot of irregular crossings and that the problem is growing. Why will the government not address this problem?

[Translation]

There is a problem right across the country, and it is important that the government speak with the U.S. administration in order to solve it.

[English]

I do not understand why the government is not talking to the United States government about this. Let me put this to the government: What if the shoe were on the other foot? What if Canada plunges into a deep recession as a result of a housing crash or some other deep recession, unemployment skyrockets, economic

growth is negative, and we have the opposite happening? What if we have literally tens of thousands of people irregularly crossing the border from Canada into the United States? We would not have much leverage to renegotiate the safe third country agreement. We would be under inordinate pressure as a government and a country to give the Americans whatever they want in order to ensure that the free trade of goods and services continues to flow across that border.

Why is the government not taking the opportunity today to bring this challenge to the administration, to seek a remedy here that would stem the flow of irregular border crossers so that we can regulate this problem before it becomes a real crisis in the other direction?

Mr. Marc Miller: Madam Speaker, I want to commend the member opposite on his choice of words. He is indeed an example to this House and to his party in particular.

The member opposite should note that we are in constant conversation with our American counterparts on these issues and a number more. This is one of the most highly crossed borders in a regular fashion in the world, and indeed one of the best managed. I know the member opposite has been paying attention, so he knows that many ministers have been south of the border, including the Minister of Public Safety and the Minister of Immigration, to discuss specifically these issues and to have a concerted response on irregular migration and the management of the border as well. The member can rest assured, and I again thank him for his use of the words "irregular migration".

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, the centre of this debate of course is to how to manage the situation with the irregular border crossers. One of the ways in which we can do that is to suspend the safe third country agreement. Suspending the agreement would mean that people would not be forced to go through the irregular crossings and that would put order to things. Within the agreement itself, article 10 allows for Canada to give notice to suspend it for a short period, just to see how it could work, and then to work with the international communities and others on a long-term plan.

Why can we not go forward with a sensible plan that would actually address the issue and the pressures experienced by Quebec and other provinces in the border communities, and also to ensure that those who are seeking refuge, which is what Canada is about, can do it safely, and then for us to do all of this in a rational way?

Mr. Marc Miller: Madam Speaker, again the working assumption in the member's question is that this should be done unilaterally. Certainly that would be highly inadvisable, given our partner across the border. Again, these are discussions that need to be taken privately and soberly in a whole-of-government approach to how the border is managed. Hundreds of thousands of people cross that border regularly. We are lucky compared to our European partners to have only one partner across a border. People cannot simply march into Canada and march through Canada. We have three quasi-impermeable borders, and our partner in the major crossing of 9,000 kilometres is indeed a safe country, but issues do arise and we are addressing them in a sober and orderly fashion.

Business of Supply

• (1540)

[Translation]

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague and friend from Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs for sharing his time with me.

[English]

I am glad to rise today to continue the debate on the actions that our government is taking to meet the clear objectives of our fair and compassionate immigration and asylum system. These objectives are to save lives and to offer protection to the displaced, the most vulnerable, and the persecuted; to meet our country's international legal obligations with respect to refugees; and to respond to international crises by providing assistance to those in need of protection.

[Translation]

As we know, in recent months we have seen a considerable increase in irregular migration at key points along the border we share with the United States while asylum seekers have been entering Canada somewhere between official ports of entry.

People seeking asylum in Canada must be shown compassion and must avail themselves of all recourse under the law.

When we treat them with respect and give them the chance to be heard, we are acting in accordance with Canada's long-standing humanitarian tradition, for which our country is renowned throughout the world.

[English]

As I noted, this is a long-standing tradition, and Canadians are rightfully proud of our strong international reputation for humanitarian leadership, which was damaged by the Harper Conservatives during their 10 years in government.

Since the election, through the work of our former and current Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship and the department, our government remains focused on efficient and streamlined processing as well as on developing more flexible and nimble responses to adapt to the influx of asylum seekers at the Quebec border and elsewhere.

One important response to this situation, and mentioned many times by the minister, is that our government has accelerated the processing of all applications for work permits for asylum seekers across Canada from three months to three days so that they are able to support themselves while they are in this country. This was something that both the governments of Canada and Quebec worked on together collaboratively.

[Translation]

To date, 97% of applications for work permits submitted by irregular migrants have been approved and only 3% have been rejected, mainly due to incomplete medical examinations.

Since April 2017, more than 12,500 work permits have been issued to refugee claimants in Quebec.

Our government is pleased to be working closely with the Government of Quebec to manage the influx of asylum seekers who are crossing the border in that province.

[English]

Given the influx of asylum seekers, budget 2018, as noted by the minister, has invested \$173.2 million toward managing irregular migration to ensure security at the border and faster processing of asylum claims by the IRB. The Conservatives have flip-flopped on this. The member for Calgary Nose Hill called for this increase, and the Conservatives are now arguing against the additional funding, which is somewhat typical.

Quebec will also receive \$3.2 billion as part of the Canada social transfer in 2018-19. More importantly, we have provided an increase, as my colleague said, of \$112 million to support settlement and integration services in Quebec, under the Canada-Québec accord, which the Conservatives voted against, even though they are calling on the government through this debate today to provide more funding to Quebec. It is typical when the shoe on the other foot is a flip-flop.

At the same time, our government continues to lead the collaborative work of the ad hoc intergovernmental task force on irregular migration, which is ensuring a coordinated approach across all levels of government. Rather than the politics of fear and division, which lost the Conservatives the election, we are focused on working with Canadians together to manage the situation at the Canada-U.S. border. Our government is managing the volumes we are seeing now and is preparing for any fluctuations, as any responsible government would do.

Before closing, let me make some final points. Asylum seekers face a rigorous process to determine whether they have a legitimate claim according to Canadian and international law. There are no shortcuts and no guarantees that an asylum seeker will be able to stay in Canada. The member for Calgary Nose Hill should know this, having been the critic on this file now for over two years.

The New Democrats should also remember that not everyone is eligible to make an asylum claim, and not all asylum claims should or will be accepted. All eligible claims are assessed by the independent Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada and are decided on a case-by-case basis.

• (1545)

If the IRB determines that individuals are not in need of Canada's protection, they are removed from Canada, something the member for Calgary Nose Hill knows and understands.

The NDP would open our borders to 11 million irregular migrants who are illegally in the United States with their proposal to completely undermine and tear up the safe third country agreement.

Let us talk about which side has been absent on our immigration asylum system. The Conservatives had families, spouses, and children wait up to 26 months to be reunited. Our government eliminated that backlog, and we now process applications within 12 months.

Business of Supply

The Conservatives made applicants under the federal live-in caregiver program wait over six and a half years to be processed. We eliminated that backlog, and by the end of 2018, we will have a processing standard of one year; 12 months.

The Conservatives created the legacy asylum claim backlog, those who had to wait almost a decade to have their claims heard after the Conservatives left them behind. Our government will be eliminating this backlog by the end of this year. We are also working hard to eliminate the privately sponsored refugee backlog left by the Conservatives. Our government is processing study permits and citizenship and economic immigrant applications faster than ever before.

As the member for St. John's East, I am confident that the initiatives I have outlined will help us maintain our strong and compassionate immigration system. I trust that these points will help my hon. colleagues support our government's position and our efforts. We are fixing the mess left behind by the Conservatives. The movers of this motion and the motion itself seek to make things even worse. I will not be supporting it.

I have an opportunity now to talk a little about my time and the testimony I have had the opportunity to hear at the Standing Committee on Citizenship, Immigration and Refugees, on which I am one of the new members. This is obviously a topic on which we are greatly seized. While I trust that the government response is going to be safe and effective and is going to support the people who are irregularly crossing at the border, and have been since last summer, we will be briefed further as to the particulars of those efforts.

The motion itself is somewhat bizarre. It says, "take responsibility for the massive social services costs burdening the provincial government". The Government of Canada and the Government of Quebec have worked together to design a system so that the irregular migrants have work permits in three days so they are able to work, to earn money, to pay taxes, and to contribute to the economic development of the province of Quebec, just as all immigrants have the possibility to do. That lowers their burden on the social services system, so in fact, point three is completely wrong. We are addressing this problem head on, in collaboration with our partners.

The motion says, "admit the Prime Minister's irresponsibility of" something that was in a tweet. However, Canada is a welcoming country. We are welcoming immigrants to Canada. We are helping and supporting refugees. We are accepting legitimate asylum seekers who come to the border, and that is widely determined. Those people who cross irregularly at the border with a valid asylum claim are not illegal migrants. They are merely irregular migrants, and this is how they are choosing to seek asylum, and we support them. We welcome them. We will meet our international obligations to them.

The other point is "ensure the agencies responsible for our borders are properly equipped so that they can continue to do their jobs effectively". This is what budget 2018 does that the Conservatives voted against ad nauseam, point by point, line by line, every item, yet here we are on this item, and they are saying to do more. We are doing what we need to do.

Finally is the request that the government "table in the House no later than May 11, 2018, a plan to (i) stop the influx of people". Again, if asylum seekers come to the border, we have an international obligation to them. It is a fundamental human right that all citizens of the world whose countries are members of the United Nations enjoy. They have the right to leave their countries or the country in which they are located. If they are legitimate asylum seekers, the country they enter should accept them and process their asylum claims in accordance with the rule of law. That is what we are doing.

Every point in the motion makes no sense. It is dog whistle politics, and I do not want anything further to do with it. I urge all members of the House to defeat the motion today.

• (1550)

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be the first to denounce racism or dog whistle politics when I see it. However, some of the rhetoric coming from the Liberal members does not match reality. The fact is that both Liberal and Conservative governments have strongly supported Canada's immigration and refugee system.

In preparation for this debate, I downloaded some statistics from StatsCan about the number of immigrants who have come to Canada every year. They tell a story. The facts do not lie. The facts are that during the Harper government of some 10 years, a record number of immigrants were admitted in the postwar period. Some 260,000 immigrants and 26,000 UN refugees a year were admitted during that 10-year period, which is much higher than during the Chrétien or Martin years or the Mulroney years. Therefore, I think we have to tone down some of the rhetoric and focus on the issue at hand, which is that border crossings are taking place in Lacolle, Quebec, and Emerson, Manitoba.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the measured tone and respectful dialogue from the member in his question.

It is true that Canada is an open country and has been for many years. If we look percentage-wise at the size of the population of the country and the amount of immigration that has been permitted from time to time, I am not sure that would bear out the statistics that were proposed. Perhaps they would with the raw numbers. However, if we look at the percentage of the population, I would like to see whether that is borne out.

When we look at the text of the motion, and if we look at what the citizenship and immigration committee, of which the sponsor of the motion is a member, is currently studying and being briefed on, we cannot help but think that what is being proposed in the motion, with the antics and the rhetoric to the media, including this morning at the member's press briefing, is not solely about whether people are crossing irregularly at the border or what needs to be done. Obviously the government is doing a lot. It has devoted a lot of resources to this. I trust that with all the efforts through public safety and immigration it will handle this as well as or better than the similar situation that happened with the Mexican migrants.

Business of Supply

If we look at the text taken as a whole, it goes beyond that. It is attempting to drive a wedge in Canada. It refers to people who cross irregularly as “illegal” immigrants or “illegal” aliens, or some such deprecating language that insults and intimidates newcomers to this country. I do not want to stand for it. I appreciate that the member himself has not used that term in his discourse. I appreciate that he has not taken this tack, but the rest of his party has.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member's colleague raised the issue of suspending the safe third country agreement as a unilateral move. For the information of all members, it is in the act itself that both countries, Canada and the U. S., can give notice and temporarily suspend the safe third country agreement. It is not in violation of the act or anything like that; rather, it is absolutely within our right to do exactly that.

Somehow the member seems to think that the NDP is suggesting that we should simply open up the border and allow anyone to come through without the proper assessments. That is simply not true. What we are saying is that people should come through in an orderly fashion. We can do that by suspending the safe third country agreement so that people are not forced to cross over irregularly. If they cross over when the safe third country agreement has been suspended, they will still be processed accordingly. In my 20-minute speech today, I went through the entire process. Therefore, I would like to ask the member to retract his comments.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Madam Speaker, I was not convinced by the arguments put forward by the hon. member. When I look at the totality of the logistics and what is realistic to expect from people, if we open the borders to all asylum claims to process regularly, we will make a bad situation worse. It is totally inconsistent with the government's position today or with the previous government's position. It is inconsistent with our relationship with the Americans in managing our shared border for regular crossings. It is unrealistic to expect that Canada, a country of 35 million people, could potentially expose itself to irregular crossings at the border in Windsor or at the airport in Toronto of up to 110,000 special migrants, even if it is only 1% of the number of illegals in the United States—

• (1555)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Wellington—Halton Hills.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am going to address this whole issue of “illegal” versus “irregular” up front. I think both are acceptable, but even the CBC uses the term “illegal” in its news articles. The CBC, I trust, is a trustworthy news source, so other people have used it. At the end of the day, in order to focus on the issue at hand, I am going to avoid focusing the argument around the term itself, and rather focus on the issue at hand.

Let me start by saying that I think everyone in the House understands and supports the need for immigration to Canada. We have a below-replacement birth rate as a country, so we need immigration in order to maintain a constant population. We have labour market shortages, so we need immigration to fill jobs. Also, we are a country of immigrants. Since the early 17th century, immigrants have come here and have built our country.

[*Translation*]

I am proud to be the son of immigrants. My father was Chinese and my mother was Dutch. They moved to Canada in the 1950s and 1960s to start a new life. I am proud of my history and my family's history with respect to this issue.

[*English*]

I am sure members in all parties of the House have similar stories about immigration to this country. Also, because Canadians are fair and generous, we also believe in and support our policies on refugees and asylum seekers, people who have been dispossessed. That is why subsequent and successive Conservative and Liberal governments have taken in refugees from Hungary, from Vietnam, today from Syria, and other people who are dispossessed, such as Yazidis.

Therefore, the debate in front of us today is not about whether we support immigration, because we all do, and as I pointed out earlier, some of the highest levels of immigration intake during the post-World War II period came during the Harper years. We admitted some 260,000 immigrants a year for almost 10 years of the Harper government. That is 2.6 million immigrants. In addition to that, we admitted roughly 26,000 UN refugees each and every year. That is 260,000 UN refugees over that 10-year period. I think we can all say that successive Liberal and Conservative governments have supported immigration and the need to take in those dispossessed and those who are refugees.

That does not mean we agree on every aspect of our immigration and refugee system. For example, during the last election, the Conservatives said we would take in approximately 25,000 Syrian refugees. The Liberals promised to take in approximately double that number, at 50,000. The Canadian people spoke, and they elected a Liberal majority, and I respect that. The Liberals had a mandate to take in some 50,000 Syrian refugees.

In 2006, we disagreed with the previous Liberal government's position on charging prospective immigrants a \$975 fee to process their application. We promised to cut that fee in half, which we did. We may disagree on the details of our system, but we agree on the fundamentals, so let us focus on the details of what is going on here and why this motion is in front of the House.

Madam Speaker, I am supporting the motion, as indicated. I am also splitting my time with the member for Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner.

The motion in front of us today is not about whether or not we support immigrants or refugees; it is about one particular issue that has gone unresolved, the irregular border crossings that are taking place, especially in places like Lacolle, Quebec, and Emerson, Manitoba.

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The Liberal government has mismanaged this issue. A country ultimately has sovereignty over two things: its people and its geography. By mismanaging our borders, the government is weakening the sovereignty of the Canadian state, and by failing to address this problem over the last two years, it has created a host of other problems.

• (1600)

First, we have seen a significant increase in spending to process people crossing the border irregularly, and the government has had to significantly increase spending to provide for social services for people in Quebec. That is \$173 million more for processing and \$180 million more for social services, and this is just the start. The cost could spiral into the billions of dollars.

All the while, the government is not delivering on the spending it committed to Canadians on repairing our nation's ailing roads, bridges, and transit infrastructure, all the while running much higher deficits than the Liberals promised.

The Liberals have also created another problem. Because they have had to divert money and resources away from regular immigration and refugee processing in order to process the people crossing the border in Quebec and Manitoba, there is now a backlog of some 45,000 applications for privately sponsored refugees. I am told the wait times for processing are now seven years. There is now an 11-year wait time for the processing of asylum claims. The problem is only going to get worse unless the government supports the motion and takes action to address this problem.

Last year, we admitted some 20,000 people who crossed the border in Emerson and in Lacolle. This year, it could well be north of 60,000 people. To date, about 60,000 people have crossed at those two locations, and officials are predicting that this summer some 400 people a day will be crossing. We could be looking at 60,000 people this year who are crossing through non-normal channels, a fifth of our overall immigration intake.

For decades, Canada has had an orderly, planned, controlled, and safe immigration system. Our immigration system has for decades been controlled through the vetting and screening of immigrants. As a result, we enjoy very high levels of public support for immigration and for refugees. As a result, Canada has one of the highest intakes of immigrants and refugees in the world. The two are linked: orderly, planned, and controlled immigration and refugee resettlement and high levels of public support for those systems. This is not true of Europe and the United States.

For example, in the United States, the Americans for decades have had no control or planning of their immigration system. U.S. administrations and U.S. Congresses dating back to the 1980s have failed to deal with their challenges of irregular border crossings and people entering the country illegally. As a result, today the United States finds itself with some 10 million people who have entered irregularly and who are without documentation and without papers. It is causing huge problems, and the problem is in some ways insoluble. We do not want to go down that path here in Canada.

The same is true of Europe as it is in the United States. That is why I am supporting this motion. We need to maintain high levels of public support for our system, and that begins by maintaining an

orderly, controlled, and safe immigration and refugee system so that Canada can continue to benefit from the world's brightest and best and so that we can continue to receive and welcome the downtrodden and dispossessed in this world.

There is a final reason that I am supporting this motion. What if the shoe is on the other foot? Let us not forget that the 2002 safe third country agreement between the government of Prime Minister Jean Chrétien and the administration of Bill Clinton came about because of the horrific events of September 11, 2001. We were under an inordinate amount of pressure from the Americans, who wanted that agreement in place and who had the cards to play in those negotiations. We managed to keep the borders open to trade so that we could continue to grow our economy. However, what if we go into a severe recession? What if the housing bubble pops and we see a reverse flow of migrants in irregular crossings from Canada to the United States? We would have no leverage to deal with an American administration that wants the problem fixed. That is why the government needs to sit down with U.S. administration, talk about this problem, and find a solution to these issues in Emerson and in Lacolle, Quebec.

• (1605)

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have two problems with the motion. One is that it does not come across as being genuine. For a party that cut resources so badly during its time in office to ask that agencies get the resources they need does not connect very well. The other problem is that asking the Prime Minister to admit irresponsibility in this matter smacks to me more of partisan politics than it does of any genuine attempt to fix something.

I would ask the hon. gentleman, whom I enjoy working with on our committee, if he would go back to his party and say that if they really want to give the government the path of least resistance to doing something they think is a good idea, then they should cut the partisanship and get on with really good ideas for Parliament.

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Speaker, on the issue of the previous government's deficit reduction action program, I do not think that the reduction in budgets for the then Department of Citizenship and Immigration actually created any backlogs in the system. I thought the system quite orderly and quite planned. In fact, backlogs went down for many streams of immigration.

With respect to calling on the Prime Minister to withdraw his tweet, I think social media is relevant to the story. The fact is that even today social media is having a huge impact on these irregular border crossings. It is the social media networks that are suddenly triggering a surge in people from Nigeria coming through Lacolle, Quebec, as a result of the power, pervasiveness, and ubiquity of social media.

It was the Prime Minister's tweet that first got people thinking about doing this. The Prime Minister, who has millions of Twitter followers, should tweet out and clarify what the situation is at the Canadian border and tell people not to cross the border at Lacolle, Quebec, or at Emerson, Manitoba, and to do so through regular means. That will strengthen our immigration system and public confidence in that system.

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Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the civilized tone in which the member's comments were made. I want to identify this one piece, though. It is not just about semantics, because the words used are absolutely critical. There is a major difference between the words "irregular" and "illegal". It is like saying to somebody that what they are doing is illegal versus saying to someone what they are doing is irregular. There is a difference.

From that point of view, this is why I take issue with this motion. I have highlighted a number of areas where I take issue with the motion. If the Conservative members really want to get on with a real debate on how best to manage the situation before us in the best interests of border communities and Canada, then why did the Conservative members not support my amendment when I put it on the floor today?

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Speaker, I support the motion. I am comfortable with the wording of the motion.

At the end of the day, the issue is that the government has mishandled this file and needs to seek a remedy with the American administration. In my view, it needs to seek it because there is a broader issue at play. The tide of people flowing from the United States to Canada could very well be reversed, and in that situation we will not have any leverage. The American people, their administration, and their economy, which is 10 times bigger and more powerful than ours, are going to drive those negotiations and get what they want. We are much more reliant on exports to the United States than the Americans are on exports to Canada. We need to seek a remedy to the situation before we find ourselves in a much more difficult situation where we will not have any leverage to negotiate a suitable outcome.

● (1610)

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to begin my speech today by taking a moment to remember the lives lost yesterday in Toronto. Today, I think all Canadians are thinking of and praying for those who have lost loved ones, a friend, a co-worker, or a neighbour. Just as Canadians have rallied around to support those affected by the tragedy in Humboldt, I know Canadians will rally to support the people in Toronto today and into the future.

I would like to address the Conservative motion, and I will use the term "illegal border crossers", because that is what they are.

The motion is straightforward. Most Canadians will readily understand what the Conservatives are seeking. It is not drastic or partisan. It is simple. We want the Liberal government to acknowledge the problem that we are seized with, take ownership of it, and act in the best interest of all Canadians to address the flow of illegal border crossers.

As has been said, tens of thousands of illegal border crossers came to Canada last year. This year experts are predicting even more, potentially up to 60,000 in 2018 alone. Already, up to April 15, over 6,000 individuals have crossed over to Canada, the majority of whom have come in since March 1. That is an increase of 128% over 2017.

What is the Liberal plan? What is the government doing to deal with this issue? It is not unreasonable for Canadians to expect better than just "everything is fine", because in reality, everything is not fine.

In my riding, I hear from people continuously about this issue. What concerns them, in addition to the increased risk to public safety, is that the illegal queue jumping significantly impacts immigration for legal immigrants, with delays in security checks, delays in immigrants getting their applications processed, and delays in families being reunited. Legal, law-abiding immigrants and refugees are stuck waiting years to have their hearings and applications processed. All they are ever told is that their file is pending. Why are those who want to come to Canada legally being punished, while the illegal crossers are being rewarded? That is their question.

In addition to the impact on legal immigration, there are issues with costs, resources, public safety, and potentially national security.

The sudden and unexpected influx of people has stretched the capacity of our border agents, our police forces, our immigration processes, our support systems, and our not-for-profits like food banks. The cost of providing for these people, who are allowed into Canada to claim asylum, are extensive. It includes the cost of keeping them in Canada for years until the processing is completed, providing housing, health care, food, social assistance, and the cost of preparing them to enter the workforce.

When we take border agents and police out of their communities to deal with this crisis, it of course leads to problems elsewhere in the country. Reduced resources, longer shifts, and limited vacations mean that border agents and law enforcement cannot operate at their best. Communities do not receive the policing services they deserve or expect and borders are backlogged by skeleton resources. It is Canadians who pay the price and taxpayers who foot the bill.

So far, the Liberals have no plan for dealing with all of these issues. Last year, we heard from Liberal ministers that everything was fine and that there were no issues here. There were no cost issues, no safety issues, and everything was fine. In fact, the Minister of Immigration testified that there were no concerns, no costs, and no problems with these illegal border crossers.

However, it becomes much harder to trust those empty words when we hear the real stories from front-line officers. We know that the number of people awaiting deportation rose from 291 in 2012 to nearly 1,200 in 2016, and I can only imagine the thousands who are in the queue today.

Canadians saw recent media reports that hardened, repeated offenders who were ordered deported remained in our country to continue to victimize Canadians. We heard about known associates of terrorists still in the country for decades after being ordered deported. Clearly, we have a problem and clearly there is a need for much more work to be done.

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We know officials were told to rush screening to reduce wait times. That comes from the officials who are doing the screening. The number of initial questions asked of illegal border crossers were reduced from eight to two. That is not what I or most Canadians call “no change will be made to our system”. In fact, it is exactly what the minister said was not going to happen, the downgrading of our security screening.

• (1615)

Canadians are being shown that when it comes to national security and public safety, the Liberals cannot be trusted to make tough decisions and put what is good for Canadians ahead of their own political interests.

I have little doubt they will attempt to demonize anyone who points out their incompetence, especially on tackling these tough issues. However, as Canadians, we must point out the many ways the government has completely failed to protect Canadians, enforce our laws, and provide the tools and policies for border agents and law enforcement to do their jobs.

How did we get here?

It all started with a tweet, and in my opinion, another example of a flippant, immature Prime Minister who is stupidly naive to the consequences of his actions. He tweeted out that anyone could come to Canada, that we welcomed anyone. He forgot to add that they should please respect our laws and follow our processes.

Tens of thousands of people streamed across the border in 2017 from the U.S., a safe third country, a place where democracy and rule of law hold strong. “This was not a crisis” the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship told the committee. There were no resource problems. Everything was being managed internally. There were no safety risks. Now, in an effort to address their so-called non-issue, the Liberals have sought \$174 million more to deal with the massive influx, and we know it will not stop there.

Here we are yet again with no plan, in a crisis with no plan.

From the few bits of information provided by the government about Immigration and Refugee Board proceedings, we know there is a massive backlog of thousands of cases, with the usual timelines being pushed from months to years. People may be here three to five years as asylum seekers before even being called for a hearing. That means not only those who have come here illegally, but those who are genuine asylum claimants fleeing oppression.

In nearly two years, the Liberals have gone from pretending this is not an issue to admitting there is a problem. They say it is fine, that they have it managed. They are now saying it is still fine but they just need more money to fix it.

The Quebec government has said that the Liberals are wrong. Border agents have said that the Liberals are wrong. National Security experts have said that the Liberals are wrong. The opposition has been saying, and will continue to say, that the Liberals are wrong.

Here we are with this Conservative motion calling for what seems to be common sense, something that is far from common with the

Liberal government. All we are asking is for government to provide Canadians with a plan.

A plan means doing something to stop people from illegally entering Canada without following an honest, independent, and fair system of immigration. My colleague suggested we make the entire border with the U.S. a port of entry. This could be a temporary measure that the government could use until it gets a grip on the illegal border crossing crisis. It must close the current safe third country loophole.

A plan means immediately deporting criminals and all those who do not have a case for asylum and will eventually be deported anyway, which from media reports is around 90%. This will save taxpayers millions upon millions of dollars.

A plan means eliminating the appalling backlog and endless delays of legal refugee claims, ensuring that support goes to those who legitimately need it.

Our border agents, the RCMP, and the Immigration and Refugee Board should be provided with the resources to get the job done. The Liberals should stop saying everything is fine. They should take responsibility for the costs of their mistakes, costs that have been pushed onto the provinces, which is expected to increase even more.

It seems unlikely that Liberal backbenchers will vote in favour of a common sense Conservative motion, but rather will continue to blindly follow the myopic meandering of their leadership.

Canadians need a secure border. We need our rule of law enforced. We need our men and women in uniform to know that when they do their jobs, they will have the support of the government. We need to know that people who come to Canada are seeking to follow our laws and join our communities, not exploit our rules and abuse our generosity. We need leadership, leadership that will act in the best interests of Canada.

Perhaps a plan will need to wait until 2019, when there is a new Conservative government to put a plan into action.

Hon. Kent Hehr (Calgary Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciated the passion with which the hon. member spoke, yet I recognize the difficulty in speaking to this motion due to its schizophrenic nature.

I will point out a couple of glaring issues. The motion complains about gaps in the security screening process and it is worried about a backlog in scheduled hearing deportation orders, and the like. My sense of the matter is that we have an agreement in place with the United States that allows our international agreements to be met. I do not sense anyone in the House would find it wise to rip this up.

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The member, in particular, was talking about border security guards and the amount of time spent asking questions of people, all those things that government services can provide. Our solution is that, yes, we recognize there is an emerging situation and we want to do this in an orderly, professional fashion. We are investing \$179 million in the CBSA and other institutions that will allow this process to go smoothly. In a sense the member is looking for that. Most of his solutions appear to need government investments, which we are doing.

Am I wrong to suggest that the member in all of his rhetoric was saying this was not the solution? Do you have another means besides investing in those institutions to make the situation better?

• (1620)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind the member that he is to address the questions to the Chair, not to individual members.

The hon. member for Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner.

Mr. Glen Motz: Madam Speaker, I think it is fair to say that, yes, this issue requires resources, but it also requires a common sense approach. As we have allowed this to start, where will it end? We have already gone from a few thousand entries in 2017 to potentially 60,000 in 2018.

There are no systems readily available in our country to deal with this influx of illegal border crossings. We can pour all our money into this issue, but pouring money into it will solve the problem by itself. We have to stop illegal crossing in the first place and deal with it in a legal, orderly fashion of immigration.

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. It is always a pleasure to work with him on the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

It is rather interesting to hear the Conservatives talk about a plan, because the union that represents border officers clearly told me that they are still paying the price for the cuts made by the Conservatives.

I would like my colleague to explain something. If the Conservatives' approach is supposed to reassure us, how does he explain that, when it was in power, this same party cut resources? How does he explain that the cuts made by the Conservatives exacerbated all of the issues that these officers face, including the valid issues he raised, such as overtime and even, in some cases, post-traumatic stress?

How does he explain this?

[English]

Mr. Glen Motz: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for the great work he does on a lot of different fronts.

I would like to clarify this. During the time of the former Conservative government, the CBSA was funded to the tune of \$6.5 billion. In 2017, under the Liberal government, the CBSA was funded by \$6.4 billion. I do not consider that to be a cut, but it was under the Liberal government, not ours.

Also, under the former Conservative government, CBSA border officials and officers were increased by 26% in the last number of years. I do not see that as a cut. I see it as a positive step to improve a system that surely is overtaxed at this current time.

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Salaberry—Suroît.

She will certainly not say this about herself, so I want to take this opportunity to congratulate her on the work she is doing in her community on the refugee file. As the NDP's public safety critic, I have had the opportunity to work with her and, unlike the Conservative members, she sits down with people on the front lines, such as border services officers or representatives from the municipalities grappling with this issue. I congratulate her on that. I think that her fair-minded approach is a good example of how best to represent our constituents and to manage an extremely difficult situation.

Before I go on and talk some more about the situation of immigrants, I would like to thank the border services officers at the Canada Border Services Agency, the RCMP, the police, the Sûreté du Québec, the non-profit organizations, and the community organizations in the regions and municipalities. Unlike the federal government, they have all been working on the ground. Border services officers and the RCMP fall under federal jurisdiction, but these men and women have worked hard despite the rain and the fact that their government does not have a plan. I would like to take this opportunity today to commend and thank them. This is a very difficult situation to deal with.

I would like to provide a little background on this situation. In January 2017, when Trump took office and was inaugurated as the President of the United States, the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie, the member for Vancouver East, and I told the government in the foyer of the House of Commons to take into account the fact that, with the arrival of spring just a few months after Trump officially took office, we would see the consequences of having a racist president that was not shy about using cultural communities to score political points.

We warned the government numerous times to take that into account. We requested an emergency debate in the House on the situation so that we could talk more about what we were hearing from municipalities, border services unions, and Canadians. The government, however, did nothing.

That should come as no surprise. I asked this question last year at a joint meeting of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration and the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, but of course, I did not get a satisfactory answer. I pointed out that when Mr. Trump visited Minnesota, which shares a border with Manitoba, he talked about Somalis and problems associated with the Somali community in that state. It just so happened that, afterward, people from the Somali community crossed the U.S.-Manitoba border. When Mr. Trump said he would end the moratorium on deporting Haitians who had been through major disasters like earthquakes, Haitians came to Quebec to join their families. That was no coincidence. There is a direct link between what happened and what Mr. Trump said. To suggest otherwise would be an attempt to kiss up—my apologies for using that expression—in hopes of resolving all kinds of issues that, frankly, are far from being resolved, such as NAFTA and U.S. tariffs. We can see how well that strategy has worked.

Despite everything, our officials have not been able to take a stand. When I said these things to my colleagues, I was thinking about a CBC program where Jean Chrétien talked about his decision to stay out of the Iraq war. Canadian business people approached him and said that it was a disaster and that Canada would pay the price, because the Americans would no longer want to do business with them, since we were not supporting the U.S. in that war. Mr. Chrétien said he would not change his mind and told them to let him know if they suffered any consequences. As he wryly pointed out in the interview, about 15 years later, he was still waiting for their complaints. Obviously, there were no negative repercussions, because countries are capable of expressing opinions and criticizing the behaviour of other heads of state without burning any bridges or ruining any relationships with their most important partners. That is what this government has been unable to do.

• (1625)

Not only did the government not denounce this, but it did not listen to the NDP in January 2017, over a year ago now, when we noticed that the situation was becoming strained. We saw it last summer. I remember meeting a journalist at the Quartier DIX30 centre, not far from home in Chambly. The journalist had just returned from the Stanstead border crossing. He had just filed a story and said that the situation was completely insane. We talked about the situation. We made the same request again. I said in a public forum that we were calling on the government for a plan, we were calling for help for the Government of Quebec, for the municipalities, for the community organizations, and for the border officers who had come to our offices to say that they were fed up.

Now we are getting back into this debate just as the weather is improving, and I am proud to say, as I have said many times throughout my speech, that the NDP has been on this issue from the start. Before anyone was talking about it, we knew that this was a problem and we wanted to deal with it.

It is quite the opposite for the Conservatives, who come here with a motion designed to spread fear instead of truly solving the problems and giving Quebec the money it is owed, offering assistance to those fleeing hatred in the United States, and providing help to the CBSA. The only thing the Conservatives had to offer

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these people when they were in power was cuts, and we are still suffering the consequences.

The NDP has concrete solutions that do not require a war of words or an attempt to pit communities against each other. We support Quebec. We want to give the CBSA the resources that its officers need to do their jobs. We are calling for the suspension of the safe third country agreement, since the United States, in its current state, is no longer a safe country for people fleeing violence, hatred, and all kinds of terrible situations around the world.

We are calling for the agreement to be suspended in order to make it easier for such people to cross the border in an orderly and regular manner, if I may say it that way. It would make things easier not only for the people who work at the border, but for the people crossing the border, since their lives are in danger when they try to cross the border irregularly. They are not doing this for fun. They are facing very real hardships. However, there was a party in power for 10 years that did nothing to advance any immigration or public safety issues, in spite of its never-ending overheated rhetoric. Now, that party has moved a motion that, although we agree with certain aspects of it, does not really help fix the situation.

The solution is what the NDP has been saying from the beginning. It is to address all of these elements, to help these communities, to do what the member for Salaberry—Suroît did, or what the union did, namely meet with members and explain what is really happening on the ground. It is to do as the Government of Quebec did and ask for help, and to do as organizations have always done, I might add, even in the face of widespread austerity, and offer assistance despite being stretched beyond their limit, because it is the right thing to do. We are not here to pass judgment. We must help everyone. Everyone is shouting for help, and the government is turning a blind eye. The only solution for some people is to spread even more doubt and fear regarding this situation. Instead, we need to talk about real solutions, as the NDP has been doing for over a year now.

If we look south of the border, with President Trump, it is clear that the situation is not getting better. This government keeps spouting hollow words, blaming the previous government, and pinning everything on a bogeyman by the name of Stephen Harper. They are no longer in power, so for crying out loud, the Liberals need to realize that they are the ones in power and that Mr. Trump has been in power since the November 2016 election and his installation in January 2017. None of that is a surprise to anyone except, apparently, the federal government.

Today, we oppose the motion because we have seen one Conservative failure after another for close to 10 years. Nevertheless, we will keep asking the government for a real plan, just as my colleagues have done, as my colleagues from Quebec have been doing for weeks by supporting Quebec's demands, and as my colleague from Vancouver East did when she talked about the importance of protecting refugees. There is no need for heated rhetoric. What we need to do is stand up to a president who says dangerous things and stand up for the men and women in these dangerous situations, be they first responders at the border or people seeking a better life here.

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•(1630)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have been listening to the debate all day. When the Conservatives speak, I often get the sense they want to prevent or do not see the value in the process we currently have in place. It has done a truly amazing job with irregular border crossings for years, not only in this government but also during the Harper government. The difference is that to further complement our border control, we have invested literally tens of millions of dollars to ensure additional support will be there if it is fully warranted.

On the other hand, the NDP seems to want to take a different approach. I would argue that it is irresponsible to try to give an impression that there is absolutely nothing wrong with crossing the Canada-U.S. border anywhere. In essence we could treat all crossings the same by just waiving one aspect of the legislation. The process we have today is doing the job—

•(1635)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I was been trying to show the member that there was not a lot of time left. I would suggest members do not use so much time on the preamble and get right to the question so we can allow for more questions and comments.

The hon. member for Beloeil—Chambly.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Madam Speaker, considering he is the only Liberal to speak, I am sure he will have an opportunity to elaborate on his thoughts at some point over the course of debate.

The fact is that I do not know what the Liberals are trying to accuse us of. In question period the Prime Minister accused us of fearmongering. God only knows why he is saying things like that. Now that member is accusing us of calling for a free-for-all.

Since the beginning of this situation in January 2017, we are the only ones who have called on the government repeatedly to do something about this. In January 2017, I along with with my colleagues from Laurier—Sainte-Marie and Vancouver East were telling the government to wake up, that President Trump had not made a secret of how he felt about different communities that had made their lives better in the United States, and that this would be a problem.

We were calling for the Liberals to offer help to the Canada Border Services Agency, and not in May 2018. We called for it in January 2017. We also called for the safe third country agreement to be suspended so entry could happen in a more appropriate way at the border. We are calling for that, not the nonsense the member just dreamed up right now.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, all day long the NDP has talked about invoking article 10 of the safe third country agreement, yet the NDP is continually discrediting the UNHCR's position on this. It said that one thing that had been noticeable was the effort of Canada to respond to this crisis and to ensure the system was in place to uphold the human rights of those asylum seekers and to process them not only in such a smooth manner but also with dignity.

Do NDP members disagree with the UN? If so, why? Why would they disagree with the United Nations, which is saying that Canada is handling this properly, effectively, with dignity, and in the best interests of the asylum seekers?

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Madam Speaker, I am siding with the municipalities and community organizations that are asking for help, the Government of Quebec, border services officers, Amnesty International, the Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers, the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, and all the other organizations that have been saying since January 2017 that the NDP has the right approach.

We could boast about it with quotes, but, ultimately, here we are in April 2018, more than a year later, and there is still no plan to address what is happening on the ground.

My colleague can say that everything is fine, but the reality is very different for everyone on the ground affected by this issue. The time has come for the government to wake up, acknowledge the situation, and take action.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Beloeil—Chambly, who gave an eloquent and fact-based speech. It was in sharp contrast to the populist, anti-immigrant, and anti-refugee speeches given by the Conservatives, who used terms such as “corruption” and “corrupt system” to scare people, make them lose faith in our system, and make them wonder if we are letting in criminals. They also said this was about dangerous people.

They denounce the fact that the Liberals have no plan for dealing with the influx of migrants crossing the U.S. border due to President Trump's immigration orders and his decision to end temporary permit programs for certain communities in the United States. Because of all this, the number of migrants crossing the border has tripled in the past year and a half.

It is true that the Liberals have no plan and that this is causing a problem. Quebec's National Assembly has unanimously requested \$146 million to allow community groups to continue providing assistance, accommodations, health care, and education for children, among other things, because these organizations are running at 71% capacity and estimate that things will get really tight at 85%.

Many people are concerned about this issue, but the goal is not to scare the public. On the contrary, the goal is to help immigrants. Today, the Conservatives have repeated ad nauseam that these people are crossing the border illegally, implying that they are criminals. However, they have been unable to name a single law broken by the immigrants crossing the border. That is because there is no such offence, either under our laws or under the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which Canada signed.

The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act states that when a person crosses the border anywhere other than at a port of entry to claim refugee status, it constitutes an irregular entry. That is what is happening at the border right now. In 2018 alone, 6,373 people have crossed the border irregularly.

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Such entries are deemed to be irregular because we have a safe third country agreement. However, as my colleague from Vancouver East has said a hundred times, we are asking that this agreement be suspended because the United States is no longer considered a safe country by the many organizations that she mentioned, including Amnesty International, the Quebec immigration lawyers association, and the Canadian Council for Refugees.

There are even 200 Canadian law professors calling for the suspension of the Canada-U.S. safe third country agreement, since people who filed a refugee claim in the United States and who are now subject to an immigration order and those whose temporary permits will no longer be renewed in the United States no longer feel safe in the U.S. They no longer feel welcome. If their claim is denied after a year, they cannot make any more claims in the United States, and since the Canada-U.S. safe third country agreement is in effect, they have to enter Canada by irregular means. If they go through customs, they will be sent back to the United States and could be deported to their own country, where they could be subject to human rights violations, persecution, and torture.

That is not the kind of message we want to send to people who could settle here by obtaining refugee status.

● (1640)

Some Conservatives are saying that they are the children of refugees or immigrants. I too am the daughter of immigrants. What about it? That is not what we are talking about today. We are talking about secure processes. That is what we want. Everyone wants the immigration process to be secure and orderly, but that takes resources. The Conservatives were the first to cut resources. When they were in power, they cut more than 1,000 border services jobs. How can they now ask them to do more with less, when more migrants are coming to our borders? These same people now want us to create an invisible wall along a border that is more than 9,000 kilometres long. How is this realistic, when the Conservatives themselves cut resources to begin with? Now they want RCMP officers to monitor the 9,000-kilometre border every day, and they want border services officers to cover all 9,000 kilometres as well. Come on. That is an unrealistic solution, and the Conservatives know it. They are just posturing. I cannot believe that members of Parliament are saying such outrageous things in the House of Commons.

The government anticipates that 400 people per day will enter the country as the weather improves. More than 20,000 irregular migrants have already arrived, 90% of them via Quebec. That is why the members of the National Assembly asked the federal government for financial assistance. The fact that border management is a federal responsibility is another factor. Why has the federal government been so slow to respond, and why has it failed to keep up with all the provincial, municipal, and community initiatives over the past year and a half?

Members have reiterated that there have been multiple requests for an emergency debate, for studies in committee, and for the suspension of the safe third country agreement. The Liberals simply say that everything is just fine, that there is no problem, and that everything is under control.

In the meantime, the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada says it currently has a backlog of more than 46,000 claims. It usually takes 60 days to process a refugee claim, but it is now taking 18 months. It makes no sense. The Liberals say that an investment of \$74 million is included in budget 2018. However, \$74 million is not enough to process half the files. The board will only be able to process about 20,000 of the 46,000 backlogged cases. We also know that there are 2,100 new cases every month. How can we ensure that all these files are processed efficiently if we do not have the necessary resources, border staff, and money to welcome these people?

Community groups in places like Hemmingford and Dundee in my region of Salaberry—Suroît have mobilized. I am talking about Bridges Not Borders, the Upper St. Lawrence community development corporation, the Valleyfield diocese, and people like Rémi Pelletier, Grace Bubeck, and Michel Pilon. They have organized three town hall meetings in my riding since January 2017. These meetings were not held to scare the public, like the Conservatives are doing. They were held to provide accurate information, for example on the Canada-U.S. safe third country agreement. People wanted to know why immigrants were crossing at Roxham Road, what the immigrants needed, and what they could do. They asked the RCMP officers what they could do to help the immigrants. Were they allowed to welcome them in their homes? Would they be charged for giving them a bowl of soup to warm up? Could they give them a coat and mittens in the winter if they were not dressed for the cold? Was it normal for children crossing the border to not be suitably dressed, to not have eaten, and to seem so tired from walking through the night? Those were the types of questions that people were asking. They were not asking whether the people had entered illegally and whether they would be arrested.

● (1645)

Indeed, what the Conservatives are saying is that the borders are wide open, that anyone can enter, and that—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am sorry to interrupt, but your time is up. I am sure that the member will be able to add comments when answering questions.

The hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

● (1650)

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Madam Speaker, my NDP colleague went after us today instead of attacking the Liberal government. One would almost think that we Conservatives were in power and had to defend ourselves. I am not going to get into that.

Let us imagine that I agree with her and say that we will implement the NDP's plan. How many asylum seekers would she be willing to let bypass customs? How much money is she prepared to have us vote on for that purpose?

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Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Madam Speaker, I would be prepared to let in the same number coming in now because those people are crossing the border irregularly anyway. RCMP officers and Canada Border Services Agency officers adhere to the process, and provinces and communities provide services in accordance with it.

Right now, the problem is that people are entering the country irregularly, and we know that. We were the first to acknowledge that. We requested an emergency debate about it. We asked the government to suspend the safe third country agreement, as was suggested by Amnesty International, 200 law professors, and the Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers. We did all that. There was a reason we made those requests, which were based on studies, facts, and pronouncements by experts who suggested we make them.

These people need resources. They do not need to be stigmatized even more. They do not need to be victims of discrimination before they even enter the country and have their cases reviewed by the people with the expertise to do that.

The Conservatives slashed over 1,000 positions at the Canada Border Services Agency, a move the officers' union condemned ages ago. The union is also asking for more resources at all levels, but the Liberals have not done anything to meet that need.

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member gave a very balanced and professional speech. I really liked her points, and the points about how ridiculous it is to ask how many more illegal people would be allowed to cross the border. Well, they have come here illegally. We do not know they are coming here, so what are we going to do? Of course it is going to be the same. She had the perfect answer.

I also liked your point that if one wanted to have more control of the border, one would not cut hundreds of millions of dollars from CBSA. I just want to thank you for making those points so clearly.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I just want to remind the member to address the questions or comments to the Speaker and not to the individual member.

The hon. member for Salaberry—Suroît.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to hear those comments.

We are calling on the government to suspend the safe third country agreement and invest more so that all claims can be processed more efficiently. We could thus reduce the number of unprocessed files, currently 46,000 files. The Canada Border Services Agency could also be given additional funding to be able to process claims for people crossing the border. This would also allow community groups to provide services, since they are practically at full capacity right now.

People in the Montreal area are telling us that at full capacity, sooner or later, services are going to have to be decentralized and offered in the regions. That is why communities back home are beginning to mobilize. They want to provide services to people, but they have no financial resources. The federal government needs to

assume its responsibilities, get the funds moving, and provide assistance to those working in the area of welcoming people who are applying for refugee status.

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, Public Services and Procurement.

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Barrie—Innisfil.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this motion which has been brought forward today by the member for Calgary Nose Hill. I want to thank her for her excellent work on the matter of illegal border crossings. She has been a strong voice in holding the Prime Minister and his Liberal government to account for their shortcomings on this file. In fact, she has been one of the strongest defenders of Canadians living along the Canada-U.S. border, not only calling for the integrity of our borders to be maintained, but also calling out the Prime Minister for his irresponsible and reckless actions which have misled and continue to mislead thousands of would-be migrants to Canada to enter illegally. The member has shown a commitment to addressing this issue constructively and yet compassionately. All the while, the Liberal government has failed to show any leadership on this file at all.

Indeed this is an issue that has been on the Liberal government's radar for over a year. It was February 2017 when I first raised the issue of illegal border crossings here in this place. I mentioned the situation that was developing in and around the community of Emerson, Manitoba, a part of Provencher that I represent, and a number of communities along the Canada-U.S. border. Therefore, I know first-hand how illegal border crossings have been impacting the folks who call these communities home. They are on the front lines. I have raised the issue many times since then, including alongside the official opposition shadow minister for immigration, the member for Calgary Nose Hill, and invited the Prime Minister to visit Emerson to see the situation for himself. The Liberals have taken no action to step in, and our invitation has gone without response.

While the Liberal government may not be stepping up, the people of Emerson sure have been, and they have gone above and beyond to assist with the influx of illegal migrants. Their efforts should be commended, right from Reeve Greg Janzen to the first responders to the people who have been inconvenienced by having individuals who have crossed the border illegally show up on their doorstep in the middle of the night. It has also been great to see organizations such as the Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council and the United Way offer their support to these communities. The trouble is that this support, while welcome and essential, does nothing to resolve the issue of illegal crossings. For that solution, we must look to the government, yet while so much time has passed since I first brought these concerns to this House and the attention of the Liberal government, it has failed to take any measurable action to address the crisis at our borders, and it is a crisis.

Canada has a world-class immigration and refugee system, but our system is being undermined by a government that prefers virtue-signalling over sound policy decisions. I will flesh it out in a bit more detail, but for now I want to share about the new reality that residents of Emerson have described to me. Some have been woken up, as I said previously, in the middle of the night with strangers banging on their doors. Others have walked out into their garages in the morning to find that folks have slept there overnight. Parents refrain from letting their children play outside without supervision.

This is not an indictment on many of the illegal migrants, some of whom do not pose a threat to local residents. However, the reality is that they are unknowns when no proper entry process has been followed, and residents must adjust their behaviour accordingly. Without the knowledge that those entering our country have proceeded through proper channels, people are rightly concerned about the possibility of someone having a criminal history appearing on their doorstep. An orderly system managed responsibly by the government does not have these problems, but even the best system would not produce the desired results without proper leadership from the government.

Sadly, the Liberal government has not been a good steward of our immigration system. For one thing, the Liberals have failed to maintain order at our border. One of the most important responsibilities of any government is to keep Canadians safe. In order to maintain any semblance of security, Canada's borders have to mean something. Under the Liberal government, our borders have become meaningless. Canadians expect our immigration system to operate in an orderly fashion. They expect a system that is fair and safe for those proceeding through it. These expectations are reasonable, but when Canadians see individuals crossing the border at unofficial ports of entry, and we are talking about thousands of people every year, they do not see a system that is functioning as it should.

Let me be clear. This is no fault of the brave men and women serving Canada at our border through the Canada Border Services Agency or our Royal Canadian Mounted Police. This is about a Prime Minister whose virtue-signalling has created serious problems where previously very few existed. It was January 2017 when the Prime Minister tweeted out the following message: "To those fleeing persecution, terror, and war, Canadians will welcome you, regardless of your faith. Diversity is our strength. #WelcomeToCanada."

There is nothing wrong with welcoming those facing persecution in war to our country. Canada is, without a doubt, a beacon of peace and freedom and hope in a world ravaged by war and conflict, but as the Prime Minister of Canada, he has to consider how his words will be received around the world. Context does matter. The fact is this tweet created a great deal of confusion in Canada and across the globe and led to a flood of refugee claims.

• (1655)

Many in the media have pointed out just how misleading these claims are. For example, in April 2017, in a piece for the CBC, Graham Gordon wrote:

Anyone with the smallest bit of knowledge about the immigration process understands that Canada's doors are anything but wide open, but [the Prime Minister] isn't just blatantly spreading falsehoods by sending that message — he's actually

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enticing people to uproot their lives, throwing another wrench into an already chaotic immigration system, all based on disingenuous messaging.

He is exactly right. When the Prime Minister places virtue-signalling above good public policy, there are real world consequences. For example, last year we received the tragic news of a woman who Minnesota authorities said died while attempting to cross the border illegally. This is something I expressed concern about in the months leading up to this tragic loss, that individuals are choosing to enter Canada illegally and dangerously because of the Prime Minister's misleading rhetoric. While this was the first known instance of loss of life related to an illegal border crossing, we know that others have endured physical consequences as well.

To ensure the safety of all individuals looking to come to Canada, we must do all that we can to promote safe, legal entry. Many Canadians, including myself, want a Canada that helps those fleeing war, violence, and persecution, but in light of the dramatic increase in illegal border crossings, the Prime Minister had to know that the messages which he shared covered the world and would lead to many would-be immigrants believing that Canada's border is just a suggestion.

As the *National Post* reported on April 3, border immigration and embassy officials faced an influx of inquiries about coming to Canada following the Prime Minister's tweet. For example, an email from Canada's embassy in Mexico obtained through an access to information request reads, "We are receiving an increasing number of enquiries from the public about requesting refugee status in Canada, and a number clearly having links with our Prime Minister's tweet this weekend."

I will wrap up my speech for now, but there is much more I could say. However, I would like to say that the Prime Minister's actions on this file have been irresponsible and reckless. We would ask that he encourage his Liberal caucus to support the motion that is before us today.

• (1700)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, all day we have been lectured by the Conservatives with respect to how we should be securing our borders. In fact, I have asked on a number of occasions, only to have them try to discredit what I am saying, why the Conservatives stripped away nearly \$400 million from the CBSA. In fact, I will ask the member the same question.

The opposition motion calls on the government to "ensure the agencies responsible for our borders are properly equipped". The Conservatives stripped away nearly \$400 million from the CBSA. How can the Conservatives stand and exert this type of hypocrisy when they actually made the situation even worse than it was prior to that? How can the member stand and lecture this government on border security when the Conservatives were unable to properly secure the border and they stripped money away from it?

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Mr. Ted Falk: Madam Speaker, a problem with the Liberal government is that its members think that throwing money at any issue will fix the problem, and it absolutely does not. In fact, we have seen time and again where the Liberals have thrown money at different programs right across the country and it has done nothing to accomplish any achievable results.

Our borders were safe prior to the influx in early 2017 of all of these illegal migrants. The additional workload this has placed on our CBSA officers, the RCMP, and indeed the Immigration and Refugee Board is going to cost Canadians a whole whack of money.

The CBSA folks were not complaining about a lack of funding. In fact, we increased the number of CBSA officers right across Canada.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to echo the appreciation that my colleague from Manitoba expressed to Manitobans in Emerson and across the province who have given of themselves in order to welcome refugees into Manitoba and help them adjust to life in a new place. I also want to offer a word of caution: the appropriate way to counter some of the virtue-signalling of the government on this issue is not by vice-signalling. I think that is what we see in the Tory motion with language that is needlessly alarmist.

We too believe that we need a secure border, but the way to do that is to suspend the safe third country agreement, which is causing these refugees to cross at irregular crossings. If the agreement were suspended, instead of causing the CBSA to have to monitor the 9,000-kilometre border between Canada and the United States, those migrants could come through the appropriate channels and be vetted properly. We know that somewhere in the neighbourhood of 60% of the refugees who are coming over the border are being denied, so it is not a case of open borders and everyone staying. There is an appropriate process. There is screening. It is working. Why would we not want those migrants to come through the appropriate border crossings?

• (1705)

Mr. Ted Falk: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona for recognizing how Manitobans have really stepped up to the plate to assist these refugees to make their plight as painless and seamless as possible.

He raises an interesting point. He suggests we should get rid of the border from the safe third country agreement. Certainly something we would like to do would be to encourage any would-be refugee claimants to come to ports of entry, as they should, to make a claim there. They should not take a chance. Sixty per cent of the people who are coming here are going to be rejected and sent back, not to the United States to a safe country, but back to their point of origin. Something that is very important to note is that 60% of the people who have come here are being denied their refugee claims.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am really pleased to be effectively wrapping up this debate.

I also want to thank the member for Provencher for sharing his time with me today. I know this is a situation he has had to deal with directly. I commend him for his efforts, and I commend my colleagues for their efforts in that area, including the opposition House leader for her work in making sure that our borders are secure.

Why are we dealing with this motion? It is because we are effectively in uncharted territory. We are in an unprecedented situation, where we have tens of thousands of people crossing our border illegally. I have sat through most of this debate, and I heard some of the comments this morning about “needlessly alarmist” and “fearmongering”. The fact is that we have a very critical situation at our borders.

Let me remind the House and all Canadians of what we are dealing with here today. Let us take a look at what the motion says.

First, we need to make sure that the CBSA, the RCMP, and other agencies that protect our borders have the resources to do just that.

Second, it needs to be confirmed that an immigration policy should never, ever be expressed in 140 characters. Immigration and all the policies about coming to Canada that are part of it are complicated enough without the efforts of the Prime Minister trying to simply dumb it down or put it in a single tweet.

I will go one step further. What the Prime Minister was trying to do with that single tweet, sending that message around the world, was to one-up Donald Trump. It was on that day that Donald Trump announced restrictions to policies for people coming into the United States. The Prime Minister thought he was going to be smart, and he did not realize the ancillary impact that this single tweet would have and how it would resonate around the world, from here to Nigeria and to other parts of the country. This is why we are in this situation, because of one single, irresponsible tweet, and because our Prime Minister thought he was going to show up the President of the United States.

Third, we need the government to undertake and accept that there is a huge financial responsibility with this. We have had over 20,000 illegal people come into this country, which has cost close to \$1 billion that was unplanned for and unaccounted for, and that Canadian taxpayers are on the hook for.

We hear about “fearmongering” and we hear about “needlessly alarmist”, but these are real concerns for real Canadians. This is what the motion is trying to represent today.

Last, let us have a plan in place no later than May 11. The weather is getting better. Better conditions mean that more people will illegally cross the border. There is no reason for them to come in that way. Many of them are in the United States. They have claimed refugee status in the United States, or they are there for other reasons. There are legitimate ways that these people, illegal border crossers, could come into this country.

Again, we hear from the government that it is “irregular”. They are not “irregular” border crossers; they are illegal border crossers. Let us get this straight. Let us stop the charade on the part of the government to try to dumb this down or water it down in a way that suits the Liberals and is more appealing to Canadians. These are illegal border crossers. There were 20,593 last year and 6,373 this year. This is 400 a day, and it is projected that we are going to get 50,000 to 70,000 people crossing the border this year.

What is the impact? What is the impact on communities like Quebec? What is the impact on communities like Emerson? The fact is that it pushes back a legitimate refugee system. These people are jumping the queue. They are coming to the front of the line. This is not an American Express thing. This speaks to the legitimacy and the rightful immigration and refugee system that we have. These people are using that system, but those who are going through it legally are paying the price. Cases in my constituency office have spiked since this process started. It has pushed back the refugee system by 11 years.

More important, and I said this earlier, it has cost \$1 billion to deal with the system that was caused by one person, the Prime Minister of Canada. It should not fall on the back of every single Canadian taxpayer. However, that is the Liberal solution to this whole process.

• (1710)

The Liberals talk about investments. These are not investments. This is money they have to put toward this process because of the impact it is having not just on the refugee system but particularly on the province of Quebec.

There are 11 million illegal immigrants in the United States. The Prime Minister sent out a tweet that has resonated around the world. If just 5% of the illegal immigrants in the United States decide to cross into Canada because of this singular tweet, we could potentially face 500,000 more people. We are not prepared for a situation like that, and that \$1 billion will seem small by comparison if this happens.

What we are asking the government to do is come up with a plan to secure the border. The member for Calgary Nose Hill said that there is a solution. It is a solution that we have been calling for during the last nine months, which is to make these legitimate border crossings so that the safe third country agreement comes into effect. That way, if a refugee who has claimed refugee status in the United States decides to come into Canada, that is not going to happen. The same situation would happen in Niagara Falls, at Pearson airport, or at any other legal and legitimate border crossing in this country. That person would be sent back, and the cost and the burden would not fall on Canadian taxpayers, not just the cost of border security.

God bless the RCMP and the CBSA for the work they have been doing. They have been put in an untenable position. We have tents on the border. Never before has this happened in Canada. There is one singular cause for this, which is the Prime Minister of Canada. He needs to take responsibility for it, come up with a plan, and make sure that he, singularly, stops this process from gaining any more momentum than it already has.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It being 5:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

The question is on the motion. May I dispense?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

[Chair read text of motion to the House]

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The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Call in the members.

• (1755)

(The House divided on the motion, which was negated on the following division:)

(Division No. 653)

YEAS

Members

Aboutaif	Albas
Albrecht	Allison
Anderson	Arnold
Barlow	Barsalou-Duval
Beaulieu	Benzen
Bergen	Bernier
Berthold	Bezan
Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)	Block
Boucher	Boudrias
Brassard	Brown
Calkins	Carrie
Chong	Clarke
Clement	Cooper
Deltell	Diotte
Eglinski	Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)
Falk (Provencher)	Fast
Finley	Fortin
Gallant	Généreux
Genuis	Gill
Gladu	Godin
Harder	Hoback
Jeneroux	Kelly
Kent	Kitchen
Kmiec	Kusie
Lake	Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)
Leitch	Liepert
Lloyd	Lukiwski
MacKenzie	Maguire
McCauley (Edmonton West)	McColeman
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)
Motz	Natier
Nicholson	Nuttall
Obhrai	O'Toole
Paul-Hus	Pauzé
Plamondon	Poilievre
Rayes	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Saroya	Scheer
Schmale	Shields
Shiple	Sopuck
Stanton	Strahl
Stubbs	Thériault
Trost	Van Kesteren

Private Members' Business

Van Loan
 Viersen
 Warawa
 Waugh
 Wong
 Zimmer— 97

Vecchio
 Wagantall
 Warkentin
 Webber
 Yurdiga

NAYS

Members

Aldag
 Amos
 Angus
 Arya
 Aubin
 Bagnell
 Bennett
 Bibeau
 Blaikie
 Blaney (North Island—Powell River)
 Bossio
 Boutin-Sweet
 Breton
 Brosseau
 Cannings
 Carr
 Casey (Charlottetown)
 Champagne
 Cormier
 Cuzner
 Damoff
 Dhaliwal
 Di Iorio
 Dubourg
 Duncan (Etobicoke North)
 Dusseault
 Dzerowicz
 Erskine-Smith
 Eyolfson
 Fillmore
 Fisher
 Fortier
 Fraser (Central Nova)
 Fuhr
 Garrison
 Goldsmith-Jones
 Grewal
 Hardcastle
 Harvey
 Hehr
 Holland
 Hughes
 Hutchings
 Jones
 Jowhari
 Kang
 Khera
 Lambropoulos
 Lamoureux
 Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)
 LeBlanc
 Lefebvre
 Levitt
 Long
 Ludwig
 MacGregor
 Malcolmson
 Masse (Windsor West)
 May (Cambridge)
 McCrimmon
 McGuinty
 McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
 Mendès
 Mihychuk
 Soeurs)
 Monsef
 Morrissey
 Murray
 Nassif
 Ng
 Oliver
 Ouellette
 Peterson

Alleslev
 Anandasangaree
 Arseneault
 Ashton
 Badawey
 Baylis
 Benson
 Bittle
 Blair
 Boissonnault
 Boulерice
 Bratina
 Brison
 Caesar-Chavannes
 Caron
 Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)
 Chagger
 Chen
 Cullen
 Dabrusin
 DeCoursey
 Dhillon
 Dubé
 Duclos
 Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)
 Duvall
 El-Khoury
 Eyking
 Fergus
 Finnigan
 Fonseca
 Fraser (West Nova)
 Fry
 Gameau
 Gerretsen
 Graham
 Hajdu
 Hardie
 Hébert
 Hogg
 Housefather
 Hussen
 Joly
 Jordan
 Julian
 Khalid
 Kwan
 Lametti
 Lapointe
 Laverdière
 Lebouthillier
 Leslie
 Lockhart
 Longfield
 MacAulay (Cardigan)
 MacKinnon (Gatineau)
 Maloney
 Mathysen
 May (Saainich—Gulf Islands)
 McDonald
 McKay
 McLeod (Northwest Territories)
 Mendicino
 Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-
 Moore
 Mulcair
 Nantel
 Nault
 Oliphant
 O'Regan
 Peschisolido
 Petitpas Taylor

Philpott
 Poissant
 Ramsey
 Rioux
 Rodriguez
 Romanado
 Rudd
 Rusnak
 Sahota
 Sajjan
 Sangha
 Sarai
 Schiefke
 Serré
 Shanahan
 Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)
 Sikand
 Sohi
 Spengemann
 Stewart
 Tan
 Tootoo
 Vandal
 Vaughan
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 Wrzesnewskyj
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Picard
 Quach
 Ratansi
 Robillard
 Rogers
 Rota
 Ruimy
 Saganash
 Saini
 Samson
 Sansoucy
 Scarpaleggia
 Schulte
 Sgro
 Sheehan
 Sidhu (Brampton South)
 Simms
 Sorbara
 Stetski
 Tabbara
 Tassi
 Trudel
 Vandenbeld
 Virani
 Whalen
 Whalen-Raybould
 Yip

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion defeated.

It being 5:56 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[Translation]

SUPPORTING NEW PARENTS ACT

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC) moved that Bill C-394, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (parenting tax credit), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to begin debate on my private member's bill, the supporting new parents act.

[English]

The arrival of a new child, whether the first, second, or fifth, is one of the biggest milestones in life. As a father of five, I can say it is also one of the greatest joys a couple can experience. With every new child, the experience does not get any less joyful and exciting but it is also a great responsibility.

[Translation]

All parents know just how tough those first few years can be. The financial pressures can seem overwhelming. The ever-increasing cost of raising a child can be very high.

[English]

It is not cheap to raise a child in Canada. New parents have to make sacrifices to afford the basic necessities for the new baby. It is often surprising how quickly the costs can add up. With diapers, toys, bottles, new clothes every three months, it is not easy.

• (1800)

[Translation]

That is especially true for families where one parent has to take time off to care for the new baby. While Canadian families were hoping for lower taxes and higher benefits in 2015, the fact is that many families are struggling under this government. This government's tax hikes are leaving less money in Canadians' pockets. The Liberals are breaking their promises.

[English]

The average family in Canada is already paying over \$800 more in taxes every year under the Liberal government, and the costs are going up. Life gets evermore expensive. Groceries, hydro, or power as we call it in Saskatchewan, gas, and with kids in the house, all the extra trips parents are making to care for a newborn, families do not see the costs of these necessities going down anytime soon. Canada's Conservatives understand the importance of supporting young families with children during those important early years.

[Translation]

We also think the best way to support Canadian families is to keep taxes low, foster a positive environment for job creation, and make sure parents are free make their own decisions for their families.

[English]

That is my motivation for introducing the supporting new parents act.

The supporting new parents act would create a federal non-refundable income tax credit for any federal income tax paid under EI parental leave programs.

[Translation]

Quebec residents receiving benefits under the provincial parental insurance plan will be eligible for a tax credit for an equivalent amount. I would like to explain to hon. members how that will work.

[English]

We are fortunate in Canada to have EI maternity benefits and EI parental programs that benefit so many Canadians. However, every Canadian who receives these benefits has to deal with certain costs associated with them.

[Translation]

When someone goes on maternity or paternity leave, they take a pay cut. Benefits cover only 55% of their salary, but on top of everything, they also have to pay income tax on the benefits they receive.

[English]

When parents go on EI parental or maternity leave, they sacrifice up to 45% of their salary. After making that sacrifice, they have to pay tax on the benefits they receive. With tax being withheld from every cheque, it means that families with a parent on leave see their take-home benefits cut down, and many get hit with an extra tax bill afterwards when they file their income taxes.

My proposed bill offers a major tax relief to young families. It will give Canadians on parental leave a break by offering a tax credit for

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any income earned under the EI maternity and EI parental programs. We want to leave new parents with more money in their pockets. We know the parents know what is best for their child.

[Translation]

The only way the government in Ottawa can help parents of newborns is to leave more money in their pockets and let them spend it as they see fit. Once passed, my bill will tangibly benefit thousands of young Canadian families. For example, a Canadian mom who was earning \$50,000 a year before going on benefits would be eligible for a tax credit of about \$4,000.

[English]

My hope is that once this bill is passed, CRA will support Canadian parents by applying the credit automatically so Service Canada no longer needs to withhold taxes on parental and maternity benefits. This is a limitation I have as a private member's bill, but when we are government, we can ensure the Canada Revenue Agency automatically applies the credit.

At the very least, new parents would not be hit with a surprise tax bill when they file their taxes. I think we can all agree that is not right. At a time in their lives when they need every penny to raise their newborn, parents still get squeezed by the tax collector.

[Translation]

I have already spoken with families across Canada about the supporting new parents act. We want them to know what this bill is about. They tell me they want the supporting new parents act to become law. They can see how they are going to benefit. The new law would put money in the pockets of hard-working families.

[English]

I want to share one story with my hon. colleagues.

I spoke with one mom in Ontario who told me that Service Canada withheld 10% of her maternity and parental benefits, and she still got hit with an \$1,800 tax bill when she filed. She had to pay on top of all the money that was being withheld. That is a lot of money after a stressful year, with a lot of new costs, to have to write a cheque to the Government of Canada for benefits she received after taking a pay cut of up to 45%.

What else could she have spent this money on? It could have gone toward buying a car seat or a new pair of boots for the baby. One never knows what types of extra costs add up. However, instead, the government handed out these benefits with one hand and then took a cut of it with the other.

An hon. member: That is what they do.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: That is what the Liberals do.

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[Translation]

That is unfair to her and to millions of Canadian families that are having trouble making ends meet. The Conservatives of Canada think that the government should put the interests of Canadians above its own interests. People should come before the government. I think that is what Canadians have always expected of us.

We also think that the government should not tax Canadians' money twice and that it should certainly not tax the time they spend taking care of a new baby.

[English]

For any young family, this important tax relief could make a huge difference in the cost of raising a newborn.

When we think about what important tax cuts and benefits have been cancelled by the Liberal government, we can come up with a pretty big list very quickly. The family tax cut is gone, credits for kids' sports and arts programs were taken away, the tax free savings account was been cut back, a carbon tax coming, and higher EI and CPP premiums have cut more and more out of families' weekly paycheques.

• (1805)

[Translation]

All of these measures are harmful to the well-being and financial security of Canadian families. Why did the government do away with the tax break for families? That was a bad decision since this small but very important tax break for parents put up to \$2,000 back in the pockets of over 1.5 million families across Canada.

[English]

By giving Canadian parents an incentive to sign up their kids for arts classes and sports programs, we make sure that our children grow up healthy and engaged. Engaging in those extracurricular activities helps our children meet new peers, make friends, and learn about the importance of team play. Instead, the current government decided to cancel this benefit for purely political and partisan reasons. Playing politics with Canadian families should never be a motivation for a government policy.

According to a recent Fraser Institute report, Canadian families, as I mentioned, are paying over \$800 more in taxes today compared to previous years. This is a big burden for any Canadian family, but especially for families with newborns. By 2022, 90% of Canadian families will be paying higher taxes.

[Translation]

When Canadian families decide to have a baby, they want assurances that their government will support them and that they will have enough money to raise their children. We know that the government should work for young parents and not the other way around.

[English]

I am pleased that in the short time since I introduced this bill I have already received the support of hundreds of families all across the country. What I am offering today in this bill is a very simple yet extremely effective way of showing our solidarity and making the lives of Canadian families a bit easier. Young families should not be

punished financially for their decision to have children. They should have our help instead.

Conservatives understand that Canadians work hard for their money. That is why, instead of making families pay more taxes, the government should focus on giving more money back to those hard-working families.

[Translation]

We believe in the tax break because we truly believe that Canadians know how to spend their money better than the government. We think that when free people are able to make free decisions about what to buy or where to invest, for example, it creates a better quality of life than when the government takes that money and spends it for them.

[English]

There are some fundamental things the government must do, like invest in critical infrastructure, keep our borders safe, and make sure that our armed forces have the tools they need to protect Canada in times of crisis. Beyond that, the government needs to have a very good reason to forcibly take money out of Canadians' pockets and then spend it on their behalf. Our Conservative position is always to start off with the default of leaving money in the pockets of hard-working Canadians in the first place. We are always fighting for lower taxes, not just because it is good for individuals but because it is good for society as a whole.

Now is the time for this House to take action and show our support for hard-working Canadian families. There is no good reason not to prioritize Canadian families and put their interests first. The current government has a choice: to say no to Canadian families for partisan reasons or to support my initiative and say yes to helping young Canadian families.

• (1810)

[Translation]

I hope that all members will unite to support this important bill.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the official opposition has a proposition that I am sure Stephen Harper himself would be happy to vote in favour of. There is no doubt about that. It demonstrates once again that the Conservatives are not open to recognizing what Canadians really and truly want. Let me give an example of that and pose it in the form of a question. We have seen the Conservatives now vote not once, not twice, but on several occasions against the Canada child benefit and the increase. Will he now say, unqualified, that he supports what this government is doing for the very type of individuals he referred to with the Canada child benefit program?

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Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, I am very confident that many, many Canadians will like this bill I am proposing. There is probably one person I know who will not like a solution that actually helps Canadian families, which is Kathleen Wynne, in Ontario, who hurts Ontario families every time she tables a new budget.

I just want to congratulate the member across the way. He asked me a very specific question about the method by which we support Canadian parents. I remember being in this House and arguing with Liberals for years and years, because they wanted to give support to bureaucrats and build big babysitting bureaucracies. It took the hard work of the Conservative Party to convince the Liberals that the best way to support parents was by providing support directly to them. I am not sure they actually believe it. I think it was a tactical decision they made in the election campaign, but let me be absolutely clear: Canadians know that when it comes to trusting a party to deliver support directly to parents, it has always been the Conservative Party that has fought for that, and it will always be the Conservative Party that fights for that.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while we applaud the interest of the Leader of the Opposition in standing up for Canadian families, one wonders why his government did not do more for Canadian families when it was in power for 10 years.

While the spirit of this bill may be an honourable one, the priorities are misplaced, and I will speak to that later. My question for the leader is this: why they did not talk about increasing the income replacement rate so that more parents can get more of their income when they go on parental leave. Why are we not looking at making more parents eligible for EI and the fact that 64% of Canadian mothers are able to access parental leave only? Finally, why do the Leader of the Opposition and his party not stand with us in support of a basic need that so many Canadians have, which is affordable child care? These are critical points. When we talk about standing up for Canadian families, we in the NDP will do that. Will the Conservative Party do that as well?

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the hon. member on the additions to her family. I know it is a challenging time to have a new child as a parliamentarian and to balance both things, so I want to congratulate her on doing that.

I will point out that I have always found it curious in the House of Commons, when it comes to debating private members' business, when the sponsor of the bill is asked all the questions about why there are not other things in it.

This principle addresses a very real gap for thousands of Canadian families, and that is that after sacrificing 45% of their income, they are then hit with a tax bill on the benefits they receive. That is the problem I am trying to address.

Other things the member mentioned worthy of examination often require a royal recommendation and require government action to do. When she talks about the Conservatives' history, though, I have to say that she must not have been watching the same budgets I watched tabled year after year. There was the support for families and parents, the tax cuts for kids, the expansion of EI benefits for self-employed Canadians, and the direct universal child care benefit

that went to every family and benefited every child. Those were the steps our government constantly took.

The difference between the Liberals and the Conservatives is that Conservatives wake up every morning looking for taxes to cut, and the Liberals wake up every morning looking for taxes to raise.

• (1815)

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before I begin, this is my first opportunity to speak in the House since yesterday's tragic event in Toronto. It has touched all of our families and all of our communities in different ways. I want to assure the people of the city I represent and have the privilege to speak on behalf of in this House that all of Parliament and all of the government is here to help with support. We will make sure that the beauty of Toronto, its diversity and its capacity to help its citizens, is not surrendered to this horrible act we witnessed on its city streets just yesterday. My love and heart go out to those families that have been impacted.

I am pleased to rise in this chamber to speak to Bill C-394. While anytime we talk about the plight of this country's children and families is a good day in the House, I also think it is very important to talk about why costly tax changes really should be implemented as part of a comprehensive budget process and not as a gimmick, stunt, or slogan, as we have just seen presented in this House.

The tax proposal being presented here would not do half of what it promises it would do. It certainly would have very little impact on the most vulnerable families in this country, and it would not provide a firm or comprehensive tradeoff that would allow our government to support it.

Doing a full budget allows the government to consider all the tradeoffs and balance all the priorities and undertake new fiscal commitments in a responsible manner that helps those who have the greatest needs with the most amount of support. It does not, as this proposal would do, target support to people who are doing slightly better than others. I will get into how that works in my comments.

It is critical to understand that as the government works to propose and deliver real change for Canadians, it does so in a way that reflects and respects their real needs. The government does not believe that Canadian families are well served by a maze of boutique tax credits, such as the proposed tax credit we are debating today, which would benefit some while doing nothing for those who need it most.

Let us consider who would actually be helped by what the hon. member is proposing. Under his proposed scheme, the tax credit would only be available to individuals who are receiving maternity or parental leave benefits from an employment insurance program. All the other parents—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I just want to remind hon. members that someone is speaking, and I think it would be polite if we listened to hear what he has to say.

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Mr. Adam Vaughan: Mr. Speaker, under this proposed scheme, the tax credit would be available only to individuals who are receiving maternity or parental leave benefits from an employment insurance program. All other parents, such as same sex partners or parents who are adopting a child, would not benefit with 1¢ of tax relief under the proposed bill that is in front of us.

However, these are not the only people who would be left out as a result of this kind of Tory conjuring. Under the hon. member's proposal, we would also be denying benefits to almost all self-employed people, those who do not pay any federal personal income tax because their income is too low, and those who do not qualify for EI parental benefits because of the hours they work, perhaps in seasonal employment. They would not qualify for the non-refundable tax credit. In short, the proposed tax credit would do very little for those families who need it most, and in particular for the poorest children in this country. It would also not help families who are already working hard to make ends meet.

Let us contrast that with our approach, which is the Canada child benefit. Compared to the old system of child benefits, the CCB now gives low- and middle-income parents more money each month. It is also tax-free. We just heard the Leader of the Opposition say that the government should not give money and then take it back, yet that is exactly what that proposal will seek to do. Our approach would provide more money each month, tax-free, to help with the high costs of raising kids. The CCB is simpler, more generous, and better targeted to give more help to people who need it most.

About 3.3 million families with children are now receiving \$23 billion in annual CCB payments. About 65% of the families receiving the maximum CCB amounts are single parents, and about 90% of those are single mothers. A single mom with two children aged five and eight, and a net income of \$35,000 in 2016, will have received \$11,125 in tax-free Canada child benefits in the 2017-18 benefit year. This amounts to \$3,535 more than she would have received under the old system.

This talk about an \$800 tax that floats around does not take into consideration one very important thing, which is that the most important benefit a family receives for having children is not part of the Fraser Institute report. The Fraser Institute report likes to do math; it just does not like to do the complete equation, which is a problem.

Therefore, we end up with a situation where low-income families that want to get their kids into sports get the money up front to invest into their kids' opportunities, as opposed to having all the taxes come off it, as it was under the previous regime. Only if the parents had enough money after all of that could they participate, and only after all of that would they get their tax return with the benefit coming back to them, and only if they were in a particular income class would they qualify to put their kids into sports. It was sports for the rich, and nothing for the poor. That is not progressive taxation policy, and it is not good athletic policy. It is Tory policy.

Through budget 2018, we have done even more to help people with the CCB by increasing the benefits each year to keep pace with the rising cost of living. This starts in July, two years earlier than scheduled, because the economy is doing so well. The books are good, and we are moving forward with the growth agenda. The CCB

was one of the big contributors to the economic growth and the vitality of the economy last year, which shows that good, strong social investments that help people move forward help the economy move forward simultaneously. That is why our approach is the better approach. It would also continue to ensure that hard-working moms and dads have more money each month to buy the things their families need, with the most help going to those families who need it the most.

Our government is taking action to help ensure that everyone who qualifies for support receives it. To close this gap, the government will expand outreach efforts, in particular to on-reserve, remote, and northern indigenous communities, many of which do not pay income tax and are therefore left out of the scheme proposed by the party opposite. We will also be piloting outreach projects for urban indigenous communities so that indigenous people are better able to access not just this program but the full suite of services offered, including the CCB.

There is also the EI parental sharing benefit. In budget 2017, we gave families greater choice and flexibility, allowing parents to receive up to 61 weeks of EI parental benefits over an extended period of 18 months instead of the usual 12 months, which is critical. As families try to fit together the different choices they have to make in their life, we have created more flexibility. Making EI parental benefits more flexible helps working parents navigate the challenges that come with a growing family. It gives them the option of staying at home with their baby longer, if that is the right choice for their family.

In budget 2018, we went a step further, introducing the EI parental sharing benefit. This benefit would provide additional weeks of a "use it or lose it" EI parental benefits program when both parents agree to share parental leave. With this new benefit, parents in two-parent families who agree to share parental leave could receive an additional five weeks of leave, or an additional eight weeks for parents who choose the extended program. Providing these additional weeks of benefits under the new EI parental sharing benefit would encourage both parents in two-parent families to share equally in the work of raising their children.

● (1820)

It will also provide greater flexibility, particularly for mothers to return to work sooner if they so choose, knowing their family has the support to do just this.

In addition, the government proposes to amend the Canada Labour Code to ensure that workers in federally regulated industries have the job protection they need while receiving federal EI benefits.

Our government is also committed to doing more for Canadian families when it comes to early learning and child care. We listen to the Leader of the Opposition talk about regulated child care as some sort of bureaucratic monster that needs to be slain at every opportunity when we have heard from constituent after constituent about the need for highly regulated, proper day care and having a system that is funded nationally. To have that party say they will walk away from regulated child care is just appalling.

If that is their approach to supporting women in the workforce, supporting families with new kids, and supporting child care needs and early learning opportunities for children in this country, I can only say they should get out more and talk to people who do not vote Conservative, because the rest of the country is demanding action on this file.

This government has taken action on this file with its \$7.5-billion investment. The member referenced Kathleen Wynne. Her investment coupled with our investments provided 100,000 new regulated day care spaces in Ontario alone. Half of these are in the GTA, in the riding I represent and close to the riding I represent. That is real help for real people, and it is being delivered not with boutique tax cuts that only help wealthy families, but with good, strong investments that help all families. That is one of the most critical things we are doing to support families, children, and social development in this country.

The other component to our support for families, and in particular families with children, is about to be launched within the year, as the provincial governments have now signed a multilateral agreement. That is the Canada housing benefit. It is yet another investment to support families who have vulnerabilities largely driven through economic circumstance, many of whom are single mother-led families with children in housing that is not affordable.

We are providing these services and rebuilding the social safety net that was not only neglected but in fact cut over the previous 10 years. We are investing in making sure those with the greatest needs get the greatest help, instead of targeting our tax cuts at a voting bloc that is affluent and that we think we can hold onto and win in the next election. We are doing good social work and making good investments in social progress. We are making good investments in day care, housing, and child benefit. We are reforming the EI program and rebuilding the social safety net. As we do all this, we are starting to look at our reforms as a trampoline, something that will not hold people when they fall but bounce them back up and get them—

• (1825)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Churchill—Keewatinook Aski.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to discuss Bill C-394, a private member's bill put forward by the leader of the official opposition.

Whereas we applaud the suggestion of investing resources for new parents, this bill misses the point. It does not address the inadequate parental leave system that exists in this country. It leaves out the fundamental issue of child care and contributes to the growing inequality in Canada. This proposal would not fix the many issues

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with Canada's parental leave, particularly the systemic barriers that Canadian women face.

Let us talk about inequality. Growing inequality is the result of decades of Conservative and Liberal policies of privatization and deregulation. They are policies that have ravaged our public services and dismantled our welfare state. They are policies that have attacked the foundations of what previous generations have fought for to offer better living conditions to the working class and to people across this country. They are policies that are in the interest of a few and leave the many behind.

We know that inequality in Canada does not affect everyone equally. It is gendered, racialized, indigenous, disabled, and more and more, it is generational. The millennial generation, my generation, faces the prospect of being worse off than their parents. This is the generation we are talking about when talking about new parents. Let us talk about what millennials are facing.

Millennials are facing increasingly precarious work conditions. They have to survive going from one gig to the next. They are being told to get used to the job churn. We are hearing a government telling us to embrace this reality as a new normal. We are seeing an official opposition that does not seem to get that the fundamental challenges we face cannot be fixed with a regressive tax proposal like the one in front of us. When the Conservatives were in government, they did nothing to improve the working conditions that millennials face in our country and did nothing when it came to child care.

The economy we have today is not working for Canadian millennials. A 2015 Abacus survey shows us that 59% of millennials are delaying major life milestones, such as starting a family, because of the financial pressures they face. Beyond this number are the stories of young people who are struggling to get by.

I am reminded of a young woman I met in Windsor who talked about how, given all the challenges she has faced to be able to find secure employment with multiple degrees and student debt, et cetera, the one thing she said she knew well was that she was not going to be able to have kids because she would not be able to afford to give them what her parents gave her.

In the fall of 2016, a CIBC report was published that demonstrated that not only is there a historically high rate of part-time jobs in the economy, a rate that still sits at over 19%, but the share of below average paid jobs is steadily increasing. In Canada, more and more jobs that are being created are insecure ones, and many of those are being done by young people.

Reversing growing inequality must be front and centre for us as parliamentarians. This is where the proposal put forward by the leader of the official opposition falls short.

The measure proposes an investment of \$850 million annually according to some estimates. This number will be looked at by the Parliamentary Budget Officer. As it stands, an investment of this size needs to address some of the most pressing issues related to the deficient parental leave system that exists in our country.

Private Members' Business

● (1830)

[*Translation*]

We know that we can do better. An example within our own federation has shown us the way. Quebec has implemented measures that should be supported by the federal government. Quebec has generous and accessible parental leave and a much larger number of women and their families who can benefit from it. Women who earn minimum wage in Quebec have to work only 178 hours to have access to the Quebec parental insurance plan, or earn only \$2,000 through insurable employment. That number climbs to 600 hours for other Canadians. Once they have their child, Quebec families can count on a network of affordable day care throughout Quebec. Elsewhere in Canada, day care is often too expensive. Families and often mothers have to make a tough choice: postpone starting a family, not return to work, or face financial hardship in order to pay for child care.

This is unacceptable. We can and must do better. If Quebec can do it, so can the rest of Canada. It is a matter of priority.

[*English*]

Therefore, what can we do?

First, we have to talk about the fact that too many Canadian parents are not eligible for parental leave. Excluding Quebec, only 64% of Canadian women can take their leave benefits after having a child. This means that more than one-third of new mothers do not qualify to take that leave.

David MacDonald from the CCPA indicated that Bill C-394's tax credit proposal will not help alleviate inequalities in Canada and in some ways will even contribute to them, and that the tax credit proposal is more likely to benefit higher-income and middle-income earners, and is less likely to benefit new parents earning lower incomes.

Barriers to access EI, notably in the number of insurable hours that are required, are too high for many young women in precarious work. That reality is very much the case where I come from. Many people up north do not have access to parental leave, because of the high rates of unemployment and underemployment. Also, I hear from my neighbours and friends, and I know from my own reality as a new parent, that there is a lack of access to affordable child care, and that proves to be a major financial burden for many families where I come from.

Second, instead of providing a tax credit, we need to increase the income replacement rate. We agree that we need to put more money in the pockets of new parents because they need it. However, with this proposal, since the proposed tax credit is not refundable, new parents that earn low incomes would not benefit nearly as much as middle-income or high-income earners, since many low-income families earn only 55% of their salary when on leave.

The income replacement rate of 55% is simply too low, especially when families are dealing with many new expenses. A higher income replacement rate would benefit all levels of income earners, and would therefore not participate in increasing the already alarming growing inequality that exists in Canada.

Finally, we must address the issue of child care. For Canadian women, and for new parents to have more income available to them, we must as a country find a way to offer child care services that are affordable across Canada. In all our major cities outside of Quebec, costs for child care are making life unaffordable, and are proving to be very challenging when families are deciding their priorities. I will list off some of the numbers of the median costs of child care by city in our country: Toronto, \$1,212 per month per child; Ottawa, \$1,009 per month per child; and Vancouver, \$950 per month per child. Canadian parents know this reality and this is the kind of priority that they want to see addressed.

We want to be clear that the NDP supports the idea that we need to invest in Canadian families and in new parents, but we disagree with the proposal that has been put forward by the Conservative leader, a proposal that will increase inequality as it will do nothing to help lower-income families. It is a proposal that will not help new parents finally access the benefits they need and deserve, by making parental leave more accessible. It is a proposal that for all of the public resources it aims to invest will not create a single affordable day care space, something that is urgently needed across our communities.

I am proud to say that, along with our colleagues, we believe that Canadian parents deserve much better.

● (1835)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am so proud to stand in the House and support the private member's bill put forward by Canada's Conservative leader and the leader of the official opposition that supports new parents. Bill C-394, the supporting new parents act, is a policy that works in the best interest of families, in the best of interest of children, and in the best interests of Canadians.

Canadians have seen many changes in the employment insurance program, specifically to maternity and parental benefits. This specific change provides support to families by providing tax relief on their employment insurance benefits. Currently, employment insurance is taxable under each and every program. This new refundable tax credit would benefit Canadian families at a time when it would be truly needed by the families.

Let us have some fun with this, and I will let everyone take part in this. As a parent, I understand how much it costs to purchase diapers. I went on to my little app, and currently at Walmart, a case of Huggies Little Snugglers diapers for newborns costs \$29.97 and provides 88 diapers. According to the New Kids-Center, a site where one can find out how to parent, a newborn uses, on average, 10 to 12 diapers per day, per month. Sometimes I fell asleep, so I am sure I used less. Still, at 35¢ a unit, the cost is \$4.20 a day. The total cost per month for diapers alone for a newborn is \$130. Although the number of diapers used per month may go down as the child grows up, the cost per unit goes up. Regardless, we are looking at an average cost of about \$130 a month just for diapers. This is just some basic parenting 101.

Private Members' Business

The supporting new parents act is a plan proposed by a parent in the House who knows a lot about diapers and children. When we have a leader of the opposition, our Conservative leader, bring forward legislation like this, he does it because he understands family. He understands what it is like to raise children and the cost of that. He and Jill have had many children, as he discussed, so he understands what it is like.

If we were to add his family to my family we could field an entire baseball team, with one substitute. I do not think there are a lot of people in the House who could do that. This is coming from two parents who have spent a lot of money on diapers, so I understand this. There is a personal feel to it.

Currently parents of newborns receive anywhere between 33% and 55% of their income, whether they are taking extended benefits that now go to the 18-month period. As the chair of the status of women committee, we talk a lot about women and equality. As was brought forward in committee, one of the biggest things parents who are stay home with their child look at is loss of income. Who is going to choose to stay at home with the child? They may be looking at the opportunity to stay beyond the six-month parental leave, to be taken by the mother or the father. A lot of times that decision comes down to who is making the most money. Therefore, that person will continue to earn their benefits and the other person will stay home. The bill would help make the decision easier though.

At the end of the day, the bill would put more money back in the pockets of parents. The benefit to an average Canadian whose salary is \$50,000 would be \$4,000. We have heard from witnesses across Canada that choices on EI are based on the impact of the family's income. Therefore, an important bill like this provides that ability for parents to actually choose. There is going to be a choice. When parents know they can make x number of dollars and keep that in their pockets, it will be their choice.

Many times we have discussed why fathers do not take parental leave. One reason is because sometimes the breadwinner is the father. This would give them an option. In some families, the breadwinner may be the mother. This also would provide them additional income. It is that simple.

The Conservative Party of Canada believes in the family unit, and this is all about that. We believe in supporting families and developing reasonable, responsible programs and legislation. We believe that the way to help families is to lower taxes and have good policies. Strong families raise strong individuals, which in turn create strong communities and a stronger country.

Bill C-394, the supporting new parents act, is a policy that would work for families. It would work to help offset some of the costs of parenting. With five children of my own, I know the cost of raising children truly never goes away. I have a 22-year-old son who is still learning how to budget, so I give Garrett a budget. We are working on that. Working with our children and trying to ensure they have the best opportunities does not stop at a particular age.

• (1840)

Canadian families have so much to think about, including what school their child is going to. Do they take sports or piano lessons, or perhaps both? We do not get a tax credit on that, but it is an option.

There are friends and curfews. However, the beginning of a child's life is a very special experience. Providing any opportunity for a parent to stay home with a child and help raise that child is a key to building a stronger child-mother, child-father bond, and I think that is really important.

This bill would put families first by providing a tax credit for income earned under EI maternity and EI parental benefits. According to reports, the average family right now, under the current government, is paying \$800 a year more in taxes, and we know that is going to continue to grow. Yesterday in the House, we were discussing budget 2018 and the government's historic investments. These historic investments, of course, are the ones the Liberals are going to see on the backs of these children we are currently going to try to diaper, so let us give them a break now.

Let me provide a little insight. When I was talking about diapers, I was talking about the average cost. We can look at other things parents have to pay for. There are baby wipes, \$7.99; a box of Q-tips, \$3.99; two jars of baby food, three dollars; baby formula, anywhere from \$9.98 to \$52; baby cream and soaps, an average of five dollars to \$10. We can add on the car seat, the crib, blankets, strollers, bottles, and swings. When we add all of those things, parenting does cost money. Being a parent is not cheap, and we know that at one time, one or two parents reduce their income to become parents and raise their children.

Bill C-394, the supporting new parents act, is a policy that would work in the best interest of families, children, and Canadians. The bill would assist new families by removing the federal tax on EI maternity and parental benefits for parents who choose to take time off to raise families, a newborn, or an adopted child. As a party, we believe that the family is essential for the well-being of individuals and society as a whole.

Raising children in Canada can be challenging. Canada's Conservatives recognize the sacrifice of Canadian parents who have to make these choices when having children, including taking leave from work and losing almost half of a regular income. This compassionate policy would help families when they need it most. It would give them more freedom and flexibility to raise their families. For any young family, this important proposed tax relief could make a huge difference in the cost of raising newborn children.

Canadian parents should be able to focus on providing for a new child. They deserve our support. This is especially important when the cost of living continues to rise for parents under this government.

Private Members' Business

This is the first major economic policy put forward by our leader. We look forward to proposing many other initiatives as we carry forward. As a Conservative team, we are working together to develop social and economic policies that make sense for all Canadians.

I hope I have not scared off anyone who is currently considering having a child when I say how expensive it is. Having a child is one of the greatest joys. It sometimes causes the greatest amount of tears, a lot of late nights, disagreements, and perhaps some time outs. Any time we can give a break to parents so they can raise their families, that is what the government should be doing. Our children are worth it, and supporting today's families is worth it.

I urge this government and members of the opposition party to support this bill.

• (1845)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I beg your indulgence to just give me some indication of the time. I am not accustomed to speaking ad hoc, but I feel compelled to rise today to speak against the private member's bill being proposed by the Leader of the Opposition, Bill C-394.

I do so knowing that the hon. member is a member of the party of the late Jim Flaherty, so I am very disappointed that a basic principle of taxation has been thoroughly ignored in presenting this private member's bill, which is that there is a difference between a benefit that is offered through the federal government and a program that a citizen pays into.

A program such as the Canada pension plan or the employment insurance program is one that a person, not necessarily a taxpayer—we do not know yet—who qualifies for that program pays into, and the person is then entitled to derive certain monies from that program, depending on whether they meet the criteria.

That is very different from a social benefit, which is awarded based on other criteria. It could be universal or means-based.

Again I must reiterate how disappointed I am that this bill has been put forward to the House, especially in light of the terrific work that our government did in the very first few months of our mandate in bringing in not only a bona fide and increased universal Canada child benefit but one that was tax-free, that was needs-based for those who needed the money more, and that was automatically deposited to people's accounts. They did not have to apply for it. They did not have to worry about whether it would be taxed back when it came time to do their personal income taxes 12 or 14 months later.

It was worry free, and it has lifted, as we know, more than 300 children out of poverty. That is where the money needs to go: toward lifting those families that have the most need out of poverty. Again, that is my disappointment on the tax side.

As a woman, as a feminist, as a mother, as a daughter, I am someone who saw my own mother opening up that envelope in the kitchen. I think it was when the eighth child was born in our family that the family allowance originally came in, in the 1960s. That was money in her hands. She had worked briefly as a teacher prior to having my oldest brother. She had decided to stay home, of course,

as many women did, to look after us. We came one after the other. When the twins came, she said, "That is just next year's baby come this year." Next year's baby came anyway. They just kept coming.

We ended up being nine in the family. Having that money in her hands meant she could use it for the very important things that she wanted to spend the money on—not that my father was not doing his part; he definitely was. He was working and bringing home money, but it was so important for her to have that income and to feel that she could make decisions for the family.

Fast-forward 25 years to myself as a single mom. It was the early 1980s. It still was not quite the thing to do, but I had a very supportive family around me. I was able to benefit from a number of programs at that time that allowed me to not only have my child and to feel secure in looking after her on my own, but also to go back to school. In doing so, I earned my master's degree in business administration and learned about financial matters. By this time, as members can imagine, it was very important to me.

It was at that time that I realized I had so many opportunities. Again, because I lived in Montreal, Quebec, I was able to get an excellent education for a very low price, but that is not free. There is a cost to society.

• (1850)

There were taxpayers before me who had paid into the general pool so that education could be available to people like me. When I got a terrific job at a bank three years later and I was finally making the big bucks, I paid my fair share of taxes and I was happy to do so, because then I could feel that I was helping another young mother like me to get her chance in life. That is what our tax system is about, that when we are in need, money is available and public support is available to us, but when we have more money, we are able to help other families who are in need.

I just wanted to come to that very basic principle. I had enormous respect for the late Jim Flaherty because as minister of finance, he brought in so many terrific initiatives to help people do better in life. Again, I would ask the hon. member opposite to think a bit more about this proposition that he is bringing forward.

I want to get back to families. Yes, it is expensive, and yes, it is complicated, but it is what makes life so rewarding. When people talk about cost, it always kind of bothers me because it really depends on how we value our children. Having my daughter completely changed my life. Having my daughter made me into the person, I would like to say, that people see here today. I hope that I am doing her proud. She is an artist today. She lives and works in New York City with her husband and they too are paying their taxes. If there is one thing I taught my daughter, even as an artist she did her bookkeeping and her accounting, and when she sold her work, she paid her taxes. I would certainly encourage all young people to think about how important it is to be that contributing member of society so that when they need the money, it is there for them, but when it is time for them to give back, they are able to do so.

Adjournment Proceedings

We do not have to make it complicated. I am happy to report that I did get married. When my daughter was six years old, I met a wonderful man. We had twin boys, and it was not long before they were into sports, hockey and this and that. That sports credit was around and chasing after receipts from volunteer organizations was a pain in the neck. The arts credit was too late for my daughter, but she took art anyway. We did not wait for a tax credit to put my daughter into art school. It was complicated, and life is already complicated enough. Then we had that bus transit pass thing, and people should try looking for receipts for the monthly bus pass at the bottom of their kids' knapsacks at the end of every month. They have to have that receipt because at the end of the year when they want to claim it, CRA is going to come looking for those receipts. Please, let us simplify the lives of today's families. That is what our government has done. We are putting money into the accounts of families on a daily basis.

[Translation]

In my riding alone this represents \$6 million a month. That is money that goes into our local economy. When I knock on doors in my riding, my constituents are very pleased to know that they are getting this money without having to apply for it or worrying that it will be taken out of their bank account.

[English]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Calgary Midnapore. I would like to remind the hon. member that she has about three minutes.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to discuss Bill C-394, the supporting new parents act, brought forward by our leader.

I know one thing to be true, since I am a mother myself. I am very proud to be a mother. We have heard this repeated several times today, but I will reiterate it. It is that babies are expensive, but this government is more expensive.

This is why we need to consider the different costs associated with babies. When people have a child, they prepare and purchase all the things that are required, such as the stroller, the car seat, the crib, and the high chair. My previous colleague talked about the costs of diapers and formula.

As a responsible Conservative, I also considered the financial implications, so I considered things like additional life insurance for my family. My husband and I took the time to have a will made, now that we had an entity to pass something on to, and also opened an RESP, which I will get back to.

Certainly one of the great joys of having a child is the time spent with the child. That has actually the greatest value of all. I was very fortunate when I had my son. I was the deputy consul general in Dallas, Texas, and my husband took two years from his career to care for our son. He credits this experience with the position he has today, in that his skills as a parent were recognized by his present employer. This bill allows parents to spend more time with their children.

In addition, we were very fortunate to have not only a happy child, but a healthy child, and this is not something every family or every parent gets to experience. Someone who is very close to me

had a child with hemolytic-uremic syndrome, which resulted in many hours in the hospital. This experience with this sick child was a testament to the parent's will and strength, and is something I cannot possibly imagine.

What I am most concerned about for my son is the generational debt. It is an \$18-billion deficit this year, with a \$669-billion debt. My son will be 32 years old when the debt is scheduled to be paid off. In closing, I repeat that babies are expensive, but this government is more expensive.

• (1855)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): 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.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[Translation]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, negotiations begin at 9:00 a.m. tomorrow between the Coast Guard and Davie shipyard, because we need icebreakers. Who said that? The Prime Minister himself did, on January 19, while on a tour. He even added that Davie is first in line for contracts to build the four icebreakers.

We know that the Coast Guard has significant needs. Its fleet is more than 40 years old. Even though Irving and Seaspan have contracts to replace the ships of the Coast Guard and National Defence, they are struggling to replace the fleet. There have been delays and major cost overruns.

Unfortunately, whereas the Prime Minister promised four ships, the people at the shipyard now tell us that there will be no more than three. The promise of four ships has therefore been broken, but there is also a matter of deadlines. The workers at Davie delivered the *Asterix*, the only ship they have built for the Canadian government to date, right on time, and their reward is to be told to go on EI and wait until they are called.

They are still waiting for this call. They waited on January 17, 18, and 19. Then February, March, and April passed. Spring has now arrived and there is no news. The government is dithering, and no one knows what is going on, but we know that the Coast Guard does not have the icebreakers it needs.

Can the minister's representative tell us that the government has stopped wasting time and that it will award the contracts? That would be a start, because not only does the Coast Guard have needs, but the Royal Canadian Navy does as well. We are not just talking about three icebreakers. We are also talking about the second supply ship, *Obelix*, the first ship that to be converted at the shipyard. It went very well, and a second ship is wanted.

Adjournment Proceedings

Can the parliamentary secretary confirm this evening that the ships will be built? The Liberal government has a buddy-buddy relationship with Irving and Seaspan, but we want it to work in the best interests of taxpayers. This means that it must award contracts to top-performing businesses that meet deadlines. This is exactly what the Davie shipyard did for the government and for the private sector. It built the *Cecon Pride*.

Workers are anxiously awaiting results. It is not complicated. All they want is for the government's negotiations to conclude and for it to award the icebreaker contracts to the shipyard, since there is work to be done and the shipyard has the capacity to do it.

I have another question for the parliamentary secretary, but she is not required to answer this evening. When will the government update the naval strategy? There are cost overruns, and taxpayers are footing the bill.

My question is simple. When will the Liberal government keep its word and award the icebreaker contracts to the Davie shipyard?

• (1900)

[*English*]

Ms. Kamal Khara (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before I respond to the hon. member, on behalf of all the constituents of Brampton West, I would like to offer our sincere condolences to the families of the victims who were killed in the tragic incident that took place in Toronto yesterday. To all the injured, we wish for their speedy recovery. This hits really close to home, and my heart aches alongside those of many Canadians for all affected by this incident. I thank the Toronto Police Service and all the first responders for their courage, bravery, and professionalism. I thank them for all they do every day to keep us and our communities safe. In the face of this tragedy we, as neighbours and a community, pull together and stand united with Toronto.

I am now pleased to respond to my colleague's remarks. The national shipbuilding strategy is charting a new course for shipbuilders across Canada. It is based on the fundamental premise that the future fleets of the Canadian Coast Guard and the Royal Canadian Navy will be built in Canada by Canadians.

As a minister in the previous government, my hon. colleague understands probably better than any of us the procurement process for selecting the shipyards that are now building the large combat and non-combat ships needed by the Canadian Coast Guard and the Royal Canadian Navy. The government of the day announced the successful bids in October 2012.

It is important to note that Chantier Davie competed in this process. Ultimately, Seaspan was contracted to build the non-combat vessels. An umbrella agreement was subsequently signed with its Vancouver Shipyards. A separate agreement for combat ships was signed with Irving Shipbuilding in Halifax.

I also appreciate this opportunity to remind my colleague that there is more, indeed much more, to the national shipbuilding strategy than just building large ships. In fact, the shipyards in Vancouver and Halifax are not allowed to compete for any projects for building small ships, such as search and rescue lifeboats, channel survey and sounding vessels, or hydrographic survey vessels.

The national shipbuilding strategy sets aside \$2 billion for building these ships, which provides significant opportunities and benefits for Chantier Davie and other Canadian shipyards. Of course, they also compete for conversion work, as well as repair, refit, and maintenance contracts.

My hon. colleague also knows that Chantier Davie has received a considerable amount of work as a result of the national shipbuilding strategy. Since the launch of the national shipbuilding strategy, Quebec shipyards have been awarded more than \$760 million in contracts. Since 2014, Chantier Davie alone has been awarded six contracts for ship repair, refit, and maintenance. This includes the \$587-million contract awarded to Federal Fleet Services in November 2015.

As we know, the Canadian Coast Guard needs an interim icebreaking capability pending the delivery of new ships under the national shipbuilding strategy. That is why we reached out to the marine industry and invited them to provide potential options. Our government is now in active discussions with Chantier Davie to fulfill the Coast Guard's requirements for an interim icebreaking capability. We look forward to providing additional information once these discussions are completed.

• (1905)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I concur with my colleague that we honour and share the grief of the people of Toronto and especially that we acknowledge the work of first responders.

There is nothing new in her response. I would have liked something more tangible. She need not give me a history lesson about Davie; I know it well, I was there. What I can tell her is that, to date, Davie was awarded contracts because it was the most qualified. This represents 1% of all contracts awarded by the federal government. They are not asking for charity, they simply want the Prime Minister to keep his word and meet an urgent need, especially since we have learned that the Coast Guard has a \$7 billion reserve.

The money is there and the shipyard is ready to start working. What is the government waiting for to put the shipyard workers to work?

[*English*]

Ms. Kamal Khara: Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that the employees at Chantier Davie have the expertise and skills in shipbuilding, refit, and repair. The process is ongoing with Chantier Davie. We continue to pursue these negotiations in good faith with Chantier Davie. That said, we will not negotiate on the floor of the House of Commons.

Adjournment Proceedings

Our government is committed to the national shipbuilding strategy and equipping the Royal Canadian Navy and the Canadian Coast Guard with the ships they need to do their job, while creating jobs for middle-class Canadians across our country. We are working extremely closely with Canada's marine industry to maximize the benefits of the strategy. The member can rest assured our government has engaged and will continue to engage with Chantier Davie and other businesses in the shipbuilding sector on future needs and opportunities.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted.

[*English*]

Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:07 p.m.)

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