



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
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OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)

**Monday, May 11, 2015**

—

**Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer**

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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, May 11, 2015

The House met at 11 a.m.

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*Prayers*

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## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1105)

[*English*]

### MISSING ABORIGINAL WOMEN

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.)** moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the tragic and inequitable issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls is of critical importance for all Canadians; that the government has failed to provide justice for the victims, healing for the families, or an end to the violence; and that the House call on the government to take immediate action to deal with this systemic problem and call a public inquiry.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to my private member's motion about the overwhelming number of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls in Canada and the urgent need to ensure their safety and well-being.

[*Translation*]

My motion calls on this House to recognize that the tragic and inequitable issue of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls is of critical importance for all Canadians and that the government has failed to provide justice for the victims, healing for the families, or an end to the violence.

[*English*]

It also calls on the House to urge the government to take immediate action to deal with this systemic problem and call a public inquiry.

[*Translation*]

Aboriginal women in Canada experience rates of violence that are three times higher than they are for non-aboriginal women. Young aboriginal women are five times more likely to die violently than other women.

[*English*]

The disproportionate number of aboriginal women and girls who go missing or are victims of homicide has been an issue that has spanned many decades and many governments. That is why, in 2005, the previous Liberal government invested \$5 million to fund a project called Sisters in Spirit, run by the Native Women's

Association of Canada. The goal was to conduct research and raise awareness of the alarmingly high rates of violence against aboriginal women and girls.

In 2009, Sisters in Spirit released a report, "Voices of our Sisters in Spirit", which identified almost 600 cases of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls. The reprehensible response of the Conservative government to this worrying evidence of the scope of the crisis was to end the funding of the project.

The Sisters in Spirit report and the disgraceful government response led to the Liberal Party's call for a non-partisan, independent national inquiry in 2010.

Last year, the RCMP released an even more disturbing report, which identified almost 1,200 aboriginal women and girls who had gone missing or had been murdered since 1980.

Despite representing only 4% of women in Canada, aboriginal women accounted for 8% of the female homicide victims in 1984 and a staggering 23% by 2012. Think of those shocking statistics. The aboriginal proportion of female homicide statistics has been steadily rising, and as of 2012, this 4% of the female population accounts for almost one-quarter of women who are murdered.

These statistics are eye opening, but we must also remember that they represent real people. They are daughters, mothers, sisters, and aunties. They leave families in unimaginable pain, and we are deprived of their tremendous potential contributions to our communities.

Canadians are beginning to take notice. From the NWAC Faceless Dolls Project started years ago—in which the missing women and girls were anonymous to most—recent victims have become household names. Loretta Saunders and Tina Fontaine are now symbols of the many other aboriginal women and girls who have been failed by Canadian society.

This is not an aboriginal issue. It is not a women's issue. It is a continuing Canadian tragedy.

*Private Members' Business*

Despite this new broader awareness, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development recently quoted unpublished statistics about the ethnicity of some of the perpetrators to cynically insinuate that this is an aboriginal problem. He irresponsibly referred to statistics without any context of how they compare to the general population. He also neglected to note the RCMP finding that aboriginal women are less likely to be murdered by a spouse or an intimate partner than non-aboriginal victims.

These disgraceful political games are why we need an independent and comprehensive public inquiry. It is also important to understand that a national public inquiry is not only a matter of seeking justice and reconciliation for past injustices, but it is critical if we are going to address the systemic problems underlying this ongoing crisis.

A properly conducted, adequately funded inquiry has the potential to teach us both about the causes of the violence and how to prevent it from recurring. This is a point I want to emphasize. If we are to truly end the violence, we must find ways to prevent it. It is not enough to just better respond to crimes after they have been committed.

For an inquiry to be effective, victims' families and aboriginal organizations will need to be involved not only in the inquiry's work but in the design of its mandate and its operations. It must engage the broader public and facilitate a much wider understanding of the issues through its very operations. It must involve civil society, welcome independent research, and make it clear that all evidence it hears will be valued.

Grieving families, indigenous leaders, victims advocates, civil society, the international community, and every provincial and territorial premier have all urged the government to call a national inquiry; yet despite this overwhelming consensus on the need for a national public inquiry, the Prime Minister stubbornly rejects it out of hand. The Prime Minister refuses to acknowledge that this ongoing national tragedy represents more than a series of individual crimes that can be dealt with by law enforcement alone. In fact, last summer, in the wake of Tina Fontaine's murder in Winnipeg, the Prime Minister insensitively said, "We should not view this as a sociological phenomenon". He dismissed root causes being any significant part of the broader issue, calling the murders of aboriginal women and girls crimes that should be dealt with by the police. Last December, he even admitted to a national TV audience that this issue was not high on his government's radar. The Prime Minister is simply on the wrong side of history.

The Prime Minister's government tried to explain the rejection of a national inquiry by asserting the need for action, instead of study. These are not mutually exclusive measures. The urgency of this crisis requires the development and implementation of a comprehensive and multi-jurisdictional national action plan, like they had in Australia.

• (1110)

[*Translation*]

The effectiveness of such a national action plan depends a truly coordinated approach involving the many relevant federal departments, the provincial and territorial governments and aboriginal

leaders, an approach that focuses on preventing these senseless deaths and putting an end to this senseless violence.

[*English*]

Such a plan should be rooted in a comprehensive, non-partisan study of this ongoing tragedy that goes beyond establishing the raw statistics.

However, there are concrete steps that could be taken immediately. Additional funding for inadequate shelter spaces on reserve and in northern communities, addressing the horrifying numbers of aboriginal children in foster care, real approaches to keeping families together, better funding and support for aboriginal policing, and better co-ordination among all levels of government would all be positive steps. Unfortunately, the federal government's response to this urgent crisis has been complete inaction.

The government's action plan, which members opposite will undoubtedly shortly point to, is no more than a repackaged inventory of inadequate federal programs and funding that existed before last fall's announcement. The \$25 million highlighted as new money simply maintains the existing insufficient funding levels from 2010. Many of the broader initiatives noted in the larger strategy are not even directed at aboriginal people at all.

The epidemic of violence must end, and the Conservative government, which claims to be tough on crime and to stand up for victims of crime, cannot continue to ignore this appalling situation.

[*Translation*]

Only a national inquiry would have the credibility, scope and resources to address the systemic problems underlying the violence. It would provide the accountability to ensure implementation of its recommendations, and bring justice and reconciliation to the victims and their families.

[*English*]

I urge all members to support my motion, and I thank so many of the aboriginal women and girls who have helped us on this journey and who still suffer so much.

[*Translation*]

*Meegwetch.*

[*English*]

**Mrs. Susan Truppe (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we all have a role to play in protecting aboriginal women and girls, and our government has taken strong action to address the broader challenges facing aboriginal women and girls. Since 2006, we have been proud to introduce more than 30 new justice and public safety initiatives to keep Canadian families safe, and the party across has voted against them.

*Private Members' Business*

We recently tabled our action plan to address family violence and violent crime against aboriginal women and girls. The action plan makes significant investments to support the creation of a DNA missing persons database, more community safety plans through Public Safety Canada, and better tools and resources for first nations leaders to address this problem on reserves. We are also going to engage men and boys. We are going to have projects that will break cycles of intergenerational violence.

We have heard from victims' families that now is the time for action and not more studies, so I do not know what part of the action plan the member opposite does not like. These are actual initiatives that will help aboriginal women and girls.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Mr. Speaker, clearly the member had not heard my remarks. What we are saying is that the Conservatives' so-called inaction plan is absolutely not addressing what we have heard. It is totally focused on the time after people have died or gone missing. It is not doing anything to help with the prevention and stopping of this epidemic of violence. They just do not get it. The DNA bank means that the victim is already dead. These are important issues for the families, but what the families really want is for this not to happen to anyone else.

Yesterday, on Mother's Day, all I could think of was those families and those mothers who did not have a daughter to say "thank you". That is what the government does not get, and it is just so disturbing.

• (1115)

**Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for bringing the motion forward. She said in her speech that the statistics are eye opening but that we must also remember that they are real people. I could not agree more.

She brought up a few names, including that of Loretta Saunders. As we know, Loretta Saunders was a young Inuk woman going to St. Mary's University in Halifax, who was killed. Her killers have pleaded guilty and the justice system has worked. We will see what happens as these two continue to make their way through the justice system.

Loretta Saunders parents are actually still asking for an inquiry, even though the killers have pleaded guilty. Does the member agree that we do need an inquiry if we are to see justice truly served here, that it is not about these two individuals who killed Loretta Saunders, but it is the bigger issue we are trying to tackle here?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her question, and I thank her and her party for the advocacy that has continued on this. It should not be a partisan issue.

The parents of Loretta Saunders and Holly and the rest of the community there are not only working very hard to seek justice, but they are a tremendous example of why we need a national public inquiry. They too want to deal with some of the root causes and illuminate the things we do not even know yet around not only policing but foster care and all the things we know are part and parcel of this huge difference in the numbers between aboriginal women and girls and the non-aboriginal population.

I thank the member for raising this. We too support Loretta Saunders' parents in their quest for a national inquiry.

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague on the motion. I know how hard she has worked with the aboriginal women across Canada.

I think there is a misconception that public inquiries are just to find cause. Is it true that the purpose of the inquiry is to find the root causes, yes, but what is really key is the kind of recommendations that could come out of such an inquiry to make changes and improvements in the future so this kind of situation does not happen?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member that the recommendations that come out of these kinds of inquiry are hugely important.

I have been interested in listening to some of the experts on national public inquiries and how they feel that one of the other issues is bringing the public in and having the resources to let all Canadians know how they can be part of the healing and reconciliation and be part of stopping this epidemic.

I thank people like Christi Belcourt and the Walking With Our Sisters campaign and the kind of art and awareness-raising that has been very much part of this journey for so many families.

**Mrs. Susan Truppe (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, as well as one of the members who sat on the special committee which studied the issue of missing and murdered aboriginal women, I welcome the opportunity to participate in this important debate.

This motion deals with a very important issue in our country: violence against aboriginal women and girls. Our government takes the issue of violence against women and girls very seriously. That is why we have put in place an ongoing series of important measures so that women and girls, including aboriginal women and girls, can live violence-free lives. I would like to take a few moments to describe some of the actions our government has taken.

To make communities safer for all Canadians, we have enacted over 30 measures into law since 2006. These measures are making communities safer by holding violent criminals accountable for their crimes, giving victims of crime a stronger voice and increasing the efficiency of the justice system. We increased penalties for violent crimes. We introduced legislation to give police and prosecutors new tools to address cyberbullying. We introduced the victims bill of rights.

*Private Members' Business*

The Government of Canada has allocated more than \$140 million since 2006 to give victims a more effective voice in the criminal justice system through initiatives delivered by Justice Canada. On February 20, 2015, the Government of Canada announced a 10-year, \$100 million investment to prevent, detect and combat family violence and child abuse as part of our government commitment to stand up for victims. Of this amount, \$30 million is dedicated to supporting aboriginal communities through Health Canada's first nations and Inuit health branch.

With respect to addressing violence against aboriginal women and girls specifically, our government was pleased to participate in the National Roundtable on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls on February 27, 2015 here in Ottawa. As part of the round table, the Minister of Labour and Minister of Status of Women and the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development highlighted recent actions we have taken to address family violence and violent crimes against aboriginal women and girls. For example, they highlighted our government's action plan to address family violence and violent crimes against aboriginal women, which I am pleased to announce has been implemented as of April 1, 2015. The action plan takes immediate and concrete action to prevent violence, support victims, and protect aboriginal women and girls through new and ongoing commitments totalling approximately \$200 million over five years. It includes new funding of \$25 million over five years starting April 1, 2015, as well as renewed and ongoing support for shelters on reserve and family violence prevention activities.

The action plan's new funding of \$25 million is broken down as follows. There is \$8.6 million over five years for the development of more community safety plans across Canada. There is \$2.5 million over five years for projects to break intergenerational cycles of violence and abuse by raising awareness. There is \$5 million over five years for projects to engage men and boys, and empower women and girls in efforts to denounce and prevent violence. There is \$7.5 million over five years to support aboriginal victims and families. There is \$1.4 million over five years to share information and resources with communities and organizations, and report regularly on progress made and results achieved under the action plan.

Above and beyond the new funding that is part of this action plan, there is further funding of \$158.7 million over five years beginning with the government's new fiscal year on April 1, 2015 for the existing network of shelters on reserve and family violence prevention activities through Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. Through Status of Women Canada funding became available April 1, 2015 to improve economic security of aboriginal women and promote their participation in leadership and decision-making roles.

All of these actions by our government represent important steps forward in creating safer communities for aboriginal women and girls and for all Canadians. We are proud of our action plan. However, no individual, organization or government working alone can tackle this problem. I think most Canadians would agree that everyone needs to be part of the solution. That is why the actions I have talked about today are intended to complement the work of provinces and territories, police and the justice system, as well as

aboriginal families, communities and organizations to address violence against aboriginal women and girls, which is why I find myself unable to support the motion before the House today.

We have over 40 studies, along with the report from the special committee, which have aided in the development of our action plan. We believe that now is the time for action. We must continue focusing on actions that will help our country deal with the very issues the member has described in her motion.

• (1120)

We will continue collaborating with aboriginal leaders, aboriginal communities and other levels of government to get the most out of our respective action plans. I am confident that by working together we can and we will help ensure aboriginal women and girls have a greater chance to live violence-free lives.

We know that helping women and girls live violence-free lives is not only the right thing to do, but that a life free of violence also can help women and girls achieve their full potential in their own lives and in the lives of their families and communities. That is what will move us toward greater equality in our country, which is something I know we all wish to see.

**Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskaing, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, we have been debating this issue in the House for quite some time. We would not have to debate it continually if the government actually took proper steps to address this issue.

I have spoken about this issue on a number of occasions in the House, among other first nation issues, whether it is education, housing, or infrastructure, and the government has turned a blind eye to what is really happening in first nations communities. When it comes to women, the issue is that much more important.

I will be reiterating some of the words that I have said in the past, because nothing has really changed in the position that the government has taken. I want to recognize that this particular motion is similar to Motion No. 444, which my colleague from Churchill has tabled. The difference between the motions is that the NDP motion is more in-depth and is what we think needs to move forward.

I will speak to Motion No. 411 for a minute and indicate that a national inquiry is actually an essential step in confronting the epidemic of missing and murdered indigenous women in Canada and realizing justice for the families who have lost their loved ones. The Conservative government has been standing alone among governments and the majority of indigenous communities in opposing a national inquiry. That should tell us a lot.

The member on the Conservative side talked about the round table. The national round table started on February 26. It was supposed to offer testimony to find answers and solutions to end the violence. Families were looking to the government to finally change its rhetoric and come together with its provincial and territorial counterparts to act upon coordinated solutions and finally call a national inquiry. As one can imagine, keeping to the way that it has been going down the line, the government did not listen to the plea for a national inquiry.

We have to also consider that families of the over 1,200 women and girls who have disappeared or been murdered in Canada have raised the issue over and over again and actually deserve much better from the government. They deserve a real action plan that would get answers. They deserve a genuine consultation process. That is what a national inquiry would do. They certainly do not deserve the Conservative government's action plan that offers nothing but the status quo. The member on the Liberal side will attest to the fact that that is basically what the government has been offering over and over again.

Statistics actually show that every year in Canada, violence drives 100,000 women and children out of their homes and into shelters, but I have to stress that it is where those shelters actually exist. The government has said that it has invested more money into shelters on reserve, but let me stress that they do not exist in every first nations community. We have to take into consideration that there are a lot of remote and rural areas which do not have shelters. There needs to be much more done.

In northern Canada, the problem is extreme, with more women facing abuse and fewer safe houses and shelters. That all plays a role in this. Despite quantifiably greater rates of violence, 70% of northern and remote communities do not have safe houses or emergency shelters. That justifies the fact that the government has not been taking action. A lot of the dollars the government talks about are just re-announcements.

• (1125)

When we look at the skewed statistics, the government continues to minimize its responsibility and refuses to call for an inquiry. The Conservatives claim to take the problem seriously, but their words do not match their actions, and women are forced to remain in the homes of their attackers as a result. We have seen that the issue is not just in the homes, but the issue is in the communities, as well. There is a lot of discrimination out there still to this day. That is unbelievable.

• (1130)

[*Translation*]

In spite of the government's claims that it is doing a lot for victims of crime, statistics show that just 53% of homicides involving aboriginal women are solved, compared to a solve rate of 84% for all murders in this country.

These statistics seem quite acceptable to this government, even though they show that the government does not treat all victims of crime equally. Abuse crime rates are similarly skewed for women in the north, who are primarily aboriginal women.

### *Private Members' Business*

Statistics Canada shows that aboriginal women are vastly overrepresented among homicide victims. Statistics also show that the rate of abuse against aboriginal women is also higher, and if we consider the lack of housing in northern communities, the statistics point to a perfect storm, where women cannot get away from their abusers, which is the most basic step in escaping from a domestic violence situation.

A few years ago, I went to Maniwaki. A young woman from the aboriginal community had disappeared and has never been found. Very little was done to find that young woman compared to what was done to find a young woman from another community who had just disappeared. As I said a few minutes ago, discrimination is alive and well in our country.

[*English*]

A national action plan to address violence against women and girls is urgently needed. Rates of violence against women in Canada are shockingly high, especially against indigenous, racialized, disabled, and LGBTQ women.

The current response to violence against women and girls has failed to significantly lower the level of violence they experience and cuts by both the Liberal and Conservative governments have exacerbated the situation. I have to mention that it is not just under the Conservatives that we have seen cuts. We actually saw cuts as well when the Liberals were in power. During the Liberal majority government in the late 1990s and early 2000s, funding for anti-violence initiatives and services began to be cut. Social housing initiatives, including shelters, secondary and tertiary housing were gutted by Chrétien's Liberals. Much of the responsibility to prevent violence against women was downloaded onto the provinces, for example, legal aid. The Liberal austerity budgets cut deeply into the social services that women were reliant on. Poverty can be seen through a gender lens and high poverty rates for women coincide with higher rates of violence against women.

There has been a blind eye turned to first nation issues for far too long under the Liberals and the Conservatives. It was not until my colleague from Timmins—James Bay raised the issue of the living conditions at Attawapiskat that finally some action was taken.

Even this weekend in Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing there was a rally. The issues are quite noticed, even in Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing. The United Urban Warrior Society held a rally on Saturday not only on Bill C-51, but mostly on the need for a national inquiry into the missing and murdered indigenous women.

In conclusion, we certainly support the motion, but the one that we have put forward is much more in-depth. We need action. We need to ensure that this House comes together to recognize the injustices being done and to ensure that the families can have closure.

*Private Members' Business*

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to strongly support Motion No. 411 put forward by my colleague and friend, the member for St. Paul's. This is the day after Mother's Day, and my heart goes out to these families.

The motion says:

—the tragic and inequitable issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls is of critical importance for all Canadians; that the government has failed to provide justice for the victims, healing for the families, or an end to the violence; and that...the government to take immediate action to deal with this systemic problem and call a public inquiry.

Each missing and murdered indigenous woman or girl leaves behind a family that loved her and a community struggling to deal with her loss. As a country, as Canadians and as members of the House serving our communities, we must continue to tell the stories of missing and murdered women and girls until perpetrators are brought to justice, families are given necessary resources for healing, violence is brought to an end, and the lives of these women and girls are honoured.

A CBC news database was recently launched and found that there were more than 230 indigenous women across Canada whose deaths or disappearances were unsolved. The CBC interviewed 111 of their families and told their stories, not just about the death or disappearance of a loved one, but who she was and how she lived. As the CBC reported:

Each one of those women is unique, each story is gut-wrenching. Yet reading these profiles together, we begin to see patterns emerging. The underlying causes associated with missing or murdered indigenous women become hard to ignore.

CBC reported on one woman. She was a survivor of a sexual assault by age six, and that had haunted her for years. As she grew older, she continued to struggle. There were addictions and suicide attempts, and when she was 24 she disappeared. The report recorded life after life and, while they are each unique, some similarities arise again and again.

Advocate and lawyer, Christa Big Canoe, said that much could be traced back to colonization and policies rooted in assimilation. She said:

We have to contextualize everything. We have to look at the history and roots of institutionalization of aboriginal people in this country, including things like residential schools, the '60s Scoop and, most importantly, the criminalization which has incarcerated a lot of people in our communities...

A recent report supports the idea that the violence currently faced by indigenous women has roots in the past. The Cedar project followed 259 aboriginal women for seven years. Researchers found that survivors of childhood sexual abuse were 10 times more likely than the average person to be sexually assaulted. The children of survivors of residential schools were 2.35 times more likely to be sexually assaulted.

We cannot ignore the patterns that are being repeated again and again in the lives of these women. Until the root causes are addressed, the violence will continue. Dealing with these issues is not just a matter of violence prevention; it is a matter of crisis intervention.

Indigenous women and girls are dramatically more likely to be the victims of homicide or to go missing in Canada. While only 4% of women in Canada are indigenous, this demographic accounted for

8% of female homicide victims in 1984 and a staggering 23% by 2012; that is, the situation has been getting worse and now almost one in four female homicide victims in Canada is indigenous.

Last year's RCMP report, which identified almost 1,200 indigenous women and girls who had gone missing and been murdered since 1980, crystalized both the scope and the urgency of this national crisis. The epidemic of violence must end and the Conservative government, which claims to be tough on crime and to stand up for victims of crime, cannot continue to ignore this national tragedy.

In February 2013, my friend and colleague, the member for St. Paul's, tabled a motion in the House of Commons asking for unanimous consent to convene a special committee on violence against indigenous women and girls.

● (1135)

In March 2014, the special committee tabled its report, including 16 recommendations intended to address the violence faced by aboriginal women. However, the report did not include a recommendation to set up a national public inquiry. Liberals were very critical of the report's recommendations, as well as the manner in which the committee conducted its work.

The Prime Minister's comments last summer that "we should not view this as sociological phenomenon", and his shocking admission during his year-end interview with Peter Mansbridge that "it isn't really high on our radar" were insensitive and reprehensible. The Prime Minister and his government are on the wrong side of history on this issue.

The Prime Minister's stubborn refusal to call a national public inquiry is in stark contrast to the overwhelming consensus that one is needed. Grieving families, indigenous leaders, victims' advocates, civil society, the international community, and every provincial and territorial premier have urged the government to call a national inquiry. The Prime Minister and his Conservative government are alone in their refusal to see the need for action on this issue.

In the fall of 2014, the government tabled an "Action Plan to Address Family Violence and Violent Crimes Against Aboriginal Women and Girls". Unfortunately, the action plan does nothing new to stop violence against indigenous women and girls. Instead it is a laundry list of existing federal government initiatives, many not even specific to indigenous women and girls.

Moreover, the \$25 million highlighted in the announcement is not new money. It is simply a renoucement of funding from budget 2014, which is an extension of temporary funding of \$25 million over five years, first announced back in 2010.

In February 2015, the government held its first round table on missing and murdered indigenous women. Although the federal government belatedly agreed to send the Ministers of Aboriginal Affairs and Status of Women to the round table, the federal government remained the only participant adamantly opposed to an independent national inquiry.



*Private Members' Business*

Afterward, the government indicated that the issue was one of domestic violence within aboriginal communities. Indigenous groups, however, dispute this and point out that many of the women met their fate in major cities and not just on reserves, for example, the murders by serial killer Robert Pickton. They also argue that the violence facing indigenous women has deep social roots in discrimination, poor education and poverty that lead indigenous women in to high-risk lifestyles.

Only a national inquiry would have the credibility, scope and resources to address the systemic problems underlying the violence, provide the accountability to ensure implementation of its recommendations and bring justice and reconciliation for the victims and their families.

The Liberals have long joined aboriginal communities and Canadian society in calling for a national public inquiry on missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. That is why a future Liberal government will hold a national public inquiry. That is why the member of Parliament for St. Paul's tabled this profoundly important motion in the House of Commons to do so.

I thank her for her work and I thank the families. I want them to know my heart goes out to each and every one of them.

• (1140)

**Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Motion No. 411.

I had the privilege of being the chair of the Special Committee on Violence Against Indigenous Women, also known as the special committee for missing and murdered aboriginal women. We heard testimony from witnesses and family members and, at times, it was overwhelming to hear about the tragedies, the grief and the extreme heartache. It would have been impossible to take part in that study and not be moved by the gut-wrenching stories of suffering and grief experienced by the families of aboriginal women. All committee members listened to the evidence, and what we heard was compelling.

Root causes were examined, solid recommendations were made and our action plan was the result. This is the action plan that the Minister of Labour and Minister of Status of Women tabled in the House on September 15, 2014, which was created based on the recommendations that came out of our committee report.

This Conservative government takes the issue of violence against women very seriously, and I would like to speak to some of the measures we have put in place, as well as the action we have taken to address this very serious issue.

There are three main areas in which the government is taking action that were highlighted in the action plan, again, as a result of the recommendations from the special committee.

First, we are taking action to prevent violence against aboriginal women and girls. Specific actions set out in the action plan include the development of more community safety plans across Canada, including in regions that the RCMP's analysis has identified as having high levels of incidents of violent crime perpetrated against women and girls. There are also projects to break intergenerational cycles of violence and abuse by raising awareness and building

healthy relationships, as well as projects to engage men and boys, which empower aboriginal women and girls to denounce and prevent violence.

Second, our government is taking action to assist and support the victims of violence. In particular, family and police liaison positions ensure that family members have access to timely information about cases is part of the action plan. There is also specialized assistance for victims and families, and awareness regarding positive relationships in the sharing of information between families and criminal justice professionals.

Third, the action plan highlights our action we are taking to protect aboriginal women and girls, with initiatives such as funding shelters on reserves on an ongoing basis, supporting the creation of a DNA-based missing persons index and continuing to support police investigations through the National Centre for Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains.

The Government of Canada will also continue to work closely with the provinces and territories, police services and the justice system, as well as aboriginal families, communities, and organizations to address this serious and tragic issue.

Thirty new justice and public safety measures to keep Canadians safer have been introduced since 2006. They have not been re-announced. For example, the action plan to which I have been referring makes significant investments to support the creation of the DNA missing persons database, as well as more community safety plans through Public Safety Canada, and better tools and resources for first nations leaders to address the problem itself on reserve. First nations leaders asked for this support at committee. We listened and we acted on it.

Yes, sadly, in Canada, aboriginal women and girls face disproportionate levels of violence. This vulnerability to violence can be associated with a number of socio-economic problems facing their communities, such as poverty, relationship violence and substance abuse. These are some of the root causes that we also looked at in the special committee.

As first responders to many aboriginal communities in Canada, RCMP officers often respond to difficult calls involving violence against aboriginal women, so I would like to take a moment to discuss the role of the RCMP.

The RCMP works collaboratively with other Canadian police services, provincial and territorial governments, aboriginal and non-aboriginal agencies, and the public to address the health and safety of aboriginal women and to investigate and resolve outstanding cases of missing or murdered aboriginal women.

*Private Members' Business*

•(1145)

We heard from the RCMP at the committee as well. Since 2001, a number of police task forces have been established in areas of the country where more significant numbers of these cases have happened. Project Devote in Winnipeg, Project E-PANA in northern and central British Columbia, Project EVEN-HANDED in Vancouver, and Project KARE in Edmonton are great examples of RCMP-led multi-agency task forces that diligently investigate cases of homicides and missing persons in Canada. These task forces have been successful in advancing investigations and solving a number of cases of missing and murdered aboriginal women.

The RCMP focuses its operational efforts on preventing and resolving missing persons cases through multi-agency community engagement, victim support, and effective coordination of timely and quality investigations. Its operational policy directs police officers to give operational priority to a missing-person complaint or report and to investigate all cases of missing and murdered persons within its jurisdiction, regardless of sex, ethnicity, background, or lifestyle. One example of a tool the RCMP might use is the national public website [canadamissing.ca](http://canadamissing.ca) to inform and seek tips from the public.

In 2013, Bob Paulson, the Commissioner of the RCMP, initiated the compilation of all available police data related to missing and murdered aboriginal women on behalf of the Canadian law enforcement community. Something that was requested, and clearly needed, was a central gathering of evidence and numbers so that we had reliable statistics related to the high incidence of these cases. The result was the national operational overview, which was published in May 2014. This provides the most accurate account to date of missing and murdered aboriginal women in Canada.

We now know definitively that missing and murdered aboriginal women are overrepresented vis-à-vis their proportion of the Canadian population. The numbers show that aboriginal women accounted for 16% of female homicides and 11.3% of missing women. This is three to four times higher than the representation of aboriginal women in the Canadian population.

This research enabled the RCMP to identify both key characteristics and key vulnerability factors of the missing and murdered aboriginal women victims. The overview also highlights that the rate of homicide perpetrated by strangers against aboriginal women is low, at 8 %, practically the same as for non-aboriginal women at 7%. This information is guiding the police community in its investigations as well as informing the government and partners in the development of future prevention, intervention, and enforcement policies and initiatives.

Public awareness is very important. We spoke to the witnesses at committee and I have talked to ordinary folks in my riding who are concerned about this issue and have been watching the excellent coverage and assistance the CBC has been providing in identifying cases and raising public awareness. I would like to acknowledge that effort and thank the CBC for that, because public awareness is a very valuable tool. When Canadians understand the severity of a problem, they encourage us to look for solutions, which is exactly what this government has done with this action plan.

I am thankful for the opportunity to talk about the action plan and the three main pillars of the action plan as well as the work we did on the special committee on missing and murdered aboriginal women, which was a non-partisan, all-party, comprehensive study that looked into this serious and tragic situation.

We all have a role to play in protecting aboriginal women, and I thank members for the opportunity to speak to this issue today.

•(1150)

**Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to the debate today with keen interest. I had an opportunity earlier to ask a question of my colleague, the member for St. Paul's, who moved this motion. I asked her why there should be an inquiry. Why, for example, in a Halifax courthouse, when two people have pleaded guilty to the murder of Loretta Saunders, do we need an inquiry? Why does her family want an inquiry? Why do activists in Halifax still want an inquiry, when those two people have pleaded guilty? Has justice not been served?

It is because violence against indigenous women is systemic. That is the real issue. That is what we need to get at with an inquiry. It is systemic in nature. It is both the cause of and is caused by poverty, poor health and mental health, economic insecurity, homelessness, lack of justice, addictions, and low educational attainment for indigenous women and girls. All of these things place these women in precarious situations where the risk of violence is greater. There is nothing that can realize justice except an inquiry into these issues.

I am really proud of the New Democrats' record on this issue. The member for Nanaimo—Cowichan has been a strong and consistent voice when it comes to the need for an inquiry. The member for Churchill, first as the status of women critic and now as the first nations, Inuit and Métis affairs critic, brought forward Motion No. 444, which calls for an inquiry into murdered and missing indigenous women.

This fall, the NDP had an incredible day when our MPs flooded the House of Commons. There were enough of us present on that day that we were able to force a vote and take control of the House of Commons' debate for a day. It was an incredible thing to be part of. When members have the opportunity to take over debate, they can debate anything. There are a lot of really important issues that deserve the attention of the House, but we chose to debate murdered and missing indigenous women and the need for an inquiry.

I was so proud to be here that day, to sit in my seat and listen to the first NDP speaker on that debate, my colleague from Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, himself a residential school survivor who represents communities and comes from a community that know all too well the issue of murdered and missing indigenous women. He stood and gave an incredible, passionate, emotional speech, and that was one of my proudest moments in the House. I was so proud to know that these women, families, and communities realized just a bit of justice that day, not the justice of an inquiry but the justice of knowing that there is a group of MPs on the Hill and an entire political party that think this issue is important enough that we took control that day and debated this issue, and we are making it a priority.

Why have an inquiry? We have touched on it a little. The member for St. Paul's raised several very good reasons, and I want to add to those reasons. A national inquiry could actually compel witnesses' truthful testimony and could probe government institutions, like the RCMP and Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. I will give credit to the RCMP. It has done an incredible job recently of realizing how important this issue is and that it has the power to do something. It put forward a report in which it gave us the numbers to show us how incredibly important this is. The numbers were stark, they were chilling, and I credit the RCMP for making sure that this is a priority.

A national inquiry is also important because it can give a voice to families who have lost loved ones and give them the justice they have been denied. It can raise the question of systemic racism against indigenous people in this country. That conversation can be had on a national level, and that conversation is not what we are going to get when these individual moments of justice are realized, like in the case I talked about earlier, where two people have pleaded guilty to murder.

• (1155)

We are not talking about systemic issues in a murder trial. We are talking about the specifics of an incident. However, when aboriginal women and girls are so much more likely to go missing or be killed because of who they are and the colour of their skin, it is about more than the plea of not guilty or guilty or the finding of guilty or not guilty in a courthouse.

We are not alone in this. There are so many organizations that have come forward and so many governments that have come forward. In fact, the Conservative government stands alone among governments and the majority of indigenous communities in opposing a national inquiry. They are outliers. The inquiry is an essential step in confronting the epidemic of murdered and missing indigenous women in Canada and realizing justice for the families who have lost their loved ones.

I will be proud to support the motion. The member for St. Paul's can count on my vote in the House.

• (1200)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** I must interrupt the member at this time. When this matter returns before the House, the hon. member for Halifax will have three minutes remaining if she chooses to take advantage of that.

### *Privilege*

The time provided for the consideration of private members' business is now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

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### **PRIVILEGE**

#### PHYSICAL OBSTRUCTION

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am rising to respond to the question of privilege raised on Friday afternoon last by the hon. member for Toronto—Danforth.

As the honourable member for Northumberland—Quinte West indicated, our side wanted to look into these allegations before offering a response. I am prepared to offer such a response now.

The assistant of another one of my Conservative colleagues was standing among the group on the sidewalk which the honourable member for Toronto—Danforth referenced. I understand that the staff member confirms the sequence of events recounted by the honourable member, including his admission that the delay was less than a minute. Additionally, she was able to indicate, given that she was in the process of leaving the Centre Block, that she saw the honourable member “walking with purpose” toward the delay. While I do not doubt the honourable member's statement that he was on his way to the House of Commons, it sounds like it may have been an effort to “hurry up and wait”, to borrow a phrase.

Similarly, I understand that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police take no exception to the sequence of events expressed by the honourable member. They acknowledge that he was briefly delayed, for the purpose of traffic control, in a scenario consistent with the experience of the honourable member for Acadie—Bathurst last autumn. For the same reasons the government House leader expressed last Monday in relation to the question of privilege of the honourable member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley, and on the strength of the same precedents cited on that occasion, I would ask that you also find no prima facie case in the present circumstances.

While I will follow the lead of the honourable member for Toronto—Danforth in not repeating the citations used in the previous matter for which the Chair is currently seized, I do want to make three observations.

First, as I indicated, I was advised that this related to traffic control related to the movement of the motorcade of the President of the Philippines. The Procedure and House Affairs Committee recently reported on the complaint related to the motorcade of the President of Germany. The Chair has already heard the government House leader's arguments on that report, with which I would associate myself. The honourable member for Toronto—Danforth and I will simply to have to agree to disagree about what conclusions any reasonable observer may draw from that report.

Second, this incident is not dissimilar to the 1970 incident, referenced last week, when momentary delays were incurred at the time of an arrival or a departure of a visiting dignitary.

*Business of Supply*

Third, the honourable member for Toronto—Danforth indicated that the member of the force said that her orders had equal application to every person. You will recall that a real point of consternation for the Procedure and House Affairs Committee, in its report on the visit of President Bush, was the seemingly selective nature of security barriers, with members being held back while some non-members were allowed to pass. That is not the case here.

Last Monday, the government House leader offered a *reductio ad absurdum* about what could eventually happen here. Given the report of the honourable member “walking with purpose” toward the delay, I really have to wonder if it is not that far away.

What is more is that I would observe that he waited until after the debate on the NDP's opposition day motion had concluded before rising on his question of privilege. Given the timing of the incident, the honourable member could have easily given the hour's notice required by Standing Order 48, and made his intervention after routine proceedings.

Before concluding, I simply cannot let the remarks of the House leader of the official opposition pass without any reply. Ever since the Royal Canadian Mounted Police succeeded the Dominion force in 1920, that force has had responsibility for the security of the grounds of Parliament Hill. That was the case last decade, last year and it certainly was last week as well. The NDP House leader had to be reminded of this point last Monday, and I remind him of it again now.

In closing, we do not believe this case warrants your finding of a prima facie case of privilege.

• (1205)

**Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I will be brief because we have a very important opposition day motion to honour our nation's veterans coming forward. I look forward to hearing the comments from the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam.

What disturbs me, and I raised this with you last Friday, as well as at a previous point of privilege that the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley raised a few days ago, is that it is the inclination of the government to now investigate breaches of privilege that are raised by members of the opposition. That is not its role. It is not its role to do investigations or to decide on whether it constitutes a breach of privilege or not.

Mr. Speaker, that is your role. I have now raised this three times.

Last Friday the member for Northumberland—Quinte West said, “We are going to investigate this”, as if it is the government's purview and role. This was our concern when the government, the Prime Minister's Office, brought in all of the changes without consulting the opposition or you, just rammed it through Parliament. We are seeing an increasing number of breaches of privilege that are very serious, indeed, and it is your role, not the role of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, not the role of any member of the government, to do these investigations it has been doing.

It is up to you, Mr. Speaker, to do that, and we are confident that you will investigate this and find that a prima facie case of breach of privilege occurred.

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** Mr. Speaker, just a quick response to my hon. colleague's comments. I wish to make two points.

First, the government does not investigate questions of privilege. We merely want to try to get to the facts. I think all members would agree that the facts in a case of privilege are what really matter here.

You will recall, Mr. Speaker, the member of the official opposition raised a question of privilege at one time, only a few weeks ago. When the facts were finally uncovered, that member withdrew his question of privilege because the facts contained information of which the member was not aware. Once the member became aware of that, the question of privilege was withdrawn. It is important to get the facts straight.

Second, I would again point out, for the third time now, to the opposition House leader, despite his protestations that the force, the RCMP, has always had responsibility for security on the grounds of Parliament Hill. The official opposition House leader seems to infer that the changes made to security protocols in this place and on our grounds have sometimes, somehow, been altered, with respect to who is responsible for security on the Hill. The RCMP has always been responsible, and continues to this day to be responsible, for security on the grounds of Parliament Hill. There is no change. The government did not ram any changes through. I wish that my opposition House leader colleague could finally understand that very basic and simple point.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Mr. Speaker, I am using the word “investigate” because that is the word the member for Northumberland—Quinte West used last Friday and it is actually the term that was used by the government House leader in this House subsequent to the question of privilege that was raised by the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley. It is the government itself that is saying, “We are going to investigate these claims”, as I have stressed.

I will say a final time, Mr. Speaker, it is your purview and your role to investigate any possible breaches of privilege that have occurred in the parliamentary precinct.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The Chair, as always, appreciates the input from hon. members related to points of order or questions of privilege and will return to the House with a ruling, at the appropriate time.

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

### BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—CARE FOR VETERANS

**Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP)** moved:

*Business of Supply*

That, in the opinion of the House, a standalone covenant of moral, social, legal, and fiduciary obligation exists between the Canadian people and the government to provide equitable financial compensation and support services to past and active members of the Canadian Armed Forces who have been injured, disabled or have died as a result of military service, and to their dependants, which the government is obligated to fulfill.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Châteauguay—Saint-Constant.

I am pleased to rise in the House to address today's NDP motion calling on the government to formally recognize the existence of a stand-alone covenant of moral, social, legal and fiduciary obligation between the Canadian people and the Government of Canada to provide equitable financial compensation and support services to past and active members of the Canadian Armed Forces who have been injured or disabled or have died as a result of military service and to their dependants.

Canada's New Democrats recognize this social covenant as the foundation of a respectful relationship between our government and our veterans. When the Conservatives deny this sacred obligation, they undermine the relationship with those who have fought for all of us. We call on all parliamentarians to stand up for veterans by supporting this motion.

To begin, I would like to thank my hon. colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore for the tremendous work he has done, and continues to do, on behalf of Canada's veterans and their families. His tireless efforts championing the needs of our brave men and women are unrivalled and deserve the recognition of all members of the House.

Our country has a long history of standing up for the rights and freedoms that Canadians hold dear. The men and women who join the Canadian Armed Forces know they may be called upon to risk their lives on behalf of Canada to uphold peace, security or human rights here at home and around the world. For those who answer the call, we honour their service and are grateful for their personal sacrifices, including those sacrifices made by their families.

The social covenant with veterans was first openly recognized in our country by Prime Minister Robert Borden in 1917. He said:

The government and the country will consider it their first duty to see that a proper appreciation of your effort and of your courage is brought to the notice of people at home that no man, whether he goes back or whether he remains in Flanders, will have just cause to reproach the government for having broken faith with the men who won and the men who died.

This historic covenant acknowledges that our nation and its government and citizens will support our men and women in their missions, honour their service and look after them and their families when they are injured, they are disabled or they die in the service of our country.

New Democrats recognize the covenant between the Canadian people and the government to provide equitable financial compensation and support services to past and active members of the Canadian Armed Forces who have been disabled or have died as a result of military service and to their dependants, which in turn the government is obligated to fulfill. Yet rather than recognizing the covenant, the Conservative government continues to do damage control rather than live up to its obligation to veterans. It has made piecemeal funding announcements that only apply to a limited

number of permanently injured veterans while so many more remain unserved.

While all parties voted for the new veterans charter in 2005, the Conservatives have implemented it in a way that denies essential pension and support services that veterans deserve.

In response, the veteran's group Equitas is suing the government, claiming this change in benefits violates the covenant that exists between the government and veterans. Shockingly, the government's own lawyers claim no such covenant exists despite modern legislative and constitutional legal precedent otherwise.

Let me quote directly from Equitas' statement of claim against the government, as I believe it lays out the foundation for why formal recognition of this sacred covenant is so important. It says:

When members of the Canadian Forces put on the uniform of their country they make an extraordinary personal commitment to place the welfare of others ahead of their personal interests, to serve Canada before self and to put themselves at risk, as required, in the interests of the nation. A veteran, whether regular or reserve, active or retired, is someone who, at one point in their life, wrote a blank cheque made payable to "the Government of Canada," for an amount of "up to and including their life."

● (1210)

Military experts and veterans' advocates agree with New Democrats that the government must honour its moral, social, legal, and fiduciary obligation to Canada's veterans and their families.

For instance, the Royal Canadian Legion, representing more than 300,000 members, "...firmly believes this country has a solemn obligation owed to our military members" and states that:

...the Veterans Bill of Rights must be included in the New Veterans Charter and in the Pension Act, and that a modified version of the section 2 of the Pension Act be incorporated into the New Veterans Charter, and read as follows:

The provisions of this Act shall be liberally construed and interpreted to the end that the recognized solemn obligation of the people and Government of Canada to provide compensation to those members of the forces who have been disabled or have died as a result of military service, and to their dependants, may be fulfilled.

Further, when asked at the veterans affairs committee whether she believes the government has an obligation to honour this sacred social covenant, Dr. Stéphanie Bélanger, of the Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research, testified:

There is a social covenant and this is what started the research institute. ... There is lots of evidence of that social covenant existing in every country where the government will task people with a clause of unlimited liability, and because of this clause there is an obligation to serve back.

Tragically, in spite of the compelling case made by veterans' advocates, after nine years of Conservative government, too many veterans and their families still cannot access adequate health care, pensions, and vital supports.

*Business of Supply*

In Veterans Affairs budgets, \$1.13 billion has been returned to the federal treasury since 2006—over \$1 billion. That is shocking. This money should have gone toward improved benefits and services for veterans and their families. Veterans and their families are dealing with the closure of nine front-line Veterans Affairs offices and a reduction of more than 900 jobs from Veterans Affairs since 2009, amounting to 23% of the department's workforce. That is unacceptable.

Canadian Forces veterans and their families deserve our deepest gratitude and deserve to be taken care of. Injured and disabled veterans should not have to fight the government in court for the compensation and care they rightly deserve. Canadians expect parliamentarians to ensure that our veterans and their families are well cared for from the moment they sign up to the moment they pay the ultimate sacrifice. That care includes a dignified funeral and burial.

If the Conservatives are serious about improving veterans' care, they will stop fighting veterans in court and recognize this historic social covenant to provide comprehensive and compassionate care for the brave men and women who have served on our behalf. They would also not have hastily included the entirety of Bill C-58 in their latest budget implementation act in a cynical move to force the opposition to vote against legislation it would support if it were presented as a stand-alone bill. As well, we would have attempted to improve it on behalf of veterans and their families.

This move underscores the political games the Conservatives are playing with veterans' issues, and it is exactly why today's motion is so important.

It is Canada's New Democrats who have led the way on proposals to improve the programs and services available for veterans and their families. An NDP government would end service pension claw-backs. We would reopen shuttered Veterans Affairs offices. We would widen access to quality home care, long-term care, and mental health care services.

Today we repeat the call for the government to repair our country's relationship with our veterans to one that is based on respect, rather than neglect, by supporting our motion to recognize this sacred social covenant and taking immediate action to enshrine it.

• (1215)

**Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have been around the veterans file for quite a while, certainly as long as the member opposite, and I do not recall this member raising any veterans' issues at all until very recently.

Certainly during the months of hearings in the standing committee on veterans' issues when we started the New Veterans Charter, there was not a single interjection from this member. Reading this motion, it is clear that the member has not been involved and is instead focused on some political effort back in his riding, perhaps because he is running against a veteran.

It was only about seven weeks ago that the minister tabled the support for veterans and families act. This is a very substantive act, with lots of measures or recommendations in line with the committee's recommendations. Here we have the member for New

Westminster—Coquitlam putting forward a non-binding resolution that does not even go as far as the wording in that legislation.

I would ask if this is the type of action that the member's constituents can anticipate, or will he ramp up support for the support for veterans and families act measures when it comes to a vote and maybe ramp down some of the political rhetoric?

• (1220)

**Mr. Fin Donnelly:** Mr. Speaker, I respect my hon. colleague across the way, but what he just said is absolutely false. It is not true.

I was at committee last year. I have been in committee, and he can check the records. I have asked questions. In fact, last year I asked a question about Daniel Scott, from Surrey, who lost his spleen and has health problems that will plague him for the rest of his life. The government gave Mr. Scott a one-time payment of just \$41,000. I asked the government about that in October of 2014.

With all due respect, I have been following this issue. I am not the critic for veterans affairs. Our critic and deputy critic have been doing an excellent job at committee and in this place. I have contributed where I can and I have done my best to raise these issues in the past. In fact, earlier this year, I met with Jim and Holly Scott, Daniel's parents. I sat down and talked with them and asked what I could do further, and what they want is the wording in this motion that we have finally brought forward.

The hon. member could do the right thing and vote in favour of this motion, which is coming right from Mr. Scott and from many veterans across the country.

**Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is curious that the member from the Conservative Party would pose the question to the member from the NDP about the support for veterans and their families act. I want to tell the House how cunning the Conservatives are.

They talk about this lump sum payment increasing for members of the armed forces so that everyone across Canada thinks that this is a wonderful thing, but in section 44, they clearly define who it would be available to. It would be available to someone who suffers an immediate and severe impairment from a sudden and single incident. That means that people suffering from PTSD, which manifests itself months or years afterward, would not be entitled to this lump sum payment under this new legislation.

I wonder if the member, who gave us such an informed speech, might comment. Does he have any concerns about that?

*Business of Supply*

**Mr. Fin Donnelly:** Mr. Speaker, absolutely, I have concerns. Since I began working on this issue, I have found that a number of veterans from across the country have come forward with similar issues, saying that they have to fight the government to prove that they have had a medical problem or to prove what their injury is. Some have to prove every year whether they are disabled or not, and that has caused many veterans additional grief while trying to recover and improve their lives. They have had to fight a new fight with the government all over again.

I think that the government recognizes that it has had a problem. It has shifted ministers to try to deal with this issue and repair the damage.

I just want to add what Brian Forbes said. He is chairman of the National Council of Veteran Associations, and he calls the recent Conservative announcement a “half measure”. This is an individual speaking on behalf of a national veterans organizations. He also said:

I have been afraid from the very beginning that these announcements would produce incomplete responses to the [Commons] committee and the recommendations that have been made by veterans’ organizations for quite a few years now.

There are many veterans and veterans organizations speaking out about the half measures and the announcements that do not go far enough and showing that veterans are having to fight for the benefits that they so rightly deserve.

● (1225)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from New Westminster—Coquitlam for moving this motion in the House and giving us an opportunity to talk about veterans and the fate the government has in store for them.

That fate is not always an enviable one. As several reports over a period of more than a decade have consistently shown, the new veterans charter contains elements that are unjust. The House adopted the new charter in 2006, but it is very flawed.

Even at that time in the House, we were talking about how the charter had to be adopted so that the government could look after modern veterans properly. The pension system was designed mainly to help veterans of long-ago wars. When the House adopted the new charter, we said that it had to be a living document that would evolve. At the time, we already knew it had some problems and would have to be improved as problems arose.

Unfortunately, the government did not do a very good job because only one measure has been adopted in the House since. The new Minister of Veterans Affairs announced a few measures recently, but they are essentially half measures that were introduced in Bill C-58. I will come back to that a little later.

Two or three years ago, when the House was doing nothing to improve this new charter, veterans in British Columbia had to go to court in order to defend their rights, as other groups have had to do as well. They had to turn to the courts to show Canadians that when soldiers are injured while serving Canada, Canada does not do enough to take care of them. It is scandalous.

In a case backed by Equitas Society, they went to court because the veterans said that the pension system used to be more generous and took better care of injured veterans. They used reports to clearly illustrate that when veterans are injured, they get lump sums and pensions that are not big enough. What is more, if a soldier is injured in combat and does not have a pension, at age 65 he or she ends up with nothing. A number of troubling things like that have come up over the years. Equitas Society ended up going to court to call on the government to take better care of veterans and give them better compensation.

To block this class action suit, the government's lawyers had the audacity to tell the court that the government had no moral, sacred, fiduciary or legal obligation to take care of veterans. That was nonsense. This is the first time since World War I and the days of Sir Robert Borden that anyone has dared to say that the government has no obligation to take care of our injured veterans. Obviously our veterans were outraged.

Two years ago, when the minister and the government were asked repeatedly to refute the arguments of the lawyers in charge of this case, there was radio silence. The minister let the case move forward with that argument, which raised the ire of a number of opposition members and, obviously, of the veterans themselves, because it makes no sense. No government is so indecent that it would deny its sacred obligation to look after veterans.

● (1230)

When soldiers undertake to serve Canada, they also agree to put the nation's interests before their own. They agree to risk their lives. They agree to go into battle without the certainty that the country and Canadians will look after them and their families. That is completely absurd. We strongly condemn this situation, and that is why my colleague moved this motion.

Instead of fighting it out in the courts and opposing this class action suit, the government should have made appropriate improvements to the new veterans charter and at least responded to all the recommendations made by the committee nearly one year ago. These recommendations are not new as they have been raised many times before.

The new minister is only announcing half measures. One of the committee's recommendations was to include the sacred, moral, fiduciary and legal obligation to properly care for veterans. This was ignored by the government, which did not agree to this recommendation even though it said it would accept it.

*Business of Supply*

Recently, my colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore asked the minister several times whether the government recognized this obligation. Once again, there was nothing but radio silence. The government refuses to recognize the sacred obligation to properly care for veterans. It is mind-boggling that the government continues to behave this way. We had to move this motion today to force the government to commit to fulfilling this moral obligation. I would like to once again thank my colleague from New Westminster—Coquitlam for moving this important motion because it will allow us to see where the government stands on this issue. Will it once again simply pay lip service to this issue and attack the opposition?

Because of the many questions we have asked in the House, the government accused us of voting against the \$5 billion it claimed to have invested since taking office. The Conservatives said it again not so long ago before they were caught red-handed. They did not invest \$5 billion, since over \$1 billion was returned to the public treasury. What is more, they are firing nearly one-quarter of the front-line staff who take care of our veterans, they are closing regional offices, and they are not consistently using the whole budget even though, as I mentioned, our veterans are not receiving sufficient compensation for injuries. Veterans receive less compensation than other people working in the public and private sectors. It is an ongoing battle for many of them to have their rights recognized, and now they have to deal with a shortage of staff.

The minister acknowledges that the budgets were cut too much in recent years, since the case managers were overburdened and the government is now having to backtrack and hire 100 new people to process veterans' files. There was a ratio of 40 veterans to one case manager, which was far too high. These case managers were not able to provide proper assistance to the veterans, follow up and fill out paperwork. There is often a large number of forms to fill out. The paperwork is never-ending, even if the veteran is an amputee, as we recently saw. An amputee was asked the following year to confirm that he was still an amputee. Veterans are swamped with forms to fill out, and the unspoken objective is to discourage veterans so they will stop filling them out. That makes no sense, when there are not enough case managers to pick up the slack.

• (1235)

The government needs to stop playing politics and stop accusing the opposition of playing politics when the government is the one doing it. The government must support this motion to improve the new veterans charter. We can put an end to the *Equitas* case by supporting our veterans and giving them appropriate compensation. That is what the government needs to do in this case.

[English]

**Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member opposite for his remarks. They are very thoughtful. I also want to say that I appreciate working with him on the veterans committee.

Last year, he and I and Conservative members and other NDP members of Parliament presented a report to the then minister of veterans affairs, and this report was unanimous. Members will know how unusual it is in this Parliament to have a unanimous report; it is unheard of. It was unanimous because we wanted to send a message to the government that this was what our veterans need, and we all

agreed including members of the government party. The then veterans minister said that, yes, he agreed with them all.

However, the Conservatives have come back with half measures, as the member just mentioned. These are half measures that do not go all the way, so much so that the veterans ombudsman said that, while the government was narrowing the gap, the announced changes do not encompass all that is needed for veterans.

I wonder if the member could tell the House his concern and the concerns he has heard from veterans about the half measures that the current government is taking to meet their needs.

[Translation]

**Mr. Sylvain Chicoine:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Guelph for his question and comments. He is one of the newest members of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, and I have to say that he got into the swing of things quickly. It did not take him long to get up to speed on veterans' issues.

His comments on the government's half-measures are right on the money. After the government proposed its measures, many people said that they were just half-measures. They were announced in Bill C-58, which will die on the order paper because all of those measures were subsumed in the budget implementation legislation. We will be opposing that because it includes income splitting and many measures that we find utterly indecent.

I can already hear the government MPs saying that we opposed their measures, but those measures include lump sums that will help just a tiny fraction of veterans. They will not help enough people. For family caregivers, the government announced \$7,000, which is not very much. Those are the only measures—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Order. The hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam.

[English]

**Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge the efforts of my colleague for his work with veterans not only in his community but across the country.

The member touched on a recent announcement by the government to put Bill C-58 into the budget implementation act. I wonder if he could comment on whether he feels that veterans think this is going far enough, that this is what veterans are looking for, and that this is an appropriate reaction to, for instance, the call to agree that there is a social covenant that exists.



*Business of Supply*

[Translation]

**Mr. Sylvain Chicoine:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question and his remarks. Yes, these are indeed half measures. The ombudsman said that they are insufficient, and Sean Bruyere said they were merely half measures, as did Jenifer Migneault, Donald Leonardo and Brian Forbes, just to name a few. They all agree that these measures are not enough.

The government has had several years to address all the problems related to the New Veterans Charter, which have been raised in various reports. Instead, it is proposing only a few small measures so that it can claim that it is taking care of veterans and that it will give them more support, when that is just not true. When a spouse has to quit her job to take care of a veteran, which happens quite often, they are given \$7,000 a year, and that is a pittance.

As another paltry measure, the government also proposed lump sum payments. According to Veterans Affairs Canada, that will help just a handful of veterans every year, even though many of them are seriously injured and not being paid adequate compensation. The government is still giving them just peanuts. It is obscene.

● (1240)

[English]

**Hon. Erin O'Toole (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is always a distinct honour to rise in the House to speak on any issue for the riding of Durham, which I represent. Since the beginning of this year, January, it has also been my profound honour to rise in the House as Canada's Minister of Veterans Affairs. It is a huge responsibility for anyone to serve those who have served us, veterans and their families. It is a responsibility I take very seriously and I appreciate the Prime Minister's confidence in me.

It is very special to me as well because I joined the Canadian Armed Forces at 18 and spent 12 years serving Canada, the highest form of public service, in a place full of public servants. Like so many veterans I meet, shortly after hanging up my uniform, I tried to help my comrades and support veteran families the best I could, including here in Parliament. Therefore, I want to thank the member for New Westminister—Coquitlam for bringing the broader issue of our obligation to veterans to the floor of the House of Commons today. It is not spoken about enough in this place. It is also good to see that the member is passionate on public policy items beyond shark fin soup. This is a very substantive piece that I am glad he brought forward.

[Translation]

It is always important to discuss the needs of our veterans in the House. I have spoken many times about our men and women in the Canadian Armed Forces and our veterans in the three years that I have been here as a member. All of us, as members, must work to make sure we are meeting the needs of our veterans, today and in the future. That is our duty.

[English]

Almost seven weeks ago, if I recall correctly, I was very proud to bring Bill C-58 to the House for consideration, which has a profound set of modernizations to the new veterans charter. This appears to be the first formal response from the New Democratic Party to this substantive bill. I am a little surprised it has taken it so long to

comment substantively on this, but I am glad it is before us, nonetheless.

Our government inherited the new veterans charter, introduced and brought forward by the last Liberal government and then implemented by our government since 2006. Like any substantive change to the delivery of benefits and programs, it needed updating and there needed to be some gaps fixed. In 2011, our government proceeded to fix one of the larger gaps by creating the permanent impairment allowance supplement to support, in an additional capacity, the most seriously injured; and Bill C-58, the support for veterans and their families act, recognizes that there were also a number of key measures that needed to be addressed.

While all members of the House at that time, in 2005, voted for the new veterans charter—it is a very good approach to wellness, transition, and support for veterans and their families—it did emerge that there were critical gaps noted by several groups, the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, and others, as well as Ombudsman Guy Parent. Bill C-58 is meant to address those gaps.

[Translation]

However, there is a lot of work that remains to be done and some gaps that need to be filled, as identified by the Veterans Ombudsman and many other veterans groups, as well as the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

● (1245)

[English]

Many people weighed in on some of the gaps that had arisen and been recognized in the new veterans charter. Therefore, Bill C-58 is our attempt to get the balance right. I publicly thanked the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. As my friend from Guelph recently said, it is rare for an all-party committee of Parliament to agree on some recommendations. I want to thank it for that. It was a brief glimmer of taking the politics out of this file, of which I think we need to do more. I am hoping that, over the course of this debate today, we can go back to that brief glimmer moment and try to address substantively what is in Bill C-58 beyond just the motion about a covenant that the member brought today.

I am going to go through the substantive additions to getting the new veterans charter correct.

First, the most critical item the ombudsman, Guy Parent, identified, not impacting veterans now but was a real issue for the future, was post-65 income for moderately to severely injured service members. About 1,200 members, men and women, are released each year from the Canadian Armed Forces because of a medical issue.

*Business of Supply*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Order, please. I am sorry to interrupt the minister for a moment. I understand there is some problem with the translation. I do not know if some of the switches are not turned on properly, but if the translation staff could sort that out it would be greatly appreciated.

**Hon. Erin O'Toole:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the job the translators do. I have been trying to improve my French. I appreciate them being patient with me in that progress.

The RISB, the retirement income security benefit, is a benefit on which we worked. Groups, including the standing committee, identified there was a gap at age 65 for a moderately to severely injured veteran. When the earnings loss benefit ended, an income supplement for veterans while they are transitioning or retraining, for many people who were on that to age 65, there would be a sharp decrease in their income. That was an unintended gap, as I have described it, because the earnings loss benefit was meant as an income replacement while someone was doing job training or re-education. Post-65, it is more of a retirement issue. For those, particularly those injured, who did not have pension time from their time serving with the Canadian Armed Forces, something needed to be done so they did not have a steep drop in income.

Therefore, we introduced the retirement income security benefit, which would mean veterans post-65 would be guaranteed a 70% level of income compared to the year previous, at age 64, from Veterans Affairs. That would provide certainty for veterans and their families in their future, in their retirement years. It would give them that security and peace of mind.

Another is that it will have survivability to the spouse beyond 65. The old pension act does not. The exceptional incapacitation allowance did not have such survivability to a surviving spouse beyond age 65. Therefore, it is enhanced and better addresses the gap identified by the ombudsman a couple of years ago and again last year in the standing committee report.

We also introduced the critical injury benefit, which is still mischaracterized radically by people in the House. I urge the hon. members to actually look into the details. This was not meant to be a benefit that applied to all 700,000 veterans in Canada. It was another benefit earmarked for seriously injured veterans. In particular, it would address circumstances where a veteran was critically hurt, in Afghanistan for instance. I know the NDP members know of a case that is similar to this, where someone went through traumatic injury, hospitalizations and major surgeries, but because the disability award, the so-called lump sum, which is not the only thing seriously injured veterans get, by the way, as our friends still like to imply, was assessed once the individual recovered, the disability award was very low.

The critical injury benefit recognizes and compensates pain and suffering related to that trauma and the period of recovery. It is another gap that we have closed.

We also introduced the family caregiver relief benefit. I worked very closely with military veterans families since I left the military, long before I became a member of Parliament. We all know the incredible strain on the family that a serious injury causes. We need to do more, and our government has done more in recent years by expanding counselling for family members affected by post-

traumatic stress or operational stress in the home. More recent, we doubled that. We have allowed families to continue to access the important military family resource centres after their family members leave the military.

The caregiver relief benefit helps the most seriously injured members, who in many cases will have contract care in their home for which Veterans Affairs pay. However, we all know that for the spouse, partner or the adult child, it is a 24/7 job. This allows some respite, with almost \$8,000 a year, tax free, to be used to get additional support. It might be to fly in family members so they can recharge their batteries or help with family life.

Over time, I see us doing even more because the new veterans charter actually has programming for families, unlike the old pension act, which did not really have programming and did not anticipate the wellness needs.

Also, beyond Bill C-58, we have expanded the eligibility for hundreds more veterans in the permanent impairment allowance category. PIA is a lifetime benefit. I have also said that I want to wrap the permanent impairment allowance, its supplement and the retirement income security benefit into a lifetime pension for our most seriously injured. We are moving that way. After years of howling, I do not hear anything from opposition. We are making progress, and I do not hear substantive questions on that front.

● (1250)

I have also ensured that we show the respect our reserves deserve, to ensure that class A and class B reserves have the same access to earnings loss benefit as class C and regular force members do. If they are serving their country, they will get that income replacement and vocational rehabilitation up to \$75,000 per person, if they are injured.

I have also announced in recent weeks that over 100 case managers will be targeted to specific areas of need, with flexibility built into the system, and a combination of at least 100 more benefit adjudicators to get through the backlog, and we do have a backlog. The Auditor General recognized that, and we are acting on this.

*Business of Supply*

Critically, what is in Bill C-58, which the hon. member who brought forward this motion seems to ignore, is a purpose clause. His motion today about an obligation is in many ways a purpose clause. We have a far superior and advanced clause in C-58, which he apparently either does not know or glossed over. In fact, it reads:

The purpose of this Act is to recognize and fulfill the obligation of the people and Government of Canada to show just and due appreciation to members and veterans for their service to Canada. This obligation includes providing services, assistance and compensation to members and veterans who have been injured or have died as a result of military service and extends to their spouses or common-law partners or survivors and orphans. This Act shall be liberally interpreted so that the recognized obligation may be fulfilled.

Many of my colleagues, and I do consider my colleagues friends on this, talk about sacred obligation, solemn obligation. The obligation is clearly written in Bill C-58. In fact, this motion does not even suggest that it should be liberally construed. In fact, the members have not even followed the guidance the standing committee offered last June. Recommendation 2 from the standing committee said that the provisions of this act should be liberally construed and interpreted to recognize solemn obligation.

I am glad my friend brought this motion today, even though it is flawed and would not go as far as Bill C-58. I am happy to say I will be supporting my friend's motion today. However, I and the government urge him to dig a little deeper to see that the purpose statement, the obligation spelled out in Bill C-58, would go much further and would accord with what the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs recommended last June. His motion would not.

This purpose clause came as a result of looking at what the standing committee produced. It came as a result of talking to veterans groups and veterans organizations. That is what led to the support for veterans and their families act.

At the outset I referred to this. My first day in the House as minister I quoted Sir Robert Borden and the obligation we owed, since Borden's time in 1917, when he first articulated it to our veterans. He termed the line "just and due appreciation that we owe our veterans". In fact, we have used his language to show the connection from 1917 to today of this obligation. I have termed the obligation "a tremendous obligation". Whether we call it "solemn", "sacred", "tremendous", it will be enshrined in Bill C-58, which I hope the hon. member looks into further, and gets behind and supports.

I will support what the NDP has brought to the floor today, but I would ask that it go further and join with us and pass Bill C-58 quickly through the House. I included it in the budget implementation act in case the political gamesmanship continued on this file, because I made a solemn, sacred pledge to our veterans to ensure that these reforms and new benefits would pass before July, and they will.

• (1255)

Important to note is that from Borden's time to today we have an obligation that is living in the new veterans charter. The veterans charter is intended to be living, and Bill C-58 breathes new life and new reforms into the new veterans charter brought forward by the Liberals in 2005, implemented and updated in 2011, and updated again before the House now.

The care and benefits of veterans are not frozen in time to 1917. In fact, the Pension Act that emerged after World War I then led to the creation of Veterans Affairs Canada after World War II. Therefore, Borden's obligation predates my department. That is how historic it is. However, in Borden's time there was very little done. In fact, Sam Sharpe, the MP for Ontario North, who was a member of Borden's caucus, died as a result of PTSD in World War I. He was the only sitting MP re-elected to the House in World War I. Mental injuries from service were not even recognized back then.

We have come a long way. The money we are committing and the programs we are delivering in mental health care shows that we have an evolving commitment to meet our needs for our veterans now and in the future. We are doing more for families, for mental health, for alternate therapies such as equine therapy, assistance dogs and service dogs. Those programs were not delivered in the 1950s. We also have the my VAC account. We are doing home visits. Those were not conducted in Borden's time.

This is a positive obligation on the government to constantly ensure we look to the future to meet the needs, the medical programming and the benefits that veterans, their families and their children need. However, we need to recognize that it is an obligation, but not to be frozen in the way it was delivered in 1917 or 1950. I think all members of the House know what progress we have made in many areas of physical and mental rehabilitation for our veterans and their families. We owe it to them to use the new veterans charter as a living document, to use the obligation that we are talking about today, the obligation enshrined in Bill C-58, which we have specifically said should be liberally construed, owing back to the recommendation of George Hees, a minister in the 1980s, to give veterans the benefit of the doubt.

I want to make that even easier. Let us make it easier to get to yes for the veterans. Let us look at new programming that would get them well, back to work and able to support their family members. That is what is in Bill C-58. Therefore, I truly hope the opposition members, by raising the purpose provision of the bill, the obligation, which is very important, it is a principle, dig a little deeper and look at the benefits, programs and reforms we are rolling out to ensure we meet that obligation. Otherwise, it is just talk and posturing.

*Business of Supply*

I will constantly remind the opposition critic for the NDP, who I met when I was a young officer at a base in his riding, that he is the only member of the standing committee who voted for the new veterans charter. He has had since 2006 to bring something like this to the House, but it is here six weeks after we introduced, Bill C-58, the most substantive veterans' legislation in a generation. Let us move past the politics, let us get behind Bill C-58, and pass it.

● (1300)

**Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the minister for his acknowledgement. I also want to acknowledge his service to our country and the Canadian Armed Forces. As well, I would thank him for his acknowledgement of my efforts on the work that I did trying to improve the health of our oceans. Unfortunately, when it came to the vote on the ban on the importation of shark fins to Canada, the members of his party, except for three, did not support that. That is a very unfortunate. If three more had voted with the opposition, we would have had that pass. Unfortunately, that party voted against it.

However, he said that the Conservatives would be supporting this motion, which is very good news. Unfortunately, it is a long time coming.

My hon. colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore asked the current minister, and previous ministers, many times if the minister felt that there was an acknowledgement or an obligation, and he failed to answer. Therefore, my question for the minister is this. Now that he is acknowledging this, what does that mean in terms of settling with Equitas and the class action lawsuit? Could he comment on that?

**Hon. Erin O'Toole:** Mr. Speaker, my colleague has brought the House together today on a single issue but, by that question, has shown that he has not actually done the research.

He is correct that, on my first day as minister, the hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore did ask me about the obligation. I quoted Robert Borden, and I called it a tremendous obligation that we owe our veterans. I think that would be in the *Hansard* around January 26. I invite the member to check it out.

Considering that he has brought us all together to debate this today, I would have hoped that he would at least get my first statements on the obligation as Minister of Veterans Affairs correct. We have a tremendous obligation.

The real question that I would ask him to ask his colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore is why it has taken from 2006 until today for him to bring this before the floor of the House of Commons. As someone who likes to remind the House of how many ministers of veterans affairs he has faced off against, he is the only member of the committee who voted for the new veterans charter. He was on the old SCNDVA committee. There is nobody who knows this file more, and I would suggest that there is nobody who has surfed this file more from time to time.

Our obligation statement in Bill C-58 is closer to the ACVA recommendation that the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore asked of the House last June. I would ask him to check that out, too.

**Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I remember when I was at staff college and they talked

about what we now know is PTSD in the First World War. They actually called it LMF, or lack of moral fibre. Men could be taken out and shot because they had a lack of moral fibre. We have certainly come a long way since that time. Today, we had better recognize the fact that PTSD is not only an important consequence for some people but actually quite common.

I commend the new Minister of Veterans Affairs for his commitment to our veterans. I think he still has a great deal to prove, but he is certainly a great improvement over his predecessor. However, I did hear him cautioning the NDP about, to use his words, “talk and posturing”. We have had nothing but talk and posturing from the Conservative government over the last few years.

I want him to give me a warm feeling that he really understands PTSD and the urgent need to make sure it is addressed by Veterans Affairs for our soldiers coming back from theatres of war.

● (1305)

**Hon. Erin O'Toole:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my friend for that sort of warm and fuzzy comment alongside a back of the hand. I want to thank him for his service before his time in the House, both on the sea and in the upper air for Canada. It is appreciated.

He is absolutely right in terms of the lack of moral fibre, the nervous shock, and the nervous breakdown. That is what Sam Sharpe, my predecessor in the House 100 years ago, returned from World War I with, as was said in *The Globe and Mail*. He had a nervous breakdown. Sadly, he leapt from the window of the Royal Victoria Hospital before returning to his riding.

We have come a long way. I hosted the Sam Sharpe breakfast last week with Roméo Dallaire, in part to show that we are making progress. We still have a long way to go, but if we look at our investments in recent years, we will have gone from a couple of operational stress injury clinics to 26 by the end of this year. We are looking at alternative means of support, because there is no one-size-fits-all solution for mental health.

We are also looking for support for the family. That was always the intention of the new veterans charter, to do more for families. The member would remember the old military expression from the time we served in the Canadian Armed Forces: if the military wanted us to have a family, it would issue us one. Now, we look at the family as being the core part of the unit for our military families and veterans. That is why the member's colleague from Markham—Unionville launched us on the new veterans charter route, to have more support for the family and the veteran at transition.

*Business of Supply*

We will continue upon this path. I hope he recommends to his caucus and his leader to unanimously support Bill C-58 and our obligation statement in it.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague the minister for his exceptional speech today, as well as for his exceptional work on the veterans affairs file and his leadership there.

He mentioned a number of the benefits that have been increased under the charter and under the initiative of this bill. One of the specific issues that our finance minister addressed in our recent budget was the whole issue of family caregivers. I was pleased to see the extension of EI benefits available to those who are caring for a gravely ill family member from 6 weeks to 26 weeks. That is as an exceptional improvement.

I wonder if our minister could outline some of the specific improvements we made for the family caregiver aspect in terms of caring for our veterans and their families?

**Hon. Erin O'Toole:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my friend for that question and his passionate work on support for families with ill members in their homes, both young and old, and his work on palliative care. It is admired.

We are very proud of the family caregiver relief benefit that is in Bill C-58, one of the reasons why I urge members of the House to pass it. We would provide more support for the families of our critically injured.

The goal of the new veterans charter, and indeed Veterans Affairs in recent decades, is to provide the supports to keep the veterans in their homes as long as possible. That is part of wellness, to be with their family, to be with the people they know and trust in an environment with which they are comfortable. The veterans independence program all the way through to respite care being done by Veterans Affairs focuses on keeping our ill, injured, or very elderly in their homes. We have other provisions within our budget to apply that to more Canadians, but the family caregiver relief benefit would be a tax-free benefit of almost \$8,000 a year that would give families that extra flexibility.

We are also trying to make it as administratively simple as possible, so that if spouses need to attend a child's graduation and know there is someone in the home, that Veterans Affairs is caring for their loved one, but not before 9 o'clock or not in the evening, and they need to fly in a sister or brother or to hire professional help to fill that gap, we want them to have that so that their wellness as the family caregiver for the support for that veteran is sound, so that they do not have caregiver fatigue, which we know happens.

This is just one of many reforms we have had in recent years, providing more support in the homes of veterans and more support to families dealing with operational stress injuries in the home. This is yet another reason for the opposition to vote in favour of Bill C-58.

• (1310)

**Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the minister mentioned veterans who have taken their own lives. As we know, many veterans suffer from PTSD and it is a very unfortunate statistic that there have been more suicides of

Afghanistan vets than were actually killed there. We all recognize the benefits that are needed for our soldiers.

Will the minister support separating Bill C-58 from the budget omnibus bill?

**Hon. Erin O'Toole:** Mr. Speaker, certainly the focus of our veterans' mental wellness event last week at the Sam Sharpe breakfast was on telling the stories of some veterans who have become well after struggling with post-traumatic stress.

Roméo Dallaire likes to tell me not to ever say individuals recover, because they learn to cope, learn what programs work for them. Therefore we need to tell more stories, because if anyone is out there struggling with mental injuries from service or with mental health—men and women in uniform for Canada are Canadians, so we will have mental health issues—they need to come forward because there are great new programs in which we have been investing. Members need to get behind that. That is why we have been enhancing these benefits. Bill C-58 is yet another step in that road to enhancing care for our veterans.

**Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, today's motion should not be one that has to be brought forward by the opposition. It is a travesty that the current Conservative government has ignored veterans for the length of its nine years in government to the extent that we are here still, in the dying days of a Parliament, asking the Conservatives to finally give our Canadian Forces veterans their due for accepting unlimited liability in the face of various conflicts and wars. In the shadow of the First World War, Sir Robert Borden made a covenant with those Canadians who fought, that their government would support them. On the eve of Vimy Ridge, he told Canadians:

You can go into this action feeling assured of this, and as the head of the government I give you this assurance: That you need not fear that the government and the country will fail to show just appreciation of your service to the country and Empire in what you are about to do and what you have already done.

The government and the country will consider it their first duty to see that a proper appreciation of your effort and of your courage is brought to the notice of people at home that no man, whether he goes back or whether he remains in Flanders, will have just cause to reproach the government for having broken faith with the men who won and the men who died.

Those soldiers accepted unlimited liability on behalf of their country, and the government assured them with the words made true by Colonel John McCrae that their sacrifice would not be in vain. Yet, our current Prime Minister seems to believe that appreciation of service to Canada ends once his camera crew is done with the necessary shots for this week's 24 Seven.

*Business of Supply*

From its beginning a century ago, 625,825 Canadians fought in the First World War, a total of 61,082 never returned home, and 154,361 were wounded. In the Second World War, more than one million served, 42,042 died, and 54,414 were wounded. In Korea, 27,751 Canadians served, 516 giving the ultimate sacrifice, while 1,072 suffered injuries. Thousands have served as peacekeepers, and more than 40,000 Canadians served in Afghanistan.

Most of us watched as each of the 158 Canadians who died returned home. The thousands who were injured with wounds both visible and invisible are our neighbours, co-workers, friends, and family. These men and women and their families did incredible things that many of us here will never understand, because we have not had to face the rigours of combat or the terror that we or someone we love might not come home.

I have been fortunate, since being asked to take on the role of Liberal veterans critic, to meet with and speak to many men and women who have served this country, and the men, women and children behind them here in Ottawa and across the country. Last week I returned from the Netherlands with the Minister of Veterans Affairs, where I was fortunate to speak with many of the veterans who were there at the liberation 70 years ago.

These Canadians received a warm reception from the Dutch, not just those who had been there during the Second World War but their children and their grandchildren. In Groesbeek, we marched for over an hour side by side. I was at the front with a number of others from the Canadian delegation, the Minister of Veterans Affairs, and the mayor. As we approached the cemetery, I turned around, and there were 3,000 others still behind us, Dutch and Canadian alike, who were in lockstep as we moved in memory of those who had sacrificed to accomplish the liberation of the Netherlands and those throughout Europe and the Pacific who had brought about the end of the war.

I was struck by something when we arrived at a monument as we were walking. There was an inscription on it, which roughly translated from Latin, stated: "We live in the hearts of friends for whom we died". Truly, we who live on are stewards for these brave souls. When another Canadian is willing to lay down his or her life for us, we are stewards for what comes next.

It is not enough that their memory lives on. We are responsible to make sure that not only the legacy of these brave women and men is preserved, but also their standard of living and that their families.

Gathering at these monuments is one thing. Reading the words and being moved by them is one thing. However, acting is a whole other thing.

• (1315)

There is another side of this coin. There are those whose battles with the enemy are done but whose battles with the Conservative Government of Canada are just beginning. Take Jennie Migneault, for instance, another person with whom I have been so fortunate to speak since taking on this role. We were more than prepared to send her husband off to fight on our behalf, but when he came back and his PTSD made life difficult for him and their family, the current government did not provide the necessary resources for them to confront their new reality. In fact, she famously had to pursue the

Minister of Veterans Affairs' predecessor down a hall, and she still could not get a hearing. A government that has figuratively turned its back on the very veterans who served it quite literally rushed past the families left in the wake of its disastrous inaction.

Over the course of the current government, Veterans Affairs Canada has frankly been in crisis. Information published by the department clearly demonstrated that it lacked adequate staffing to deliver the services necessary to meet the needs of veterans and their families. In his message introducing last year's Veterans Affairs Canada report on plans and priorities, the Minister of Veterans Affairs' predecessor himself wrote of the complex and changing needs of our veterans and said that the department's processes must change for veterans so that they can better access benefits and services. That very same report highlighted that the first risk to the department is that "[t]he modernization of [Veteran's Affairs Canada's] service delivery model will not be achieved as expected, and will not meet the needs of Veterans, Canadian Armed Forces members, and their families".

Worryingly, despite this advice, Treasury Board of Canada data on the population of the federal public service showed, as of last year, that 949 full-time equivalents had been cut since 2008, approximately 25% of the Veterans Affairs Canada workforce. All that is to say that last fall, Veterans Affairs Canada was at its lowest staffing level since 2000. The Conservatives may have recently tried to replace 100 positions, but that is only a tiny fraction of the 900 front-line staff they cut, and even then, many of them are just part-time. The Conservatives try to say that they are putting resources into new services, but there is nothing the current government has done to back that up. Closing the gap is beyond them.

On April 23 of this year, the Veterans Ombudsman observed at committee that while these announcements might contribute to closing the gap, "The announced changes do not encompass all that is needed for veterans".

It is programs like disability and death compensation and the health-care program that have suffered the most significant cuts under the current government. It is the current government that has squandered \$1.13 billion in funding for the department since 2006. It is the current government that could not find a dime for veterans, because those billions of dollars it let lapse, that it clawed back, went to falsely balancing its books in this election year. There are veterans coming forward and applying for programs that are understaffed and underfunded, while the Conservatives seem a little too busy getting the camera angle right.

A benefit delayed is a benefit denied, and as long as the Conservative government continues, it appears that the government is in the business of denying benefits.

*Business of Supply*

In his report this fall, the Auditor General illustrated that one veteran in five is forced to wait up to eight months for mental health assistance, and Veterans Affairs Canada is largely unconcerned with "...how well veterans are being served and whether programs are making a difference in their lives". The inability to provide adequate mental health services to these veterans is a greater threat to past and present Canadian Forces members than any enemies we have faced recently in the theatre of battle. In the same period of time we were engaged in Afghanistan, 160 died by suicide. That is just the ones we know about. As long as the current government continues to blindly accept incomplete data, which is skewed by leaving so many people out of the count, we will never know the true impact.

● (1320)

The faces at the helm of Veterans Affairs Canada may have recently changed, but the song remains the same. These men and women deserve more than a PR campaign to convince them that everything is going to change.

We owe a great deal to the brave men and women of the Canadian Forces who are willing to accept unlimited liability and to sacrifice everything, including their lives. We owe a great deal to their families who are left behind to pick up the pieces and continue their lives without a father, mother, brother, sister, son, or daughter.

The government is not delivering, and it is in large part because it does not believe it has more than a political duty to pay lip service to those very serious words of prime minister Sir Robert Borden, whom I quoted earlier. Until it is truly willing to fully embrace that duty to veterans, that sacred covenant, nothing it does can be taken in good faith.

For our part, the Liberal Party of Canada has clearly indicated its support for a social covenant with Canadian veterans. At our last policy convention, Liberal members passed a resolution confirming its commitment to the successive generations of Canadians who have served their country honourably as members of the Canadian Armed Forces. They know that service in the Canadian Armed Forces requires those men and women to make a personal and grave commitment to put their lives on the line on behalf of their fellow citizens and that they may be called upon to risk their lives anywhere in the world that we in Canada deem it appropriate they do so.

Liberals know that military service is a burden borne not only by the service member but by their families, as evidenced by the countless sacrifices made to ensure the success of Canadian Armed Forces missions. The only sacrifice the Conservative government seems to know when it comes to service missions is having to take down its propaganda videos once they have endangered the safety and security of our special operators, as we saw in the past weeks.

The Conservative government's approach to veterans' policy demonstrates an utter lack of regard for our country's obligation to those who serve on our behalf in the military. Liberals have resolved that a future Liberal government would uphold the principle of this social covenant in its defence of veterans policies and would present a government that would finally live up to Canada's sacred obligation to care for veterans and their families throughout their lives.

A little over a year ago, I travelled to France and Belgium with a delegation to commemorate the 97th anniversary of the battle at Vimy Ridge. As I stood before the monument on Vimy Ridge, overpowered by its immensity as a testament to Canada's sacrifice in the First World War, the enormity of the impact of war was made so clear. Before us stood a memorial to a conflict colossal in its overwhelming effect on the lives of all those who fought and died or who returned and lived and tried to carry on in its wake. The contrast of something so beautiful serving as a reminder of the horror and cost of war was stark.

I have told this story before, but I feel it is important. It is foundational for me and should be for all of us. Early one morning, as the trip drew to a close, I stood alone at Essex Farm Cemetery, on the outskirts of Ypres, where Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae, a Guelph native, performed his work as a field surgeon in the Canadian artillery. It was here that McCrae's friend and student, Lieutenant Alexis Helmer, died from wounds sustained in battle. It was here that he composed *In Flanders Fields*, a poem we all know, a poem that just celebrated its 100th anniversary. I had heard the words hundreds of times, worn the poppy every Remembrance Day, and now stood between those crosses.

Suddenly I was aware of a small group of Canadian high school students on a similar pilgrimage on the remembrance trails of the First World War. They sat quietly pondering the carnage upon the surrounding fields 100 years earlier and the transformation of those events into words written by McCrae. I listened as they recited the poem, each of three stanzas recited one by one. It was as if I was hearing it for the very first time. Everything was still as the last student recited:

If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders fields.

In that single moment, I understood the fundamental truth of our sacred covenant to our veterans. Our solemn obligation cries out that we must not break faith with those who died. Therein lies our sacred obligation: that our commitment to their well-being, their families, and all who return home to tell their stories is bound forever by the sacrifice of those who lived and died on those fields and elsewhere.

● (1325)

We just celebrated the centenary of that poem, yet we seem no further ahead over the last decade than we were when it started. We have had another war to end all wars, cold wars, and other very hot conflicts around the world.

Canada has taken on terrorism, yet somehow it is beyond the current Conservative government's grasp to finally and formally recognize that there exists a stand-alone covenant, including, as the motion says, our moral, social, legal, and fiduciary obligation to the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces and their families.

*Business of Supply*

The current Conservative government could start right now. It could start by adjusting the new veterans charter disability benefits to encompass post-traumatic stress disorder. It could ensure that the amount of money received is fair and not leave veterans feeling that they could have been compensated better if they had been hurt on a job site or injured in a car accident in Canada rather than off somewhere else serving and protecting Canada and Canadians' freedom.

It could start by no longer spending millions of taxpayer dollars fighting veterans seeking benefits in court and instead spend some of those millions bolstering programs that veterans are literally begging for.

It could use some of those millions to rehire any of the full-time front-line personnel it has let go or to reopen the Veterans Affairs centres in communities like Brandon, Manitoba, and Sydney, in Cape Breton.

It could start by acknowledging that the social covenant is, in fact, a sacred obligation and not just political rhetoric.

Every year in November, we see the incredible outpouring of love Canadians have for our friends and families who have served this country. Remembrance Day across the country is observed at schools, at cenotaphs, and in halls. We stand and pause and promise “never again” and say “Lest we forget”.

However, it is not enough anymore. So long as veterans have to fight their government for benefits, we are forgetting. So long as veterans have to convince officials that their legs, which they lost fighting for Canada, have not grown back, we are forgetting. So long as the wife of a veteran has to chase the minister responsible for her husband's care down the hall in Parliament, we are forgetting. We are forgetting so long as we do not finally enshrine our social covenant with veterans and pay it more than lip service.

It is our duty to do more than support the motion. We need to implement it. I know that a Liberal government will but certainly hope we do not have to wait until the fall, for our veterans' sakes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

My colleague is also a member of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. In May 2014, almost a year ago, following a study of the new veterans charter, we submitted a unanimous report on our observations and on ways to improve the charter.

To arrive at this unanimous report that all parties supported, I must admit that we watered down some of our positions to reach a joint agreement with the government, in order to present it to the minister and ask him to make the necessary changes to the new veterans charter.

Recent announcements include a very small minority of the things that were in the report, so much so, that I feel like we were swindled. By coming up with a unanimous report, we were under the impression that the government had no choice but to apply all these recommendations, which it did not.

What are my colleague's comments about the recommendations made with regard to the introduction of Bill C-58?

• (1330)

[*English*]

**Mr. Frank Valeriote:** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his question. I want to thank him more for his work on the committee.

He is quite right. Last year, in May, the committee issued a unanimous report. We did put a little water in our wine, as they say, because we wanted to send a message to the government. We wanted to send a message not just to the minister but through the minister to the Prime Minister that veterans' needs are not being met. This has come out in the Auditor General's report. It has come out in Veterans Affairs Canada's own reports that they are not being met.

We met with the Minister of Veterans Affairs' predecessor back then, and he agreed with all those recommendations. Do members remember that? He agreed with them all, but his hands were tied, and the current minister's hands are tied, because as hard as he is working, and I have to acknowledge that he is working hard, he cannot get to where we need to go on those recommendations, because he has a Prime Minister who wants more, this year, to balance the budget on the backs of our veterans. He refuses to close the gap completely, which would have been closed had we fully embraced those recommendations.

**Hon. Erin O'Toole (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my friend for his speech. Certainly there were eloquent and very respectable parts of the speech and his talk about Vimy was very engaging. Some of the political stunts in it were a little unfortunate because it detracted from some otherwise powerful statements.

The member focused a few times on closing the gap. What caused this gap? I know that the member only joined this place in 2008, so I would suggest as veterans critic for the third party that he should speak to the Liberal member for Markham—Unionville. That member and the Liberal party created the new veterans charter. All members of the House at the time voted for it. The member was not there, nor was I, but the gaps we are talking about closing are Liberal gaps. He should do some research with the member for Markham—Unionville.

That said, let us take the politics out and say what we have addressed from the standing committee's report. A vast majority of the moves have been made to fix those gaps that all parties agreed on.



*Business of Supply*

Today, the NDP motion does not even go as far as recommendation 2 in that ACVA report. Our obligation statement in Bill C-58 gets it done. Will the member support Bill C-58?

**Mr. Frank Valeriote:** Mr. Speaker, until now I was not very disappointed in the minister's approach to the file, but he now suddenly has disappointed me. I will tell the House why.

The new veterans charter was brought in in 2005 and the then Liberal government never had an opportunity to deal with it because we lost the election. It was the Conservative government that was given the mandate to implement it. The new veterans charter in and of itself is a living, breathing document that would have met the needs of our veterans. Why did it not? Because the Veterans Ombudsman said so. He said it needed to be adequately funded in total. Accessibility to the programs had to be available to our veterans and the amounts of money they individually received had to be available by not making these thresholds of entitlement to the benefits so high.

What did the government do with the charter? It used it not to the benefit of veterans, but to the benefit of the Conservative government in trying to balance its books. Had it properly implemented it, our veterans would be better off today. Instead, we have a Prime Minister who rather than adequately funding the new veterans charter has chosen, for instance, to give \$2 billion to 14% of Canada's most wealthy through income splitting.

I said in my speech what Sir Robert Borden said. It is our first duty, not our second duty, not our third duty, our first duty to meet the needs of our veterans over and above the wealthy and those who will benefit from all the other programs the Conservatives have presented to make the wealthy wealthier.

• (1335)

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Guelph knows the degree of respect I hold for him not just on veterans issues, but on all issues that he brings to the floor. Certainly when it comes to working on the veterans files and his role as critic, he does an exceptional job.

It was not talked about during his speech, but I would like him to place on the record that veterans and all Canadians were amazed at the amount of money that had lapsed over the period of time since the Conservative government came to power. He did address the fact that there were 900 frontline workers in Veterans Affairs who were let go early on in the tenure of the government. The Conservatives have put 100 people back to work, but we know there was \$1.5 billion that had lapsed over that period of time.

I would appreciate his insights on this. Does he think that because there were no bodies in Veterans Affairs to deliver on the programs, to make sure that veterans were being looked after and had access to those very important programs, because of the cuts that were made in personnel, would that account for the fact that those monies that should have been getting out to veterans, that amount of money has lapsed over that number of years? I would like his insight on that.

**Mr. Frank Valeriote:** Mr. Speaker, similarly, I want to thank and compliment the member for Cape Breton—Canso for his remarks and his hard work on this file. He has never once stopped informing me of what is happening to veterans in his riding.

He talks about the \$1.13 billion that lapsed. It was essentially money available that could have been spent on veterans, but the government said no, let us bring back into the treasury because we can maybe use it to pay down our debt. What did it do? It closed nine veterans offices, one of them in the member's riding—

**Mr. Bryan Hayes:** We opened 600.

**Mr. Frank Valeriote:** Mr. Speaker, I am hearing from the other side that they opened 600. They did not open 600. They just pushed those veterans to Service Canada offices elsewhere. Do members know where they have to go if they are in Cape Breton? They have to leave the island. If they are on Prince Edward Island, they have to leave the island. If they are in Brandon, they have to drive hours to Winnipeg. This is because when they get to a Service Canada office, the people are not adequately trained to deal with veterans. Those people to whom we have talked will admit that they are not adequately trained.

In the face of all of that, we had report after report, including two Auditor General reports, not one, in 2012 and last year, both warning that these cuts are severely impacting our veterans. Their own department's reports said that cuts to staffing, which the member spoke of, are severely, negatively impacting access to services for our veterans.

We wonder why the Conservatives have an outbreak of anything but Conservative rising from what was their base. That is our veterans, who will no longer vote for them, because they have been abandoned. Our veterans have been abandoned by the Conservative government.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksasing.

Today we are debating a very important opposition motion on our obligation to our veterans and soldiers. It is a matter of resolving this issue once and for all. We are giving every member of this House the opportunity to say loud and clear during the vote that they believe that the government, Canada, and the people they represent have an obligation to soldiers and veterans, not only a legal obligation, but a moral, social and fiduciary one as well.

Certain people have been trying to avoid this issue for far too long. It is now time to give everyone the chance to take a clear stand on this issue. Taking care of our veterans should not be a partisan issue. It should be national issue. It involves our commitment as a nation to the people who agreed to risk their health and their lives to serve their country and stand up for Canadian values.

*Business of Supply*

When soldiers agree to go to war, their decision involves a lot more than just lacing up their boots and picking up their guns. By going to war, they are giving the government carte blanche without knowing what is going to happen them. They have an idea of what the mission entails and what the dangers will be, but they never really know what will actually happen. They may never come back. They may lose a piece of themselves that they can never get back. They may be imprisoned, mistreated or tortured. They could lose limbs.

When soldiers agree to go to war, they also accept that they will be missing out on part of their lives here. They may be leaving behind a two-year old child. When they come back six months later, they will have missed out on events in that child's life. There are new technologies today that make communication easier, but these soldiers are still away for a certain period of time and they feel bad about it.

Those who agree to serve their country and defend its flag make enormous sacrifices. That is why, in return, Canadians, and particularly members of Parliament, need to recognize our obligation to them.

Furthermore, soldiers are not paid a millionaire's salary to go to war. They do this work even though they do not earn a fortune because they sincerely believe that it is more important to defend our country's values and freedom. They believe that the government is capable of making good decisions for them with regard to the commitments we make.

• (1340)

[*English*]

I would like to quote Karl Marlantes, ex-U.S. marine, who said:

When the peace treaty is signed, the war isn't over for the veterans, or the family. It's just starting.

Even though this marine is from the U.S., many Canadian veterans have expressed that feeling to me in the past.

[*Translation*]

In Canada, we train our soldiers to fight and to be the best soldiers. We have excellent soldiers who have a very good reputation and who can handle themselves in extreme situations. They are taught to use their bodies and weapons. However, they are not taught to fight endless battles with red tape, officials and the courts.

This makes no sense. We have people who were taught all their lives to fight, to keep trying and to never give up. However, we try to discourage them and drive them crazy with red tape, legal challenges and endless files. It is just incredible and mind-boggling that over the years a veteran can accumulate a file consisting of three binders that are two inches thick each. People get tired of fighting the system. In combat, an action has an immediate reaction and things happen simultaneously. In contrast, this situation just drags on. It often takes years before a case is settled. Our country has to be able to recognize that we have a moral obligation towards these people, the obligation to not treat them in this way and the obligation to ensure that their case is promptly and properly dealt with. It is unacceptable that peoples' lives are put on hold for many years while a decision is made about whether or not injuries will be recognized, when

everyone knows full well that the injuries were sustained in combat. That is not an acceptable way to treat people.

When a soldier goes into combat, he relies on his brothers in arms and has full trust in them. He knows that if something happens they will be there to pick him up, to rescue him and to get him out of there. Unfortunately, many of them have the same perception of their country when they are in combat. They see Canada as a brother in arms that will be there for them if something serious happens and that it will take care of them and their families. They see Canada as an ally and a brother in arms. However, when they return they realize that that is not at all the case and that the country they trusted is abandoning them and making them wait. When someone needs help, a real friend or a real brother in arms is there right away to help. They are there within a few hours to help when things are not going well and when you need someone to talk to. There is an immediate response. Unfortunately, in the cases we are talking about, people wait far too long with no response. They are left on their own and they are bounced back and forth. This is not an acceptable way to treat people.

We also cannot forget the sacrifice made by the spouses, partners and children of members of our military. Behind every soldier is someone who stays at home, takes care of the children, makes sacrifices and experiences unbelievable amounts of stress. They live in fear of not knowing what is going on and have to accept, for example, when their spouse says he has to leave for a period of time, that he cannot really say where or what will happen, but that he loves them very much and hopes he will come back. Imagine the stress. Behind these men there are also women. We also have some form of social obligation to these women and these men who stay at home while their military spouses go on mission. We also have a moral obligation to these families who make sacrifices every day to support people who choose to serve their country. We can never forget that.

In closing, I would remind the House that men and women in uniform often hear ministers, MPs and others giving speeches on military bases. I doubt that any soldier has ever refused to listen to a speech that an MP or minister has given to soldiers. Maybe things should go both ways. When families and military personnel try to talk to politicians, they should not react by fleeing, like the former veterans affairs minister, the member for Vaughan. On the contrary, by accepting this moral obligation, we also agree to be ready to listen to what they have to say about how we can do a better job of helping them. That is the best way to do things. It is now up to all members of the House to honour that moral obligation.

• (1345)

**Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech. She was very passionate, and her speech was so interesting. She did not mention this, but I know that she was once a member of the Canadian Armed Forces. I would like to talk more about the personal side of this debate on the NDP motion.

Can the member talk about her experience in the Canadian Armed Forces and the amazing work these men and women in uniform do? What does she think of the Conservative government's lack of interest in helping these men and women in uniform, and what might be the consequences for her former armed forces colleagues?

*Business of Supply*

• (1350)

**Ms. Christine Moore:** Mr. Speaker, all I can say is that over the years, I had the good fortune—if you can call it that—to have colleagues who talked about some of the experiences they had when they were sent on combat missions. Those individuals went through some difficult times, and some of their stories are hard to listen to. I have friends who have told me they remember the water in the river running completely red in Rwanda, because of all the bodies floating in it. When people are left with those kinds of images stuck in their heads, obviously the government and the country have a moral obligation toward them to recognize what they have been through and make sure that we are always behind them and supporting them. We also need to make sure that their families can count on us during the most difficult times to help these individuals heal and ease the suffering from the effects of their experiences.

[*English*]

**Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the House knows that since 2006 the current government has clawed back \$1.13 billion that could have been spent on programs. The government claims that it met its obligations, met the thresholds, and paid veterans what they were entitled to, yet in the face of that we have thousands of veterans begging for better payments and better services for themselves and their families.

The government also closed nine veterans offices from Corner Brook in Newfoundland and Labrador to Prince George, British Columbia. It let 949 front-line staff go. The Conservatives were warned by their own that this would have a negative effect on Veterans Affairs and a worse negative effect on the veterans those offices were to serve. The Auditor General even recited that point in his report.

I wonder if the member can comment on any concerns she might have and on the effectiveness of the Conservatives' response to the many claims by veterans for better benefits for themselves and their families.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Moore:** Mr. Speaker, most of the people who have brought me their files—three or four binders, two inches thick—started their fight under a Liberal government. They have seen two or three successive prime ministers, and their files are still active under the Conservative government.

At the beginning of my speech, I said that taking care of veterans should not be a partisan issue, but a national issue. I do not want to start debating whether the Liberals or the Conservatives did the most damage to veterans. What I can say is that they did not do enough, that is for sure. Here we are in 2015 and we are still asking for everyone to stand up and recognize that we have a moral and social obligation to veterans. That is what is important, not which of the two parties was worse. Currently, we are seeing Liberal and Conservative MPs pointing the finger at each other, instead of making a sincere and deep commitment to understanding what veterans and soldiers are going through every day.

[*English*]

**Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to join this important debate today and to stand up for the veterans of our country who were there

for Canada when we needed them and deserve our being there for them once they have finished serving.

I want to congratulate my colleague, the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam, for bringing this motion to the House today, and I would be remiss if I did not mention the vast body of work undertaken by the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, who has been relentless with his work on behalf of the veterans of this country.

Surely most Canadians would agree with New Democrats when we say that we value the work and sacrifice of all Canadian Forces and RCMP veterans, along with those currently serving, in every aspect of the difficult jobs they have undertaken on our behalf. Whether they serve at home or in war or in peacekeeping missions, these individuals distinguish themselves with professionalism and honour at every turn. Sadly, their professionalism and honour have not been reflected in the actions of the government, which has set out to nickel-and-dime veterans while somehow convincing itself that it is being nothing but supportive.

The truth is that under the Conservatives' watch, we have witnessed injured and disabled veterans having to fight their own government in court for the compensation and care they deserve. It has become so bad that during the last few weeks that Parliament will sit, the Conservatives are playing politics with veterans in an attempt to woo back some voters in October. To do this, they have cynically included provisions to assist veterans in the latest omnibus budget bill. It is nothing but an attempt to force opposition parties who support those measures to vote against them when they oppose the larger reckless measures in this massive bill.

I want to make it clear right now that if the Conservatives truly stood behind veterans, they would have off that section of the budget and bring it for debate as a stand-alone item. I am convinced that if they were to do that, our veterans would be able to witness members of the entire House working together on their behalf. However, the Conservatives do not care about anything more than their political fortunes and are therefore planning to use veterans as a wedge in the October election. In that respect, they are showing even more contempt for our veterans than they have so far, which is really and truly saying something.

In reality, the Conservatives are not serious about making the circumstances of veterans any better. If they were serious about improving the care that our veterans actually receive, they would stop fighting veterans in court and recognize the historic covenant that is the veterans charter.

What our veterans deserve is a government that is willing to work with them and respect them, a government that wants to hear their stories and find ways to repair the damage that has been done. Instead, veterans are getting some last-minute attention from a government that up until now has made it seem as if the country they served so proudly has abandoned them.

*Statements by Members*

What has to change is the way the Conservatives view the Department of Veterans Affairs. They need to understand that Veterans Affairs should be run in such a way that veterans and their families are well cared for from the moment members sign up until the moment they pass away, including being given a dignified funeral and burial. It may sound inconceivable to some Canadians that we have to stand in this place and fight for these things, but that is the sad state of affairs that defines the relationship between our veterans and our government.

In fact, it is so bad that after nine years of Conservative rule, too many veterans and their families still cannot access adequate health care, pensions, and other vital supports. Despite those challenges, the Conservatives have gone ahead and closed nine front-line veterans affairs offices. I am sure most people understand that Canadian Forces veterans and their families deserve our deepest gratitude and deserve to be taken care of. Closing the front-line offices these people worked with and relied on is no way to do that.

We knew that Veterans Affairs was among the very best of our departments and that when it came to using its resources, it did so efficiently. It was lean and effective and should never have had to deal with the across-the-board budget cuts the government dealt out.

New Democrats said as much at the time, but the government refused to listen. Conservatives have proven time and again that they have a tin ear when it comes to these issues. They would rather fight for budget lines than fight for our veterans.

• (1355)

[Translation]

We have seen this many times, and it has resulted in the Conservatives eliminating more than 900 jobs at Veterans Affairs since 2009. That is a very large number of jobs that have been eliminated, and that is very troubling. This amounts to staff cuts of 23%. These deep and damaging budget cuts show that the government's actions fly in the face of what it says it stands for. That is why many people are wondering if this government really supports our military and our veterans.

Veterans are realizing this. They came to tell us about their problems, and we did what the government is incapable of doing: we listened. That is why the NDP is bringing forward proposals that will improve programs and services for veterans and their families.

The government prefers to play games with its omnibus budget at the last minute. The Conservatives know that they have made life more difficult for veterans, and they hope that the games they are playing with this budget will deceive enough people—

• (1400)

[English]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Order, please.

The Chair regrets interrupting the member. However, she will have four minutes remaining when the matter returns before the House after question period.

**STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS**

[English]

**CANADIAN COUNSELLING AND PSYCHOTHERAPY ASSOCIATION**

**Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to highlight the excellent work of the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association, or CCPA. It is the leading association for counselling and psychotherapy in Canada, which increases the awareness about the role of the profession in all health care, educational, and industry sectors.

Through its exclusive education programs, certification, professional development, and direct contact with professional peers and speciality groups, the CCPA promotes the profession and its contribution to the mental health and well-being of all Canadians.

The CCPA is celebrating its 50th anniversary at its 2015 conference in Niagara Falls. It will attract more than 450 delegates from several other countries.

This is the largest gathering of counsellors and psychotherapists in Canada and their opportunity to share information and training techniques and to connect and network with other health care professionals.

The conference, whose theme is “Communicate, Connect, Collaborate”, will facilitate professional development of mental health practitioners and promote the exchange of theory, research, and ideas among delegates

The mental health of Canadians is a very important issue to all of us, and the CCPA is doing its part, and I thank it for that.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**LANAUDIÈRE NATIVE FRIENDSHIP CENTRE**

**Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, for the past three years, the Lanaudière native friendship centre has been organizing the *Motetan Mamo* nation-to-nation walk or “walk together, nation-to-nation walk”.

The march is approximately 185 kilometres long and goes from Joliette to Manawan. It is a fundraiser to assist Atikamekw people who have to leave Manawan in order to receive dialysis, which takes half a day every three days.

This event is a demonstration of solidarity, but it also brings together the nations in our region. It is a classic example of the extraordinary work that friendship centres do across the country.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the Regroupement des Centres d'amitié, whose representatives are on the Hill today, and I invite all my colleagues to take the time to learn more about the friendship centres in their regions.

*Statements by Members*

[English]

● (1405)

**ARTFEST ON THE ESPLANADE**

**Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the City of Pickering, in partnership with the PineRidge Arts Council and the Music by the Bay, is pleased to host Artfest and Blues Fest in Esplanade Park in Pickering, Saturday, May 23, from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Every summer, the Esplanade comes alive with music, dance, crafts, and singing, along with children's art areas and artists' demonstrations.

This free arts event will include more than 90 artists from across Canada who will exhibit a great variety of original art, which includes paintings, photography, pottery, wood carvings, jewellery, handmade rugs, stationery, candles, and much more.

This year's Artfest will include also a blues festival, bringing together the whole community, where everyone will enjoy the food, various types of art, live music, and the offerings of local artists.

I would like this House to join with me to wish the City of Pickering and its partners a successful and memorable event in order to promote, educate, and celebrate the arts, while creating awareness of the need for a visual and performing arts centre in the city of Pickering and Durham region.

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**LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD**

**Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize William Callahan of Newfoundland and Labrador, who has had a distinguished career in journalism and politics. Mr. Callahan was recognized this past weekend at the Atlantic Journalism Awards as recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award.

His career spanned radio and television, as well as print media in which he held various positions, including principal owner of the paper *The Daily News*. His sports writing and broadcasting earned him a place in the Newfoundland and Labrador Hockey Hall of Fame.

As a reporter, he covered everything from the Germany that emerged after the fall of the Berlin Wall to the burgeoning oil and aquaculture industries in Norway.

He also authored two books, as well as editing a third.

Mr. Callahan took a break from journalism when he ran successfully to be a member of the provincial House of Assembly.

While he served as minister of energy, mines, and resources, he was involved in the establishment of Gros Morne as a national park, which later became a UNESCO world heritage site, and L'Anse aux Meadows and Port au Choix as historic sites in the province.

I ask all members to join me in congratulating 83-year-old William Callahan on this prestigious award.

**BRUCE GREY MUSIC HALL OF FAME**

**Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is with great pride that I rise in the House today to recognize the upcoming grand opening of the long-awaited Bruce Grey Music Hall of Fame.

The hall will officially open on June 7 and will be located in what was originally known as the Hepworth Country Music Auditorium.

The auditorium has a long music history with performances from several famous artists. It is said that Stompin' Tom Connors got his start at the auditorium when he asked if he could take the stage while the headliner took a break. I was there that night. The soon-to-be-open Hall of Fame will recognize all genres of local music and will highlight all local entertainers who have made their mark in Bruce Grey.

I would like to congratulate Bill Murdoch, Arnie Clark, Jim Merriam, and Kevin Moyse, for all the work they have put into this project.

As Stompin' Tom said in his farewell letter, the torch has been passed on to future artists to "keep the Maple Leaf flying high" in Canadian music. The Bruce Grey Music Hall of Fame will do just that by keeping local music in Bruce Grey alive for generations to come.

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**HOUSING**

**Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in Toronto, rents have soared year after year and, without real rent control or new affordable housing, tenants are being squeezed.

In my riding of Parkdale—High Park, private landlords are buying up apartment buildings, but doing modest repairs and then applying for above-guideline rent increases that force residents out of their homes. However, Parkdale tenants are fighting back, challenging multinational property owner Akelius at the Landlord and Tenant Board. It was an honour to join them in solidarity, and I congratulate them on their victories.

Local residents and community organizations have also founded the Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust to create space for affordable housing in our rapidly changing downtown neighbourhoods. It is a model for integrated and democratic urban development.

The only thing missing in the fight for affordable housing in Toronto is the federal government. We need a comprehensive national plan to build and support social and affordable housing, and Canadians can count on the NDP to deliver just that.

*Statements by Members***CAMP X**

**Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this past Friday, I had the honour to attend the 70th anniversary VE Day ceremony at Camp X, near my home riding of Oshawa.

Camp X was a top secret spy training ground set up by Sir William Stephenson, who is believed to be the real-life inspiration for James Bond. Oshawa's Royal Canadian Legion Branch 637 is named after Sir William Stephenson.

The deciphering and communications ability of the Hydra communications facility at Camp X was so advanced that Alan Turing, who was recently portrayed in the highly acclaimed movie, *The Imitation Game*, came to study it. By mid-1944, the Hydra station sent and received the bulk of allied communications in the western hemisphere. The work made German tapping of transatlantic lines useless, and was crucial for allied victory in Europe.

Camp X is a symbol that Canada has always punched above its weight and plays an important role in preserving world peace. With CBC's *X Company*, a new generation of Canadians is beginning to understand this truth.

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**MCHAPPY DAY**

**Mr. John Carmichael (Don Valley West, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, last week, Canadians celebrated the 22nd annual McHappy Day. Each year, more than 1,400 McDonald's restaurants across Canada celebrate this day, raising money for the good work of their charity.

Ronald McDonald House Charities helps give sick children the one thing they need most: their families. It provides families with a home away from home or a place of peace and calm within a hospital. Since its inception, 300,000 families have been served by the Ronald McDonald houses, family rooms, and care mobiles.

The McHappy Day 2015 and the happy meal program this year raised more than \$9 million for Ronald McDonald House Charities and local children's charities across Canada.

My riding of Don Valley West is home to McDonald's Canada's head office. I want to congratulate and thank them for giving back to the communities in which they operate.

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**HEROES OF NEW WESTMINSTER—COQUITLAM**

**Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, every community has heroes meriting recognition for their volunteerism, charitable giving, commitment to helping others, and building a caring and prosperous Canada. Recognizing these community heroes allows us to publicly thank them for their contributions.

I would like to recognize some heroes in my community. Elsley and Yetty Foulds are long-time volunteers with the Coquitlam Legion. For years, Yetty has been the driving force behind the local poppy drive, while Elsley recently received the French National Order of the Legion of Honour, just before he died.

Brenda Miller volunteers with the Port Moody Legion and promotes local heritage.

Tally Baybic is an award-winning youth advocate for social justice and the environment.

Ruth Foster is a nationally recognized environmental educator who has worked for decades to promote environmental stewardship at Mossom Creek Hatchery.

Guy Black is a Canadian Forces veteran who was instrumental in organizing the largest Korean War commemorative event in Canada.

These are just a few of the many community heroes from my riding, and I am proud to honour them.

\* \* \*

● (1410)

**TAXATION**

**Mr. Jay Aspin (Nipissing—Timiskaming, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Liberals do not think that people earning up to \$60,000 a year are middle class. The Liberals think that people who earn up to \$60,000 are too rich and, therefore, should pay higher taxes.

The Liberals clearly have no idea of how to make life better for the middle class, small businesses, and seniors. They want to replace our family tax cut with a family tax hike. In fact, they admit that their plan has a \$2 billion hole, which we know they will fill by taking away tax-free savings accounts and income splitting for seniors.

We will not let them do this to the people of Canada or the people of Nipissing—Timiskaming. The people of my riding work too hard to be double-taxed by the Liberals. Clearly, this side of the House is the only side that stands up for the middle class.

\* \* \*

**PRIVACY**

**Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, during the debate on Bill C-51, the Conservatives' draconian attack on our rights and freedoms, a number of my colleagues expressed concern about sweeping new powers to share information among government departments and agencies on almost anything, not just terrorism and violence. We heard that the Privacy Commissioner is concerned that the bill would allow information on law-abiding Canadians to be collected and shared without reasonable cause and that it could allow the government to build personal profiles on each and every one of us.

In Scarborough and in Toronto, we have heard this story before. For the past 10 years, Toronto police have been engaged in carding. Carding allows police to stop anyone without cause and collect personal information and enter it into a database. This practice has been widely criticized, with many people seeing little difference between carding and racial profiling. Will the information in the carding database be subject to the sharing provisions of Bill C-51?

*Statements by Members*

We should all be very concerned. As Tom Mulcair said, we cannot protect our freedoms by sacrificing them.

**The Speaker:** I believe the hon. member meant to refer to his colleague by his riding and not by his proper name.

The hon. member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore.

\* \* \*

**TAXATION**

**Mr. Bernard Trottier (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, moms and dads, not government bureaucrats, should be the ones making important decisions that affect their own children. That is why our new family tax cut and enhanced universal child care benefit would give 100% of families with kids an average of nearly \$2,000 per child annually. That is nearly \$12,000 over a child's first six years. Families in my riding of Etobicoke—Lakeshore are pleased that they can utilize that support for their family's unique circumstances.

What do we hear from the leader of the Liberal Party? He wants to take away the universal child care benefit and the family tax cut. He would raise taxes on the middle class, raise taxes on small business, and raise taxes on seniors. We will not let that happen.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**CLAUDE POIRIER**

**Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to acknowledge the contribution of Claude Poirier, one of my constituents from Bourassa. This year, he received the Governor General's award for his contribution.

Claude Poirier has been actively involved in his parish's activities and within his community for more than 50 years. Young people are a special focus of his volunteer involvement. He is dedicated to promoting mental health and early intervention as part of the youth net program, of which he is the founding president.

He also served on the board of directors of Muscular Dystrophy Canada, of Fleury hospital and of the Fondation de la recherche sur les maladies infantiles, in addition to being involved with the Regroupement des Auberges du coeur du Québec and with Club Richelieu.

Mr. Poirier is a successful businessman. He is the president of Société Montréal-Nord 2015. I would like to congratulate him and thank him on behalf of my colleagues and on behalf of the people of Bourassa.

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•(1415)

[*English*]

**CANADIAN ARMED FORCES**

**Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the ISIS death cult has made it clear that it targets Canada and Canadians by name. Ignoring this threat and standing on the sidelines will not keep Canada safe. I rise today to thank the men and women in uniform who are working to degrade ISIS so that it is no longer a threat to Canada.

In fact, on May 9, one our CF-18 Hornets carried out a successful strike on an ISIS fighting position located north of Bayji. On behalf of my constituents of Mississauga—Streetsville, I thank our brave members who serve.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**ETHICS**

**Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, Senator Duffy's trial has been under way for a month, revealing with every passing day a little more about the Conservatives' and the PMO's manoeuvring.

Duffy served as the front man to help 74 Conservative MPs raise funds for the party. He did so at taxpayers' expense. It is hardly surprising that the Conservatives and the PMO did everything they could to bury the scandal. Heedless of Privy Council's warnings, the Prime Minister appointed an Ottawa-based senator for P.E.I. in violation of the Constitution.

The RCMP says that the PMO carried out a deliberate strategy to delete or change information in a confidential internal Senate report on Duffy's questionable expenses. After violating the Constitution, covering up information, and systematically refusing to answer questions, the Prime Minister no longer has a choice. He has to tell us the truth, the whole truth.

\* \* \*

[*English*]

**TAXATION**

**Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in my riding of Yellowhead, my constituents are very pleased with our government's low-tax plan for Canadians and their families. These are families whose incomes come from agriculture, forestry, mining, energy, and tourism.

We cut the GST, introduced pension income splitting, created the tax-free savings account, implemented the family tax cut, and enhanced the universal child care benefit to provide 100% of families with children with more money to spend on their priorities.

The Liberals want to replace our family tax cuts with their family tax hike, taking more of these families' hard-earned income. We know that the Liberals would raise taxes to fill the \$2 billion hole in their scheme. However, on this side of the House, we will not let that happen to families in my riding and across Canada.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS***[English]***ETHICS**

**Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's Office exists to provide the Prime Minister with advice. Nowhere in its mandate is there any mention of orchestrating cover-ups or interfering with Senate investigations, yet the RCMP found the PMO was secretly making changes to a Senate report in order to try to cover up Mike Duffy's expense and residency scandal.

Will the government cut its evasions and answer two simple questions: under whose authority did the PMO staff get hold of a confidential Senate report, and under whose authority was it whitewashed?

**Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as members know, this matter is before the courts, so it would obviously be inappropriate for me to comment on evidence that is before the courts.

**Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact is that this matter is not before the courts, and quite frankly, Canadians deserve answers, not antics. Instead of honest responses to written questions, we get excuses and evasions from that member.

To the Prime Minister's parliamentary secretary, how does the Prime Minister ensure that the people he appoints are actually eligible to fill their positions, and what criteria did they use to determine whether Mike Duffy, Pamela Wallin, or any other appointees were actually residents of the provinces they were appointed to represent?

**Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have answered that question on a number of occasions. As members know, the constitutional practice on this has been clear for almost 150 years. It is the same practice with other issues that come before us in this House.

For instance, it is not appropriate to use House of Commons resources, taxpayers' resources, for partisan political purposes. We know, for instance, that the member for Gatineau used \$24,498 against the rules of this House to fund an illegal partisan office in Montreal, and I hope that she will do her best to repay those funds immediately.

\* \* \*

● (1420)

**EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

**Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, while disgraced Conservative Senator Mike Duffy was pocketing thousands of dollars, the Conservative government was spending \$1.3 million fighting moms like Jennifer McCrea. She had the misfortune of getting seriously ill while on parental leave. More than 3,000 women paid EI premiums only to have the government deny them support just when they needed it most.

Conservatives promised to fix this situation, so why are they still denying these women the sickness benefits they paid for and that they deserve?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, while we cannot discuss an individual case, obviously our hearts go out to anyone who is in these difficult circumstances. That is precisely why our government introduced legislation to ensure that people who fall ill while they are on EI parental leave can get sick leave as well. It was in 2013 that we put it forward. We promised it and we also delivered it.

*[Translation]*

**Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, between 2002 and 2011, the federal government systematically refused women who were on parental leave access to sickness benefits. Over 4,000 women were denied benefits because they had the misfortune of becoming seriously ill right after giving birth.

The Conservative government promised to fix this problem, but its solution failed 3,000 women like Jennifer McCrea. What is the minister going to do to right this wrong?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, obviously we cannot talk about a specific case, but we have a great deal of sympathy for people in those kinds of situations. That is why we introduced a bill in 2013 that allows people to access sickness benefits if they fall ill while receiving parental benefits. That is already in place and we have resolved the issue for future cases.

**Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, 3,000 women are not one specific case. The Conservative government has done nothing about most of the claims that were unfairly denied between 2002 and 2011. It handed out payments arbitrarily and left thousands of other women without compensation. In 2011, however, following Natalya Rougas' appeal, the umpire ruled that women can claim sickness benefits during parental leave.

When will the minister fix this unfair situation for young mothers who became ill?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what we did in 2013 when we introduced a bill that is now in force. The bill allows people who become sick during their parental leave to receive sickness benefits as well. This has been a positive change. Our government delivered that. As I just said, it is now in force for future cases.



*Oral Questions*

[English]

**TAXATION**

**Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, last week, for the 52nd time, the government reported a monthly massive trade deficit at \$3 billion, and job numbers keep falling. There were 20,000 more Canadians out of work in April. There are 200,000 more jobless Canadians today than before the recession. There is no economic growth and inequality is rising.

Instead of investing in growth and fighting inequality, why is the government providing a \$2,000 tax bonus to those earning a quarter of a million dollars, but no tax break at all for a single mom?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, actually, single moms will receive the Prime Minister's enhanced universal child care benefit, which is \$2,000 for every child under the age of 6, and \$720 for children ages 6 through 17.

The Liberals have announced that they will take away the universal child care benefit. They also announced that they would raise taxes on half of families with kids by cancelling income splitting. Income splitting or the family tax cut helps almost half of those families with kids. The Liberals have announced that they will raise taxes by up to \$2,000 on those very families.

● (1425)

**Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, if the government were truly committed to real fairness for middle-class families, it could give those families a child benefit that is much bigger. For a family of \$45,000 with one child, it could be \$2,000 more. For a family of \$45,000 with two children, it could be nearly \$4,000 more. For a family at \$90,000 with two kids, it could be \$2,500 more.

If we are progressive and fair, if we focus on those who need the help the most, nine out of ten families can get more tax free. Why is the government against that?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in addition to the Liberal tax increases, the ones the Liberals admit, they have billions of dollars in unfunded promises in their plans. Just like budgets do not balance themselves, the Liberal leader's platform does not balance itself either. He admits there is a \$2 billion hole, his tax increases will not raise the money he claims, and he has not properly accounted for the real costs of his promises.

When the Liberals have massive multi-billion dollar financial holes, we know what they do. They raise taxes on the middle class. We will balance the budget and keep taxes low.

**Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have actually balanced a budget. The Conservative government has not balanced a budget since before the recession eight years ago. It has the worst economic growth record in eight decades. Job creation is down 60% from two years ago. Job quality is the worst in 25 years. New Conservative debt has ballooned to \$4,400 for every man, woman and child in the country. Now the Conservatives are against a better tax credit. Why do they not just get out of the way?

**Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, if opposition members had risen to cheer again as they did last time I

spoke, I might have thought, hope against history, that they would vote for the budget.

Our government is focused on what matters to Canadians: jobs and economic growth, with 1.2 million net new jobs created, 20% more than the G7. According to the International Labour Organization, Canada has the second best pay gains in the G20.

With a fragile economy, we must stay the course with our low-tax plan for jobs and growth.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**EMPLOYMENT**

**Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, 20,000 Canadians lost their jobs last month. Fully 1,000 GM workers in Oshawa will soon be unemployed, as will 300 workers in Mirabel, 125 workers at the Rivière-aux-Rats sawmill and dozens of workers in Matane and Havre-Saint-Pierre. Nevertheless, the Conservative budget only gives gifts to the wealthy.

Why is there nothing in the budget to boost the economy and create jobs for everyone?

**Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the New Democrats have a lot of nerve criticizing our record on job creation.

They voted against every job creation measure adopted by our government, including the freeze on EI premiums, the tax cuts for manufacturers, the \$70-billion investment in stable and predictable job-creating infrastructure, and more.

The NDP would rather raise taxes for Canadian businesses, which would kill jobs.

● (1430)

[English]

**Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP):** In fact, Mr. Speaker, under the Conservatives, our economy is slipping and Canadian families are feeling the pinch. Last month alone we lost 20,000 jobs.

With major jobs in construction and retail, Canadian workers in all sectors across the country are worried their jobs could be next, but the Conservatives keep giving gifts, tax cuts to the wealthy few.

### Oral Questions

When will the Conservatives stop giveaways to those who need it least and start to take action to help Canadians struggling to find work?

**Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am proud of the many tax measures that will benefit all Canadian families, the middle class, seniors and the disabled.

We are doing a great deal for Canadians. We are helping job-creating businesses. We are reducing the small business tax from 11% down to 9%. We have provided an additional break of over \$1.5 billion to small businesses. We are providing tax breaks to large manufacturers.

What we are doing will create prosperity and security for Canadians over the long term.

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### EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

**Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, Carissa Kasbohm became seriously ill shortly after she gave birth to her son in 2010. At a time when she really needed support, the government denied her sick benefit claim.

Some women who were unjustly denied benefits by the government have since received payment, but more than 3,000 of them have been forced to go to court to try to get justice for the unfairness perpetrated by the government.

Why are the Conservatives refusing to give women like Carissa Kasbohm the benefits they paid for, the benefits they need to support their families?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our hearts go out to any family in these difficult circumstances. That is why, in 2013, our government brought forward the Helping Families in Need Act to ensure that parents who fell ill during their parental claim could receive their sickness benefits.

As the matter in question is before the courts, it would be inappropriate to comment. We have delivered results for all future cases by passing the Helping Families in Need Act.

**Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, what about the 3,000? The Conservatives always have money for their wealthy friends, but nothing for Canadians in need.

The Conservatives just do not seem able to grasp that the money in the EI account does not belong to them; it belongs to Canadians. Fewer than four in ten unemployed Canadians get EI benefits, yet instead of improving access, the Conservatives are raiding the account to pay for tax cuts for the wealthy.

Why are the Conservatives giving the rich the benefits they do not need and leaving unemployed Canadians to fend for themselves, 3,000 of them?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our hearts go out to anybody who finds himself or herself in these difficult circumstances. That is why back in 2013, we introduced the Helping Families in Need Act. This act will ensure

that people who fall ill while they are collecting parental leave can also get sickness benefits.

[Translation]

**Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, 20,000 workers lost their jobs in April. Meanwhile, 1.3 million Quebecers and Canadians are already unemployed. They contributed to the employment insurance fund every payday, but fewer than four in ten unemployed Canadians will get benefits when they need them. Why? It is because the Conservatives, like the Liberals before them, are looting the EI fund to give gifts to their friends rather than giving unemployed workers the insurance they paid for.

When will the Conservatives stop misappropriating EI contributions to write cheques for the rich?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is wrong. What he said is not accurate. The reality is that the employment insurance fund will be balanced in the medium term. During the recession, there was a deficit in the fund. Now, that deficit is being paid back. However, we are going to decrease contributions in 2017 to reduce costs for businesses and workers. That will create jobs.

The NDP wants to increase contributions, which will kill jobs.

\* \* \*

• (1435)

[English]

### NATIONAL DEFENCE

**Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, less than a week after creating a security breach and sparking a political fiasco by posting videos showing Canadian special forces, the Prime Minister's office has posted yet another video, with footage showing the faces of soldiers. Apparently, DND approved this video. Of course, we have heard that before.

Could the minister tell us this? Is it or is it not the government's policy to protect the identities of our forces for security reasons, or is this a standard that applies only to journalists but not the Prime Minister's propaganda videos?

**Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member is quite correct. The latest videos that he referenced have been approved by National Defence.

[Translation]

**Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, that makes twice in one week that the Prime Minister's Office released videos that compromise our soldiers' safety. Apparently, no one at the PMO learned from those mistakes because the new images are almost identical to the ones that had to be removed last week.

*Oral Questions*

We seriously question the Conservatives' priorities. The safety of our soldiers is beyond price. Are the Conservatives really prepared to do anything to get a good photo op for the Prime Minister?

[*English*]

**Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Again, Mr. Speaker, as I just said, National Defence has reviewed these videos and has approved them for viewing.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**VETERANS**

**Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, when people decide to join the armed forces to serve their country, they expect to get their government's support once that service is completed. It is a pact that every member of the armed forces has with their government. However, after fighting in service, our veterans have to keep fighting against their government, this time to get the compensation and services to which they are entitled.

If the government plans to support our motion, in what tangible way does it plan to honour our obligations to our veterans?

[*English*]

**Hon. Erin O'Toole (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, being on the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, we have before the House Bill C-58, which is the most substantive set of reforms to veterans' benefits and programs in a generation. We have the retirement income security benefit, the critical injury benefit, the family caregiver relief benefit, on top of improvements to permanent impairment allowance, and our commitment to top up case managers and processing for disability benefits. We are moving at a furious pace to address these needs.

Bill C-58 has a purpose statement, which outlines the obligation we owe to the men and women who served us. I truly hope that by bringing this motion today, the New Democrats will also move forward and support Bill C-58 in the House.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, 10 times we have asked the question if there is a social obligation to care for veterans and 10 times we have not received an answer.

My question for the Minister of Veterans Affairs is this. Ernest Campbell, a 78-year-old veteran in Nova Scotia, was denied access to Camp Hill Hospital even though there were empty beds in that hospital, like there are empty beds across the country for modern-day veterans. The federal government will not pay for his medical care as it does for World War II and Korean veterans.

Will the minister now allow the heroes of our country, like Ernest Campbell, the opportunity to go into Camp Hill, paid for by the federal government?

**Hon. Erin O'Toole (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as the member well knows, in the 1960s and 1970s as the provinces stood up their health care systems, the federal government transferred the Veterans Affairs hospitals to the provinces. What he does know is that any veterans injured in the line of duty for Canada

will have their health care and long-term care paid for by the federal government. We do that through contract beds with the provinces.

The real question is, since Camp Hill, which I have enjoyed touring on occasion, transferred to the provincial government in 1977, did the member lobby the NDP government that owns that facility to grant access to those beds?

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[*Translation*]

**TAXATION**

**Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, let us make one thing clear right now. Doubling the contribution limit for TFSAs will do nothing for 93% of Canadians. The Conservatives want to pass that problem on to our grandchildren. Only 7% of Canadians make the \$5,500 maximum contribution to TFSAs.

Instead, the Liberal Party is suggesting a 7% tax cut for the middle class and a simple, generous and tax-free program that will give money back to nine out of ten families.

Why are the Conservatives against a tax cut and a plan to give money back to 90% of Canadian families?

• (1440)

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, almost two-thirds of people who max out their tax-free savings accounts earn less than \$60,000 a year.

The Liberals believe that people who earn less than \$60,000 a year are too rich and should be taxed more. The Liberals also want to cancel income splitting for families. That will increase taxes for about 50% of families with children. Finally, there is an enormous gap of billions of dollars in their plan. They will have to increase taxes even more than what they are calling for at this time to fill that gap.

[*English*]

**Ms. Eve Adams (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, doubling the TFSA limit to \$10,000 gives another expensive tax break to the rich. The middle class will pay for the tax break and when the program becomes completely unaffordable, the Minister of Finance says our future grandchildren can figure it out.

Only 7% of Canadians could contribute the TFSA limit in 2013 and the number has gotten smaller each year. Why would the Conservative government increase the TFSA limit at a cost of billions of dollars in the years ahead instead of trying to help the middle class and those working so hard to join it?

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, that Liberal member campaigned vigorously in favour of doubling the tax-free savings account. She went to door after door promising voters that if she were elected, she would double the tax-free savings account to give people more of their money to save for a brighter future. Some 60% of those who maximized their TFSAs earn less than \$60,000 a year. She made a solemn promise to help lower their taxes. Why is she promising now to raise taxes on those very same people?

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**EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, even though the Conservative government continues to waste money on those inane television ads especially during the playoffs here, it refused to settle EI benefits with sick moms in this country. One such mom, Jennifer McCrea, was diagnosed with breast cancer and underwent a double mastectomy. She was refused her sick EI benefits. She went to her MP, who just happens to be the Prime Minister, who did nothing for her.

Why did the Prime Minister not just go to his chief of staff and say, “Nigel, could you fix this for me? Could you make it good to go?” He has done that before.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, obviously our hearts go out to all the families who are in circumstances such as these. That is why in 2013, our government brought in the Helping Families in Need Act, that ensures that parents who fall ill while they are on parental leave can actually access sickness benefits.

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*[Translation]***ETHICS**

**Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, we are learning a little bit more about the saga of the activities of the Prime Minister's Office.

Canadians expect the Prime Minister's Office to work on government issues, for example, on their behalf. However, in 2012, some members of the Prime Minister's Office were instead working on handling the Senate scandal.

Did the Prime Minister task his staff to look after Senate business?

*[English]*

**Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I just said, this case is before the courts. It would obviously be very inappropriate for me to comment on evidence that is before the courts.

As I said, it is equally inappropriate to use taxpayers' resources for partisan political purposes, like the member for Gatineau who used \$24,498 that was supposed to be spent in her riding but funnelled it to an illegal office in Montreal. I hope that she and the other 67

members of the NDP caucus will do the right thing and pay that money back.

*[Translation]*

**Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, not only did the Prime Minister's Office stay well informed, but it also decided to intervene. First, the Prime Minister's staff got its hands on a so-called confidential report. Then, the staff tried to alter the findings to protect the reputation of his good friend Mr. Duffy.

Can the Prime Minister tell us why he let members of his office tamper with the Senate's files?

● (1445)

**Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, once again, this case is before the court. It would be inappropriate for me to comment.

*[English]*

As I just said, it is inappropriate to use House of Commons or taxpayers' resources for partisan political purposes. We know, for example, the member for Rivière-du-Nord used over \$25,000 destined for his riding. He in fact funnelled it to an illegal office in Montreal. He should pay that money back, do the right thing for himself and his constituents and pay the money he used against the rules of this House.

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in trying to deflect for the Prime Minister, the member has been making a mockery out of question period. No wonder. This is a government that is under siege. The appointment of senators is the sole responsibility of the Prime Minister, yet they cannot seem to give a single credible response.

We will try this. What is the criteria the Prime Minister uses to ensure that the people he appoints to the Senate are actually eligible to sit there? Would the parliamentary secretary answer or explain to Canadians why he is so desperate to stonewall for his Prime Minister?

**Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I have said on a number of occasions, the constitutional practice on this is very clear and has been so for close to 150 years. Other issues, of course, are before the courts so we are not going to make a comment on evidence that is before the courts.

I do not want to do what the member opposite, the member for Timmins—James Bay was accused of doing by the boundary reform commission for his inappropriate involvement in that process. That was inappropriate. It would be inappropriate for us to comment on evidence before the court. We will not do it.

However, as I said earlier, it would be nice if they did the right thing and repaid the \$2.7 million that they owe taxpayers.

*Oral Questions***HEALTH**

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, well, the feeble excuses of my friend. If the constitutional requirements have been clear for 150 years, why is the Prime Minister afraid to stand in the House and explain them? The member has not only interfered with the works of question period, but now he is using his role to block information coming out through parliamentary written questions.

Canadians have a right to know why the Prime Minister ignored 150 years of constitutional requirements. This is not an issue before the courts. Can the parliamentary secretary put aside the attempt to protect the Prime Minister and tell the truth about what went down in the Prime Minister's Office?

**Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I said, the constitutional practice on this is clear for almost 150 years.

However, when it comes to talking about the truth, one of the sacred responsibilities we have as members of Parliament is when we campaign, and we campaign on an issue, it is then to respect that when we come into the House. The member for Timmins—James Bay turned his back on his constituents, voted against them and then tried to inappropriately involve himself in the boundary review commission because he knew he was in trouble. He tried to get them out of his riding as opposed to respecting them and voting for them. I will never do that and I suspect no one on this side of the House would ever treat their constituents the way he has.

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**FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

**Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canada is unequivocal in its support for the people of Ukraine and Ukraine's territorial integrity. We will never, ever accept its invasion of Eastern Ukraine or the annexation of its sovereign territory. This is precisely why Canada continues to have the strongest sanctions regime in the world and why we have made significant contributions to NATO's Ukrainian assurance measures.

My question is for the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. What further action has the government taken to show our support for the people of Ukraine?

**Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Consular, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I need to say thank you to the member for Etobicoke Centre for his consistent support for the people of Ukraine.

Since the Minsk agreement we have seen hundreds of attacks on Ukrainian forces by Putin-backed groups. This is cause for serious concern. Recently, we announced that Canada will contribute \$1.2 million to Ukraine's ministry of defence to improve its medical systems. We are also transferring non-lethal equipment in the form of 1,600 tactical medical kits. Some of these kits were provided to some 100 Ukrainian soldiers this past weekend.

President Poroshenko has said such equipment is saving the lives of his people. Make no mistake, Canada and our government will stand with Ukraine against Putin's aggression.

**Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it has been over five months since this House unanimously agreed to provide full support to thalidomide survivors. They are fed up with the current government's failure to make detailed commitments, so they now say they are going to be forced to return to Ottawa on May 25.

Survivors like Bernadette Bainbridge need immediate answers so they can plan their futures and start receiving the support they so desperately need now. However, they cannot do that as long as the current minister keeps hiding behind vague promises.

Will the government provide them with clear answers before the May 25 deadline?

● (1450)

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, of course this tragic event from the 1960s reminds us how important drug safety is and, of course, there was deep pain and suffering inflicted on the thalidomide survivors. We cannot undo that pain and suffering, but what the government has done is provide a lump sum payment already. There is \$125,000 tax free. We are in the process of negotiating the remainder, which is going to be \$180 million for fewer than 100 survivors. That will ensure that they have ongoing yearly support. Of course, there is an extraordinary medical assistance fund that will also be available.

[Translation]

**Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, victims have waited long enough. Every day their health deteriorates. It has been more than five months since the government supported our motion to compensate thalidomide victims.

After giving some hope to victims who have waited 50 years, the Conservatives have now forgotten them again. Supporting the motion is not enough. It is high time for the government to give us details on the compensation.

Does the government at least understand how its lax attitude affects victims?

[English]

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we do agree that it is time, and that is why each survivor got \$125,000 in an immediate tax-free payment. We are committed to providing ongoing support to them. There is \$180 million that has been designated for ongoing support for fewer than 100 people. Of course, there is going to be an extraordinary medical assistance fund. Again, we are committed to doing the right thing and we are moving forward in due process and haste.

**Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, Canada is one of the few G7 countries without a national dementia strategy, and the number of Canadians with dementia will double over the next 15 years. Canada needs a dementia plan now.

### Oral Questions

However, many Conservatives, including the Minister of Health, voted against my bill to create a national dementia strategy. A Liberal member's failure to stand up sealed the bill's fate.

Why are the Conservatives and the Liberals ignoring the looming crisis? Why did they not support this important bill?

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the health minister has been working in good haste with the provinces to develop a pan-Canadian strategy. What is really important is the research that is going to be done that the federal government is responsible for. We have \$1 billion in neuroscience since 2006. We have 400 research projects investigating dementia this year alone.

In partnership with the provinces and territories, we are moving. I believe it is an important issue and we need to get to some good solutions. Research is an important process forward.

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### FISHERIES AND OCEANS

**Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Federal Court has ruled that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans has not lived up to its responsibility to protect wild salmon. The court found DFO rules failed to prevent diseases from being transferred from fish farms into open ocean, raising the risk of our wild salmon economy that supports thousands of jobs throughout British Columbia.

Why did the Conservatives leave open regulatory loopholes that put salmon at risk for so long, and when will they finally close them?

**Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canada's aquaculture system is one of the most rigorous in the world. Fish-farming licences are subject to thorough review and oversight as well as stringent regulations to protect our aquatic species.

The recent court decisions deal with two subsections of one licence condition associated with aquaculture facilities in B.C. We are currently reviewing the decision and the member opposite should be aware it is inappropriate to comment further at this time.

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### HEALTH

**Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, five months ago this House voted unanimously for full compensation to the victims of thalidomide. There were 97 of them. They asked for a \$250,000 lump sum and an annual pension of \$75,000 to \$150,000 depending on disability. To date, they have been given half the lump sum and zero for annual living expenses.

Since that broken promise, three victims have died. The minister's answer is she is working hard. Well, people are hurting hard. Will she give them the help they need now?

•(1455)

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I find it a little ironic. This member was part of the government for 13 years. They did nothing. We have a motion in this

House. We have moved forward. We have given \$125,000 immediately, tax free, and we are committed to having a solution that is going to serve these victims into the future.

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### TELECOMMUNICATIONS

**Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, 250 metres from an elementary school in a Charlottetown neighbourhood is a range lighthouse owned by Fisheries and Oceans. It is of questionable structural integrity, yet DFO has allowed for the construction of a cell phone tower on it. Industry Canada's rules do not require that residents be consulted, and they were not.

This is not an isolated incident. Industry Canada's broad exemptions ignore the concerns of communities right across Canada. The Minister of Fisheries and Oceans could have said no. She still can. For once, will she listen to Prince Edward Islanders?

**Hon. Ed Holder (Minister of State (Science and Technology), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member opposite for his question.

Let me say very clearly that Canadians across this country deserve a say in how their cell phone tower locations are identified in communities all across the country, including in Prince Edward Island. The new cell tower rules we put in place will ensure that homeowners and municipal governments are at the forefront of the tower placement process by ensuring that they are all consulted on all new towers.

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, many families in my riding of Scarborough—Rouge River rely on OMNI television for their Canadian programming in their language. OMNI tells stories in which many Canadians of diverse backgrounds can see themselves and their communities represented, but recent cuts announced mean that OMNI will no longer be able to do any of its own news gathering.

What will the government do to ensure that these Canadians have access to media that covers their stories and keeps them informed about what is happening in Canada in their own language?

**Hon. Shelly Glover (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, of course, our hearts go out to those who are affected by this decision, but this is a decision made by a private broadcaster. When it comes to the government, we have demonstrated time and time again our support for many of the languages across this country. We will continue to do that, but I would suggest that this member pose that question to the private broadcaster.

*Oral Questions*

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, OMNI news was a key link for many new Canadians to each other, to their culture, to Canada, and to the Canadian way of life. Punjabi speakers in Surrey and across Canada are in shock.

News in Punjabi, Cantonese, or Mandarin engages new Canadians in our democracy. It builds bridges between our diverse cultures. OMNI's role is to foster multiculturalism. These cuts undermine the mandate the CRTC has given OMNI.

How will the government ensure that new Canadians who relied on OMNI stay connected and informed?

**Hon. Shelly Glover (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome that member to the issue. We have been saying over and over again that there is a serious change in the broadcasting industry, in the media environment, that requires adaptation. This is, in fact, one of those decisions made by a private broadcaster because of the changes in the media environment.

We sympathize very much with those who have been affected by this decision, but our government will continue to support languages and those cultural communities through some of our programs through Canadian Heritage, like our building communities through arts and heritage program that supports many of the festivals, et cetera, that provide these opportunities across the country.

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**TAXATION**

**Ms. Joan Crockatt (Calgary Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, families in my riding of Calgary Centre are excited about the family tax cut and the universal child care benefit, but they have questions. Will the Minister of State for Social Development please tell the House how families apply and what the new deadlines are so they can get their cheques this summer?

**Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, one thing families should know across this country is that if the Liberals had the chance, they would cut the universal child care benefit. They think that families would spend that money on beer and popcorn. We know the NDP would also cut it, because they believe that only certain families deserve support. We believe that all families with children deserve support, and that is why we are delivering on the family tax cut and the expanded and enhanced universal child care benefit.

Families, about 200,000 of them, do need to apply. We have extended that date to May 15 so that they can apply. They will receive the benefit, because it is their money. We believe on this side of the House that Canadians deserve the benefits they should be getting.

\* \* \*

•(1500)

[Translation]

**FORESTRY INDUSTRY**

**Ms. Lise St-Denis (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, more layoffs have hit the forestry industry in Mauricie.

More than 300 jobs were cut last week when the Resolute Forest Products plant shut down in Rivière-aux-Rats.

In light of this closing and of the closing of the plant in Grand-Mère a short time ago, does the government agree that it is important to create a national policy on the harvesting, processing and use of wood?

[English]

**Mrs. Kelly Block (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government's balanced budget will continue to create jobs and grow our economy. We will continue to make targeted investments in research and development along with expanding and diversifying our exports to new and emerging markets.

However, do not take my word for it. The Forest Products Association of Canada has applauded our budget for its job creation measures.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**CANADA POST**

**Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the City of Gatineau recently passed a resolution calling for a moratorium on the installation of community mailboxes. My constituents are outraged by the lack of public consultation and by the fact that Canada Post is acting unilaterally without taking into account municipal realities. Over 500 cities have now condemned Canada Post's attitude.

Will the government finally listen to what cities, including Gatineau, are asking for, or will it keep forcing people to use community mailboxes?

[English]

**Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canada Post has a five-point plan to ensure that it returns to self-sufficiency. One part of that is to convert the last remaining one-third of Canadian households to community mailboxes. In doing this work, it is expected to work with the municipalities in siting and take into consideration the concerns of the people who will be having this change. We expect that it will do that in a very thoughtful manner.

In terms of the number of municipalities, it is very clear that the resolution that was attempted to be passed at the Federation of Canadian Municipalities failed miserably with respect to taking us to task for these decisions.

*Routine Proceedings***EMPLOYMENT**

**Mr. John Barlow (MacLeod, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canada needs more than one million new skilled workers over the next decade. Unfortunately, there are still many young people who are looking for jobs.

Can the Minister of Employment and Social Development update the House on what our government is doing to ensure that young Canadians have every opportunity to receive the skills they need for the good, high-paying, quality jobs that are available?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, for years, limousine Liberals and champagne socialists turned their noses up at the trades. When we took office, there were not programs to help young people get into the skilled trades. There were plenty of grants for university, but none for apprentices, so we brought in the Canada apprentice grant. We have given out half a million of these grants that help young people get their skills and get their ticket so they can practise in 57 Red Seal trades that are in extremely high demand.

We are going to need one million skilled workers over the next seven years, and our government is giving the grants to the young people to fill those jobs.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**MARINE TRANSPORTATION**

**Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the St. Lawrence is more than a waterway. It is a great conduit of Quebec's history and development, but the federal government could not care less about it.

For example, in Beauharnois, the wreck of the *Kathryn Spirit* has been on the verge of splitting open since 2011, but nothing is being done. Supertankers are docking at the Tracy terminal even though ships one-tenth their size have broken their moorings during loading. Moreover, neither safety at the handling facilities nor the storm lines are up to standard.

Will the Minister of Transport finally do something to protect the river, make up for the federal government's blatant carelessness and step up to her marine transportation responsibilities—

**The Speaker:** Order. The hon. Minister of Transport.

[English]

**Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this government is very proud of its work and its history with respect to the St. Lawrence Seaway. It is an incredibly important lifeline into the heart of Canada's hinterland, and indeed, it allows us to move goods in a very efficient manner all the way into the United States from the ports in the Great Lakes.

Of course we look after it. We invest heavily with respect to the St. Lawrence Seaway and all of the ports along the river as well. Montreal, Quebec, and Trois-Rivières have all seen significant investment by this government, and we will continue to make sure that we look out for their best interests.

● (1505)

**FISHERIES AND OCEANS**

**Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Ind.):** Mr. Speaker, last Friday afternoon, inshore crab fishers in areas 8A and 9A were informed that they must relocate their crab pots from specific coordinates this week to make way for the laying of a subsea cable. These fishers are concerned about the potential damage to the environment and to the crab habitat. The timing could not be worse. It is halfway through the season. Some crab are spawning, and the potential destruction to gear could be costly.

Could the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans act immediately to stop this cable from being laid on the ocean floor while there are pots in the water, and will she share the information DFO has on the potential destruction of the crab habitat?

**Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will look into the matter and get back to the member promptly.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**EMPLOYMENT**

**Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, Ind.):** Mr. Speaker, the government claims that the changes to the temporary foreign worker program do not affect the farming sector. However, the Fondation des entreprises en recrutement de main-d'oeuvre agricole étrangère tells us that processing companies are having to dramatically reduce the number of foreign workers they hire and that the maximum stay for Guatemalan workers, who make up half the foreign agricultural workers in Quebec, has been reduced from 48 months to 24 months.

Does the minister realize that these measures are truly hurting Quebec's agri-food sector and consumers, who will have to foot the bill at the end of the day?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, a special temporary foreign worker program already exists for the farming industry. The farming industry aside, we want Quebeckers to be first in line for jobs in Quebec, and we will never allow the temporary foreign worker program to replace Quebec workers. Quebeckers are our priority. Quebeckers first, Quebeckers above all.

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**ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

[English]

**GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS**

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's responses to 34 petitions.



*Routine Proceedings***COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**

## PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

**Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the following reports from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts: the 17th report, on Chapter 5, Support to the Automotive Sector, of the Fall 2014 report of the Auditor General of Canada, and the 18th report, on Main Estimates 2015-16, Vote 1, under Auditor General, and to report the same.

Pursuant to Standing Order 109 of the House of Commons, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response for the 17th report.

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**PETITIONS**

## ASSISTED SUICIDE

**Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, today I would like to present to the House hundreds of signatures against physician-assisted suicide. It is noted that in the state of Oregon, where assisted suicide is legal, patients desiring treatment under the government's health plan have been offered assisted suicide instead. People across our country are very concerned about assisted suicide and the path it may lead down for very vulnerable populations.

[Translation]

## TAXATION

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, today I am pleased to present a number of petitions with hundreds of signatures from people opposed to the federal tax on feminine hygiene products. This is an important cause because this tax is fundamentally sexist. These products are essential for half the population in our society. They are not optional.

We are very pleased to know that this evening the government will be supporting the motion the NDP moved on this issue.

● (1510)

## AGRICULTURE

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition circulated in my riding by a group called Development and Peace. This group has done a tremendous amount of good, not just in New Brunswick, but around the world. It has collected the signatures of people living primarily in Kent County and the Sainte-Marie, Saint-Antoine and Shediac areas.

The petition calls on the government to take into consideration small farmers in its international aid and development policies. Many people are concerned that the policies of the federal government and other countries are detrimental to small-scale farmers in developing countries. They are calling on the government to correct this situation.

[English]

## THE ENVIRONMENT

**Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition from constituents opposed to the Kinder Morgan pipeline. These constituents in Burnaby and across

British Columbia are angry about the Conservatives' attempt to force this through Burnaby, as well as the Liberal support for this pipeline.

## PENSIONS

**Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have a petition today signed by constituents in Kingston, Ontario, and surrounding communities. It asks parliamentarians to recognize that raising the retirement age from 65 to 67 years will cost many people a lot of retirement benefits, especially the lowest-income seniors. The two years they will miss will cost lowest-income individuals over \$30,000 and couples over \$50,000. At the same time, the government is introducing tax changes that would benefit the rich more.

Instead of changing the tax system to benefit the rich more, my constituents are calling on the government to first reduce the retirement age back to 65 to protect our lowest-income seniors in the years to come.

[Translation]

## TAXATION

**Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, today I have the honour to table a petition signed by hundreds of Canadians supporting the abolition of a tax on feminine hygiene products, which quite frankly is rather sexist.

As one of my colleagues said earlier, these are essential products for half the population. I am pleased to table a petition addressing this issue.

[English]

**Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I too have a petition that calls upon the Government of Canada to end the tax on menstrual hygiene products, because they are essential products. They are not a luxury, and it creates difficulty for many women and girls in this country.

The petitioners are calling on the government to end the GST on feminine hygiene products.

[Translation]

## AGRICULTURE

**Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to submit to the House three very similar petitions about the need for the Government of Canada to adopt international aid policies that support small farmers, especially women, and recognize their vital role in the struggle against hunger and poverty.

[English]

## TAXATION

**Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am also pleased to rise in the House to table petitions to remove the GST on menstrual hygiene products. This is causing some financial hardship for many Canadians, given the fact that this is an essential product that should not have GST attached to it.

We are certainly hoping that the government will keep its word and support the opposition day motion to remove such a tax.

*Routine Proceedings*

[Translation]

**Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present to the House a petition that calls for the elimination of the GST on feminine hygiene products.

Back in the day, a long time ago, women used rags. At that time, feminine hygiene products likely would have been considered a luxury. However, we have come a long way since then, and I think that it is high time that the government removed the tax on these products, which are truly essential for women. This is an unfair tax that is detrimental to women.

[English]

## THE ENVIRONMENT

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present two petitions.

The first has over 475 signatures from residents within my riding and calls for an end to fracking. This is an important petition.

• (1515)

## 41ST GENERAL ELECTION

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from residents primarily in the Vancouver area, who continue to be concerned that we have not got to the bottom of the so-called robocall events that took place during the election of 2011. They would like an inquiry.

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## QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the following question will be answered today: No. 1131.

[Text]

Question No. 1131—**Mr. Paul Dewar:**

With regard to Canadian military operations in Iraq: (a) did the letter sent by the United States Department of Defence, received on September 19, 2014, proposing options for an additional Canadian contribution to the military operations against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in Iraq, specifically propose the deployment of Canadian air strike capabilities; (b) what alternative options did this letter propose; (c) how many direct requests for Canadian assistance were received from members of the US-led coalition against ISIS prior to October 3, 2014; (d) of the requests identified in (c), how many specifically requested the deployment of Canadian air strike capabilities; (e) has the government undertaken legal consultations regarding the potential deployment of Canadian Forces personnel or equipment in Syria; (f) what are the incremental costs of the military mission in Iraq to date; (g) what are the full costs of the military mission in Iraq to date; (h) when did the Government of Canada receive formal authorization from the Government of Iraq and the Kurdish Regional Government to conduct ground operations on Iraqi and Kurdish territory; (i) do these authorizations enable Canada to engage in ground combat operations on Iraqi or Kurdish territory; and (j) does Canada have a Status of Forces Agreement with Iraq governing the operations and liability of Canadian Forces on Iraqi territory?

**Mr. James Bezan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, with regard to (a) and (b), the letter in question requested Canada's assistance in the form of Canadian planners and liaisons to work with U.S. Central Command, special forces personnel to advise and assist Iraqi security forces, and support to airstrikes, such as combat aircraft, aerial refuelling and aerial surveillance.

With regard to (c), prior to October 3, 2014, Canada received two direct requests for assistance: one from the Republic of Iraq and one from the U.S., which is leading the multinational coalition against ISIS at the request of the Republic of Iraq.

With regard to (d), the U.S. requested Canada's assistance including for support to coalition air strikes against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, ISIS.

With regard to (e), the Department of National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces, DND/CAF, have consulted appropriate experts to ensure that there is a sound legal basis for all CAF operations against ISIS.

With regard to (f), the estimated incremental costs for the Canadian military operation in Iraq, known as Operation Impact, for the 2014-15 fiscal year that ended March 31, 2015, were approximately \$122 million. The total incremental costs for this period will not be fully accounted for until the end of May or June 2015 at the earliest.

With regard to (g), DND/CAF only publishes incremental costs as they provide a more accurate picture of the additional costs incurred during an operation or mission. Full costs include incremental costs, in addition to other costs that are incurred regardless of the operation or mission. These include the salaries of regular force personnel, equipment depreciation, command and support cost, and operating costs of some major equipment within normal planned activity rates.

With regard to (h), Canada received formal authorization from the Government of Iraq to deploy CAF members to Iraq to advise and assist Iraqi security forces on 7 September 2014.

With regard to (i), Canada is not engaged in ground combat operations in the Republic of Iraq.

With regard to (j), a status of forces agreement, SOFA, is a binding, treaty-level international commitment between Canada and one or more other countries. It is one of several different mechanisms available to Canada to ensure appropriate status and legal protections for CAF members conducting operations abroad. Given the complexity of formalizing a SOFA, however, they are not routinely developed to support time-sensitive international operations. While Canada does not have a SOFA with Iraq, the Government of Canada has worked directly with the Government of Iraq to secure appropriate protections for CAF members participating in coalition operations against ISIS.

*Business of Supply***GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[English]

**QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS**

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, if Questions Nos. 1132 and 1133 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

**The Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 1132—**Ms. Ruth Ellen Brousseau:**

With regard to funding allocated to the constituency of Berthier—Maskinongé: how much funding has the government allocated from fiscal year 2008-2009 to 2014-2015, broken down by (i) year, (ii) department or agency, (iii) initiative and amount?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 1133—**Ms. Joyce Murray:**

With regard to Tax-Free Savings Accounts (TFSAs) for each of the years 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, and, if available, 2013: broken down by income groups of \$0-\$20,000, \$20,000-\$40,000, \$40,000-\$60,000, \$60,000-\$80,000, \$80,000-\$100,000, \$100,000-\$120,000, \$120,000-\$160,000, \$160,000-\$200,000 and over \$200,000, (a) what is the (i) total number of TFSA holders, (ii) total number of TFSAs, (iii) average number of TFSAs per holder, (iv) total number of TFSA holders who contributed to a TFSA, (v) total number of TFSA holders who did not contribute to a TFSA, (vi) total number of TFSA holders who maximized contributions, (vii) total number of TFSA holders with withdrawals from a TFSA, (viii) total number of open TFSAs with no transactions during the year, (ix) total number of TFSAs opened during the year, (x) total number of TFSAs closed during the year, (xi) total number of TFSAs with deceased holders; and (b) what is the (i) total dollar value of contributions, (ii) number of contributions (transactions), (iii) average number of TFSA contributions (per individual), (iv) average dollar amount of TFSA contributions (per individual), (v) total dollar value of withdrawals, (vi) number of withdrawals (transactions), (vii) average number of TFSA withdrawals (per individual), (viii) average dollar amount of TFSA withdrawals (per individual), (ix) average unused TFSA contribution room, (x) total fair market value, and average fair market value (per individual)?

(Return tabled)

[English]

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** Mr. Speaker, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

**The Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

\* \* \*

**BUSINESS OF SUPPLY**

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform the House that Wednesday, May 13, shall be the day appointed, pursuant to Standing Order 81(4)(a), for the consideration of all votes in the main estimates for 2015-16 related to Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

[English]

**BUSINESS OF SUPPLY**

## OPPOSITION MOTION—CARE FOR VETERANS

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing has four minutes left to conclude her speech.

**Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives know in their heart of hearts that they have made life more difficult for veterans and hope that their cynical budget shell game will fool enough people into believing them, but it is too late.

They are worried because we have the courage of our convictions and a plan to end service pension clawbacks, reopen shuttered Veterans Affairs offices, and widen access to quality home care, long-term care, and mental health care services. Most of all, they are worried that veterans have actually been paying attention.

The government should remain worried, because veterans will not see through the ridiculous budget game the current government is playing. They know, more than anyone else, that this is an eleventh-hour attempt to drive a wedge and nothing more. What the government ought to do is back up its support of the veterans charter that it voted in favour of in 2005 and implement it as it was intended.

Veterans remember that all parties voted for the new veterans charter. They also know that after being elected a year later, the Conservatives implemented it in a way that denies the essential pension and support services that veterans deserve. How would most Canadians react if they were to sit down with veterans and hear about the way the Conservatives have been nickel-and-diming them and fighting them in the courts? I am sure they would be outraged.

Most people understand that the men and women who join the Canadian Forces do so with the knowledge they could be called upon to risk their lives on behalf of Canada and might be called upon to put themselves in harm's way in order to uphold peace, security, or human rights here at home and around the world. Most people also understand that in return for these sacrifices and the way these individuals accepted the condition of unlimited liability, we as a country have certain responsibilities. That is how we honour their service and show our gratitude for their personal sacrifices, including the sacrifices made by their families.

This is at the heart of the social covenant that was first established by Prime Minister Robert Borden in 1917. He had this to say about the country's responsibility to our soldiers:

The government and the country will consider it their first duty to see that a proper appreciation of your effort and of your courage is brought to the notice of people at home that no man, whether he goes back or whether he remains in Flanders, will have just cause to reproach the government for having broken faith with the men who won and the men who died.

*Privilege*

That has been the working model ever since: a social covenant that acknowledges that our nation, its government, and its citizens will support these men and women in their missions, honour their service, and look after them and their families if they are injured or die in the service of their country.

Put another way, it is the arrangement that most Canadians would recognize as being fair and straightforward, the arrangement they might also assume is the way things are being done today because it is the way things were done many years ago.

If the government will not recognize these responsibilities, veterans know they can count on New Democrats to do so, and Canadians can know that too. New Democrats will recognize this covenant between the Canadian people and the government to provide equitable financial compensation and support services to past and active members of the Canadian Armed Forces who have been disabled or have died as a result of military service, as well as to their dependents. Canadians who are wondering how it got to the point that record numbers of veterans are turning to food banks or wondering why the veterans' group Equitas is forced to fight for their due through the courts can count on New Democrats to have our veterans' backs and to fight for them, first and foremost and every time, and not just when it is politically expedient.

• (1520)

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to focus on the issue of the veterans' offices that were closed not that long ago.

I would argue that governance is about establishing priorities. The removal and closure of veterans offices was at a great cost. In my home province of Manitoba, the Brandon service office was closed down, and that had a significant impact on our vets, yet that year, as we see this year, the government continued to waste money. The most obvious waste of tax dollars is likely in the area of partisan political advertising. The government spent almost three-quarters of a billion dollars in advertising, and in promoting this budget alone, it will spend \$14 million or \$15 million in highly biased and partisan advertising.

I am wondering if the member might want to provide some comment on the government's priorities.

**Mrs. Carol Hughes:** Mr. Speaker, let us be very clear. Services to veterans have been cut back through the Liberals as well, so it is very problematic.

I did talk about veterans offices, but I think I can wrap it up with this. This is a comment from Colin Pick, War Pensioners of Canada, Manitoulin-North Shore Branch:

The public are not aware that veterans are still greatly in need. The government portrays to the public that all is well with the vets.

However, that is not the case. Access to services for veterans is actually a problem. I have another quote that I hope to share with the House, because it is quite an important quote, but I will wait until the next question.

**Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened to the speech of the hon. member with interest. I would like to ask her how she accounts for the fact that, through Service Canada offices now, there are 600 more points of contact for veterans than

there were before, especially in small towns where some of the older vets in particular would have to travel to larger centres to access these services.

Would she explain why 600 more points of access is not a good thing for veterans?

**Mrs. Carol Hughes:** Mr. Speaker, the problem is that these people are not the ones who have been on the front line. We need people who have actually lived it, who understand the issue, who are able to provide services. Some people have gone there and have basically been told that they do not know anything about how to help them.

This quote was sent to me by one of my constituents, Ed Pigeau. He talks about a young man who just took his life:

"Just to let you know Ed, and thanks for passing information along to try to help him, however, he has just been found dead in his apartment....couldn't feel worse....." (name withheld)

I am filled with regret and remorse. Another Afghanistan veteran has committed suicide. Another soul lost.

So my question to you and your fellow colleagues is this: How many have to die before something is done. Do you and your colleagues not feel the loss, do you not understand the sacrifice they have made and that you and I and all our colleagues, have failed this soldier at his time of greatest need.

When you dine tonight and every night does your hand shake when you raise each fork to your lips? Do you sleep peacefully? Do you rise in the morning looking forward to another day?

How lucky are we to live our lives in peace, pursuing our goals, praying to our gods, all in the peace and comfort of our homes....

They did not hesitate nor did they falter when we needed them.

Do something now, before they are all gone.

\* \* \*

**PRIVILEGE**

QUESTION ON THE ORDER PAPER

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise this afternoon on a question of privilege with respect to the response that was sent to my office to Question No. 1129, the order paper question I had submitted on the notice paper on March 23.

This question is of great importance because it concerns my ability to undertake my work as a parliamentarian on behalf of my constituents, but also because it falls directly within my critic portfolio as the ethics, accountability, and transparency critic for the official opposition, because these are questions of legitimate government practice.

At issue is the refusal of the government to answer a straightforward order paper question, which was sent to me, very strikingly, by the member for Oak Ridges—Markham, who claimed that it was not government policy to answer any questions that had anything to do with court proceedings.

As will be shown, this answer is not credible and raises deep concerns because the specific questions that are asked, as shall be shown, are not subject to any court investigation right now and, in fact, fall within the purview of parliamentarians in the House of Commons.

The decision to refuse to answer an order paper question is about the potential interference in my ability to do my work as a parliamentarian.

The question asks:

With respect to each Senate appointment made by [the] Prime Minister...: (a) did the government verify that each individual being appointed to the Senate met their constitutional residency requirement; (b) how did the government verify that each individual met their constitutional residency requirement; and (c) what are the details verifying that each individual met their constitutional residency requirement?

These are straightforward questions that have been routinely evaded in the House. We know from precedent that we are told it is question period and not answer period, so the government can say whatever it wants in evading straightforward questions about government practice, and yet if the current government has answered anything at all, it has been saying that the decisions regarding certain Senate appointments were done within the clear constitutional practice of 150 years.

If that were the case, then it should be fairly straightforward to answer what those constitutional requirements are.

What I think is important to point out—and this is where I will refer to the court proceedings—is that we learned two things from the court proceedings.

One is that the Crown attorney in the Mike Duffy trial has said, clearly, that the issue of residency and the eligibility to sit in the Senate is not a focus of the court proceedings. He made that clear on the first day.

However, from what we have learned from the court hearings—and this is why I will refer to the court once again—the issues of who decides residency, who decides the eligibility to sit in the Senate, which is a very arcane place and it has been very difficult to get straight answers, is the role of the Prime Minister and the Privy Council.

These are issues that are germane to the House of Commons: how decisions were made, why they were made, and whether or not there have been constitutional breaches by the appointments.

This is an issue that we must deal with, because we are talking about the constitutional requirements of this nation, which are the bedrock foundation of both legislative branches of government, and if there are issues being raised about the credibility of certain senators who may not be eligible to sit in the upper chamber, it will affect the credibility of all levels of government.

If the residency rules have been clear for 150 years, which says that all senators “shall be resident in the Province” or territory that they represent, then there should be a practice that could be explained to the House of Commons through the order paper question process as to how that verification happened. We know Senator Duffy was appointed as senator for Prince Edward Island, despite the fact that he had lived in Ontario since 1971, with an Ontario driver's licence, Ontario health card, Ontario tax payments, and passports claiming Ontario as his place of residence.

In vetting that appointment, did he meet the residency requirements? How was it done? What is the standard process? Those are questions that are not to be asked in the court hearing. They are not

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to be asked of the Senate, because it is not within its purview. They are to be asked of the Prime Minister's Office.

I will mention one other element from the trial, and it only needs to be mentioned because it raises my concern about why this answer was not given. What we heard from the court is that it is not investigating this because it is not within its purview, but that the Prime Minister's staff have identified a number of senators who may not meet the residency requirements, and that if those names have been identified—and they have been, apparently, from what we have seen of the emails and discussions about what problem that first gives—it raises the question once again whether or not the due diligence was done.

• (1525)

We know, for example, Senator Wallin, who is facing charges now, was considered a resident of Toronto, yet was appointed for Saskatchewan.

Senator Stewart-Olsen was appointed to represent New Brunswick, but there have been questions that she should be considered an Ottawa senator.

We learn from the RCMP that Nigel Wright wrote that Senator “Tkachuk's sub-committee is interviewing Zimmer and Patterson... why? I think they...have qualification residency issues”.

Nigel Wright also wrote that “I am gravely concerned that Sen. Duffy would be considered a resident of Ontario under this ITB. Possibly Sen. Patterson in BC too”, but Senator Patterson was chosen to represent Nunavut. As he continued: “If this were adopted as the Senate's view about whether the constitutional qualification were met, the consequences are obvious”.

We have learned that, so we should be learning from the government what due diligence it did to protect the integrity of our system. If red flags are being identified about senators, and it goes back to the choices of the Prime Minister here in choosing them, the Prime Minister's Office needs to be able to explain what process was undertaken.

This is not the place to argue the various arguments back and forth, but I want to clarify because the government has claimed that it was not the responsibility of the Prime Minister, but the constitutional experts told us otherwise.

We have seen throughout the RCMP investigation and what we have seen from the court that it has been brought back to the issue of the Prime Minister's Office.

Ensuring the integrity of that system becomes the job of members of Parliament because we have to find out what is happening in the Upper Chamber, if the Prime Minister is choosing to ignore the constitutional requirements, if his own staff had red-flagged a number of senators for possibly being in contravention of the Constitution of this country.

*Privilege*

Therefore, on behalf of my constituents and for the benefit of all Canadians, I have used my parliamentary right to ask about that process that the Prime Minister has undertaken. If the basis of residency is so clear, then it should be a simple and easy definition for the government to be able to tell the Canadian public how the issues of residency are determined and who is eligible.

This brings me to the government's response to my question on May 8, which I will read in its entirety and which consists of nine words: "...the government does not comment on matters before the court".

Not only is that answer completely insufficient, but it is completely incorrect, because the issue, as I said at the beginning, of his ability to sit in the Senate has been determined by the court not to be the issue. The issue is 31 charges of fraud and breach of trust, which we do not deal with in the House because that is a matter for the courts.

Neither does the House deal with the questions in terms of certain Senate expenses that belong within the duty of the Senate, and I certainly hope they will do their job in cleaning up that place, but that is within their house. Within our House, the question goes back to what the Prime Minister knew or did not know and whether the Prime Minister has a process in place for ensuring respect for the Constitution.

What I also find disturbing is that the answer to my question was signed by the member for Oak Ridges—Markham on behalf of the Prime Minister, a man who day after day treated the House of Commons like a mockery because of his refusal to answer those straightforward questions.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask you to find that the wholesale avoidance by the government to straightforward written Question No. 1129 and the misleading character of the answer constitutes a prima facie breach of my privileges as a member of the House. The responsibility of this matter lies solely with the Prime Minister, and the government needs to respect the rules that we have put in place for parliamentarians to do their job.

Written questions are essential tools for Canadians. As their elected representatives, we hold government to account, and none of the information that is in my questions seems to have been answered, found as somehow outside of our duties of Parliament.

*House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, lays out the intended purpose of written questions as the following at page 517:

...written questions are placed after notice on the *Order Paper* with the intent of seeking from the Ministry detailed, lengthy or technical information relating to "public affairs".

● (1530)

It has been acknowledged somewhat universally in different sources, but in the Auditor general's November 2004 report that is entitled "Process for Responding to Parliamentary Order Paper Questions", it says, "The right to seek information...and the right to hold [government] accountable are recognized as...fundamental [to our system] of parliamentary government". Any attempt to interfere with the opposition's legitimate attempt to hold the government to

account should be taken seriously, since this walks a very fine line of potentially contemptuous behaviour for the House.

I hearken back to the 21st edition of Erskine May *Parliamentary Practice*, which defines contempt as "an act or omission which obstructs or impedes either House of Parliament...or any Member", in the performance of their functions is to "be treated as contempt even though there is no precedent for the offence". In this case, it is the word "omission" that stands out for me, and I believe this needs to be answered.

I am asking you, Mr. Speaker, to look into this because I believe that if this precedent were allowed to stand for government to interfere in the responses to order paper questions and use the issue of not speaking before matters of the court, it would be a ridiculous undermining of parliamentary tradition.

Just this past week government members stood up over the Khadr incident that was before the courts and made it clear that they were more than willing to give their opinions when something was before the court. The Conservatives are not respecting the precedents they are setting, and they are using a court issue to deny us in the House of Commons our ability and our right to do our job.

● (1535)

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will just offer a few preliminary thoughts and will in all likelihood return perhaps with more to say.

The first point I would make is that the matter of this question of a response says that we will not comment on matters before the courts. That is actually simply a restatement of the *sub judice* convention, which does apply in this case. In the arguments that my friend just made, he made specific reference to Mr. Duffy in the question of his residence. As I think all of us are aware from media reports, the question of Mr. Duffy's residence has been said by the prosecutor in that matter to be central to the case that he is making. We also understand from those media reports that there has been evidence led in that regard, so there can be no question but that it is an issue that is before the court in a criminal proceeding.

O'Brien and Bosc *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, at page 504, *sub judice* convention is summarized as follows:

Over the years, a practice has developed in the House whereby Members are expected to refrain from discussing matters before the courts, or under judicial consideration, in order to protect those involved in a court action or judicial inquiry against any undue influence through the discussion of the case. This practice is referred to as the *sub judice* convention and it applies to debate, statements and Question Period. It is deemed improper for a Member, in posing a question, or a Minister in responding to a question, to comment on any matter that is *sub judice*.

There is a footnote to the reference of question period. Footnote 80 says "It also applies to written questions and their responses". That is exactly the case here.

From that perspective, the response that has been provided to the question on the order paper is the proper response in the case of a matter like this. It is no secret what issue the member is getting at. He referred to Mr. Duffy, in fact, in the argument just made. That is exactly his concern.

Further, at page 505, O'Brien and Bosc says the following:

Although Members...customarily observe the convention during Question Period, the Speaker has ruled out of order questions concerning criminal cases, noting that the Chair has a duty to balance the legitimate right of the House with the rights and interests of an ordinary citizen undergoing a trial.

That states quite clearly and strongly that the convention would apply here.

I might also further go on to the question of the response, if he does not accept the *sub judice* convention, and I certainly think that is sufficient, and that is the question about the Speaker even reviewing such responses.

At page 522, O'Brien and Bosc says the following:

There are no provisions in the rules for the Speaker to review government responses to questions. Nonetheless, on several occasions, Members have raised questions of privilege in the House regarding the accuracy of information contained in responses to written questions; in none of these cases was the matter found to be of a prima facie breach of privilege.

It goes on also to say:

The Speaker has ruled that it is not the role of the Chair to determine whether or not the contents of documents tabled in the House are accurate nor to "assess the likelihood of an Hon. Member knowing whether the facts contained in a document are correct".

Furthermore, to heighten the explanation of that, on the role of the Speaker in reviewing the adequacy of answers, whether it be in question period or on order paper questions, at footnote 221, it indicates:

The Speaker has also suggested that if the Member is not satisfied with the response, the Member could resubmit the question for placement on the Order Paper...or ask that the question be transferred to debate under the Adjournment Proceedings...

Therefore, there are other avenues available to the hon. member. However, I would submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that we do not need to deal with that second set of questions because, very directly, the *sub judice* convention does apply. I may wish to come back for more submissions later.

• (1540)

**Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to respond to both the government House leader and also to the very cogent arguments raised by the member for Timmins—James Bay.

First, there is no doubt that the question put forward, in what has become the infamous Question No. 1129 with respect to each Senate appointment made by the Prime Minister, is an issue of public policy. It states:

(a) did the government verify that each individual being appointed to the senate met their constitutional residency requirement; (b) how did the government verify that each individual met their constitutional residency requirement; and (c) what are the details verifying that each individual met their constitutional residency requirement?

This is something to which the government has to respond. For the government to try to pretend that any issue touched by the Duffy trial is something that it no longer has to answer as a matter of general public policy is simply absurd. It is an absurd conclusion for the government House leader to stand and say that the government can now define anything it wants as something that remotely or faintly may touch on some trial, that somehow it means the government is simply exempt from responding. It is something the member for Timmins—James Bay pointed out very effectively and very cogently

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in his argument, and the government House leader simply has not contradicted that.

Second, this goes back to the issue that was raised by Speaker Sauvé 35 years ago, saying that in terms of a prima facie question of privilege to be made there effectively is an argument that could be made when there is a deliberate attempt to deny answers to an hon. member, if it could be shown that such action amounted to improper interference with the hon. member's parliamentary work.

This is a very clear issue where the government is deliberately, because it is an embarrassing issue to it, trying to withhold what is a simple question of public policy, what is a simple constitutional process, and one that the government has responded to for decades. Now that we have the Conservatives entering this twilight zone where I assume they only have a few weeks in their mandate and are perhaps reacting to events in Alberta, they are trying shut down what should be an appropriate public policy response. They should have responded to the question raised in Question No. 1129 by the member for Timmins—James Bay. There is absolutely no reason for them not to. For them to try to throw out these outlandish reasons for why they cannot respond to a simple public policy question on the process that the Prime Minister's Office undertakes is something I think the public certainly sees through.

This is a question of privilege that I hope you will consider over the next little while, Mr. Speaker. If the government is going to respond, we will be responding in kind as well.

**The Deputy Speaker:** I thank the member for Timmins—James Bay, the government House leader and the leader in the House for the official opposition for their interventions today. I expect we will hear from both sides once again, perhaps in a timely fashion, given the lateness of the agenda to which we are working.

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### BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

#### OPPOSITION MOTION—CARE FOR VETERANS

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

**Mr. Bryan Hayes (Sault Ste. Marie, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Etobicoke Centre.

I am proud to be a member of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. I actually asked to be on this committee because I care very much about the well-being of our Canadian Armed Forces, and I care because I am an air force brat, travelling the world with my parents and siblings for 17 years, my father having had a distinguished 37-year career in the Royal Canadian Air Force.

Both of my sisters and brother-in-law also served their country very well, again, in the Royal Canadian Air Force. My immediately family has over 100 years in the Canadian Armed Forces. I am the only one who did not have military service, so as a member of the veterans affairs committee, this is my way of giving back to armed forces and veterans to the very best of my ability. As a committee, we have recommended substantial improvements, many of which the government has adopted.

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Canadians recently marked the 70th anniversary of the liberation of the Netherlands and Victory in Europe Day, or VE Day, as we call it. I know a number of our colleagues had the opportunity to be there and experience that. We all saw Canada's veterans being welcomed with open arms by grateful Dutch citizens. We saw friendships rekindled and happy reunions, along with very moving ceremonies.

We also know that things did not simply go back to normal for many of our brave Canadian soldiers, sailors and airmen and women when they returned home after the war was over.

Certainly for Canadian Armed Forces members today, a homecoming may not be the easy return to the routine one might expect. Rather, for some, they return to a different world. A loving home, one hopes, but a jarring new reality shaped by severe and perhaps permanent injury or illness. Home may now be a place of stress, of uncertainty, of what may seem to be insurmountable challenges. That is as true for family members as it is for the full-time armed forces member, the reservist or the veteran.

This was painfully clear last week, as I attended the second annual Sam Sharpe breakfast, held in his honour to recognize the struggle of Canadian servicemen and women who suffer from operational stress injuries and to highlight individuals and organization dedicated to assisting Canadian Forces members, their families and veterans.

Many may not be aware, but Lieutenant-Colonel Sam Sharpe was first elected to the House of Commons in 1908 as the sitting member for Ontario North at the start of World War I. After suffering mental injuries on the front, he returned to Canada and took his own life on May 25, 1918, at a Montreal hospital.

During the breakfast, we heard two very emotional stories of how PTSD impacted the lives of two of our veterans and how, with the help of services provided through Veterans Affairs, they were managing their PTSD, although, and this message was very clear, they would never be the same.

The people in the Government of Canada have a duty to such brave men and women in need of immediate and perhaps lifelong assistance. They must know that we are here for them. They must never doubt the intensity or sincerity of our care, compassion and respect.

I know I speak for all members in this place when I say that while politics may differ or approaches, ultimately every member of Parliament, from the government and the opposition benches, supports our veterans and expects the highest level of assistance to those in need.

That said, I am concerned with the political undertones of the NDP motion. I am troubled that the New Democrats have proposed this language a month after our government tabled the largest improvement to veterans benefits and supports since forming government. While I agree with the spirit of the motion and the vast majority of what is said in it, I am disappointed with the New Democrats for their continued political manoeuvring, using the noble cause of supporting Canada's veterans.

Perhaps many know, last week our government tabled economic action plan 2015 act. In particular, there is a section that proposes a

series of new benefits for veterans and families affected by injury and illness sustained during service to Canada.

● (1545)

This bill also presents a welcome statement of purpose for the new veterans charter, one that goes far beyond the motion being debated here today and that would be formally legislated and approved by both Houses of Parliament. It reads:

The purpose of this Act is to recognize and fulfill the obligation of the people and Government of Canada to show just and due appreciation to members and veterans for their service to Canada. This obligation includes providing services, assistance and compensation to members and veterans who have been injured or have died as a result of military service and extends to their spouses or common-law partners or survivors and orphans. This Act shall be liberally interpreted so that the recognized obligation may be fulfilled.

I hope the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam will support this purpose clause contained in Bill C-58 when the time comes to vote for it in Parliament in the coming weeks.

I was proud to have played a part in the unanimous report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. So many of the recommendations have been adopted by the government, including adding a new retirement benefit so that veterans have stable, reliable monthly income after age 65.

I want to make something very clear in this debate. Our government has a tremendous obligation to provide assistance to members and veterans of our forces who have been injured as a result of military service. We have an obligation as well to the families of those injured while in service.

I would like to take a few moments to highlight the new retirement income security benefit, which is arguably the largest of the new benefits we have introduced as a government over the past few months. The new retirement income security benefit would directly address this issue for moderately to severely disabled veterans and survivors. Beginning at age 65, eligible veterans would continue to receive monthly benefits totalling at least 70% of Veterans Affairs Canada's financial benefits received before the age of 65. This benefit would be determined on a case-by-case basis, taking into account other sources of income beyond the age of 65.

The key word here is "security". As per our government's veteran-centred approach, potential recipients in receipt of financial benefits administered by Veterans Affairs would be contacted before they reached the age of 65 to ensure a smooth transition to that security. For disabled Canadian Armed Forces veterans nearing 65, that would mean being better able to save for retirement and anticipate future earnings. Further, when that veteran passed on, his or her survivor would continue to receive approximately 50% of this lifelong monthly payment.



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This was one of the key recommendations made by the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, and I am so pleased that the government acted swiftly to include it. I look forward to the recommendations being put forward and passed by the government.

Lest we forget.

• (1550)

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to raise the issue of monies that have not been spent by the government. I am sure the member, being on the veterans affairs committee, would be aware of that. There is a great deal of concern at a time of need for veterans. There are many issues they are having to face. It seems that every other week, if not every week, there are questions to the government on its commitment to providing for veterans who are in need. Yet since 2006, the government has actually clawed back expenditures of just over \$1 billion.

I am wondering if the member might want to comment. It is one thing for us to be talking about supporting veterans, and it is another thing when the government does not spend allocated money and in essence claws back money that was voted on and allocated in budgets that was meant to go to veterans.

**Mr. Bryan Hayes:** Mr. Speaker, I would point out that the Liberals and the NDP are providing misinformation with respect to this. For Veterans Affairs, the budget is established. It is a Conservative budget. It is established to ensure that there are enough funds for every veteran that requires service. During the course of the year, over those nine years, six times, maybe even nine times, we asked for additional fund authorizations throughout the year in the event that we needed service.

What happens a lot of times with a budget is that a service simply is not required. It is very difficult to predict exactly how much service is going to be required. It is those authorizations, which totalled almost the exact amount the member opposite referred to, that were, in fact, not required. Every single veteran that required service during that time period received service. There was never a situation where service was not received because of a lack of funds. That is a fallacy.

• (1555)

[Translation]

**Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to know whether my colleague understands that, regardless of anything else, the priority is what is actually happening. What is happening is that veterans are still coming to my office feeling desperate and discouraged. They do not know what else to do about their file, which is taking forever to process. They do not know where to turn for help. We often hear about veterans who have to go to food banks to survive.

Does my colleague think that we need to do more for these individuals? Does he think that there are others to whom we have an obligation, the obligation of recognizing how much they have sacrificed? Are there still people who need our help?

[English]

**Mr. Bryan Hayes:** Mr. Speaker, I too, as a member of Parliament, have veterans come to my office. As a member of Parliament, I provide the direction they need and the assistance they need.

Through Veterans Affairs Canada, the programs and services are in place. As I mentioned in my comments, I had an opportunity to attend a breakfast the other morning where two veterans spoke. These are veterans who have achieved those services. They knew where to go, and they had assistance.

I think it is the role of all of us as members of Parliament to make sure that we are reaching out to our veterans. I do that through my office, and my staff does that. I am sure the member opposite does that. It is the role of a member of Parliament.

I reiterate that the services are there, and our new legislation, Bill C-58, would expand upon those services. It is a fantastic piece of legislation that would benefit our veterans. I would really like to thank our Minister of Veterans Affairs for bringing this bill forward and his predecessors for their work in bringing this forward. It was one of the recommendations brought forward by the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, on which I am so proud to serve.

**Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Sault Ste. Marie for his speech and for his family's combined service of over 100 years. Serving alongside him on the veterans affairs committee is an honour, because I know the member is seized with veterans, as many in the House are.

I would like to point out members in Veteran Affairs who are veterans, starting with our minister, who is an RMC grad and a veteran; our parliamentary secretary, who is an RMC grad and a veteran; and our deputy minister, who is an RMC grad, a veteran, and the former CDS. I myself am a former infanteer. We have a fighter pilot, and of course, there are members, like the member for Sault Ste. Marie, with a long family tradition. I am delighted to be serving along their side.

I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak to the motion. I am pleased to also lend my support to it, though I do share some concerns about the political undertones of the motion from the opposite side.

Our government places the highest priority on the health and well-being of all members of the Canadian Armed Forces. There are many veterans in the House, and as I said, some with recent service, me included. We are seized with ensuring that our veterans get the care and services they so rightly deserve from a grateful Canada. From the day they enrol, through basic training and their progression through the ranks, through deployments at home and abroad, through to when their service ends and they are back into civilian life, we want to ensure that our men and women in uniform, as well as their families, have everything they need.

We ask a great deal of those Canadians who serve in Canada's Armed Forces, both regular and reserve forces, those members who are so highly dedicated and serve concurrently with civilian occupations. We often forget that reservists make up 25% of Canada's missions abroad.

*Business of Supply*

As part of the rigours of military life, they face a number of unique challenges unfamiliar to most of us. Military service and the needs of the nation require them to deploy when needed to locations near and far, as they are presently, as part of domestic and overseas missions.

While visiting Canadian Armed Forces members stationed in Kuwait last week, our Prime Minister said:

Your courage, like the courage of generations of service personnel before you, is the currency in which our freedom, our lifestyles, have been bought and paid.

For that, the Canadian people offer you our deepest admiration and our eternal gratitude.

These are words we can never forget, in particular as we have just observed the 70th anniversary of VE Day in which Canada played a major role in the Second World War.

Present day Canadian Armed Forces personnel often move their residence frequently throughout their careers as part of their service both inside and outside the country. This process is generally disruptive to family life. It means new neighbours, friends, schools, sports teams, and so many normal family-related activities that many of us who are settled take for granted. Their families are constantly moved. As the member for Sault Ste. Marie pointed out, for 17 years his family moved around the world.

They often work irregular hours and complete difficult tasks. Their job to defend and protect Canada's interests is inherently stressful, and of course, they may face great physical danger as part of the job. Sometimes they are in life-threatening situations.

Our Canadian Armed Forces members never fail to respond when they are needed, and we hear from around the world over and over the high regard our service members are held in for their professionalism and their skills. Because we demand so much from them, we have a moral imperative to ensure that there is a strong system to care for them when they become physically or mentally ill or injured.

Allow me to take a few moments to outline some of our existing services in several areas. In my time of service, I personally relied on the military health care system for many of my own injuries. It is a great system.

There are also our compensation and support services, our comprehensive mental health services, and our ongoing support to military families. Because of the comprehensiveness of our health care system, the vast majority of our military personnel are very well and very healthy indeed. However, for those who require ongoing physical and mental health care, we are committed to continuously improving the system.

The old maxim, "prevention is better than a cure", is still a guide for military health care. In fact, prevention is a top priority, particularly when it comes to operational stress injuries. We address operational stress injuries through regular screening but also through fitness and safety programs. In addition, personnel are medically evaluated when they enrol and when they are taken on strength in the military.

● (1600)

They are medically evaluated before and after deployments, and they are medically evaluated on a routine basis throughout their careers. This is something that I have personally experienced.

Our military health care system is both comprehensive and collaborative. It supports our men and women in uniform in a wide variety of ways and through many different mechanisms, and it is highly adaptive.

As serving members' needs evolve mission to mission, our medical expertise has evolved, and we have responded by renewing and modernizing our services. For example, following an increase in the number of severe musculoskeletal and other combat injuries during our engagement in Afghanistan and indeed throughout a service career in terms of training, we established a Canadian Armed Forces physical rehabilitation program, creating seven centres of rehabilitation excellence across the country by partnering military health service units with pre-eminent civilian institutions.

Until recently, this has not had the attention that it really deserved. Weight, quite frankly, is weight, and in the past we have had load-bearing systems that were inadequate, which over time provided a lot of damage to bodies, backs, knees, ankles and to all kinds of things, especially for those people in the infantry who had to carry their homes, houses and all of their kit on their back. Nowadays, although the kit and equipment is much better, it is recognized much more through a study in science. It is being addressed and is no longer just anecdotal stories about injuries that soldiers sustained while on the job. We have also enhanced our post-deployment screening to ensure that any physical or psychological problems are quickly identified for early intervention.

The Canadian Armed Forces health care system is truly world class, and is committed to constant modernization and adaptation to best practice. It is far superior to anything that was provided decades ago, because it has been informed by modern medicine and disability management.

In partnership with Veterans Affairs, our presently serving members, veterans and all of their families benefit from a comprehensive system of support. However, more can and must be done to ensure that process, that seam that currently exists between these two huge entities, the military and Veterans Affairs, is as close together as we can make it in order to stop transitioning personnel from falling through the cracks. This work is occurring in earnest, and regular and constant improvements are being realized within this process.

We have strengthened and expanded our member and family supports in other areas. For example, financial assistance, often critical in times of illness or injury, is offered to military personnel and their families through the service income security insurance plan, which is commonly known as SISIP. This delivers life and disability insurance, vocational assistance and financial counselling through 18 offices across Canada.

*Business of Supply*

In 2011, we introduced a new suite of benefits designed specifically to help severely injured personnel, by providing for home and vehicle accessibility modifications and monetary support to their spouses and caregivers. We also make on-base employment opportunities available to Canadian Armed Forces spouses and dependants throughout Canada and Europe, helping to improve the financial situation of our military families.

Indeed, whenever we reflect on the health of our military personnel, we know family support is absolutely vital to their well-being. In recognition of the fundamental role played by military families, we have worked hard to renew the military family services program by increasing its funding and expanding its services, especially through our 32 military family resource centres, which provide youth programs and activities; parenting support; daily emergency and respite child care; counselling and referral services; deployment and separation support; and education, training and employment assistance.

I wish that the NDP members were focused like us on delivering results rather than the games they have been playing in Parliament and elsewhere that only serves to confuse and misinform. Veterans should know that every MP on all sides of this House supports them. The political rhetoric that has been applied should become obsolete, because it is inaccurate and unfortunately it does mislead.

In that bipartisan light, I am pleased we are supporting this motion, largely because it was virtually copied from the text of our support for veterans and their families act, but also because I believe no one in this place should use our veterans as political talking points, as the other side does. I believe we should be striving to improve, because it is the right thing to do for all of our veterans, past, present and future. I hope that ultimately this is the case for the politically charged NDP motion.

•(1605)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that the NDP has moved this motion to help our veterans.

I represent the riding of Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, which is home to the Bagotville military base. I see as many veterans as soldiers. I recognize the crucial role the Government of Canada needs to play in helping these men and women. I am disappointed in the Conservative government's attitude towards veterans. My office staff often find themselves fighting on behalf of these veterans for financial compensation related to the degree of injury they suffered on their mission abroad.

I would ask my Conservative colleague why the government spends so much time in court fighting to avoid honouring the covenant between the federal government and veterans. Why does the government not simply give this money to veterans instead of spending it on legal fees? It seems as though these veterans would feel much more respected by their government.

[*English*]

**Mr. Ted Opitz:** Mr. Speaker, I respect the fact that my hon. friend comes from a part of Quebec that has a military base nearby. The brave men and women of Quebec have made tremendous contributions over all of Canada's history in Canada's armed forces

and many of the units in Quebec are absolutely storied units for their exploits on behalf of Canada.

That is why there are members of Parliament, so that when veterans or constituents come to us, we provide them with the guidance that they need to get through any particular system or issue and to gain the benefits that they so richly deserve, especially veterans. I do that. Veterans come to my office to ask me these questions and I guide them through it.

If the member was paying attention to the budget, he will notice that there is money for Veterans Affairs. He will notice that many of the points that have been made by the veterans affairs committee are absolutely being adopted. I have a whole litany of them here. This government is moving forward and looking after veterans.

By the time we are done, under the leadership of the Minister of Veterans Affairs, this is going to be a world-leading veterans charter. Many of our colleagues, fellow nations and allies around the world are experiencing many of the same issues and we are learning from that too. It is a lessons learned sort of thing.

As far as veterans go, I would also like to point out that the RCMP, with its contributions to Canada, has served us and veterans well.

•(1610)

**Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the NDP for bringing this motion forward, but the reality is that the Conservatives are not going to change much.

I am from a riding in Cape Breton, which, per capita, has made the largest contribution to any conflict in the last 100 years. There was a Veterans Affairs office in Cape Breton that served over 4,000 veterans. There were over 1,000 walk-ins in the last year and 3,000 clients. The government can do all it wants with its money, but the reality is that veterans are coming home, they need a place to go and somebody to take care of them. That is not happening.

I do not want an answer about Service Canada, because that is not working down in Cape Breton. It is the same with all the offices across the country. How can the member represent his government and the Conservative Party knowing that when all these offices were closed, it threw all these veterans out into the dark?

**Mr. Ted Opitz:** Mr. Speaker, I am absolutely proudly supporting this, supporting my government and supporting what we have done, and continue to do, for veterans. Whether the member likes it or not, that is the reality.

*Business of Supply*

Many of these offices were within hundreds of metres, in some cases, of a Service Canada office. This has expanded the points of access to Veterans Affairs services to over 600 points of access. Many service members and veterans have called to tell me that the Service Canada offices are a godsend, especially for a lot of the older veterans who do not have to travel to larger centres. They can access service in their home towns and get the services they need very conveniently, very quickly and very cheaply. That is the whole point: to serve veterans, not to make it tougher on them.

**Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, my grandfather was from Finland. He fought in World War II, and I remember that he received a pension. I remember as a kid thinking that was strange. I did not understand how that worked because it was a pension that came from Finland and he did not even live there any more. Kaarina and Tauno, my grandparents, immigrated from Finland to Canada and yet the Finnish government still supported my grandfather. Then, when he passed away, that pension went on to my grandmother, my mummo.

As a kid I remember that was the first time I ever thought about that obligation that a country has to its servicemen and women. It was the first time I really thought about what it was. I knew my grandfather had fought in the war, I understood that, but I did not understand what it meant to sign up for something different, to sign up and say, “I am going to fight for this country and I am going to put my own life on the line”.

As members know, I am the member of Parliament for Halifax. I have not served in Canada's military, unlike a couple of our previous speakers and other members of this House. However, as the member of Parliament for Halifax, which is home to Canadian Forces Base Halifax, I have learned a lot about our military and our veterans over the years, both as a representative and also as somebody who lives in the city.

It is difficult not to know at least a bit about the Canadian Forces if one lives in Halifax. CFB Halifax is Canada's east coast navy base and is home port to Maritime Forces Atlantic. It is the largest Canadian Forces base in terms of number of posted personnel. Anywhere people go around the Halifax harbour they will see evidence of the Canadian Forces.

As the MP for Halifax, I have had the opportunity to see first-hand the work that is happening at HMC Dockyard Halifax, one of the oldest defence establishments in Canada. I have attended events at Stadacona, which is in the north end of Halifax. I have visited the Halifax military family resource centre on many occasions.

Shortly after my election in 2008, I had the opportunity to go on the inaugural sail of HMCS *Halifax* by her new captain, Captain José Kurtz, the first woman to command a Canadian warship. That was an incredibly special event as Captain Kurtz took women from the community on her inaugural sail with her.

Before I go on, I do want to note that I will be splitting my time with the member for London—Fanshawe.

In this time, living in Halifax, and representing Halifax, I have learned two key things about the men and women who serve. The first thing that I have learned is that our military men and women are us. They are not separate from us, walled off on a base that is

isolated and different. CFB Halifax is part of our city, and the men and women serving there are part of the Halifax community. They are our soccer coaches. They are the neighbours who offer a hand shovelling the driveway, and we certainly had a lot of that this winter. They are our volunteer firefighters. They are our community board volunteers. They are part of our communities, and our communities are part of them.

The second thing that I have learned is that while they are members of our community, they are different. Every day they go into work and they make an extraordinary personal commitment, a commitment much more extraordinary than that which members and I make. When I worked at Dalhousie Legal Aid in Halifax, I went to work in the morning, I served my clients, and came home at the end of the day.

My colleague from New Westminster—Coquitlam quoted from the Equitas statement of claim. As members have heard, there is a court case going on right now. I would like to repeat this quote because I think it really sums up how our servicemen and women are different.

It states:

When members of the Canadian Forces put on the uniform of their country they make an extraordinary personal commitment to place the welfare of others ahead of their personal interests, to serve Canada before self and to put themselves at risk, as required, in the interests of the nation. A veteran, whether regular or reserve, active or retired, is someone who, at one point in their life, wrote a blank cheque made payable to “the Government of Canada,” for an amount of “up to and including their life.”

● (1615)

That blank cheque made payable to our country is not something that most of us have to write every day when we go to work, so while our servicemen and women are coaching our kids at soccer or helping raise money for the United Way in our communities, they are also unlike most of us in our community. That difference, that blank cheque of up to and including their life, is what creates our obligation and the obligation of our country and of our government to honour that commitment with a stand-alone covenant.

A moral, social, legal, and fiduciary obligation exists between the Canadian people and the government to provide equitable financial compensation and support services to past and active members of the Canadian Armed Forces who have been injured or disabled or have died as a result of military service. The government is obligated to fulfill this covenant.

Canadian Armed Forces veterans and their families deserve our deepest gratitude and they deserve to be taken care of. Too many veterans and their families still cannot access adequate health care, pensions, and other vital supports, including the nine front-line Veterans Affairs offices that have been closed in this country.

I want to thank my colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore for helping us lead the way on proposals to improve programs and services available for veterans and their families.

The NDP has a plan to end service pension clawbacks, reopen shuttered Veterans Affairs offices, and widen access to quality home care, long-term care, and mental health services.

*Business of Supply*

I also want to thank my colleague from New Westminster—Coquitlam for bringing forward this important motion and my colleague from Châteauguay—Saint-Constant for seconding the motion. Thanks to their hard work, this issue gets the important debate it deserves.

Our country has a long history of standing up for the rights and freedoms that Canadians hold dear. The men and women who join the Canadian Forces know they may be called upon to risk their lives on behalf of Canada and to uphold peace, security, or human rights here at home and around the world. We honour the service of those who accept the condition of unlimited liability and we are grateful for their personal sacrifices, including the sacrifices made by their families.

Members may have heard the minister make reference earlier to what was a saying, although it is now quite an outdated saying. It was that if the military wanted us to have a family, it would issue us with one.

The first time I heard that saying was during a meeting with then Rear-Admiral Maddison at the Halifax dockyard. Of course, it is a totally outdated saying. It is not true today. Canadian Forces have put a lot of work into supporting military families and acknowledging the role that families play in supporting our military servicemen and women. I have had opportunities to see that kind of support first-hand in talking to military families and seeing the special work that the Halifax Military Family Resource Centre does to support families in the Halifax area. That is why the social covenant not only acknowledges our veterans but also acknowledges their families. It acknowledges that our nation and its government and citizens will support these men and women on their missions, honour their service, and look after them and their families if they are injured or die in the service of their country.

Recognizing this covenant between the Canadian people and our government with past and active members of the Canadian Forces is essential. This covenant honours their service and their personal sacrifices and includes the sacrifices made by their families.

To highlight that, I would like to read a quote from Dr. Stéphanie Bélanger from the Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research:

There is a social covenant and this is what started the research institute. It is being studied as well in military ethics studies. There is lots of evidence of that social covenant existing in every country where the government will task people with a clause of unlimited liability, and because of this clause there is an obligation to serve back.

That sums it up perfectly.

I am proud to stand today to speak to the motion. I will be proud to vote for it and I encourage my colleagues across the House to support this motion.

• (1620)

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order, please.

[*Translation*]

It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for London—Fanshawe, Employment;

and the hon. member for Drummond, Regional Economic Development.

[*English*]

Questions and comments, the hon. Minister of Veterans Affairs.

**Hon. Erin O'Toole (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my friend for her remarks. Certainly she knows that I served in the military in Halifax for a number of years before we met at Dalhousie law school. I am glad that she talked about the important role that the Military Family Resource Centre in Halifax plays, as well as the one at Shearwater as part of the larger Halifax Regional Municipality.

I was struck by her comments confirming what I have said many times, which is that the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces are, indeed, us. They are Canadians from all walks of life and all parts of the country who step forward to serve.

That is why the veterans charter was created. It was to move to a system that looked at rehabilitation, wellness, and family, and that allowed for supports not just for physical injuries but for mental injuries. That is why it was brought in by the Liberals in 2005. That is why it is still a good system with the fixes that we have in Bill C-58, with the retirement income security benefit, critical injury benefit, family caregiver benefit, and a number of modernizing updates to the veterans charter.

My question for her is twofold. First, as the deputy leader of her party, can she urge her leadership to get behind Bill C-58? Most of Bill C-58 was agreed upon unanimously by the standing committee, including her critic, so why do we not move this measure through the House? It represents benefits and improvements to families.

More importantly, I have said that we support the motion brought forward today, but the purpose clause in Bill C-58 that talks about the obligation actually goes further. It includes all veterans and our obligation to all veterans, not just those who are injured, and it directly states that it should be liberally construed, which is what the standing committee wanted. By getting behind Bill C-58, we go further than the motion brought forward today by the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam.

I would ask her to get her party to support it.

**Ms. Megan Leslie:** Mr. Speaker, I do not have the wording of the bill in front of me, but the minister does know that there are parts of Bill C-58 that the NDP can support. However, the problem is that when Conservatives put everything plus the kitchen sink together, it forces those of us who want to support good parts of legislation to vote against the whole, because we cannot include these other egregious parts.

I do not understand why the government does not want to work with opposition parties to establish what can we agree on here. Is there some piece that we can pull out and work on together?

*Business of Supply*

The minister had some very good words about the veterans charter. This motion actually talks about creating the fiduciary duty with this covenant. That fiduciary duty would give the government a chance to pause and have a second thought about how its actions are reflecting that fiduciary duty, especially when we look at the money, time, and energy that has been taken by the government to fight veterans in courts.

I would hope that having a fiduciary duty would give the government pause before it embarks on these kinds of lawsuits that are so wasteful of everybody's time and money.

• (1625)

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote directly from the bill's statement of its purpose and then ask for a response from the member. The bill states:

The purpose of this Act is to recognize and fulfil the obligation of the people and Government of Canada to show just and due appreciation to members and veterans for their service to Canada. This obligation includes providing services, assistance and compensation to members and veterans who have been injured or have died as a result of military service and extends to their spouses or common-law partners or survivors and orphans. This Act shall be liberally interpreted so that the recognized obligation may be fulfilled.

It is no doubt a wonderful platitude that is being expressed in the purpose of the legislation that the minister just made reference to, but I wonder if the member would provide some comment regarding the reality. Does she believe that the reality of the last few years reflects the actual purpose of Bill C-58 and what the minister is talking about?

**Ms. Megan Leslie:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question and also for reading out the purpose, because that is what I could not find in front of me.

The member is right to point out the disconnect between the words and the reality. That is why I go back to this idea of creating a fiduciary duty so that we have this sense of duty that informs every single step we take as legislators.

That disconnect is very real. We have seen nine regional Veterans Affairs offices shut down across Canada. We have seen lay-offs at Veterans Affairs Canada. I am from Kirkland Lake, Ontario. There is a Department of Veterans Affairs regional office in Kirkland Lake, and I have seen the impact it has had on my hometown. I have seen money left over at the end of the year being given back to Treasury Board when veterans are going to food banks and when veterans are unable to make ends meet.

We are not alone in this. There are veterans across Canada who are standing behind what we are saying. Veterans have spoken out publicly to say they need help and are wondering where they can get this help.

That is the disconnect. Hopefully something like a social covenant will guide a government, no matter colour or party affiliation, in making those decisions.

**Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to speak to this motion today, because Canadian veterans are our heroes, and they should be treated with the utmost respect and provided with all the support we can possible give.

Conservatives continuously remind us to support our troops—we hear it all the time—but fail to understand that support must continue

once those Canadian Forces are no longer active and they become veterans. We owe them that much. We were, and are, a country engaged in modern-day conflicts in places like Somalia, Bosnia, Lebanon, Cyprus, East Timor, Afghanistan, and now Iraq.

Our troops have answered the call to assist communities jeopardized by floods, earthquakes, ice storms, forest fires, hurricanes, and tornadoes domestically and around the world. However, Veterans Affairs Canada has not adapted to the very real needs of the veterans of the modern day. This government has failed to support the obligations we owe veterans who served in the great wars, in Korea, and on peacekeeping missions.

In fact, because of the shortsightedness of the Conservative government, our relationship with our veterans has been damaged and diminished rather than enhanced. Older veterans were told to learn to use the Internet, for example, for continued service when local VAC offices faced service reductions and closures.

The Conservatives have cut—and this has been said a number of times—more than 900 jobs from Veterans Affairs since 2009. That is 23% of the workforce.

Compensation for funerals under the Last Post Fund has not kept up with the actual costs, leaving cash-strapped veterans and their families to pay the difference. Veterans requiring long-term care beds have been shuffled off to provincial jurisdictions because they have had the misfortune of outliving their life expectancy.

The ministry refuses to extend our obligation as a courtesy to them beyond the contracted dates. These are veterans with special needs who need special care as a result of their service to our country.

New Democrats have long advocated for the continuation of the veterans long term care program. The rates of homelessness and suicide among our veteran population are horrifying, but testimony to that fact and effects of post-traumatic stress are not being seriously addressed. Families are left without the supports they need to deal with younger veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress, and injured veterans with obvious disabilities as a result of their service must suffer the delay and humiliation of proving to the department over and over again that they have been disabled, in order that they continue to receive support.

The current government's Bill C-58, as proposed, is a good start, but many veterans feel it just doesn't go far enough in enhancing programs and services for all veterans and their families under the new charter. New Democrats agree with these veterans and their families. That is part of why we have chosen to dedicate this opposition day to point out that financial compensation and support services to past and active members of the Canadian Armed Forces who have been injured, disabled, or died as a result of military service, and to their dependents, must improve. We have a moral, social, and legal as well as fiduciary obligation to do that.

*Business of Supply*

Dr. Pierre Morisset, a retired major general and the chair of the Scientific Advisory Committee for Veterans' Health, was a witness before the veterans affairs committee last year, and he said, "When a soldier leaves the forces and is officially known as a veteran, then he's treated in the civilian health sector". Dr. Morisset went on to say that the civilian health care system is "not necessarily tuned to the reality of what kind of life the soldier may have had".

Similarly, Dr. Ruth Stewart of Athabasca University argued that:

The Canadian Forces represent a distinct culture, containing distinct subcultures. They possess unique languages, norms, and customs, and are socially stratified to a degree completely foreign to most north American civilians.

Once a soldier leaves the military, he or she is left to the care of civilian doctors who will do their best, but they do not have the expertise to deal with the specific issues veterans face. Veterans are our national heroes and, as such, they are a federal responsibility and should be looked after by the federal government. They are not, as the government believes, a problem to be dismissed, undervalued, or offloaded to the provinces.

This Parliament's veterans affairs committee identified three core themes for the study resulting in the new veterans charter: care and support of the most seriously disabled, support for families, and improving how Veterans Affairs Canada delivers the programs, services, and benefits of the new charter.

• (1630)

The Conservatives' Bill C-58 would only partly address some of the 14 recommendations contained in that unanimous report. It would, for instance, only provide assistance to help 100 of the most seriously injured.

The NDP believes that we have the obligation, and capability, to help all veterans and their families.

New Democrats will push for the retirement income security benefits to be increased from 70%, as outlined in the bill, to 100% of what the veterans received in VAC financial benefits before age 65, to ensure that veterans have financial stability.

The critical injury benefit proposed under Bill C-58 would provide a \$70,000 tax-free award to support the most severely injured and ill Canadian Forces members and veterans. However, under the proposed criteria for qualification, only two or three people per year would qualify. This is simply not good enough for our veterans. They have given their lives and their careers for this country.

We have also heard from veterans who are disappointed in the government for not addressing the disparities and unfairness related to lump-sum disability payments, as compared with civilian court awards for pain and suffering.

Scott Maxwell, executive director of Wounded Warriors Canada, said the new benefits under Bill C-58 would go to just 1% of all severely disabled vets and Sean Bruyca, veteran advocate, has expressed similar concerns.

Injured and disabled vets should not have to fight their own government in court for the compensation and care they deserve, but sadly, this has become all too common under the current government.

If the Conservatives are serious about improving the care of our veterans, they should stop fighting those veterans in court and recognize our historic covenant.

Today, New Democrats are calling upon the government to restore our country's relationship with the veterans to one that is based upon respect rather than neglect.

Instead of including provisions to assist veterans in an omnibus budget bill—a cynical attempt to force opposition parties that support the measures for veterans to vote against them—the Conservatives should recognize the historic covenant that we share with veterans and honour it with decisive action.

I would like to speak, now, about the proud history of military service in London, Ontario.

I cherish the relationship I have been able to foster with the veterans in my community who have served us so well over the years. Their participation in our community enriches all of us. They support hospitals, young athletes, the homeless, the wounded, and the forgotten. I feel very privileged to stand with our veterans in the community.

Perhaps members have heard of the proposed demolition of many buildings at Wolseley Barracks, including the historic officers' mess. Bob Marshall, president of the Duchess of Kent Legion, would like to see the officers' mess repurposed as the Legion's new home, rather than demolition.

This is a reasonable proposal, a win for the Legion, a win for Wolseley Barracks, and a win for the community. I am fully behind it. I hope that the Minister of Defence has had time to consider this proposal adequately and that he will support it.

I would also like to remind the House that, when in opposition, the Conservatives promised they would make significant veteran reforms. Sadly, after nearly a decade in office, they have done little to address the gaping holes in the services offered Canadian veterans and their families. In fact, they have gone so far as to challenge the existence of our sacred covenant with those veterans.

The Conservatives have forgotten our veterans and the contribution of modern-day Canadian Forces veterans and RCMP who served in peacekeeping around the world. That is absolutely unacceptable. Canadians are passionate and proud in our gratitude for our veterans.

During Remembrance Week and beyond, Canadians choose to honour the men and women who gave us a strong and free country. It is long past time for our federal government to likewise honour all veterans, both past and present, by serving their needs.

Monuments and parades are lovely, but they are cold comfort to the veterans and families who are suffering neglect.

It is time to mean what we say when we repeat the promise to remember. It must be accompanied by real action. That is what New Democrats are promising and proposing today with this motion

*Business of Supply*

The NDP is the only party with a comprehensive veterans policy that we intend to implement when we become the government of this great country.

I am proud to support today's motion. I hope everyone in this House will do so also.

• (1635)

**Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have a quick question for my colleague from London—Fanshawe, and I would like to thank her for her eloquent speech.

I would really like to know what we should expect. When the Prime Minister talked about motions in the past, it was in respect for this House to implement them, but the challenges we have today are because of not implementing those motions. I think today is a good day to reinstate that philosophy of actually following through from the government to the opposition.

**Ms. Irene Mathysen:** Mr. Speaker, the member is quite right. We have heard a great deal in this House, and it goes back to our involvement in Afghanistan with the call to support our troops, making it very clear from the Prime Minister's Office that somehow support, or lack of support, for the troops was integral to the way the House would operate and do business. Therefore, there is a lot of talk, but very little action.

I would like to underscore some of the things about which I am very concerned. One is a lack of long-term care for our veterans.

If veterans were in World War II or Korea, yes, they would have long-term care, but for post-Korean veterans or veterans who suffered in the Golan Heights or gave all that there was to give in Afghanistan, they are not covered in terms of long-term care.

This is an affront to the men and women who put their lives on the line. Yet, we still see the Conservative government making excuses about why it cannot make sure that all veterans are provided with the services they absolutely need and deserve.

• (1640)

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to base my question on a quote that the Liberal critic for veterans affairs gave earlier. In the shadow of the First World War, the then prime minister Sir Robert Borden made a covenant to those Canadians who fought. On the eve of Vimy Ridge, he told Canadians that:

You can go into this action feeling assured of this, and as the head of the government I give you this assurance: That you need not fear that the government and the country will fail to show just appreciation of your service to the country and Empire in what you are about to do and what you have already done.

The government and the country will consider it their first duty to see that a proper appreciation of your effort and of your courage is brought to the notice of people at home that no man, whether he goes back or whether he remains in Flanders, will have just cause to reproach the government for having broken faith with the men who won and the men who died.

When we reflect on that covenant and look at what has taken place over the last couple of years and what we are hearing from veterans from all regions of Canada, does the member believe that the government has been in keeping with what was then quoted by then prime minister Borden?

**Ms. Irene Mathysen:** Mr. Speaker, I do not think that the covenant has been broken just in the last few years. Rather, I think it has been broken over the last many decades.

It is interesting that, when Borden made that covenant with the men and women who went to war, I think it was from a sense of real and profound gratitude. Canadians knew how those men and women suffered in the fields, from the gas attacks, the constant bombardment, the discomfort of the trenches, and the lack of any hope in some cases. There was a real understanding. Unfortunately, almost 100 years later, that recognition seems to have faded.

Canadians go to Remembrance Day ceremonies, and they are absolutely genuine in their gratitude. I just wish the government were as grateful. I wish that the covenant spoken 100 years ago were part and parcel of what the governments of the last few decades understood as their obligation. Sadly, it quite simply is not.

**Mr. Scott Armstrong (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister of Labour, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to address the motion put forward by the member of Parliament for New Westminster—Coquitlam.

I will be splitting my time with the member for Mississauga East—Cooksville.

I urge the NDP to work with our government to improve the well-being of Canada's veterans and their families. We understand the need to provide those who have bravely served our nation in uniform with the support they need to transition to civilian life.

Our recently announced increased benefits and services are evidence of our commitment to ensuring that Canadian veterans and their families are treated with care, compassion, and respect. It is through these new measures, which are included in economic action plan 2015, that we are demonstrating the importance we place on being there for our brave men and women when they need us most.

These new benefits and services we are proposing take significant strides in improving the new veterans charter. We are moving to better support families and caregivers, those who play such a vital role in the transition process. We are respecting reservists. The purpose clause in Division 17 of Bill C-59, the economic action plan 2015 act, which my colleagues have discussed, demonstrates our government's duty and commitment to veterans. It is an ongoing commitment.

I encourage all colleagues to listen to the debate today and recognize that the measures our government is introducing would enhance the lives of those who have served our nation. It is not only about supporting those who have served, it is also about supporting their families.

We recognize the vital role the families play in the lives of the men and women in uniform and how veterans' health issues can impact those who stand by them. We understand the important role those who stand beside Canada's veterans play in their recovery and well-being.



*Business of Supply*

I would like to highlight the action we have taken to support families and caregivers.

We recognize that the family caregivers of Canada's veterans play a large supporting role in providing those who have served with the care they need and deserve, which is why I am pleased to tell the House about a new benefit our government has introduced to help relieve some of the burden facing the families of those who are severely injured. A serious physical or mental injury causes not only immense challenges for the serviceman or woman but serious stress and strain on their families. Our government has proposed a new family caregiver relief benefit to provide an annual tax-free grant of \$7,238. Family members who help with the care of the most seriously injured veterans can have the added flexibility of getting relief during times of added stress on the family or even help to recharge their batteries, if that is what needs to happen.

Today Veterans Affairs already pays for in-home medical care for the most severely injured veterans. This funding would be in addition to other VAC benefits already in place to support veterans' daily needs. It is a recognition of their sacrifice and the sacrifice of their families. It tops things up just a bit and makes things a little easier.

This benefit is for caregivers in the home—spouses, common-law partners, parents, or adult children—who often try to juggle raising children or family duties alongside assisting their injured loved ones. Their own careers are often sidetracked or reduced, and often their own health and wellness can be impacted when there is an injured veteran at home. This new benefit recognizes their important work and would provide them with a little extra flexibility.

This funding could be used for relief options, such as covering the cost of having a professional caregiver come into the home or covering the cost of another family member or friend travelling to the veteran's home, and it would be provided in addition to other benefits already in place to support veterans' health care needs. It is a supplement. We believe that this would make a tremendous difference for these families.

This recently announced benefit is not the only action we have taken in support of veterans. Last year we announced an increase in the number of psychological counselling sessions for families of veterans from eight to 20 sessions.

• (1645)

We have also invested in research to help us gain a better understanding of the impact operational stress injuries, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, have on the mental health of the spouses and children of Canadian veterans. Post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental injuries have an effect on the whole family, not just on the injured veteran. Research such as this will help us get a better handle on the complex challenges facing today's veterans, their spouses, and their children when it comes to their mental health and their mental well-being. We want to identify possible next steps in this area.

We announced that we will develop and implement veteran-specific mental-health first aid training across the country for both veterans and their families. This will provide family members and caregivers of veterans with the training they need to support their

loved ones in a time of crisis. It will do this by teaching them about mental-health conditions; training them in the signs and symptoms of common mental-health disorders; providing them with the opportunity to practise crisis first aid for those with mental-health conditions; ensuring that they know where, when, and how to get help; and providing education on what type of help has been shown to be effective in their situation and why.

Those are some of the actions our government has taken to honour our commitment not only to members of the Canadian Armed Forces and veterans but to their families as well. I am disappointed to see that once again the New Democrats are playing their political games when our government has been unprecedented in the investments we have made in improving the well-being of Canadian veterans and those family members and caregivers who stand by the side of those injured veterans.

I urge all members of this House to vote in favour of the new measures our government is introducing in support of veterans and their families. It is by taking action and passing these measures that we will demonstrate our commitment and our duty to provide those who have bravely served our nation, and their families, with the help they need.

• (1650)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to know whether my colleague thinks that it is also extremely important to understand the reality on the ground in order to understand the situation of veterans and soldiers.

Many of them have said that it is very difficult to obtain services and that they often feel they have to fight to get them. They say that they have to go through a long process that sometimes causes them more psychological pain than the incident itself.

Given what they have gone through, should we not make their lives easier by taking into account what they are saying and improving the process they have to go through to get help?

[*English*]

**Mr. Scott Armstrong:** Mr. Speaker, I absolutely agree that we need to make sure that Veterans Affairs Canada makes the process for gaining benefits for veterans clear, simple, and easy to apply for. The minister has been very clear on the personal steps he has taken to make sure that every veteran in this country has the ability to access the benefits due to them.

We are not only expanding the breadth and seriousness of the benefits we are putting in place to support veterans, we are also making changes to make sure that any forms that have to be filled out, any phone calls veterans have to make, any online applications they endeavour to take part in are easy and that veterans have support in doing that. Not only do we need to make sure that our veterans have the ability to get this large number of benefits our government is providing for them but we are working to make sure that those veterans have the ease of application and that those benefits are readily available to them.

*Business of Supply*

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, what the government actually has done is close a number of offices in different regions of the country. They include, for example, Cornerbrook, Newfoundland and Labrador; Charlottetown, P.E.I.; Sydney, Nova Scotia; Windsor, Ontario; Thunder Bay, Ontario; Brandon, in my home province of Manitoba; Saskatoon, Saskatchewan; Kelowna, British Columbia; and Prince George, British Columbia.

I wonder if the member could comment on why the government found it necessary to close those Veterans Affairs offices, given that there is a big difference between talking on the telephone to someone and being able to meet face to face with an individual, which is something the employees in these offices did on a daily basis.

**Mr. Scott Armstrong:** Mr. Speaker, before I answer the member's question, I would like to say that in 2005, when his party was in power, the budget of Veterans Affairs was about \$2.8 billion. Since our government has taken power, we have continued to increase the budget. Ninety per cent of the benefits go to veterans, and now that budget has reached over \$3.6 billion. We are standing up and supporting veterans far better than his party ever did when it was in power.

As far as offices being closed, in my riding of Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, we did not have a Veterans Affairs office. Veterans in my riding had to drive all the way down to Halifax if they were in Colchester County. It was over an hour to get to a Veterans Affairs office. If they were in the northern part of the riding, they actually had to leave the province and drive all the way out to Moncton. That was the closest Veterans Affairs office to them. Now we have put trained staff in the Service Canada offices, so Veterans Affairs can provide services to veterans in my riding in both Amherst and Truro. Veterans can go into their hometown or close to their hometown and get service directly without having to travel hours and hours.

This is the same situation that takes place all across the country. We have 600 new points of service for veterans to go to. Veterans, especially older veterans who may have served in Korea or in the Second World War, have mobility issues. It is harder for them to travel like they used to. Now they can get those services at Service Canada offices close to home.

• (1655)

**Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am very honoured to rise today to speak to our government's commitment and dedication to providing veterans and their families with the support they need and deserve. That is why we introduced the Support for Veterans and their Families Act and included these measures in our economic action plan 2015.

This important legislation will put new benefits and services in place to improve the health and well-being of those seriously injured during service. These are improvements the NDP members have pointed out the need for. These are advances the Veterans Ombudsman, veterans and their advocacy groups have called for. These measures also address the very recommendations the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs made in its report "The New Veterans Charter: Moving Forward".

As a member of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, I can attest to the extensive consultations and review we undertook to ensure our recommendations were sound and addressed the very concerns of veterans, their families and the groups that represented them.

The legislation will not only improve the new veterans charter, but it explicitly outlines the government's commitment and dedication to providing veterans with the help they need to successfully transition to civilian life in a purpose statement.

This purpose statement will be included in the new veterans charter so that this existing and important legislation recognizes and fulfills the obligation of the people and Government of Canada to show just and due appreciation to members and veterans for their service to Canada. I think we all agree this is very important and is obviously why we are having this debate today.

My colleagues on this side of the House have already spoken at length about some of the measures in the economic action plan, including the retirement income security benefit, family caregiver relief benefit and critical injury benefit. That is why in addition to the new measures introduced, we are putting more resources where they are needed to ensure service excellence.

Everyone knows case managers and the front-line service they offer are vitally important to veterans who need their services. That is why the minister announced last month that more than 100 permanent full-time case managers would be hired to improve one-on-one service. Veterans and their families experiencing complex mental health and transition needs will have them addressed more quickly and efficiently.

These additional resources, combined with a more balanced approach to managing the workload of the case managers, will help reduce the current ratio of 40 case-managed veterans to one case manager down to 30 case-managed veterans for each case manager. This will lead to better service and ultimately better outcomes for veterans. It also means veterans will be able to access the services they need quicker.

To ensure balanced caseloads, all case managers will have their caseload constantly assessed, adjusted and balanced so their time and attention is given appropriately to the needs of seriously ill or injured veterans.

It is absolutely critical that veterans as well as the Canadian Armed Forces members who are released right now from the military know they will continue to be well served and their needs met efficiently and with care, compassion and respect.

Our government has also committed the financial resources for the department to hire more than 100 new disability benefits staff, both temporary and permanent. Hiring more employees whose job it will be to evaluate disability benefit claims means veterans and their families will have faster access to disability benefits, health care and mental health treatment.

*Business of Supply*

Since becoming minister in January, the Minister of Veterans Affairs has consulted with veterans across the country to ensure we implement changes that will greatly benefit those who have served our country and their families. This has resulted in fundamental improvements required to the many systems, services, supports, benefits and programs provided or delivered so veterans can served better. Everything we do to support veterans is now “veteran-centric”, meaning everything we do centres around what is best for the veterans.

● (1700)

We are striving for service excellence and ensuring that veterans are treated with care, compassion and respect. That is why the minister has asked that options be examined to consolidate all Veterans Affairs benefits so they only have to access one single, clear and easy to understand benefit system. This action alone can have a dramatic impact on reducing stress on the injured soldier as he or she transitions to civilian life.

The improved way that veterans and their families are cared for and served did not only begin this year. Our government also took action last year in response to the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs by announcing the addition of a new operational stress injury clinic in Halifax. We also announced that the OSI satellite clinics in St. John's, Chicoutimi, Pembroke, Brockville, Kelowna, Victoria and the Greater Toronto Area would be expanded to speed access to mental health services for those with mental health conditions. These clinics play a key role in providing specialized assessment, diagnosis and treatment services for veterans and their families living with operational stress injuries.

In fact, to support them by the end of the year, veterans and Canadian Armed Forces members will have access to an established network of 26 operational stress injury clinics. Access is also being expanded to seven military family resource centres across the country as part of a pilot project. Traditionally, the services and programs offered through the centres have only been available to still-serving members of the military. Up to 1,200 medically released veterans and their families may now take part over the course of the pilot, giving them access to a wide range of services to help smooth some of the challenges they face as they transition to civilian life.

A mental health first aid training course designed especially for veterans and their families will help them better understand the various kinds of mental health conditions and their impact. A veteran or his or her family member will then be able to respond earlier when someone they care about is in crisis. New research funding will ensure that we have the information we need to develop policies and programs grounded in good science and research to support better mental health treatments, faster recoveries and better outcomes for veterans, serving members and their families.

We are making real and significant progress. We will continue to work each and every day to improve the programs, benefits and services that Canada's veterans and their families need and deserve.

Instead of playing political games, I urge all members of the NDP and the House to support the measures included in the support for veterans and their families act and in the economic action plan. It is the right and honourable thing to do for veterans and their families.

● (1705)

**Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise and ask a question of my colleague because I think there is a great deal of support in the House for the NDP motion in support of veterans. I know in my community, in Parkdale—High Park, I regularly visit our two legions: the Royal Canadian Legion, Maple Leaf Branch, which includes the Swansea Branch 46; and the one on the Lakeshore, Branch 344, the Queen's Own Rifles. That is where my dad joined the navy in the war, so it holds a special place in my heart.

However, it is not only in the legions across the country that we find support for our veterans. Certainly, just chatting with neighbours, friends and family, there is tremendous support and respect for our veterans and the work they do. Because they are willing to make a huge sacrifice for the country and for us, we to ensure that we support them when they return.

There has been a lot of friction with the government of late because of the closure of veterans offices, the cutting of personnel and taking veterans to court to deny them the benefits they should be receiving. I know the hon. member personally supports veterans, but does he not see that the government is at odds with veterans because of the cutbacks it has made and challenging the benefits of veterans in courts? Could he answer that for me?

**Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon:** Mr. Speaker, I also visit the long term care facility that is in the member's riding where many veterans spend their days now when they have to be cared for.

I would like to stress that I have a lot of respect for veterans and I always have. I remember my grandfather. I was very young when he passed away. I remember he was missing his right arm. He lost it in the first war. Where I grew up, every family was affected by the Second World War, like families in our country. We should all stress very strongly, especially for my generation and younger generations, for us born after the war, that we have to understand and admit that what we enjoy today, all our freedoms and our great country, we owe to those who went and fought. Someone from almost every family in Canada went to Europe and fought for the freedom that we, who were born after the war, enjoy today.

The hon. member mentioned that there were some service cuts, et cetera. Actually, our government restored some services that had been deeply cut in 1990s by the previous government and we enhanced many services.

The member also mentioned the closure of service centres. We should give the new system, the contact points that have been established at Service Canada, a chance to work, to see if they work for veterans. If they need improvement, we will improve them, but we have to move with life. Things change in life. Technology changes. The way people communicate changes. Therefore, delivery of services also changes. Let us give it a chance.

*Business of Supply*

However, I think there is no disagreement on any side of the House that we have to support veterans because of their service to all of us and to our country.

• (1710)

**Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to remind the House that I will be splitting my time with the great member for the beautiful riding of St. John's South—Mount Pearl.

Before I start speaking on today's motion, I want to give a plug for the Royal Canadian Dental Corps. It has supported the Canadian Armed Forces in every major combat, peacekeeping and peace-making mission around the world for the last century, including World War I, World War II, Korea, the Balkans and Afghanistan. Its members have also worked with Kosovo refugees, trained mid-level providers for the Afghan National Army, provided oral health for Haitian earthquake victims and cared for under-served populations in the Pacific and Caribbean on U.S. navy missions.

These men and women have done a great service for our country, and today I would like to congratulate them on behalf of the entire House on the centennial of the Royal Canadian Dental Corps. As of May 13, it will have been in service for over 100 years. On behalf of all of us, I want to thank the Royal Canadian Dental Corps for its outstanding historic service, and for its many years to come.

We are here today to ask one simple question, which is what we do in opposition. We ask the government of the day a particular question. Ironically, this question has taken us all day, and we still have not gotten a confirmed answer. I myself have asked the following question probably 10 times to two different ministers, a prime minister and two different parliamentary secretaries, and even did a press conference on it with no response. We are asking the government a very simple question: Does it or does it not have a social, moral, legal and fiduciary responsibility to care for those it asked to put in harm's way?

It is funny, a former Conservative prime minister, Mr. Borden, once said that the government did. I wonder if the current Conservative Party does as well. However, we will find out soon enough from the votes here.

I will get back to the matter at hand regarding veterans' care.

First of all, I want to congratulate the new minister on his posting. There is no question that there is a different tone now from the previous minister. No offence to the previous minister, but it just was not his cup of tea I guess in this regard, to be completely frank, but it is not entirely his fault. The previous minister was following orders from the PMO and the PCO in how to run his department. However, the reality is, there is a different tone now and we see a different yard mark coming from the current minister.

The previous speaker is also on the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. We did a report that was unanimous. In this House, getting a unanimous report from a committee is almost impossible these days, but we did it. There were 14 recommendations that we all agreed should be done immediately; not tomorrow, not next week, not next year, not piecemeal, but all 14 recommendations should be done immediately.

In fact, three-quarters of those recommendations are now approaching five years in recommendations; not one year, not five months, but five years. Some of these recommendations have come from the Royal Canadian Legion, the gerontological advisory board, the government's own advisory board on Veterans Affairs, ANAVETS and many other veterans and individuals who had come up with these recommendations many years ago. We formulated them into a report, and what do we do get six months to the day of that report?

Well, the previous minister said that we were going to do this in a piecemeal approach. The thing is, he was telling the truth, because Bill C-58 that the government talks about now is dealing with about three or four of those recommendations. We have not had Bill C-58 even come up for debate yet in the House let alone before the committee, let alone before the Senate, let alone before royal assent. The government is telling us to push it forward, but we have not even seen it again yet.

Now if the government is amiable to some alterations and amendments to the bill, I am sure we can get it passed like that, because there are some good elements in that legislation. However, in typical Conservative fashion, it falls woefully inadequate on the recommendations that were in our report.

I want to thank the current veterans ombudsman and the previous ombudsman for the work they have done in advising our committee on many of these things.

Let us go to the history of the Conservative Party. The current minister is the 11th minister we have had in my almost 18 years of service here. The problems with Veterans Affairs and the RCMP and their families did not start with the Conservative Party. They started long before with the Liberal Party. However, these problems have been exacerbated by the current Conservative Party.

• (1715)

Let me take everyone back to a meeting in New Brunswick in 2005 when the current Prime Minister was in opposition and Greg Thompson was a former minister of veterans affairs. When the Liberals were in power, they said in the Agent Orange or chemical spraying in Gagetown debate that they were only going to cover people for Agent Orange in 1966 and 1967, for the one month each time, when the Americans were there. They said that was what they were going to do. The Liberals said that.

Mr. Thompson was brilliant in his advocacy against that. He said there was no way the Liberals could allow that and that the Conservative Party, if it formed government, would never do that. In fact, the current Prime Minister, who was then in opposition, said the exact same thing. At a meeting, he said that all people affected by the chemical spraying in Gagetown from 1958 to 1984 would be looked after and there would be a public inquiry.

*Business of Supply*

What happened in 2006? Those words were out the door. In fact, thousands and thousands of people have died because of the chemical spraying in Gagetown and very little in compensation was offered. I think around 7,000 people actually received what I call a \$20,000 kiss-off. Many people, like Basil McAllister of Burton, New Brunswick, had to fight three VRAB decisions, two court cases over 10 years, to get further compensation for the chemicals that were sprayed on him.

Fortunately, though, people can rest assured that when the NDP forms government in October, we will have a national public inquiry into the chemical spraying in Gagetown. That is unacceptable and that is what we will do.

The money from the offices closed by the government went into advertising during the Stanley Cup playoffs. New Democrats will reverse that. We will not only reopen the offices but make them better than they were before and ensure that many more home visits happen for veterans who may wish to have someone come to their homes and fill out the forms properly. That is what we will do when we form government. In fact, there are many other things that we will do when we form government. Right now, we just have to wait and be patient. Soon it will be time for the Conservatives to find the exit door. I say that with great respect, of course, to my Conservative counterparts.

Let us go back to another promise the Prime Minister made to Joyce Carter of St. Peter's, Cape Breton. He told her in a letter, which he signed, not to worry because when Conservatives form government, as prime minister he would ensure that every single widow or widower of a deceased veteran would receive VIP service, not some of them, not a couple, not from New Brunswick, not from Nova Scotia, not from B.C., all would receive the VIP treatment. What happened? Almost four years after that date, some of them got the VIP treatment, not all of them.

That was another broken promise to the widow of a veteran. If someone can mislead the widow of a veteran, imagine what else that person could do to this country. That means nobody else is safe. It is unconscionable that the Prime Minister could have done that, absolutely unconscionable. She actually even had to come here to get that benefit. Unfortunately, not all of them received it even though it was promised to them.

Just today in the House of Commons the Minister of Veterans Affairs was asked a question. By the way, I should let every Conservative in the House know that every single time I have ever asked a question in the House of Commons, I have always provided the question in advance to the minister. Even though my own party completely dislikes that, I do it out of respect for the position of the minister.

The question was quite clearly about a 78-year-old veteran who served many years in the military, is injured, does not have much to live on, and wishes to enter into Camp Hill veterans hospital, run and administered by the Province of Nova Scotia, as World War II and Korean veterans do now. The province pays a small portion and the Government of Canada, through DVA, pays the rest. Twice now the minister asked whether I have lobbied the province to get him in there. I remind my Conservative colleagues that I have yet to see any

legislation from anyone that says the care of veterans is a provincial responsibility. It is a federal responsibility.

On behalf of my party, I hope the Conservatives and other parties will join us in supporting this motion because it is critical that we do this. I want to say, in conclusion, that we should never regret growing old because it is a privilege denied to so many.

Lest we forget.

● (1720)

**Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that it was a pleasure getting my entertainment value from my colleague from the riding of Chicken Little. Every time I listen to this member speak, the sky is falling, things are a mess and nothing ever works.

I would like to ask my friend and colleague a question, because I do have a lot of respect for the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore. He has been here a long time. He has sat here as an opposition member, which he will continue to do after the next election, and he is good at it. He is good at sitting as an opposition member, so why change the course?

He must agree that there have been some significant improvements and that things have gotten better for many veterans and caregivers. This government is trying. We are learning. We are not perfect, and we do hear situations where, sometimes, individuals fall through the cracks. Unfortunately, that is one of the things that frustrates me as a parliamentarian. Nothing is perfect around here, and individual situations do change.

I want to give the member an opportunity to stand now and talk about some of the improvements and benefits that have happened because of the good work of the veterans affairs committee. I want to give kudos for that. The veterans affairs committee members have worked really hard on some of these issues and the review of the veterans charter.

I would like to give the member an opportunity to talk about some of the positive things that have happened.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Mr. Speaker, if my hon. colleague from Ontario had understood right from the beginning of my speech, I did say that the yardstick had moved ever so slightly with the new minister and previous ones. There is no question that, since I have been here, there have been slight improvements to the Department of Veterans Affairs. There are many veterans, and I have said this repeatedly not only in the House but right across the country, who receive excellent quality care from the Department of Veterans Affairs, and special kudos go to the individuals who work at DVA to provide that excellent care.

*Business of Supply*

At the same time, what we have to ask ourselves and the hon. colleague, if he has the chance to stand up again, is why would \$1.13 billion of lapsed spending from 2006 until now go back to the Treasury Board? Many veterans were denied hearing aids. Many veterans were denied VIP. Many veterans were denied other services. That is not us saying that. That is Dennis Manuge having to go to court on the SISIP case. This case could have been settled out of court many years ago.

Yes, there have been improvements, but there is an incredibly long way to go for any member of any government or any party, for that matter, to ensure that all veterans are well looked after, because not one veteran is asking for a Rolex watch or a trip to Florida. They are asking for basic dignity, and that is the minimum that they deserve.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up on the member's comments regarding the issue of advertising. I made reference to this earlier today. Imagine, if we will, veterans who are in regions where outreach or service offices were being closed. At the same time, they tune in to their TV networks and find very partisan political ads to promote the government budget, for example.

Could the member provide some comments regarding the government's priorities when it is closing down services, while at the same time spending literally millions of dollars on self-promoting budget ads that are exceptionally partisan?

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Mr. Speaker, it is rather unfortunate that the government would waste taxpayers' dollars on these advertisements, really just to promote the Conservative Party of Canada. However, the reality is that it should be putting that money not just toward veterans' care, but toward our environment, people with disabilities, seniors, students to get a proper education, small business, et cetera. There are a lot of other areas to which the government could have allocated those funds.

Imagine closing offices and using that money for advertising. I think that veterans will be loud and clear come the next election, just like people were in Alberta. An orange wave is coming, and I advise my Conservative counterparts to get ready for it.

• (1725)

**Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I stand in support of the opposition motion, the New Democratic Party motion. I do not usually read out the whole motion when it is a long one, as it takes up precious speaking time, but I will in this case because I find it hard to believe we are actually debating it, that this subject is actually up for debate in the House of Commons.

The motion reads:

That, in the opinion of the House, a standalone covenant of moral, social, legal, and fiduciary obligation exists between the Canadian people and the government to provide equitable financial compensation and support services to past and active members of the Canadian Armed Forces who have been injured, disabled or have died as a result of military service, and to their dependents, which the government is obligated to fulfil.

It is hard to believe that we have to dedicate an opposition day, that we have to dedicate a day to debate what should be a no-brainer, what should be common sense, common Canadian sense.

Our veterans stood on guard for us. They stood on guard for Canada. Our veterans stood on guard for democracy. They stood on guard around the world in conflict zones like Iraq, Afghanistan, Bosnia, and Libya. They stood on guard for us in humanitarian missions like Haiti, after the earthquake in January 2010, and in Newfoundland and Labrador, after Hurricane Igor that same year.

Our veterans stood on guard for us, and we must stand on guard for them. That is the essence of the sacred covenant that exists between the Government of Canada and our Armed Forces. Our responsibility, our duty, is to be there for soldiers and veterans in their moment of need, not to abandon them to budget and service cuts. I call that the ultimate insult. Too many give the ultimate sacrifice and the government gives the ultimate insult.

There have been too many examples where the Conservative government has failed to stand on guard for our veterans.

The NDP MP for Sackville—Eastern Shore, Nova Scotia, who just spoke, this party's veterans affairs critic—and an outstanding critic he is—has a quotation on his office door by a U.S. senator, “If you can't afford to take care of your veterans, then don't go to war”.

The Conservative government has not been taking care of our veterans. It was not taking care of our veterans when it closed nine Veterans Affairs offices across Canada, including one in Corner Brook, Newfoundland, my home province.

I was told just today of a Newfoundland veteran who served in Bosnia. He had to drive eight hours from Corner Brook, his home, to St. John's, the closest office, so that the staff there could start a profile on him. He drove for eight hours across the island of Newfoundland.

The Conservative government was not taking care of veterans when it cut 23% of the Veterans Affairs workforce, or 900 jobs, since 2009. The Conservative government certainly was not taking care of veterans when it spent more than \$700,000 fighting Afghan veterans in court to deny the existence of the social covenant I mentioned a moment ago.

Lawyers for the government have argued that it has no obligation or social contract with veterans. Those same lawyers also argued that is unfair to bind the government to promises made nearly a century ago by another prime minister.

That social contract was struck in 1917 by then Conservative prime minister Robert Borden:

The government and the country will consider it their first duty to see that a proper appreciation of your effort and of your courage is brought to the notice of people at home that no man, whether he goes back or whether he remains in Flanders, will have just cause to reproach the government for having broken faith with the men who won and the men who died.

*Business of Supply*

Not only has the Conservative government failed to take care of our veterans, to respect that sacred covenant, but it has also been playing the worst sort of politics, the sort of politics that rots faith in our political system.

• (1730)

The latest massive omnibus bill, Bill C-59, is the budget implementation bill. It is 167 pages, which is short by omnibus standards, and it obviously includes measures on the budget. That is the same boutique budget that we will be voting against because it would cater to the wealthy, among other reasons. It would put the needs of the more affluent and more influential people first. However, Bill C-59 contains much more than this year's budget measures. The bill touches on almost two dozen other bills, from the federal balanced budget act and the prevention of terrorist travel act to public service sick leave and Canadian Labour Code changes.

The Conservatives have also cynically included provisions to assist veterans in that omnibus bill. They do this all the time. Such a move will force opposition parties who support those measures to help veterans to vote against the bill and then—and you can take this to the bank, Mr. Speaker—the Conservatives will throw in our faces that we voted against veterans. That is the kind of government we have in power, a government that is morally spent. I can definitely get much more creative, but I do not want to cross the parliamentary line. After nine years of Conservative government, too many veterans and their families cannot access adequate health care, pensions, and other vital supports.

I had a conversation just this morning with Jamie MacWhirter. He is a Newfoundlander and he is also a veteran. Jamie MacWhirter survived a seven-month tour in Afghanistan's most volatile war zones. He survived. He drove a refuelling truck loaded with 10,000 litres of diesel. His nickname was Fireball, for obvious reasons. Near misses for Jamie included rocket attacks, the horror of a suicide bombing that killed several children, fire fights, and roadside bombs. Jamie MacWhirter survived Afghanistan in one piece only to battle a different type of nightmare back here in Canada in Newfoundland and Labrador. Jamie MacWhirter has post-traumatic stress disorder, and the battle here at home was, and still is, for help.

Jamie MacWhirter says there is some help for veterans, some services available, but too often veterans do not know about them. Too often soldiers are afraid to speak out for fear of being kicked out of the military. They are afraid to ask for help. Soldiers do not feel safe in asking for help. When they do, too often the help is not there.

Jamie MacWhirter and others have formed a support group, PTSD Buddies, to help people with post-traumatic stress disorder, to help them share experiences, and to lean on one another for support. Veterans should lean on one another. It is good that they are coming together to support one another. That is what the best kind of soldiers do. However, veterans should also be able to lean on their own government.

I mentioned earlier that the Conservative government is fighting Afghanistan vets in court to deny the existence of the social covenant. Those vets are in a group called the Equitas Society. That group states:

A veteran, whether regular or reserve, active or retired, is someone who, at one point in their life, wrote a blank cheque made payable to "the Government of Canada," for an amount of "up to and including their life."

One hundred and fifty-eight Canadians were killed in combat in Afghanistan. I say this with great respect for their families, for the loved ones they left behind. Even more personnel, an estimated 160, have died from suicide since returning home from Afghanistan.

• (1735)

The Government of Canada has a sacred obligation as the holder of that blank cheque to stand and deliver, to stand on guard for the men and women of our forces when they ask for help.

**Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hypocrisy from the member opposite is almost too much to bear, but I steeled myself and listened to it.

The NDP has a very strong anti-military history, and this phony concern for veterans shines through and through. New Democrats have never supported any military action to defend democracy anywhere around the world, including the fight against ISIS. Shamefully, they are opposing Canada's participation in protecting and defending western democracies.

That anti-military legacy started with the founder of their party, J. S. Woodsworth, who actually opposed Canada's participation in the Second World War. Imagine what the world would have been like if his advice had been followed? Vladimir Lenin called the western left "useful idiots" for keeping him in power.

Why is the NDP so anti-military and not willing to protect and defend democracy?

**Mr. Ryan Cleary:** Mr. Speaker, usually when I get asked a question after a speech, I thank the hon. member, but I am not going to thank the hon. member. Too often what he says in the House of Commons either makes no sense or is just an affront to everything I hold dear about the House.

One of the things the hon. member just said was that the hypocrisy is too much to bear, and he talked about how New Democrats never support a military action. I can say this from the perspective of a Newfoundlander and Labradorian. I am a Newfoundlander, and we have had more Newfoundlanders per capita serve in the Canadian Navy and the Canadian military than any other province or territory in this country.

Winston Churchill in the Second World War called Newfoundlanders "the best small boat men in the world". He was right. We are that. Newfoundland and Labrador have given more than our share to military conflicts. Hypocrisy—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Questions and comments, the hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor.

*Business of Supply*

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-  
sor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I will not comment on the exchange I just heard, but I also would like to offer a quote into this debate that my hon. colleague the member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl brought up, from Jamie MacWhirter from PTSD Buddies. There have been several in the group and they have been very proactive in the media, for reasons that are obvious. I want to quote him when he said, "So I thought if I could just get these people together we would all learn from each other and move forward with our lives".

Anyone suffering from distress will use that method to get the same people together, talk about how they are coping with it, share best practices, and so on and so forth. I agree with that, but what has happened here is that the offices have been closed, these offices that have the capacity to deal with these people. They are on the front lines, if I could use that term, for people like Jamie MacWhirter and PTSD Buddies. I would like my colleague to comment on how much more difficult it is that these specialized services have disappeared, especially in Newfoundland and Labrador and particularly the office in Corner Brook.

**Mr. Ryan Cleary:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question, and I mean honourable when I say that.

In terms of the new group, PTSD Buddies, which has formed in Newfoundland, a group made up of veterans who come together to support each other, what they are doing is fabulous. Veterans should be able to lean on each other.

One of the central points in my speech is that, besides leaning on each other, they should also be able to lean on the Government of Canada. However, too often, and I gave numerous examples in my speech, they cannot rely on and cannot lean on the Government of Canada.

**Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I will try to be brief. I have personally suffered from PTSD for over 40 years. I was a signal maintainer on the railway and I witnessed four accidents in which people driving cars were hit, and they and the car were completely destroyed. For 40 years I have had dreams about this. It was back in a time where this was not a diagnosed illness for anyone.

It is just unacceptable that our young men, who go into war and do horrible things because they have to in war, come home and do not have the support and have to band together because the government has failed them.

I want to thank the member for putting this motion forward to have this discussion, because there is nothing worse than to live with this by oneself.

• (1740)

**Mr. Ryan Cleary:** Mr. Speaker, I would also like to thank the hon. member on this side for putting the motion forward.

The fact that we had to debate this issue shows that there is something wrong. The fact that the Conservative government is likely to vote against this motion shows that we have something wrong. Hopefully the Conservatives will vote for it. Hopefully they will not vote against it.

**Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this is an excellent time to have this debate on this very topical member's motion.

In response to my hon. colleague from St. John's South—Mount Pearl, we have already said we are supporting the motion, so let us put that aside.

I would like to take a little bit of time to be as factual as I can and as non-partisan as I can and lay out on the table what is actually happening in the Veterans Affairs world.

I am a veteran. I have had the pleasure of serving in the Canadian Armed Forces alongside some of Canada's finest. The hon. Minister of Veterans Affairs is also a veteran. That is one of the many reasons his understanding and depth of knowledge in these matters is second to none. He understands the challenges of the military lifestyle and he knows first-hand how positive these changes at Veterans Affairs Canada will be for our men and women in uniform. I am glad to see more veterans being elected to this House, and hopefully more will be elected in October.

Veterans will get the services they need, and they will get them when they need them. The minister has clearly communicated with Canadians that how we serve and care for our veterans is a priority for this government and that veterans and their families will continue to get the support they need and deserve.

Our government has always supported veterans, and in doing so, we often see veterans join our team. One of these fine veterans is a man named Tim Laidler, who is now a candidate for us in British Columbia. We look forward to having him on the team.

Historically, the support from the government for veterans is based upon the Pension Act, which was first introduced in 1919 as assistance for soldiers returning from a war that is now a century old. As time evolved, different conflicts arose and our armed forces faced new challenges.

We cannot forecast all these things. In 1938, did we understand that we would have hundreds of thousand of World War II veterans? In 1949, did we understand that we would have thousands of Korean War veterans? In 2000, did we understand that we would have thousands of Afghan veterans? Tomorrow, or ten years down the road, will we be saying the same thing about some other conflict?

Veterans needs change, and we have to adapt with that. It is our responsibility to adapt and apply new laws and legislation that better address the needs of today's veterans while not forgetting the needs of our traditional veterans. There are almost 60,000 Second World War veterans still with us.

The Liberals' new veterans charter was designed from 1999 to 2005, culminating with its introduction and passage in Parliament in a single day. It has been said that the new veterans charter represented a new social contract with Canadian veterans.

We are all aware that the new veterans charter required some practical tuning. The government has taken on those challenges. Arguably, it could have been done faster. As with all governments, that is an easy charge to make, and frankly, I wish we could have done things faster.



*Business of Supply*

The fundamental concept behind the new veterans charter is based on the wellness and rehabilitation of our injured veterans and ultimately their transition back to civilian life. It is not intended to provide lifelong financial dependence unless that is the only option. It is all about getting the veterans and their families rehabilitated and back to a life of their own choice and under their own control.

It works alongside other benefits and programs from the Government of Canada, such as the service income security insurance plan, and ensures that military personnel who are seriously injured while on duty will see an increase in overall compensation the moment they leave the forces.

Our government has applied many changes that work to benefit veterans and their families, such as adding new monthly benefits so that veterans are not just receiving a single payment if they are seriously injured. We have also changed the single payment or lump sum so that veterans can break it out into smaller payments spread out in any way they like.

We also realize that the system is far too complex, like any system that has evolved over many decades. There was one payment for this situation and another for that. There were these forms and those forms. It does get very complicated. We are trying very hard to simplify that and cut through the red tape.

Qualifying veterans now have access to five different monthly payments in addition to the lump sum. It was said that a lump sum would kick them to the curb; that could not be further from the truth. Those who are seriously injured and need the help will get it in the form of the earnings lost benefit while they are in rehabilitation. They will get it, and that goes till age 65. That has now been added to by the retirement income security benefit, which now extends that benefit for life. We might call that a pension.

They are also compensated monthly with the permanent impairment allowance, and for those more seriously injured, the permanent impairment allowance supplement. Those go for life. We might call those a pension.

Also, for the worst off, there is the Canadian Forces income support, and I have already mentioned that we are adding the retirement income security benefit.

● (1745)

Over the coming months we will be examining options for consolidating all veterans' benefits so we can provide those veterans who need it the most with a single monthly payment. They would get all those things I just talked about but instead of five payments showing up in their bank account, they would get one. They will still get a breakout as to where it comes from, but this simplifies the process and cuts down the red tape and confusion.

We have vastly increased post-secondary training, allowing veterans to benefit from two distinct retraining programs, one with DND, another with Veterans Affairs, as they transition from the Canadian Armed Forces. One of these benefits from Veterans Affairs Canada is a retraining allowance of \$75,800 to do post-secondary training. We have loosened up all the restrictions on that. It is extremely flexible, even to the point where if the veteran cannot use it, the veteran's spouse can. Therefore, the family unit can make progress and get back to a life under its control.

We have also worked with and listened to many of the veteran stakeholder groups, the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs and the Veterans Ombudsman. The Veterans Ombudsman and the Canadian Forces Ombudsman are now working hand and glove on all matters.

At the veterans affairs committee, we sat through dozens of meetings and met dozens of witnesses. Certain items were identified that needed fixing. Between the measures already taken as a result of the recommendations, every one of which was acted on, contrary to some things members might hear, and the introduction of Bill C-58, which is now a key component of our budget implementation bill, our government has addressed each and every one of those items and each and every one of the recommendations in that report, specifically compensation after age 65 for our most seriously injured veterans. I mentioned that the earnings loss benefit and rehabilitation goes to age 65. That was the cut off. We have now extended it under the retirement income security benefit for life. Add to that the permanent impairment allowance and the permanent impairment allowance supplement for life. Together, those are pretty nice pensions.

We have addressed the disparity in benefits between reserve and regular force veterans. If a reservist goes to Afghanistan and gets a leg blown off, it does not just affect the reservist's career if he or she stays in the reserves, it would obviously affect his or her life career, whatever that happens to be. Therefore, it only made sense that those two soldiers be treated equally. That is now the case.

We have addressed the problem that there were too few supports for family members of our seriously injured veterans. We have extended more of those benefits to them because when soldiers suffer, and I use the word "soldier" as a generic term, meaning army, navy or air force, for whatever reason, the families suffer, so we have to address the family unit because that is what needs to be fixed.

We have introduced post-65 support for survivors and widows of veterans who had died either in service or from a service-related injury. That is an important change. I know a number of the widows of the Afghanistan soldiers who died who are very pleased with that.

We have created compensation for veterans who are seriously injured but who may also completely recover after years of hospital rehabilitation treatment. At the end of the day, they may not need a big lump sum but they certainly need something to compensate for the pain and suffering while they are going through that treatment process, whether they are recovering from surgery or whatever it might be. Therefore, we introduced the new critical injury benefit, which is a tax-free amount of \$70,000 and is immediate and upfront.

*Business of Supply*

We have introduced important new supports for the families of Canadian veterans. We understand that those who stand beside our veterans play a key role in helping them successfully transition to civilian life. If the family member is not in good condition to help the member, then the family unit will not work.

We are making real and significant progress.

This government is also committed to closing the seam between Veterans Affairs Canada and the Canadian Armed Forces. When many veterans leave they have become lost in the gap between DND and VAC, and that is changing rapidly now. They are out there not as a soldier anymore but not holding hands with VAC yet, maybe because they have not come forward or they do not understand what is available because they have not seen the advertising that was put out there to tell them what is available so they can get those services. They tend to fall through a gap sometimes.

What this means is that our legislation includes new authorities allowing Veterans Affairs to evaluate the applications of veterans while they are still serving in the Canadian Armed Forces, before they even become a veteran.

Each year, 5,000 to 6,000 men and women retire from the military to civilian life. That adds some highly qualified and character-rich civilians to help Canada prosper in all the ways that they do. About 1,200 of those people are medical releases. Unfortunately, the majority of retiring members present their case to Veterans Affairs only after leaving life in uniform. That is changing. The average time spent before they are released medically is between three and five years. During that time frame, they are being evaluated, they are going to rehab and they are also getting paid 100% of their military salary whether they are doing a military job or not.

● (1750)

Some of these delays in seeking programs create an uneasy transition for veterans and their families alike. Some get lost in the transition. However, what is happening is that the Department of National Defence and Veterans Affairs are holding hands all the way through the process. The soldier, before he becomes a veteran, will be dealing with Veterans Affairs so that when he leaves, there is no gap. It is a seamless transition.

I am pleased to say that we have also taken concrete steps to support a veteran's transition to civilian life in other ways. We are ensuring that contact between medically releasing members and Veterans Affairs is made at the earliest point possible, long before the member actually walks out the door of the Canadian Forces and becomes a veteran.

We are ensuring that rehabilitation professionals are identified as early in the transition process as possible and where the veteran intends to reside after his or her medical release.

The benefits the veteran expects to get will be adjudicated before he or she leaves the Canadian Armed Forces. Again, it would be a seamless transition, so when the soldier becomes a veteran, everything is already there.

More money is going into research to better understand the transition from military to civilian life, to guide suicide prevention activities, to improve the recognition, diagnosis, and treatment of

mental illness in veterans, and to support the development of national standards and a certification process for psychiatric service dogs, to name just a few.

Extending more psychological counselling to families of veterans is also important. That includes parents and children. By the end of the year, an established network of 26 operational stress injury clinics will be there to support the needs of veterans.

There is also a four-year pilot project to increase access to military family resource centres and related services in seven locations. Traditionally, the services and programs offered through these centres have been available only to still serving members of the military and their families. This is a tremendous resource. I have seen it in action often. It gives them access to a wide range of services to help address their needs as they transition to civilian life. Those services will now be available to veterans and their families.

All of this work builds on progress made by our government to improve benefits and support for Canadian veterans.

There is always more to do, and there always will be more that we will be trying to do. However, the key word is progress, and that is what we are making. The government continues to demonstrate true appreciation for veterans and their families. The key components are care, compassion, and respect.

As we continue to improve the way we care for veterans and their families, we do so with three objectives in mind. First is to have a veteran-centric approach to everything we do. Everything has to be about the veterans and their families. Second is to facilitate a successful transition from military service to civilian life by closing the seam between the Canadian Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs. Third is to strive for excellence and make access to services easier by reducing red tape and eliminating administrative burdens.

The Minister of Veterans Affairs has reached out and listened to veterans organizations and advocates. He has established and maintained an open dialogue that continues to grow and is a continuous source of knowledge and inspiration. Recently he had a very successful stakeholder summit.

We will continue to focus on our Canadian Armed Forces members and our veterans and to adapt and improve our service to them. That is why in addition to the new measures introduced we are putting more resources where they are needed to ensure service excellence. Case managers offer the front-line service that is critically important to veterans. My own niece, Beverly Martin, is one of the leading case managers in the western part of the country.

*Business of Supply*

The minister has taken action and announced last month that more than 100 permanent, full-time case managers will be hired to improve one-on-one service. Effectively, veterans' needs will be addressed more quickly and efficiently. We know that, and we are taking action. The target is an optimal 30 case-managed veterans for each case manager. Better service and flexibility will allow better access to the services needed by veterans as a result.

Our government also committed the financial resources for the department to hire more than 100 new disability benefits staff, both temporary and permanent. That means that veterans and their families will have faster access to disability benefits, health care, and mental health treatment.

Our government is striving for service excellence and to ensure that veterans are treated with care, compassion, and respect. We are evaluating options for considering consolidating all Veterans Affairs benefits into one single, clear, and easy-to-understand benefits system. One might call it a pension. The goal is to reduce stress on the injured soldiers as they transition to civilian life. We understand that any administrative process that serves to delay or complicate support needs to be fixed quickly.

Even more importantly, if an administrative hurdle or form actually goes so far as to impact the overall wellness of a veteran, there is something seriously wrong, because everything VAC is structured to do is to help ease the burden of transition for a veteran after a service injury.

Speaking of forms, that has come up. I have a form that has been questioned. It is called "Medical Questionnaire: Activities of Daily Living".

● (1755)

That form is 11 pages long, and it is a little bit complex, but it is designed for every veteran who is receiving benefits. The whole form is designed to ensure that the member's condition is still there and that the services and benefits that they are receiving are still relevant. If they are not, it ensures that changes are made so that they are improved. The whole form is all about making sure that the veteran is getting the service that he or she needs, and nothing else.

It is understandable why someone with PTSD might read something into some of the questions, but nowhere on that form does it say anything about missing limbs.

Our government also took action, and last year announced the addition of a new operational stress injury clinic in Halifax. There is also a network, that I think I mentioned, of 26 operational stress injury clinics across Canada, and they will be expanded to speed up access for mental health services for those with mental health conditions. These clinics play a key role in providing specialized assessment, diagnosis and treatment services for veterans and their families who are living with operational stress injuries.

These and many more actions are being taken to improve the programs, benefits and services that Canada's veterans and their families need and deserve. I urge all members of the NDP and the House to support the measures included in the support for veterans and their families act and in the economic action plan. We are committed to ensuring that veterans and their families have the

support and services that they need. Under our government, benefits for veterans have gone in one direction, which is up.

The other thing that has come up a number of times is the lapsed funds, which shows a deliberate misunderstanding, because I know that they understand how it works. Those who have been in government certainly understand how it works. It shows a deliberate representation that is not accurate.

Funds for the Department of Veterans Affairs or any other department are allocated through authorizations. Those funds are forecast. If we need more in any department, we go back and ask for more. If we forecast something and we need less, it is often because the demand is not there. All of these programs are demand driven. If there is a demand, the funds will be spent without question. If the demand is not there, we are not taking funds away from something that could have been done. The demand was not there. If it had been there, it would have been met. Consider it a line of credit. At the beginning of the year, we fill up the line of credit. At the end of the year, if we have not used it all, the line of credit goes back and it gets re-issued again next year.

We are not talking about \$1.3 billion that has gone to somebody else. That is simply not true. Anybody over there who has been in government knows that, or should know that. If the demand is there, it does get met.

We also understand that the needs of veterans are changing. As new conflicts arise around the globe, as the previous generation comes to retirement age, and as the nature of treating injuries becomes ever more sophisticated, so too must the support provided to veterans be enhanced, especially for those who have been injured in the course of service. Before tabling the support for veterans and their families act, we consulted with veterans and their families in communities across Canada on the best ways to support them and to support those who bravely served our nation through the years.

As a member of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, I do know first-hand that all of the veterans affairs experts were consulted prior to developing the new veterans charter moving forward. These are supports that the members in the House have called for, including the NDP, and rightly so. These are supports that the Veterans Ombudsman has called for. These are supports that veterans and their families have called for. We have responded and we understand that there will still always be more that we need to do, because we want to adapt to changes as they come about.

*Business of Supply*

The increased benefits that we recently announced are evidence of our commitment to ensuring that Canadian veterans and their families are treated with care, compassion and respect. We know that there is an obligation. It has been recognized as far back as by Conservative Prime Minister Robert Borden, but we are not frozen in time. Every single government from Robert Borden on has tried its very best to honour that obligation. In fact, our government tabled support for the support for veterans and their families act, which included the following purpose written in the act:

The purpose of this Act is to recognize and fulfill the obligation of the people and Government of Canada to show just and due appreciation to members and veterans for their service to Canada. This obligation includes providing services, assistance and compensation to members and veterans who have been injured or have died as a result of military service and extends to their spouses or common-law partners or survivors and orphans. This Act shall be liberally interpreted so that the recognized obligation may be fulfilled.

This purpose, coupled with our strong action in support of veterans and their families, shows that we do understand the value and importance of providing those who have served our country with the support that they need and deserve. I am heartened by the new team at the Department of Veterans Affairs, many of whom are veterans, including the minister, the parliamentary secretary, the deputy minister and many others in critical positions.

● (1800)

It is not time to play politics, but I know that is inevitable in this place. I urge the NDP and all members of the House to work with us for the health and well-being of Canada's veterans and their families. The Conservatives are supporting this motion, even though we know it is intended to be political, we know it is intended to wedge us, but we support it because it is the right thing to do and, in fact, it is what we are already doing.

**Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, my question to the parliamentary secretary is simply this. Does that mean you are going to open up the Windsor office again?

**Hon. Laurie Hawn:** Mr. Speaker, I will point out that I am not a parliamentary secretary anymore. To save you the trouble, I will advise him to ask the question through you and not directly to a member.

All of that aside, no, it does not mean we are going to open up the Windsor office. I was on the deficit reduction action plan cabinet committee at Treasury Board that did this process. We looked at every way in every major department that we could be more efficient. Yes, that meant saving some money, but it also meant being more efficient. We looked at the workload of various areas. The nine places that were closed had, in fact, a relatively low user rate.

In fact, several departments, National Defence, for example, took a full 10% cut. Veterans Affairs took the smallest cut of any, other than maybe aboriginal affairs, in the neighbourhood of about 1.9%. All of the cuts were designed to look at areas that provided more efficiency and better bang for the buck so we could focus on those who needed us most, the most seriously injured veterans.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Veterans Ombudsman Guy Parent made a presentation at committee on veterans affairs back on April 23. In his report to committee members, he stated:

The recent announcements by the Minister of Veterans Affairs are narrowing the gap in areas of the New Veterans Charter that you identified in your June 2014 report, *The New Veterans Charter: Moving Forward*.

However, he indicated:

The announced changes do not encompass all that is needed for Veterans, but they have kick started the renewal process...

Would the member not agree that the ombudsman is right in his assessment and that the government could have done more in dealing with this issue?

**Hon. Laurie Hawn:** Mr. Speaker, I will point out for my hon. colleague that comment was made in April. The ombudsman was quite right, that there were many things that we needed to do more of, and we did. Whenever we have this discussion, opposition members always point out one side of what someone like the ombudsman or the Auditor General has said. They never report the other side. He also reported there were a lot of good things, and my hon. colleague did allude to that.

This was in April. The report was tabled in June and had 14 very substantive recommendations that did go to the things about which the ombudsman talked. As I have said countless times, there is always more we want to do. We made a tremendous amount of progress under the current Minister of Veterans Affairs and his new team. We know there will always be more to do.

We are taking this in chunks and, frankly, we are taking it in pretty big chunks right now. We have made a lot of progress and we will continue to do that with the help of dedicated people like the Veterans Ombudsman, who is holding hands, literally almost, with the Canadian Forces Ombudsman.

**Hon. Erin O'Toole (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, with a few more months remaining in this Parliament, the hon. member for Edmonton Centre is a privy councillor and has been in the House of Commons since 2006, after a 30-year career in the Canadian Armed Forces. Because he is not running in the next election, this may be one of his last major interventions in the House on veterans. I can assure all of my colleagues here that there has not been a stronger champion for the military and veterans in the last generation than the member of Parliament for Edmonton Centre. It is also his birthday. I will not use this question and comment to ask him his age, because that might be why he is retiring. I am the younger navigator version of the RCAF caucus.

*Business of Supply*

My question is about the 1,200 men and women who were medically released from the Canadian Armed Forces. In his experience, the veterans charter focuses on transition. The best post-military career for these people is a new career if their military career was cut short because of injury. With up to \$76,000 potentially being spent transitioning, has he not seen the benefit of a veterans charter working for those injured veterans, particularly with the improvements we have made through Bill C-58?

● (1805)

**Hon. Laurie Hawn:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. navigator colleague for the question. I will just say that I will never be 67 again.

With respect to the member's question, it is absolutely true. If financial dependence is the only thing left for a veteran, then we have to be there, but people want to work. They want to have a life. They want to have some satisfaction, some self-respect, some purpose in life. I cannot think of veteran I have talked to, and I have talked to many veterans, who have said that, no, they just want to be paid and sit at home. They do not want to do that. They are not the kind of people they are.

These are the kind of people who joined the military to do something, to make a difference, and they have and will continue to do that. However, if that gets taken away from them for reasons completely beyond their control, we have to do everything we can to give them something else, another profession, another life, another purpose, so they can transition and have the satisfaction that every family deserves, whatever profession they are in.

**Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to wish my hon. colleague across the aisle a happy birthday, and I would also like to ask him a question.

I brought this motion forward because I have heard from many veterans across the country who have been utterly frustrated with getting the support and services they have been trying to get for themselves or their families for their care. There have been many veterans who have been denied support and they are speaking out. It takes a lot for them, as the member alluded to, for this group to speak out. However, many have been so frustrated that they are in fact speaking out.

I asked the minister this question earlier, but he did not answer it. I ask the question because the member did indicate he will support this motion. My question then is: What does that mean for the class action lawsuit? Will he encourage the government to settle the class action lawsuit with Equitas? That is what is really behind this. I would like to hear my hon. colleague's comment on that.

**Hon. Laurie Hawn:** Mr. Speaker, it is a good question, but I am not in a position to answer it. This is something that is before the courts, and I would not be qualified to speak on that anyway even if I wanted to.

The fact is, through Bill C-58, through the statement of purpose, we are acknowledging the sacred obligation, which we have always tried to fulfill, as has every government before us, Liberal and Conservative alike, tried to fulfill. It is wrapped up in some legal nuances and details that defy logic sometimes to a non-legal mind.

I will say that veterans are never shy to speak up. I do not know any veteran who is shy to speak up, but I have vocally sympathized with some of their frustrations. That is why we have been working so darn hard to fix that. We have not fixed everything, we will probably never fix everything, and it is always going to be a work in progress, but we have made huge strides. For most of the folks who are in that situation now, please come back and let us have another talk, because there is a new team in town.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I just want to thank my colleague for his speech. We were both elected in 2006 and we are both from Alberta. I just want to say that I hope this is not the last speech I hear from him, but if it is, it was a wonderful speech. I was glad to sit behind him as he delivered it. He has been an absolutely wonderful colleague. He has been very helpful to me in my role as the member of Parliament for Wetaskiwin, which is just down the road south of Edmonton. He has come out several times to meet with veterans and so on in my constituency.

The question I have for the member is on a concern that we do sense in the room from time to time in that there is a bit of a cultural issue within Veterans Affairs Canada. It is a difficult organization. It is accountable to Treasury Board and accountable for the finances to the taxpayers of Canada.

Does my hon. colleague think that the services that are being provided by Veterans Affairs now are more fulsome and comprehensive than they were when we first showed up as members of Parliament in 2006? Is he satisfied that, for any of the veterans not receiving the benefits, there are enough mechanisms in place to make sure that every veteran who deserves benefits is receiving them?

● (1810)

**Hon. Laurie Hawn:** Mr. Speaker, there is absolutely no question that what is available today to veterans is vastly more comprehensive, broader, deeper and affects families to a much greater extent. All around, it is a hugely better package, and it has been acknowledged for that. Even the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore has said that there is more in the new veterans charter than there was before, and we have improved on that very substantially in the last couple of years, and we are going to continue to do that.

It is always going to be a work in progress, as I said. With that many clients, there will always be some who seem to fall through the cracks. We may drop the odd ball, but we are going to try very hard to pick it up on the first bounce.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Before we resume debate, I will let the hon. member for Windsor West know that there are about two and a half minutes remaining in the time provided for government orders today. We will get him started.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Windsor West.

**Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak here today to a very important motion. The first thing I want to address is the rhetoric that has come across from that stream over there. I listened today very intently to what the members said and what they projected back on us, saying that the NDP is not supportive and is actually anti-military in terms of how we approach things.

*Business of Supply*

My grandfather, John Clifford Addison, died on the HMS *Scorpion*. My grandmother was lucky enough to survive the bombing raids of London and to marry Fred Attwood, who came back after serving in the merchant marines and the Royal Navy and raised me as his grandson. I will not take any lessons from any of them about being anti-military. I grew up listening at the kitchen table to stories of what he and his mates went through.

I cannot understand the divisive rhetoric coming from that group over there. I was really shocked to hear, when I asked the question about opening up the Windsor office, which is in the motion about opening offices, that they are going to vote for this motion, but they will not open the offices again. That is a shame.

When we add up the closure of the offices, it saves less than \$6 million. What did the Conservatives spend on advertising for Keystone in Washington alone? They spent \$26 million. The money in our offices kept those buildings open, served our veterans, employed people, and made sure that people got care. What did Washington advertising do? It did nothing. It only irritated our neighbours and our friends. However, what it did do was leave an impression with Canadians, and I hope they listen to this now. It is about choices: \$26 million in Washington, or less than \$6 million to employ people in Canada to serve our veterans and keep our offices open. That is what we should have been doing.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Order, please. It being 6:15 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. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

**Some hon. members:** Yea.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** All those opposed will please say nay.

**Some hon. members:** Nay.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** In my opinion the yeas have it.

*And five or more members having risen:*

• (1815)

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Sadia Groguhé:** Mr. Speaker, we request that the division be deferred until tomorrow, May 12, 2015, at the expiry of the time provided for government orders.

[*English*]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Accordingly, the vote is deferred until tomorrow at the end of government orders or just before the period set aside for private members' business.

I see the hon. member for Northumberland—Quinte West rising.

**Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I think if you seek it, you will see unanimous support for seeing the clock at 6:30.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Is it agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

OPPOSITION MOTION—FEMININE HYGIENE PRODUCTS

The House resumed from May 8 consideration of the motion

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion of the member for London—Fanshawe, relating to the business of supply.

Call in the members.

• (1840)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 400*)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adler
Aglukkaq	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allen (Welland)	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Ambler
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Andrews
Angus	Armstrong
Ashton	Aspin
Atamanenko	Aubin
Ayala	Barlow
Bateman	Bélangier
Bellavance	Bennett
Benoit	Benskin
Bergen	Bernier
Bezan	Blanchette
Blanchette-Lamothe	Blaney
Block	Boivin
Borg	Boughen
Boutin-Sweet	Brahmi
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brosseau	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Bruinooze
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Caron
Carrie	Casey
Cash	Charlton
Chicoine	Chisholm
Chisu	Chong
Choquette	Christopherson
Clarke	Cleary
Clement	Comartin
Côté	Crockatt
Crowder	Cullen
Cuzner	Daniel
Davidson	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Davies (Vancouver East)	Day
Dechert	Devolin
Dewar	Dion
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Dreeschen
Dubourg	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Dusseault
Dykstra	Easter
Eglinski	Eyking
Falk	Fantino
Fast	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Fletcher
Foote	Freeman
Fry	Galipeau

Gallant	Garneau
Garrison	Genest-Jourdain
Giguère	Gill
Glover	Goldring
Goodale	Goodyear
Gosal	Gourde
Gravelle	Grewal
Groguhé	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (St. John's East)	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hawn	Hayes
Hillyer	Hoback
Holder	Hsu
Hughes	James
Jones	Julian
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Latendresse	Lauzon
Lebel	LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	Leef
Leitch	Lemieux
Leslie	Leung
Liu	Lizon
Lobb	Lukiwski
Lunney	MacAulay
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Maguire	Mai
Marston	Masse
Mathysen	May
Mayes	McCallum
McColeman	McGuinity
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	McLeod
Menegakis	Michaud
Miller	Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Murray	Nantel
Nash	Nicholls
Norlock	Nunez-Melo
Obhrai	O'Connor
Oliver	Opitz
O'Toole	Papillon
Paradis	Payne
Péclet	Perkins
Pilon	Plamondon
Poilievre	Preston
Quach	Raitt
Rajotte	Rankin
Raynault	Regan
Reid	Rempel
Richards	Rickford
Saganash	Sandhu
Saxton	Scarpaleggia
Schellenberger	Seeback
Sellah	Sgro
Shea	Shipley
Shory	Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind- sor)
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	Sitsabaiesan
Smith	Sopuck
Sorenson	Stanton
St-Denis	Stewart
Stoffer	Storseth
Strahl	Sullivan
Sweet	Tilson
Toet	Toone
Tremblay	Trottier
Truppe	Valeriotte
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vaughan	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John)	Wilks
Williamson	Wong
Woodworth	Yelich
Young (Oakville)	Young (Vancouver South)
Yurdiga	Zimmer — 258

NAYS

Nil

*Adjournment Proceedings*

PAIRED

Nil

**The Speaker:** I declare the motion carried.**ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS***[English]***COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**

FINANCE

The House resumed from April 30 consideration of the motion.

**The Speaker:** Resuming debate.

Is the House ready for the question?

**Some hon. members:** Question.**The Speaker:** The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?**Some hon. members:** Agreed.**Some hon. members:** On division.**The Speaker:** I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

**ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS**

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

*[English]*

EMPLOYMENT

**Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the government continually sings from the song book of reducing corporate taxes to create more jobs, but it needs to look at the evidence. In 2012, tax policies that began in 1995 resulted in \$264 billion in uncollected tax revenues. Where are the jobs that should have come from those tax reductions? By Conservative logic, those kinds of tax cuts should leave no Canadian who wants a well-paying job without one.

We all know the truth. Tax cuts do not create jobs. Not only have we lost over 400,000 good manufacturing jobs in Canada, but the gap between rich and poor in this country has steadily increased. The middle class is shrinking along with the government coffers.

Economists understand the importance of a healthy middle class to a thriving economy, and Canadians understand the value of a good paying job. Putting food on the table, providing a safe home, caring for children and elders, and paying for education are priorities for Canadians.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

We cannot continue to rely on the price of a barrel of oil to dictate whether Canadians prosper or go unemployed. Recent global realities make that very clear. The recent drop in oil prices has resulted in that sector's decision to remove \$23 billion in capital spending in this year alone, throwing thousands of Canadians out of work.

We can neither protect nor create good paying jobs that support families and local economies with corporate welfare. The loss of Kellogg's in London, Ontario, was yet another blow, not only to the London area but to the Canadian middle class. This clearly cannot continue, but what is also clear is that the Conservatives have no plan.

Fortunately, New Democrats do have a plan. It is a plan that includes diversification and innovation. It is a plan that would seize current and important opportunities in Canadian manufacturing and usher in the next generation of investment and innovation. It is a plan that would extend by two more years the accelerated capital cost allowance, which is scheduled to expire later this year. It is a plan that would introduce an innovative tax credit to encourage investments in machinery, equipment and property used in research and development.

Creating jobs requires investing in infrastructure. Helping cities build 21st century transit, for instance, will not only create manufacturing, supply and construction jobs, but will make our cities attractive to future businesses.

Ensuring accessible, affordable and universal child care is vital to building a thriving economy. Not only does it create the environment where children are cared for while parents go to work, it creates jobs in the child care industry. Studies have shown that every dollar invested in child care is returned twofold to the government. The NDP plan includes universal child care at \$15 a day.

A truly accessible, affordable, universal health care system is a fundamental keystone to the Canadian identity. The federal government has a role to play in ensuring that.

Last week, I hosted a townhall in London—Fanshawe with the Canadian Medical Association. Its representative, Dr. Virginia Walley, did not mince words. The CMA recognizes that a shift from institutional care that wastes 30% in bureaucracy and inefficiencies is necessary to address community health care needs such as home care. We need federal leadership to create a model that includes more quality home care. Like child care, home care puts trained, educated Canadians back to work and providing services.

I have already spoken to the House about the ways in which a universal pharmacare system would provide vital prescription drugs to every Canadian who needs them and save \$7 billion. That is \$7 billion that could be reinvested into child care, health care and home care programs.

Instead of being creative and innovative, the government creates barriers to job creation. When will the Conservatives stop enacting measures that strangle our economy?

● (1845)

**Mr. Scott Armstrong (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister of Labour,**

**CPC):** Mr. Speaker, with that diatribe and socialist nonsense, I do not even know where to begin.

Let me start with child care. Our government has brought forward a plan that will support every single Canadian family with children. We are going to be increasing the universal child care benefit for young people under six years of age by \$60 a month, raising it to \$1,920 per year. We are going to be raising by \$60 a month a new benefit for young people aged six to 17 years old, which would increase it by \$720 a year. Families with multiple children are going to enjoy a massive increase in the amount of money they will get from the universal child care benefit.

On top of that, the family tax cut will allow families with different incomes to share the higher wage with the lower wage, which will lower the tax burden on that family overall. Let us think about two teachers making \$50,000 a year each. I was a teacher myself. They pay significantly less tax than a tradesperson who is making \$100,000 and has a spouse who stays home with the children. That is an unfairness in the system. That is the type of measure we are putting forward. We are bringing tax fairness for families into the system and raising the amount of the universal child care benefit to support child care for young families. We are supporting families.

On health care, in every year that we have been in power we have provided a 6% increase in transfers to the provinces to deliver health care, and we have guaranteed that these increases will continue into the future. Provinces can now expect increase after increase for years into the future, supporting the health care system that they are constitutionally mandated to deliver.

In terms of job creation, since the pit of the economic recession in July of 2009, we have increased jobs in this country to the tune of 1.2 million net new jobs. That is one of the best job records in the G7.

In terms other job creation that we are working on, we have continuously supported manufacturing through the accelerated capital cost allowance and by keeping EI premiums and CPP premiums low, because we know that increasing payroll taxes would kill jobs in this country. The opposition parties would love to do that, but not my party. Conservatives understand that high taxes kill jobs and low taxes help create jobs. Low taxes allow job creators to continue to employ more people.

What we do not need is higher taxes in this country. What we need is more taxpayers, so our focus is on creating jobs and making sure more people are employed. That is our goal and that is our plan, and we know that this fall Canadians will support that.

● (1850)

**Ms. Irene Mathyssen:** Mr. Speaker, every time we talk about innovation, the Conservatives call it a diatribe.



*Adjournment Proceedings*

Conservatives turn away from the issues that matter to Canadians while New Democrats listen. We have a plan that includes diversity, innovation, and investment in small business. One example is London Sciencetech, a small but influential leader in new solar energy technology. It recently hosted a visit by the Minister of State for Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario. MPs from London West, London North Centre and Elgin—Middlesex—London were there, and while they appeared to be happy to use the business as a photo op, just as the Prime Minister did with Electro-Motive Diesel, they were not interested in hearing any concerns about federal cuts to science research and experimental development. Such cuts would adversely affect local businesses like Sciencetech, something I wrote to the minister about in 2012.

New Democrats understand the value and the critical necessity of creating an economy based on diversity, innovation, and human development. Why do the Conservatives not?

**Mr. Scott Armstrong:** Mr. Speaker, the focus of our plan is more trade, tax cuts, and better training. In Canada today, we have a mismatch. We have literally thousands and thousands of Canadians who currently cannot find work, but we also have employers from coast to coast that cannot find employees with the skills they need for the jobs they have now. That is why we are making huge changes in the structure of our training to make sure people get trained with the skills they need to take the jobs that exist.

This is why we are investing in things like the Canada job grant and bringing more employers' skin into the game so that there will be a job at the end of someone's training. Those are the practical and pragmatic steps we are taking to make sure that we provide opportunities for young people to get not only the jobs that exist today but the jobs that will exist tomorrow.

We need over a million new workers in this country over the next 10 years. We are putting the processes, the training, the tax cuts, and the trade balance in place to make sure we capture that.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

#### REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

**Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be here today to remind the House that on March 9, I asked the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec why the Conservative government hijacked the mission of the Economic Development Agency of Canada, which is to promote job creation in our regions.

Currently, nearly 99% of the money that goes unspent is returned to the consolidated revenue fund. Instead of using that money for subsequent years, the government returns it to the consolidated revenue fund. The money is diverted from its purpose, which is to support economic development in the regions, such as the region of Drummond, which I represent.

That would encourage job creation in our regions. The money could have been used to improve facilities, such as the Drummondville airport, a place that could do with some improvement. The Drummond region is lucky to have some exciting economic organizations that work very hard and are very dynamic. For example, we have the Société de développement économique de

Drummondville, the Chambre de commerce et d'industrie de Drummond, and Commerce Drummond, all of which are doing amazing work in our region and support the Drummondville airport expansion.

The runway has to be lengthened from 4,000 feet to 6,000 feet so that we can continue to attract investments and simulate job creation in Drummond. The people of Drummond are waiting for a response from the federal government and from the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec regarding their request to lengthen the Drummond airport runway and to improve the facilities there, which have aged over time. We expect a response from the minister, and we hope that he will not wait until the election campaign to make an announcement with a big photo op in Drummond. I hope the minister will do his job and make this announcement soon, before the election.

The City of Drummondville and the Drummondville economic development authority should be very proud of themselves. They have worked very hard to make the Drummondville airport more democratic and more accessible to everyone. Last year they organized an event called "Passion Avion" that opened up the airport's facilities to everyone for an entire day. People could take tours of the aircraft and go skydiving. There was an exhibit on vintage planes. The Drummondville air cadets, Drummond tourism and the City of Drummondville all had kiosks set up, and so on.

We were very proud of the "Passion Avion" event, which is being put on again this year as part of the many activities organized to celebrate Drummondville's 200th anniversary. It will be a magnificent event again this year. This time it will be held over two days, on August 29 and 30. I invite all aviation enthusiasts to attend. There will be two days of air shows at the Drummondville airport. I invite all aviation enthusiasts to come visit our beautiful city, Drummondville, during its 200th anniversary.

Of course, I hope that in 2015, the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec will announce that he is going to stop reducing and diverting money from the Economic Development Agency and will instead invest it in Drummond's facilities, such as the Drummondville airport. I hope to get an answer from my colleague here today.

• (1855)

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, for Official Languages and for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government is aware of the challenges faced by Quebec regions.

My colleague's question gives me an opportunity to remind him that the mandate of Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions is to support the economic growth of all Quebec regions, and every effort is made to do just that.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

I would like to provide the House with a few figures that illustrate the activities of Canada Economic Development since 2006: 5,511 projects funded, more than \$2.5 billion in contributions approved and nearly \$10 billion in total investments.

I would like to point out that my colleague and his party have always opposed these projects. Canada Economic Development's approach is tailored to the challenges faced by businesses and the regions to help them fully participate in the economy while building on their assets.

Our efforts have fostered entrepreneurship, business productivity, exports, trade and innovation throughout Quebec. Through its 12 business offices, Canada Economic Development has a presence strongly rooted in all regions of Quebec. Proponents are supported in their development efforts and their search for funding.

Canada Economic Development is still the Government of Canada's main economic representative in Quebec. Canada Economic Development carefully manages the public money with which it is entrusted.

In fact, it maximizes the use of the funds at its disposal, which means that Canada Economic Development may carry over funds to subsequent years, in order to adapt to the pace of developers.

As part of its Quebec economic development program, Canada Economic Development also helps strengthen the economy in communities and regions that are struggling with economic development issues, through targeted, specific support.

Canada Economic Development continues to support communities with the Canadian initiative for the economic diversification of communities reliant on chrysotile, launched in June 2013, which will receive \$50 million over seven years. To date, 22 projects have been funded and \$10.7 million in contributions have been approved, for a total of \$34 million in investments.

The team works on the ground with developers to help them in their development and diversification activities and to ensure that all of the funds are granted and that they are put to the best possible use over the course of the initiative.

After the disaster in Lac-Mégantic in July 2013, we quickly launched the economic recovery initiative for Lac-Mégantic, with a \$35 million envelope over seven years.

The envelope is divided as follows: reconstruction assistance of up to \$20 million; direct assistance to companies and not-for-profit corporations of up to \$10 million; and assistance in the form of two investment funds of up to \$5 million, managed by the Société d'aide au développement de la collectivité de la région de Mégantic.

To date, 17 projects have received funding and over \$15 million in contributions has been approved, for a total investment of nearly \$35 million.

The team responsible for implementing this initiative is on the ground and will continue to support stakeholders' efforts to stimulate the economy in the coming years in order to ensure that all of the funding for this seven-year initiative is used as effectively as possible.

These are just a few examples of how the measures being taken by Canada Economic Development are well suited to Quebec's economic realities and how they contribute to business development and the vitality of all Quebec communities.

I would like to come back to how we are using the funding we have been allocated judiciously. By way of example, in 2013-14, Canada Economic Development's budget was nearly \$308 million. The organization's actual expenditures for that same year were approximately \$269 million.

Nearly \$37 million was rolled over for use in subsequent years in order to meet future needs. Of that amount, \$34.2 million was rolled over for later use in order to adjust to the pace of the economic recovery and the efforts to rebuild Lac-Mégantic's downtown. Since this initiative will be implemented over a period of seven years, the rollover of funding will be adjusted accordingly.

That means that 99.5% of the total budget for 2013-14 was and will be used.

• (1900)

**Mr. François Choquette:** Mr. Speaker, my colleague was absolutely right when he said that the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec is very important. It is vital to the development of our regions and to job creation.

However, it is scandalous that \$131 million from the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec's budget was returned to the consolidated revenue fund. That \$131 million could have been used to support the regions of Quebec, including Drummond, and to create jobs there. However, since the Conservatives did a poor job of managing the economy and their finances, they had to put that money back into the consolidated revenue fund to pay down their deficit.

We think that the Conservatives' strategy to pay down their deficit and hide their poor performance on the economy and job creation is unacceptable. As my colleague said, it was important for that money to be put to good use for job creation and our regions. That is not what happened.

In Drummond, supporting economic players is important. For example, we have great plans to expand and modernize the Drummondville airport, and all of the economic stakeholders are ready to participate. We want respect for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, and we want that money to be channelled into our regions.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** Mr. Speaker, since its inception, the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec has always supported economic growth in all regions of Quebec, and it will continue to do so. That is part of its mandate.

I would also like to share with my colleague an overview of what the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec has achieved since 2006. It has funded 5,511 projects and has provided more than \$2.5 billion in approved contributions, with a total of nearly \$10 billion in planned investments.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

The Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec has allocated nearly \$1.5 billion in funding for the period from 2011 to 2014. Of that amount, 98% was invested by the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec based on community needs and its ability to invest. The funds carried over are primarily from projects whose scope or timeline was below the forecast, projects that extend over several years. This is called respecting the capacity of the regions and listening to the proponents on the ground.

The Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec is always open to projects that support the economy, prosperity and jobs. Those are the projects that improve the lives of Canadians.

We committed to engaging in strong, sound, smart and consistent fiscal management, and we will continue to deliver on that.

●(1905)

[*English*]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:05 p.m.)

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