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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, April 21, 2016

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, April 21, 2016

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to three petitions.

* * *

[*Translation*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs on changes to the Standing Orders.

If the House gives its consent, I intend to move concurrence in the report later this day.

[*English*]

HUMAN RESOURCES, SKILLS AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities in relation to the motion adopted on Wednesday, April 13, regarding the main estimates 2016-2017.

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UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES ACT

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-262, an act to

ensure that the laws of Canada are in harmony with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am greatly honoured to rise in this House to introduce this bill to harmonize the laws of Canada with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

As members know, a central component of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action is to use the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the framework for reconciliation. Therefore, if this bill is adopted, that would provide the legislative framework for a national reconciliation that is long overdue in this country. This would entail a collaborative process to ensure that federal laws are consistent with the declaration, and a national plan of action.

[*Translation*]

I am deeply honoured to introduce this bill.

In the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recommendations and calls to action, call to action 43 states that governments should adopt and fully implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and that is what this bill sets out to do.

I remember the first question I asked in the House of Commons. It was addressed to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs. She thanked me for the work I have done on this bill over the past four years.

She also asked all members of the House to help with the work of reconciliation. Today, I am showing how I can help.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the House will give its consent, I move that the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, presented to the House today, be concurred in.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Routine Proceedings

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[English]

PETITIONS

PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED DYING

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette (Winnipeg Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pride that I present, on behalf of the Archdiocese of Winnipeg and many of the Catholics of Manitoba, a petition to this House. I am very proud to have talked to Archbishop Gagnon. Even though I am not a Catholic myself, I believe it is important that all citizens have the right to have their voices heard in this chamber, and I represent all citizens of Winnipeg.

The petitioners bring attention to the House that vulnerable people and people with disabilities, such as seniors, and all people must be protected from the abuse and practice of physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia, as now allowed pursuant to a decision of the Supreme Court of Canada in Carter versus the Attorney General of Canada. Further, the rights of conscientious objection on behalf of the health care providers in Canada must be safeguarded. All citizens in Canada should be able to avail themselves of quality palliative care.

I am very proud to present this very large and thick petition on behalf of the Archdiocese of Winnipeg and my fellow citizens.

JUSTICE

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is a petition that I think touches just about anyone who has read about it.

Members might remember a tragic story that happened to Cassandra Kaake. She was 31 weeks pregnant when she was murdered in an area close to me in Windsor, Ontario.

Tragically, there will be no justice for Cassandra's pre-born child, a little girl named Molly, who was also killed in this violent attack. Because our criminal law does not protect the pre-born child, it is not recognized as a separate victim in attacks against its mother.

This petition comes from across Canada, and basically Canadians are asking that we start to consider justice for victims like Molly.

●(1010)

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a two petitions. The first is from a number of Yukoners who feel that, when the number of MPs a party's supporters elect does not reflect the number of voters who cast ballots for that party, they would like the House of Commons to undertake consultations across Canada to amend the Canada Elections Act. They want to ensure that voters are governed by a fairly elected Parliament and they can live under legitimate laws approved by a majority of elected parliamentarians representing a majority of voters.

GENETICALLY MODIFIED FOODS

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have another petition from a number of Yukoners who feel that, whereas transparency is a goal of the Liberal government, it should make

mandatory the labelling of genetically modified organisms, GMOs, in Canada.

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QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if Starred Question No. 70 could be made an order for return, this return would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

*Question No. 70—**Mr. Kennedy Stewart:**

With regard to the National Energy Board's review of the Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion Project and the interim measures for pipeline reviews announced by the government on January 27, 2016: (a) how many Canadians applied to participate in the National Energy Board's review of the Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion Project, broken down by (i) individuals, groups, and authorized representatives, (ii) province and territory, (iii) whether they wished to participate as a commenter or as an intervenor, (iv) whether they were "directly affected" by the proposed project or had relevant information or expertise; (b) of those Canadians identified in (a), how many were accepted by the National Energy Board to participate as intervenors, broken down by (i) individuals, groups, and authorized representatives, (ii) province and territory, (iii) whether they wished to participate as a commenter or as an intervenor, (iv) whether they were "directly affected" by the proposed project or had relevant information or expertise; (c) of those Canadians identified in (a), how many were accepted by the National Energy Board to participate as commenters, broken down by (i) individuals, groups, and authorized representatives, (ii) province or territory, (iii) whether they wished to participate as a commenter or as an intervenor, (iv) whether they were "directly affected" by the proposed project or had relevant information or expertise; (d) of those Canadians identified in (a), how many were rejected by the National Energy Board from participating either as a commenter or as an intervenor, broken down by (i) individuals, groups, and authorized representatives, (ii) province and territory, (iii) whether they wished to participate as a commenter or as an intervenor, (iv) whether they were "directly affected" by the proposed project or had relevant information or expertise; (e) of those Canadians identified in (d) who were rejected from participating by National Energy Board, will their applications be reconsidered as part of interim review measures for the Trans Mountain Expansion Project announced by the government on January 27, 2016; (f) of those Canadians identified in (d) who were rejected from participating by National Energy Board, will they have an opportunity to apply to participate in the interim review measures for the Trans Mountain Expansion Project announced by the government on January 27, 2016; (g) of those Canadians identified in (d) who were rejected from participating by National Energy Board, will their views and expertise be solicited by the "Ministerial Representative" appointed by the government to "engage communities, including Indigenous communities potentially affected by the project, to seek their views and report back to the Minister of Natural Resources"; (h) of those Canadians identified in (b) who were accepted to participate by National Energy Board as intervenors, will the government provide funding for these individuals or organizations to present evidence and cross-examine as part of the interim review measures; (i) do the interim review measures alter, in any way, the current legislated time limit of May 20, 2016, for the National Energy Board to issue its report on the Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion Project to the Governor in Council; and (j) as a result of the interim review measures, can any amendments be made to the National Energy Board's final report after it has been issued to the Governor in Council?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

Business of Supply

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—CANADIAN DAIRY INDUSTRY

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brousseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP)
moved:

That, since the government is signing trade agreements that are undermining supply management and that will have a negative impact on the Canadian dairy industry, the House: (a) recognize the magnitude of the economic losses to Canadian dairy producers from the importation of diafiltered milk from the United States, which totalled \$220 million in 2015; (b) recognize that each day of government inaction contributes to the disappearance of a steadily increasing number of family farms across the country; (c) recognize that the entire industry is standing together to call for the problem to be resolved immediately; and (d) call upon the government to keep its election promises and honour the commitments made since the start of its mandate by immediately enforcing the compositional standards for cheese for all Canadian processors.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform you that I will be sharing my time with the member for Salaberry—Suroit.

I am always proud to rise in the House and speak on behalf of the people of Berthier—Maskinongé. It is an honour. It is also a real honour to move such an important motion on diafiltered milk. As everyone here knows, I often ask questions about this issue. I have been asking the government about its failure to act, and that is why I am so proud to debate today's motion in the House. I really hope I have the support of all my colleagues in the House. I also want to acknowledge the many farmers who are here with us today. Farmers work seven days a week, 365 days a year. They are passionate and dedicated individuals, and we are extremely proud of them.

I want to acknowledge the farmers here from Montérégie-Ouest, the Laurentians, the Outaouais, Lanaudière, and Mauricie. There are here for the debate in the House, and I hope they will also stay for question period.

I will briefly sum up the situation. Diafiltered milk is a concentrated milk protein from the United States. It was created to get around Canadian law, as no U.S. processor uses it. Because the Liberal government and the Conservative government before it have been slow to address the issue, this diafiltered milk, which is in gelatinous form, is being used instead of fresh milk from our farmers. This has been going on for two years now.

In 2015, imports of this product increased significantly, resulting in economic losses of \$220 million for Canadian dairy farmers. This issue alone is causing each of our farmers here in Canada to lose on average \$15,000 a year. This situation is disastrous for dairy farmers. They need a party that will stand up for them, and that party is the NDP.

The farmers are at the end of their rope. I think it is important to share some of their stories. We get many phone calls about this at our office. I meet with farmers daily and it is truly important to share

some of their stories. I will start with that of Jean-François Allié from Saint-Léonard-d'Aston. He wrote:

“Mr. Prime Minister and dear Liberal government.... My farm is at risk. The standard price of milk of \$68 per hl and \$70 per hl is making me consider selling everything. My farm is my life, it's all I have. The agreement with Europe, the TPP and the import of diafiltered milk in recent years are at the root of our losses.... I have been losing nearly \$2,000 per month since May 2015. It has been a year, so that means \$24,000. Please help us and address these three factors. The outlook is bleak. The Jean-François Allié farm, with 40 heads of cattle in Saint-Léonard-d'Aston, will soon disappear.”

The second story I want to share with hon. members of the House is that of Ana Maria Martin, from Lorami farm in Henryville, Quebec

“Dear Prime Minister, how disappointing for me to see that I believed in you during the election and now you are abandoning us! Doing nothing about diafiltered milk at this time is cowardly and it is destroying supply management in an insidious manner by destabilizing the market. My husband and I are milk producers and have a family farm. We bought it from his parents in 2013 and, in 2014, we invested in robotics in a barn where the cow's comfort is the priority. The goal was to be among the top elite producers of milk of excellent quality and become effective entrepreneurs and managers. Last year, we lost around \$60,000 because of diafiltered milk. This factor is beyond my control, but it is not beyond yours. You are destroying our Canadian dairy industry because you do not want to upset our precious neighbours across the border. While giants send their money to tax havens, we reinvest in our region. I am the mother of four boys and it is essential that something be done before it is too late for many of us.”

● (1015)

I would like to read another account, that of a farmer from my region. Here is what Jean-Félix Morin had to say:

“Our farm is losing over \$3,000 a month, which is more than my income.... My friends were losing even more than that and they had to sell their farm this fall. I find that really hard. Would I change careers? I would have to go back to school. It is upsetting that this is all about politics and that the government is not getting involved. No one wants to be a millionaire. We just want to make a living.”

That is important to remember. I could share other people's stories with the House, but I encourage members to go and meet with the farmers who are outside, and who will come in later to participate in the debate, and to chat with them. They are going to talk to us about how important it is to do something and to do it now. Everyone knows what the solution is.

In addition to these accounts, our online petition, which calls on the government to solve the diafiltered milk problem, was signed by over 4,500 people in less than 48 hours. All of these people are really disappointed, frustrated, and angry, and I am too. I think that many members understand the situation, but it seems that they lack the political will to do something about it. The current government is not doing anything. The Liberal government is still not taking action.

Business of Supply

After asking a number of questions in the House, we still have no response and no action from the Liberal government. However, during the election campaign, the Liberals made a commitment to solve the diafiltered milk problem. Even the Minister of Agriculture told milk producers in February that there was never any suggestion that diafiltered milk would be used as milk. More than two months later, he is not even enforcing the existing standards.

If I were in the government's place, I would be really embarrassed. Even worse, two departments of the same government put diafiltered milk in two different categories. Border services allows diafiltered milk to enter as milk protein concentrate, or MPC, and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency allows processors to use diafiltered milk instead of milk in their cheese. Such a flagrant lack of consistency is unheard of.

If the government were unaware of the situation, and if the problem were not urgent, I might have been able to understand. However, everyone knows about the diafiltered milk problem, which has been going on for more than two years. We are asking questions, in the House. We even had an opportunity to conduct a brief study in the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. The Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food has had many meetings with industry stakeholders, such as Quebec dairy producers, dairy producers across Canada, and even the processors. Everyone is on the same wavelength: the government must enforce the existing law and regulations.

The situation is pressing. What is at stake is this: lives, the economy, family farms and regions. The solution is simple: the government must act. Through the debate on the diafiltered milk problem that we will have today in the House, in which a number of members will participate, I am very hopeful that we will reach a consensus, that the government will support our motion, and, most importantly, that it will take action. We are now getting a lot of pressure from the Americans, and we are wondering whether the Liberal government is going to stand up for Canadian producers or capitulate to the Americans.

I am very hopeful that we will find a solution.

• (1020)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments from the member. I can reflect on the number of occasions that the Minister of Agriculture was afforded the opportunity to provide comment on the issue of supply management and reassure members that the government has been fairly clear in recognizing the importance of supply management to Canada's economy. That obviously affects our dairy farmers.

Something I had to come to grips with when I was an MLA was trying to get milk into northern regions, particularly northern Manitoba at that point. I wonder if the member could provide some comment in regard to the breakdown of those milk components. To what degree would we be able to see milk at more affordable prices in northern regions, particularly northern Manitoba?

• (1025)

[Translation]

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Today we are discussing diafiltered milk and the government's inaction on this issue.

[English]

The member is speaking a lot about supply management.

[Translation]

I would like to refer to a comment, since somebody needs to walk the talk. Two years ago, the House passed a motion on the subject of compensation for dairy producers in connection with the trans-Pacific partnership and the free trade agreement between Canada and the European Union.

In the latest budget, no money was allocated for compensation. The Conservatives had announced a large amount of money for compensation for the dairy industry, but the Liberal government has done nothing.

It is all very well to say nice things and look good, but what we are asking for today is concrete action. We have nothing, just some nice words. The Liberals say that they understand the situation and are behind the dairy producers, but we want concrete action to be taken.

Today we are talking about the diafiltered milk problem.

[English]

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have agreement on this motion, without a doubt; many times we do not because of our political affiliation.

My background is in agriculture and dairy, and today we are talking about diafiltered milk, or liquid protein concentrates.

We used to also talk about supply management and support for it. Actually, we did not just talk about it, we took action, not only in article 18 of GATT, we did it for cheese standards in WTO. We approved CETA, and before the election, we were trying for the trans-Pacific partnership. In that was an agreement to deal with the issue around border security. That has not happened. This government has decided not to deal with TPP. It is likely a year away, so now there is no protection.

I am wondering if the member has had any talks with anyone who would give her any sense of security about it, or does she think this is just hollow talk about supply management with no action?

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Mr. Speaker, my colleague and I are both veteran members on the agriculture committee, and we are on the same page on a lot of issues: trying to study the TPP at committee, looking at the Emerson report, and making sure that some of the provisions in Bill C-30 actually stay in place. However, when it comes to supply management, the TPP, and CETA, there was a compensation package announced by the previous government, and we did not see a follow-through by this government. There is so much uncertainty.

Business of Supply

I knew the Canadian milk producers were going to be okay if there were some kind of compensation, but that is not on the table anymore. We have been dealing with milk proteins for the last few years. The situation is getting worse. There are companies that have built up in the States and have a lot invested in it. There are millions of dollars at play.

We have to stand up for Canadian farmers here. I am standing up for my constituents and for the supply-managed sector. We need to see the government standing up for farmers and taking care of this milk proteins issue, because we are going to see farmers sell their quotas, close up their farms, and leave.

Therefore, we are asking for the government to take concrete action, confirm to us today, with a date, when it is going to stop milk proteins coming into Canada, and reassure Canadian farmers instead of letting us be had by the Americans.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to be able to take part in this debate on the protection of our dairy producers. I am delighted with the proposal by the member for Berthier—Maskinongé, who has worked her heart out for our dairy producers for years. It is thanks to her that we can talk about the problem of diafiltered milk crossing our borders. We are asking the Liberal government to stand tall, do something, or simply enforce its own laws. It is a simple solution that the Liberals do not want to apply. That is what we are talking about today.

The Liberals are saying nice things. For weeks and months, they have been telling us that they are going to do something, but the producers are still waiting. Hundreds of producers are out there on Parliament Hill, and they are prepared to speak with every member of the House to explain their situation. I am very happy to be able to rise in the House and defend the producers in my riding and producers all across Canada as well.

This is an extremely important issue. As I said, it affects tens of thousands of people across the country, and it is costing hundreds of millions of dollars a year because of diafiltered milk. It is especially damaging since the dairy industry pays \$3.6 billion in taxes to the three levels of government every year. It provides the equivalent of about 215,000 full-time jobs. Quebec is a major player in the industry, with nearly 40% of the dairy cow herd.

As I said, there is a very simple solution to this problem: the government simply needs to enforce its own cheese compositional standards.

When milk comes out of a cow's udder, it contains about 3% protein. The diafiltered milk from the United States goes through a technological process that increases the proportion of protein to about 15%. As a result, with diafiltered milk, dairy products can be made at a much lower cost than the costs of Canadian producers.

Currently, the Canada Border Services Agency considers diafiltered milk to be a milk protein concentrate. As such, it is not subject to customs duties, which is why it is financially advantageous for processors. On the other hand, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency considers diafiltered milk to be milk for inspection purposes.

Within one government, two departments categorize diafiltered milk in two different ways. It is completely inconsistent. In fact, it's scandalous and crazy. This has many harmful and indeed catastrophic consequences for producers and for employment in the country, and also for the consumers who buy the products without knowing where their components come from.

In other words, diafiltered milk from the United States, where the standards are different, is mixed with Canadian milk to reduce production costs. That is a harsh blow to dairy producers. In 2015, losses to Canadian producers were estimated at over \$220 million. In my region of Montérégie alone, producers are losing an average of \$15,000 a year because of the diafiltered milk crossing our borders.

Throughout the election campaign and to this day, hundreds of producers have come to meet with me. During the campaign there was a huge demonstration at the Herdman border crossing, precisely to show the magnitude of the impact this was having on their production. Farmers came to my office or called me in tears to say they would have to close down their operations if this continued. They told me that farm work with their cows was their whole life. They had thought they would be able to continue and hand down their farm to their children, but that would no longer be possible because they had their backs against the wall.

The federal government has to act. Producers are wondering when it is going to do so, because the Minister of Agriculture just keeps saying that he is listening and he is abreast of the situation. He even went to meet with producers to tell them that the government was going to take action, but nothing has been done.

In my riding, Mr. Montpetit has written to me about the problem of diafiltered milk, and I quote: "I am beginning to see our dream of having a prosperous dairy farm vanish into thin air".

• (1030)

I am a defender of buying local. Indeed, I tabled a bill to that effect in the last parliament. Diafiltered milk is totally at odds with the buy-local principle.

What is more, the Liberals had all voted in favour of buying local. This truly contradicts the convictions they held when they were in opposition. Now that they are in power, things have changed. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

I want to be able to buy Canadian cheese, made in Canada from Canadian milk, not cheese made from dairy proteins that come from the United States. This issue is having real consequences for producers, for our workers, and for the diet of Canadians. The minister has to understand the magnitude of this problem and consider the consequences of his inaction. This is urgent.

The dairy industry accounts for nearly 5,000 direct, indirect or related jobs in Montérégie alone. If the federal government does nothing, it is going to have job losses on its conscience.

There is talk of the decline of the regions, where the land is. The agri-food sector contributes to one job in eight in Canada. This is one of the most important sectors in the Canadian economy. The Liberal government does not seem to understand this.

Business of Supply

However, the Minister of Agriculture acknowledges the problem: “[D]iafiltered milk was never meant to be allowed to be used as milk.”

During the election campaign, the Liberals committed to solving the diafiltered milk problem, which is costing our dairy producers millions of dollars. However, the Liberals are dragging their feet.

I want to share a quote from a Liberal candidate during the last election, as reported in the media. He said that:

...if the Liberals are elected, he would bring all the stakeholders together within 90 days of the election, without exception. They would have six months to find a solution, bringing to bear their respective skills.

If this group did not produce results, “the federal government would take responsibility and would solve the problem for the next 20 years”.

So far, as far as I know, the Liberals have completely broken their promise. It is starting to look like smoke and mirrors. The solution is simple: enforce the existing cheese compositional standards.

If the Liberals truly care about supply management, our family farms and our regions, they will support our motion and resolve this problem once and for all. This is why I am asking my colleagues opposite, who come from Montréal, Mauricie, the Outaouais and anywhere else in Canada, to vote in favour of our motion, and then immediately take action and enforce the rules. The minister must be compelled to act, or else to justify his decision to abandon dairy producers all over the country.

The other stumbling block is the anxiety about free trade agreements. Not only is Canada signing trade agreements that are opening a breach in supply management, but it is also putting the compensation into question.

Whether the party in power is the Conservative Party or the Liberal Party, it must be said that things are much the same. The new agreements pose the risk of other dairy proteins entering the Canadian market without tariffs being imposed, as is currently the case for dairy proteins from the United States.

According to one study commissioned by Agropur, 4,500 to 6,000 farms could disappear and 40% of processing could move to other countries if supply management were to be sacrificed under free trade agreements.

We are going to repeat it all day long, and the producers who may be listening to this will repeat it as well: it is very important to enforce the standards for cheese within our own country, to give the inspectors of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency the necessary resources, and to stand up to ensure that border services officers are given the necessary resources as well, since they too conduct inspections and allow the milk in, since the government has not adjusted its criteria for the diafiltered milk that is crossing the border.

This is urgent, because it involves jobs and our economy. It involves the consumption of products by Canadians.

• (1035)

It is time that the Liberals opened their eyes. It is time that they acted on behalf of all the dairy producers of Canada.

[English]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I too congratulate the member for putting forward the motion.

I disagree with the fact that they blame the situation on the trade agreements. I think that is a problem in the motion, and I hope it is not a poison pill. It is not the trade agreements that are causing the problem: it is the fact that diafiltered milk is allowed into Canada and is coming into Canada when it should not be allowed under our regulatory system.

The fact of the matter is that one of the most stable industries in Canada since supply management came in is the dairy industry. It has been stable because we have been able to manage supply to meet market demand, and the way we do that is by controlling the amount of milk or milk products coming into Canada.

Industry has found a way to break milk products down into ingredients, allow the ingredients in, and reconstitute them into dairy products. As a result, the market for Canadian producers is affected.

Could the member explain what is wrong with allowing these diafiltered products into the country and allowing the system to be undermined? Could she explain that so that parliamentarians can understand it? That is an absolutely valid point. It is undermining the dairy industry in this country.

• (1040)

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Mr. Speaker, I am flabbergasted by this comment. The diafiltered milk is coming from the United States, and yet the Americans do not even use it in their cheese products. The problem is that diafiltered milk is crossing our borders because the Canadian government is allowing it into the country.

The Liberals have been in power for six months, and they have known about this problem for two years. Still, they continue to let this product into Canada and allow it to be used to make cheese, because the Canadian Food Inspection Agency considers it as milk. So it continues to be part of our products. The responsibility for enforcing Canadian standards lies with the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-food.

When I hear my hon. colleague say how important this is, I am flabbergasted. He should tell his minister that. All of us already know that, all of us are quite aware that it is important.

The dairy industry is a major sector in Canada, for the country's industry and its economy. The government will have to recognize this, and not just by paying lip service.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all I would like to recognize these two colleagues of mine who have just spoken. I congratulate them on their speeches, and I would like to assure them of my unconditional support on this issue.

Coming from the heart of Quebec, from Richmond—Arthabaska, I can tell you that, unfortunately, too few people are aware of how important dairy farmers are to our economy. They keep our economy moving, and their sector plays a key role.

Business of Supply

I would like to know whether the member believes the government truly intends to fix this problem. The Speech from the Throne outlines a government's direction and mandate. However, no mention was made of agricultural and rural communities. Furthermore, there was nothing in the budget to support dairy farmers or agriculture in general.

Knowing that this issue will be resolved only by sheer political will, what does my colleague think of the current situation?

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to hear that my Conservative colleague will support our motion.

Indeed, the Liberal budget has nothing about compensation for the dairy industry, nor does it address the issue at the border, where the diafiltered milk is passing through.

However, it is important to note that the problem began when the Conservatives were in power. They were the ones that opened this loophole in international agreements to undermine supply management. Luckily, they did provide some compensation. The problems started two years ago, and the Conservatives did not lift so much as their little finger to try to address the situation or enforce the cheese standards within our country. We therefore have to be careful.

That said, if the Conservatives support our motion, it would be a good thing, and producers will be happy. The ball is now in the Liberals' court. It is up to them to open their eyes and grab the bull by the horns, so to speak, to ensure that the cheese standards are enforced.

• (1045)

The Deputy Speaker: I note that there is a great deal of interest in participating in the period for questions and comments today. Therefore, during this period, I ask that hon. members keep their interventions to around one minute so that more members have the opportunity to participate.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food .

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Berthier—Maskinongé for raising this important issue in the House. I would also like to acknowledge the producers who are here today.

The government fully supports Canada's supply management system. We are all working together to address the industry's concerns. The minister and I are both former dairy farmers. We understand very well the challenges farmers face on a daily basis. My family's farm is in La Prairie, not too far from here. It is a fifth-generation dairy farm.

Supply-managed sectors are essential for ensuring that Canada has a strong agricultural sector and a prosperous economy. All told, the dairy, poultry, and egg markets create nearly 300,000 jobs and generate overall economic spinoffs of \$32 billion.

Of all of Canada's food industries, the dairy sector is the largest. It accounts for \$6 billion in farm gate sales and more than \$16 billion in sales in the processing sector, and it employs more than 100,000 people.

The dairy sector includes our innovative cheese industry, which continues to win awards around the world. Dairy production is an important part of the economy in every region of Quebec. Across the province, over 6,000 dairy farm owners market nearly 3 billion litres of milk a year with a farm gate value of over \$2,000 billion.

That is why the government committed to protecting supply management and holding consultations to find a long-term solution. Canada is also a world leader in exports of livestock genetics, with sales of nearly \$200 million in 100 countries. The government is determined to support Canada's dynamic dairy sector.

In January, we announced a new \$1.75-million federal investment in the dairy research cluster. This large investment will support the work of our Canadian agriculture and agri-food researchers in two key areas: enhancing the energy value of Canadian forage crops to increase milk production and understanding the role played by milk fat, including its effect on type 2 diabetes. Total federal funding for the dairy research cluster is now \$13.75 million.

We have been clear from the start: the Government of Canada strongly supports supply management. Innovation is important to the Canadian dairy industry. Today, the average cow produces almost three times more milk than 50 years ago. The industry is substantially improving its productivity and sustainability. Canadian dairy farmers are among the world leaders in their industry when it comes to the environment. The Canadian dairy industry currently has a smaller carbon, water and soil footprint than almost every other dairy industry in the world.

On our family farm in La Prairie, we want to conserve water and soil resources for future generations, so we are very conscious of the importance of the environment. All agricultural activities have an environmental impact, whether they take place in the field or in the barn. Canadian farmers know they have to take the environment into account in everything they do. That is the right thing to do for the future of their families and of our planet.

That is why I was in Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue two weeks ago with the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food to announce a federal investment of \$27 million to help producers find ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from their farming operations.

• (1050)

This investment is part of the Government of Canada's ongoing efforts to help this sector be competitive, innovative and sustainable.

The agricultural greenhouse gases program supports research into greenhouse gas-reducing practices and technologies that can be implemented on the farm. This new five-year investment extends Canada's existing commitment to support the objectives of the Global Research Alliance on Agricultural Greenhouse Gases. On Monday, the Agriculture and Environment ministers announced a one-year investment of up to \$1.9 million for the agricultural youth green jobs initiative to attract youth to green jobs in the agriculture and agri-food sector.

Business of Supply

This initiative follows through on a Government of Canada commitment made in budget 2016 to provide employment opportunities for post-secondary graduates interested in helping the agriculture sector carry out environmentally beneficial activities.

For dairy farmers, these activities could include building fences so that livestock—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Drummond on a point of order.

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to my hon. colleague for a few minutes now, and he seems to have gotten pretty far off track from today's debate topic. We are talking about diafiltered milk and the seriousness of allowing it to cross our borders. We are calling on the Liberal government to take immediate action. It is all well and good to talk about measures to improve the environment and agriculture, but these measures would be relevant in another debate, another day. Today's topic is diafiltered milk. Members are supposed to stick to the subject at hand. I know that we can be a bit flexible, but members must still stick to the topic. I have not, or just barely, heard him mention diafiltered milk.

The Deputy Speaker: I appreciate the comments by the hon. member for Drummond regarding his point of order. It is true that a speech must pertain to the subject being debated in the House. Nevertheless, I recognize that the hon. parliamentary secretary has just spoken for seven minutes so far and he has 20 minutes for his speech. The House will obviously expect the secretary to address the subject being debated today. However, the Standing Orders allow all members to use their speaking time to address and develop a topic that relates to the motion being studied by the House.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant: Mr. Speaker, I will get to it.

As I was explaining, these investments will make it possible to build enclosures for livestock so they are kept away from bodies of water, relocate livestock wintering facilities away from waterways, improve manure storage to protect the environment, and establish feed crops on eroding soil.

The initiative will help finance internships at agricultural operations and agriculture and agri-food organizations to encourage youth to apply for green jobs. Furthermore, on Tuesday, the Dairy Farmers of Canada launched a sustainability initiative to showcase farmers' commitment to applying high standards on their farms in areas from milk quality to food safety, animal care, traceability, biosecurity, and the environment.

Milk producers are clearly demonstrating their commitment to responsible stewardship of their animals and the environment, producing high-quality, safe, and nutritious food for consumers in a sustainable manner. They are demonstrating to consumers that they share their passion for food quality, animal care, and the environment.

As I mentioned, we are aware of the industry's concerns. As producers have told us repeatedly, the use of diafiltered milk in cheese production is worrisome. We are working on finding a sustainable solution.

The minister and I have had exhaustive discussions with producers across Canada. The government is working to ensure that the standards are clear to everyone. The government fully supports supply management, recognizes the importance of effective import control measures, and manages those imports in accordance with its international trade obligations. The minister and his team regularly communicate with dairy sector stakeholders about this very serious issue. Our team is doing what must be done to ensure that the standards are clear to everyone.

Once again, the Government of Canada fully supports supply management. That means we have to resolve certain problems, and I am delighted to have the opportunity to do that here in the House. Problems always give rise to opportunities.

Canada's dairy industry is doing excellent work in growing markets by promoting its brand, collaborating with the industry, and innovating. Canada's dairy producers are unsurpassed. In my home province, Quebec, we know that Quebec cheeses are among the best in the world. Quebec dairy processors produce more than 60% of the cheese made in Canada. Quebec has about 110 cheesemakers and about 450 cheeses available on the market.

Today, about 50 small dairy processing companies, most of which are artisanal cheesemakers, are the pride of the regions, and their products are enjoyed by people all across Quebec. In fact, 31 of the 81 finalists in the Canadian Cheese Grand Prix were from Quebec. We can be proud of that. Fifteen Quebec cheesemakers won one or more awards for their cheeses at this prestigious competition. Nine new categories, including three for Gouda and one for smoked cheeses, were added to better reflect the growth and diversity of production in Canada, bringing the total number of categories to 27. Our award-winning cheeses can hold their own against the best cheeses in the world in terms of flavour and quality. World-class cheese made with Quebec milk is a winning combination.

We will continue to work with our industry to help dairy producers take full advantage of new global marketing opportunities.

• (1055)

We are determined to work together to help the sector make the most of the incredible opportunities that await us. We have entered into discussions with the industry and the provinces and territories about a strategic five-year pan-Canadian framework for agriculture. We will be reaching out to all producers to establish a framework for the future. I am pleased with the dialogue that is currently taking place between producers and processors in the industry on how to make the industry more competitive and innovative.

I encourage everyone to continue those discussions. I sincerely believe that working with the industry is the best way to overcome the challenges that the dairy industry is facing. From what I have learned from our discussions with dairy producers, I believe that the industry is ready to seize the opportunities for growth. The future outlook for the dairy industry is very promising.

Business of Supply

The global population is growing fast, and the world will need to produce 60% more food to feed future generations. That food will come from world-class companies, which are found all over Quebec. It will require a lot of hard work and co-operation to overcome challenges and take advantage of opportunities. I firmly believe in teamwork. Together, we will establish a partnership for a prosperous future in Canada's agrifood industry.

•(1100)

The Deputy Speaker: Once again, I remind hon. members to keep their interventions to no longer than one minute.

The hon. member for Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis.

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the member for La Prairie on his speech. It is nice to see a dairy producer on the government side. Obviously, I have no doubt about his commitment to and interest in supply management. However, now he is part of the government, so he has the ability to take action and make decisions.

In his speech he said that the issue of diafiltered milk is very serious. However, it is a simple issue. As the saying goes, faith without works is dead. Now my colleague is in a position to make decisions and take action. I know a young dairy producer who benefited from the UPA program, but decided to give up dairy farming, because the profit margins were too narrow.

Is there an immediate solution that the government or the parliamentary secretary could implement? The problem of diafiltered milk is well known, and solutions do exist.

Is the parliamentary secretary ready to take action in order to ensure that other dairy producers do not leave the farming industry?

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague.

The problem existed before we came to power. Like many other issues, the problem of diafiltered milk entering the country already existed. I have to wonder why the Conservatives did not enforce the regulations when they were in power. Those regulations were put in place by the previous government in 2008, but were never enforced.

Now that we are in power, we need to take action quickly. That is what we want to do, but first we need to take the time to come up with a lasting agreement, and not one that is hastily thrown together. That is why it is taking some time.

[English]

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his speech and for his work on agriculture.

I want to inform the member and his colleagues that I have spoken with the dairy farmers in Alberta. I have just today spoken again with Albert De Boer, who is the former Alberta representative for the Dairy Farmers of Canada. He has again repeated to me his deep concern on behalf of the Alberta dairy farmers that we urgently need action by the government.

If ever there were a time in history when we needed the Liberals to live up to their promise to diversify the economy, this is the time. The dairy farmers are an important part not just of the Alberta

economy, but the Canadian economy, so will the government live up to its promise and take action on this matter?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her remarks.

Indeed, I have met with dairy producers from her province. They understand very well that although we want to do something, it is important that we implement a sustainable solution. It is a matter of time, but we want to act quickly.

The only answer I can give is that the minister and I want to bring in sustainable solutions.

•(1105)

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am surprised by what the Liberal members have been saying this morning.

Like everyone else in the House, they recognize the importance of our farmers, who do the vital job of feeding our world. Like everyone else in the House, they say that they fully support supply management, and they decry the entry of diafiltered milk.

Now, it would be easy to resolve the issue of diafiltered milk: simply enforce the law. After six months in power, the Liberals, breaking their election promise, have still done nothing, despite their very nice-sounding words this morning. It is disappointing. It is a flagrant lack of willpower. Why is that? We know that those who are profiting from diafiltered milk are the big processors, like Parmalat and Saputo.

This is my question for the parliamentary secretary this morning: who would the government prefer to listen to and defend, the big processors or our dairy producers? I would like him to respond.

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

The Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food also covers processors. The decisions that we make must therefore represent the sector. It is a question of time. I understand the time crunch, but we are holding discussions with the industry and the producers. The producers are even holding discussions with the industry. Once the discussions have been completed, we will see how we can give clear orders on enforcement.

[English]

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the parliamentary secretary for presenting the complexities involved with the milk protein concentrates file. In fact, at the agriculture committee we have discussed this topic and we have shown the problems of imports from the U.S.A. Imports in 2010 were 4,841 tonnes and that increased to 27,051 tonnes in 2015 under the previous government.

Could the parliamentary secretary help us with the discussions that might be happening on tariff 3504, which is one of the items that is being reviewed, and also the innovation needs of the processors to compete against the American imports?

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question.

We are currently looking at all the regulations as well and trying to determine how we can enforce them as normally as possible.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary, precisely because he is a dairy producer and he understands supply management issues, should know that the time for discussions is past. When farmers demonstrate on the Hill, it is because the discussions are over and it is time to take action.

It is true that discussions are going on between the producers and the processors. However, the government now has to decide whether to stop treating diafiltered milk one way at the border and another way when it gets to the processors. The government must take action now, and it knows that. Why is it not doing so?

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her question.

It all looks so simple. However, the things that look the simplest are often the most complicated. It has become a broader issue, and it will take time to put everything in place. As I explained just now, we do not want to implement an agreement that is hastily thrown together. We want something that will last. That is why it is taking a bit longer.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a comment followed by a question.

If we look at it as an industry issue, the parliamentary secretary hit it right on when he said that this was not an issue that appeared out of nowhere, that in fact it had been around now for a number of years. The government does have an obligation to do its homework on the issue. What I have heard from the parliamentary secretary is that multi-facets have to be looked at, and that the government has made progress on it.

However, could he put some emphasis on how long this has been issue? I was a bit surprised with the NDP. When it was in official opposition, I do not recall it ever introducing a motion on this. It has chosen to do that today for whatever reasons. The point is that the Government of Canada is looking into the matter in hopes of resolving it so our dairy industry will be protected in to the future.

• (1110)

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Indeed, the problem has been around for more than three years. We were elected barely six months ago, and when we took office, the problem was obviously already there. The rules had already been established in the cheese compositional standards by the former government. However, that government never enforced them.

Now we are being asked to enforce them, when we have just taken office and the problem has already become broader in scope.

We are definitely working as quickly as possible to find a lasting solution on this issue.

The Deputy Speaker: I congratulate hon. members on this excellent question period.

The hon. member for Lévis—Lotbinière.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this debate, which is of paramount importance to a number of dairy farmers in my constituency and other parts of Canada.

I will speak to the House today about the improper use of certain milk protein substances, such as diafiltered milk, in the context of Canada's cheese compositional standards and the negative impact that such improper use has on Canadian dairy farmers.

A flourishing dairy industry means more jobs and better access to infrastructure. It also means economic spinoffs for other industries, such as the banks, businesses that sell food, livestock, parts, machinery and hardware, construction companies, veterinarians, and many others. It is important to point out that the Canadian dairy industry makes a huge contribution to the country's economy.

It contributes \$18.9 billion to our gross domestic product and \$3.6 billion in tax revenues every year. It provides the equivalent of 215,000 full-time jobs for Canada as a whole.

As we know, the dairy farming sector in Canada operates under a Canadian agricultural policy known as supply management. The policy's objectives are to ensure that farmers receive a fair return, derived from the marketplace, for their work and investments; provide processors with a stable supply of milk, so that they can properly plan their production year after year; and provide consumers with a consistent supply of milk and milk products of the highest and safest quality, at a fair price.

Canadian dairy was the first industry to operate under supply management—a system that egg and poultry farmers would later adopt.

As for the dairy sector, the supply management system is administered by the Canadian Dairy Commission. The basic idea behind supply management is simple: manage production so that supply is in balance with demand.

Supply management is much like a stool that rests on three equally important legs, or pillars.

The first pillar is farmgate prices, which ensure that the milk price received by dairy farmers takes into account the cost of production, including capital and labour costs, and the overall conditions of the Canadian economy.

It is important to note that the retail price is not set by the Canadian Dairy Commission, the provincial milk marketing boards, or the producers. The price paid by the consumer at the grocery store and in a restaurant has always been set by the retailers or restaurant owners.

Business of Supply

The second pillar is production discipline, which ensures that the supply of Canadian milk corresponds to the demand from consumers. Each dairy producer in Canada holds a quota, that is, a market share establishing the quantity of milk that it can produce, depending on the demand from consumers. The quantity that the quota allows to be produced is adjusted upward or downward according to demand.

The third pillar is import control. For supply-managed sectors, imports are controlled by means of tariff rate quotas. Tariff rate quotas allow a predetermined quantity of dairy products to be imported at preferential tariffs, generally duty-free, while maintaining control over the quantity imported.

When the three pillars of supply management play their allotted roles, they enable the dairy industry to weather all economic storms, attain a high degree of self-sufficiency, and ensure its sustainability. Conversely, if one of the three pillars becomes unstable, it can jeopardize the whole system.

This brings me to the reason why we are here today: milk proteins. It used to be that Canadian milk was a primary source and basic component in the making of dairy products.

Even though certain makers of cheeses and yogurts still use 100% milk, for which I congratulate them, a growing number of them are adding ingredients such as milk protein isolates, milk protein concentrates, and diafiltered milk to replace milk.

These ingredients may be produced in Canada or imported. When they are imported, they are not classed under chapter 4 of the customs tariff schedule, which includes milk products.

● (1115)

Instead they are classed under chapter 35, which includes ingredients such as milk protein substances. Originally, these milk protein substances were imported in dry form. Over the last five or six years, however, we have seen a change in the import model. The quantities of milk proteins imported in liquid form under the same tariff line have increased significantly.

Once they have entered the country, these milk protein substances are used as ingredients in making cheese and yogurt. However, the situation becomes complex when the same product is treated differently by two government agencies. When one agency considers a product to be an ingredient and the other treats it as milk, then we have a serious problem.

Under the Canadian cheese composition standards, a minimum percentage of the protein used to make cheese must be sourced from milk. The percentage required varies from one cheese to another. For example, at least 83% of the casein contained in cheddar must derive from milk, and a maximum of 17% of the total protein content can derive from ingredients, including milk protein substances.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency is responsible for applying the cheese compositional standards. That means that it has to verify that the milk-to-ingredients ratio defined in those standards is adhered to for every cheese. Since milk protein substances are ingredients that are sometimes less expensive, some processors use them to make up their required minimum quantity of

milk in cheese making, instead of using them for their permitted percentage of added ingredients.

This situation is also inconsistent with the classification of these ingredients at the border, where they are not treated under the chapter on milk and dairy products and enter the country duty-free.

One of the most serious issues today is the growth in the uncontrolled importing of milk protein isolates. Imported in ever-larger quantities, they are competing with the skim milk solids and milk proteins produced here, thereby altering the competitive context and undermining the revenue of dairy producers.

The importing of milk protein isolates is growing exponentially. Canada adopted tariff rate quotas on milk protein concentrates around the mid-1990s. About 10 years ago, a few companies began to import milk protein concentrates, isolates, to obtain larger protein concentrations. Milk protein concentrates are a skim milk product from which lactose and permeate, which is mostly water, have been removed to varying degrees.

These highly concentrated proteins are imported into Canada duty-free, which allows companies to get around the tariff rate quotas. The Dairy Farmers of Canada tried to resolve this situation by bringing the matter before the Canadian International Trade Tribunal.

The concentration of protein in normal farm gate skim milk is about 35% in dry matter. Any product whose protein concentration is above that percentage is considered a concentrate. Therefore skim milk containing 40%, commonly called 52% to 72%, or even up to 84% protein is still considered a concentrate.

The Canadian International Trade Tribunal determined that a product with a concentration of over 85% is an isolate, not a concentrate, even if it is used for the same purposes. This product was designed for the sole purpose of circumventing the tariff rate quota on milk protein concentrates. This decision defies common sense and is not in line with government policy.

In any case, the Government of Canada attempted to rectify the situation.

● (1120)

Around 2008, the government set a new tariff rate quota and tariffs for milk protein isolates. The only problem is that these tariffs do not apply to NAFTA countries, namely the United States and Mexico. Consequently, the border with the United States remains open. Milk protein isolates cross the border as ingredients but can be used in Canada as milk. This conundrum leaves an ambiguous situation.

Although supply management was protected in international agreements, it is now up to us to protect it from within. The Conservative government took significant action in 2007-08 by establishing cheese production standards to limit the quantity of ingredients that could be used.

Business of Supply

However, recent imports of diafiltered milk from the United States are once again threatening supply management. This product was designed solely for the purpose of circumventing border controls and Canadian cheese standards.

These proteins replace skim milk in cheese and yogurt production. In fact, there is no technical limit to the use of these proteins in production. This scheme is unacceptable. At the border, this product is considered an ingredient by the Canada Border Services Agency, which allows it to enter tariff-free.

However, for yogurt and cheese production, it is considered milk by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. This means that its use is not limited by cheese and yogurt production standards. The federal Liberal government therefore has an important role to play. Diafiltered milk needs to be considered an ingredient under the compositional standards for cheese and yogurt. This will ensure that the standards and the spirit behind them are honoured.

Also, the verification rules for these standards need to be strengthened to ensure compliance. We all need to work together to come up with a solution to the problem of diafiltered milk. We are all aware of that. I believe that many members of Parliament are keenly affected by and aware of this problem. We ran into the problem of solid proteins and then pizza kits, which the previous Conservative government was able to fully resolve.

The dairy industry says it has no choice but to use diafiltered milk in making dairy products. As I said earlier, diafiltered milk was created to get around the rules at the border and production rules. I was able to confirm that thanks to the answer I got to one of the questions I asked in the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. No one in the United States makes cheese with liquid protein concentrates with 85% protein. Processors in the United States do not do that. It does not happen.

In Canada, processors are now using this product to remain competitive. They are using it for one reason only, and that is to save money. That does not make sense because this cost savings cannot benefit the producers and, at the end of the day, the processors are not benefiting either. Things start to get profitable only after the processing stage.

Honestly, this has to stop because the entire industry is engaging in this at the expense of supply management. As long as the issue of imported diafiltered milk is not resolved, there is no doubt that processors will keep looking for ways to reduce costs. We want there to be a level playing field, and we urge the Liberal government to do something about this.

The processing industry in the United States produces cheese without using diafiltered milk. Americans therefore eat cheese that was made without diafiltered milk. Canadians should not be eating cheese made with American diafiltered milk.

• (1125)

There is absolutely no justification for this because there is no economic incentive for it. There is no reason to do this. The only reason Canadian processors are importing diafiltered milk is that it is cheaper because it is tariff-free and there are no restrictions on using it in manufacturing. That is the only reason.

With respect to imports coming into the country, how much do we need to satisfy market demand? We do not need any. Why? Because Canada has an abundance of skim milk that can be used to produce these ingredients. If the government decided to regulate the use of these ingredients, we would produce them domestically at a competitive price, and we would use them. We do not need these imports because we have an abundant quantity of skim milk available.

Whether it is imported or produced domestically, the product used by many processors contains 85% or more milk protein. That is the definition of ultra-diafiltered milk. According to the regulation, there are no restrictions on the use of diafiltered or ultra-diafiltered milk in regular cheese and other dairy products.

If imports are not controlled, it is impossible to manage the supply to ensure that it meets demand. A lack of import controls will inevitably lead to overproduction and make our system unstable. It is not enough to have good regulations in place. The validation and auditing processes and the enforcement of the regulations are also important.

Right now, those who may want to circumvent the rules are fully aware that, when it comes to dairy products, existing border controls are not being applied in a consistent and uniform way in Canada. Proper law enforcement and audits are therefore essential in order to discourage anyone seeking to exploit these loopholes. People can be very creative when it comes to getting around tariffs and quotas. The problem with pizza toppings is a prime example of that.

The Canadian dairy system is unique and has proven its worth. It provides dairy producers with an income that allows them to cover their costs and gives processors a stable environment. It helps maintain the social fabric and contributes to the economic development of our communities, while providing consumers with high-quality products at competitive prices. We therefore believe that it is necessary and more important than ever for all stakeholders to work to support supply management. That is obvious.

The Conservative government managed to maintain high tariffs at our borders in recent trade agreements. This is essential to maintaining our dairy system. We hope that the Liberal government will not undo the Conservative government's work to protect the supply management system.

With respect to border controls, at least four departments are affected by the issue of effectiveness. The Department of Finance ties into the payment of tariffs, and the Department of Public Safety is responsible for border controls, through the Canada Border Services Agency. There is also the Department of Agriculture and Agri-food, because this has to do with agricultural policy, and then there is the Department of Foreign Affairs, since we have trade agreements and we have made commitments to our partners. Our trade partners also have specific requirements and agricultural policies as well.

Business of Supply

In conclusion, if we work hard to fix the problem with diafiltered milk and other dairy substitutes that are crossing our borders, we can restore the balance in our supply management system, which will benefit the entire Canadian dairy industry. We will restore harmony in the entire industry, from producers to processors, to distributors, and all the way to our esteemed consumers.

For more than 45 years, we have managed to keep Canadians happy with high-quality dairy products at a fair price, in accordance with the wishes of this House.

• (1130)

To succeed, the industry needs to be supported by a regulatory and policy framework that maintains supply management and the three pillars.

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech.

I would like to reassure him: the Liberals are not destroying the Conservatives' work, they are continuing it. At least, that is what producers believe, because the trade agreements are undermining supply management. It is not just the Liberals who are doing this. After all, it was the Conservatives who negotiated the trans-Pacific partnership.

Quite frankly, the Liberals really need to step up to the plate. To date, they have not done their job. However, the NDP and the Liberal Party agree that many of these problems were created by the Conservatives.

How can my colleague claim to be defending supply management when for 10 years his government made every effort to undermine this system?

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I am very disappointed in the manner in which my colleague asked his question, because we will not be able to solve this problem unless we all work together on behalf of dairy producers. I will never play politics at the expense of Canada's dairy producers, as the NDP has just done.

The dairy industry is constantly evolving. It is obvious that the agreements written and signed by previous governments changed some time ago. However, we were powerless. Luckily, producers and processors alerted us to the insidious problem of diafiltered milk. People have taken advantage of Canada's dairy producers.

We will all work on solving this problem. We will never let processors take advantage of Canadian producers.

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to my colleague's speech.

Yesterday, in the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, we had an opportunity to hear from Canada's dairy farmers. However, because the opposition members would not stop talking, we did not have the opportunity to listen to what Canada's dairy farmers had to say.

In 2010, 4,000 tonnes of milk proteins entered Canada. In 2014, the quantity was 13,000 tonnes; in 2015, 28,000 tonnes. The Conservative government was asleep at the switch for five years, and that is why we have this problem today.

Can my colleague tell us why the Conservatives did nothing for five years?

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, yes, milk proteins entered the country in solid form, and I am happy to say that we solved that problem. Today, they can no longer be used in the composition of cheese.

In my speech, I provided the solution. In the government's speech, there was nothing about any measures to help Canada's dairy farmers. The solution lies with the Food Inspection Agency. It needs to change the standards so that diafiltered milk can no longer be considered milk and is instead treated as an ingredient. That way, it will be controlled.

That is the solution, but the Liberals have not even mentioned it. They are afraid to do so, because that takes political courage. When political courage was handed out, the members on the other side of the House were absent.

• (1135)

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on his defence of supply management and dairy farmers.

He and I banned the importation of milk proteins from New Zealand, along with the former minister of agriculture, Mr. Strahl. As my colleague mentioned, we did so again, a few months ago, with regard to pizza kits.

In the House, everyone says they are in favour of supply management, but action is needed. We did take action, and the current government can take action now.

In the opinion of the member for Lévis—Lotbinière, my favourite member, how can the government resolve the issue of ingredients? Can he explain again what our expectations of the government are? Will it show some political courage? If so, what concrete action can the government take that will not cost taxpayers a cent and will protect dairy farmers?

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent question.

The solution lies in the classification of diafiltered milk. It should not be considered milk, but rather an ingredient in the composition and manufacture of cheese. Classification is the responsibility of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Consequently, it is a Canadian regulatory issue that can be resolved by the current government.

I am calling on the Liberal government to have the political courage to take the bull by the horns and remedy this problem immediately. It is urgent.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, talking about the actions of the previous Conservative government is no political ploy. We are just pointing out the facts. This is not the first time that hon. members have heard about diafiltered milk. The subject was raised long before the election of the Liberal government.

Business of Supply

I am therefore asking myself how it is that my hon. colleague should today have the solutions ready in hand that he is now proposing to the Liberal government. When the Conservatives were in power, they did not lift their little finger. One would think they had just woken up with all the solutions in hand, although, alas, they are no longer in power.

The dairy producers came to talk to us about diafiltered milk under the Conservative government. This is not new. So what is it that has just woken my hon. colleague up on this issue, prompting him for once to offer solutions?

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, did my dear colleague offer a solution before or after the election? Frankly, this is pure hypocrisy. The NDP never offered a possible solution to resolve this problem. Never in their lives did the New Democrats do this, and I do not think they even understand the nature of the problem.

We have today offered the government some concrete solutions that can be implemented in the short term. It is for the sitting government to take action. Unfortunately the NDP is not presently in a position to implement anything whatsoever.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are most impressed by the fine speeches made by the Liberals this afternoon in defence of supply management and our farmers, and in tackling the diafiltered milk issue. However thus far nothing has been done. So the government is going back on its Liberal promises.

The hon. member for Lévis—Lotbinière has offered some possible solutions. We think that the solution is simple: enforce the law. In our view, this should be done immediately. It is simple. It can be done right now, even though the Liberals say that time is needed, that this is a long and complex matter.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague the following: In his view, what is long and complex about enforcing the law and resolving the problem?

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, for my part, I have not been impressed by the Liberal discourse. It contributes absolutely nothing by way of a solution. It is as if that party had both eyes closed and was looking at the problem with blinkers on.

Never have the Liberals spoken of any solution to help our Canadian dairy producers. However, the solution is simple: all that is needed is a regulatory decision from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. That takes political courage. Let the Liberals take action. We ask that the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-food stop saying pretty much anything at all here in the House and take immediate action. It is quite simple. He is the minister.

• (1140)

[English]

Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do have to admit that the entertainment on the other side is becoming interesting.

I refer to the *MilkingTimes* newsletter that was published in December 2015, a newsletter that represents the many dairy farmers throughout Alberta as well as industry partners. In this newsletter, it states, “The industry is working with the federal government to ensure that these issues are dealt with urgently.” Those are solutions. That is what the government is doing presently and into the future, to

come out with these solutions and bring recommendations forward on behalf of this industry.

What are the opposition parties both doing currently in comparison to the federal government?

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, what is this government doing? This government was elected six months ago. If it did not want to be on that side of the House, it could have simply not come forward.

The problem is crystal clear. It takes a regulatory decision by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to reclassify diafiltered milk as an ingredient, not as milk, in cheese composition and in Canadian cheese production. The Liberals need to act now. They are the ones in government. We will be keeping a close eye on them.

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will share my time with my esteemed colleague from North Island—Powell River.

Perhaps I could begin my speech by responding to the member from the Conservative Party who asked us what we in the NDP are doing for this debate. Let me tell the member that we are the ones who brought this debate today. It is we, and it is my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé, who are asking the government to come up with a solution.

Unfortunately, the Conservative members did not put forward an opposition day motion on the issue, and they are asking very few, if any, questions about it. Their new awakening to the issue, which just began with the debate today, is quite sudden.

Still, this does not let the Liberal government off the hook. The Liberals were quite happy to listen to our questions, and they applauded us when we criticized the Conservative government.

Now they are the ones in power, they are now the ones with the ball, and it is up to them to take up the responsibilities of governing. On this I agree with my colleague from Lévis—Lotbinière, because ultimately, the Liberals have been here for six months. They can certainly quote what the industry said in December, but that took place almost five months ago.

All we are asking for with regard to diafiltered milk is a regulatory change. It does not require a large bill or any studies, as the parliamentary secretary tried to tell us. This is not a complex issue; it is a very simple one.

Some American companies are producing diafiltered milk and are taking advantage of a loophole in the regulations to flout the spirit of the law and export products that are putting our farmers at a disadvantage. It is as simple as that.

All the minister has to do is enforce the law and, if necessary, make a small change to the regulations. That is it, problem solved. It is not very complicated, but it appears to be too much for the Liberal government.

Maybe the government should open not only its eyes, but also its ears, because Canadian producers are protesting today on Parliament Hill and outside some offices.

Business of Supply

For example, some producers are protesting outside the offices of the member for Shefford, the riding next to mine, because he will not even answer their calls, and they are wondering why the member is not standing up for them.

The good news for these producers is that the NDP will continue to stand up on this issue, as the member for Berthier—Maskinongé not only has done in this Parliament, but also did in the previous Parliament.

This is nothing new. The problem goes beyond diafiltered milk and extends to supply management and to the lack of respect for our producers. Loopholes are now being created in this system, which ensures the survival of our local economy and our agricultural producers.

I will give a few examples.

The first example involves my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé, who stood up for producers when the Liberals and Conservatives refused to do so.

The Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, which was introduced during the previous Parliament and which the Liberals were prepared to support before even reading it, was negotiated by the Conservative government of the time. The Conservatives told us not to worry, that they were committed to supply management, and that they would defend this system. What happened? They got to the bargaining table and put everything on the table, despite all of their rhetoric in the House in response to our questions.

My colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé therefore moved a motion calling on members of the House to support a compensation package.

The Conservative government promised financial compensation to the producers who would suffer losses as a result of the agreement negotiated, which created loopholes in the supply management system.

During the last election campaign, the Liberal Party promised to respect this agreement, since all members had voted in favour of the motion moved by my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé. This motion, which would allow for financial compensation to producers, was unanimously passed by the House. I was flabbergasted to hear one of my Conservative colleagues defend supply management a few days ago, when the Conservatives did everything they did to undermine this system for 10 years.

This compensation is yet another betrayal by the Liberal Party. This is about more than supply management and diafiltered milk. This is about all of the commitments made by the Liberals.

• (1145)

With regard to compensation, the Liberals said during the election campaign that they would honour commitments made by the former government. At the time, we extracted answers, with great difficulty, from the Conservative Party. It said that it would provide compensation, but that it could not tell us when or how much. When the Liberals came to power, there was nothing about this in

their budget. The Liberals were unable to tell us whether they would honour that commitment. They are unable to tell us anything.

This creates not only a continuity problem for farmers, but also uncertainty. That uncertainty would be eased simply with a few words. We are only asking the government to tell us, one way or the other, whether it will honour the commitment regarding financial compensation, regarding the cracks that have appeared in the supply management system.

These are not the only nice promises we have heard from the Liberals. We have also had promises about the Trans-Pacific Partnership. That was another issue on which the Liberals said one thing in the election campaign and, now that they are in power, they are saying something else. Once again, that agreement undermines the supply management system. During the election campaign, the Liberals promised to study the issue and to listen to the stakeholders and farmers who would be negatively affected by the negotiations, which, it should be noted, were conducted by the Conservative Party. Once again, we see that the Liberal Party is content to complete the Conservative Party's work, to the detriment of our farmers.

Now, despite the promises made by the two ministers concerned, the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of International Trade, when all is said and done, we are simply told that we have to sign anyway and we will see afterward. That does nothing to reassure farmers who are in an increasingly difficult position. Moreover, the farmers feel that the government is not standing up for them. It is very disappointing. It is really a betrayal.

During the entire election campaign, and even before, I heard nice words and fine promises from the Liberals. We were told not to worry, because a Liberal government would have a plan and would stand up for those people. What is happening today? The government is not even capable of making a simple regulatory change to enforce the law and prohibit the importation of diafiltered milk. Those imports are causing losses of millions of dollars for dairy farmers throughout Quebec and Canada.

The government is incapable of living up to its commitments and holding real public consultations on the trans-Pacific partnership. It is also incapable of keeping its word concerning the financial compensation to be provided to our farmers.

I keep up with the news, and I asked myself some serious questions when I heard the speech of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture. He tells us that the matter needs to be studied, that it is a very complex issue. Yesterday we voted on a time allocation motion for Bill C-10, and the government told us that it was not complicated, that we should move forward and debate was over. It is so comical to see how little time it has taken for the Liberal government to resemble the old Conservative government. *Liberal, Tory, same old story*, that's the phrase that comes to mind, because the Conservatives pulled the same stunts.

Business of Supply

Indeed, the Conservatives brought us their own time allocation motions. They would tell us that it was urgent, that we had to move quickly, that debate was over, that we were going in circles and repeating ourselves. They would gag us and ram bills down the throats of parliamentarians, without offering them the chance to speak and without listening to stakeholders. On other issues, however, they would tell us to allow them the chance to study and fully grasp the matter, because it was very complicated. This is exactly what the Liberal government is doing today: time allocations and gag orders, when it suits them to do so. They tell us that the issue is very complex, not having the gumption to simply rise and admit that they have not been equal to the task and have not met their commitments.

All that we are asking of the Liberals today is precisely that: to rise in the House, to say that the matter is very simple and they are going to enforce the law and the regulations to prevent the importing of the diafiltered milk that is harming our dairy producers. We are also asking them to say that they will meet their other commitments and will offer this financial compensation to the dairy producers. They should also add that, when they negotiate agreements, or rather when they wind up some negotiation carried out by the Conservatives behind closed doors, they will at least have the political courage to consult the people who will be affected, namely the farmers. Clearly, the Liberals have been unable to listen to them and to keep their promises. That amounts to a betrayal of those producers.

However, I am happy to rise today in support of my hon. colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé.

• (1150)

We will continue to stand up for them. We shall not relent until this government honours its commitments toward farmers, our communities, our producers, and, ultimately, our economy. That is what is at stake.

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I, too, have a good memory. I remember that, during the election campaign, his leader said he would balance the budget no matter what. That makes me wonder how he can advocate for compensation, which would have been impossible under a balanced budget.

We are holding consultations. In case he did not notice, I would inform him that the Standing Committee on International Trade is consulting the community as a whole about the negative and positive repercussions of the trans-Pacific partnership, the TPP.

Can my colleague tell me how the New Democrats would have kept that promise, considering their commitment to balance the budget no matter what?

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

To us, the choice was clear from the beginning, well before the election campaign. The Conservatives were negotiating agreements that undermined supply management, so if they were promising financial compensation, they would have to keep that promise. That is exactly why the member for Berthier—Maskinongé moved a motion calling on the government to keep that promise. At the risk of

repeating myself, I would add that all of the parties in the House of Commons voted in favour of that motion; it was unanimous. Unfortunately, it is now back up for discussion, and that means supply management is also back up for discussion. That is unacceptable.

As for the last part of his question, the consultations, that is all well and good, but those consultations came after the agreement was signed, unfortunately. That is a big problem.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague.

I had the opportunity to listen to the end of his speech. There seems to be some confusion about the issue of diafiltered milk. He talked a lot about a legislative issue. We see this as more of a regulatory issue. I am trying to understand the essence of his speech. Is this a legislative or regulatory issue? I would like him to clarify his argument.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what I said. I said that the regulations need to be adjusted and the law must be enforced. That is exactly what I said, and that is exactly what we are asking the government to do. We do not need to have long debates or introduce new legislation. We simply want the minister to do his job and stand up for our farmers.

• (1155)

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals keep saying that it will take some time, that they need to examine the issue, and that they are taking the time to do it right. I think my colleague just proved that it does not need to take so long. In the meantime, many milk producers are losing a great deal of money, as much as \$220 million a year. I did the math, and we are talking about three-quarters of a million dollars a day for dairy producers. A lot of people are being affected by this, particularly in my province, Quebec. In a unanimous vote, the National Assembly called on the federal government to do something about this immediately.

Does my colleague agree that we need to think more about the dairy farmers and less about politics right now?

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question. Indeed, we are talking about farmers here at home, and not just in Quebec. There are some in my riding, Beloeil—Chambly.

As the hon. member said, elected members in Quebec are standing up for farmers. The NPD is standing up for farmers. The Liberals' excuse is that they are trying to clean up the Conservatives' mess. However, they need to realize that the election is over and it is time to govern. So far, they have not lived up to people's expectations.

What we are asking the Liberals to do today is quite simple. We are asking them to enforce the act and the regulations and prevent the losses the farmers are suffering because of the government's drivel, as my colleague just mentioned.

It is a question of choice. The Liberals cannot take the Conservatives' previous approach and say that one thing is urgent while another thing is less urgent.

We know that farmers are losing a lot of money, so therefore this is urgent. It is clear and simple.

Business of Supply

The Deputy Speaker: We have time for a brief question.

The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to go back to the question my colleague asked about policy.

We invited everyone to work together for the dairy farmers. I would like to remind our colleague that there was an election on October 19 and that it is the Liberals who are in power now. That is not how we would like it, but they are the ones in power and they are the ones who have been doing nothing for the past six months. Instead of targeting our party, the NDP should be working hard with us to force the Liberals to do what needs to be done, which is to provide the Canadian Food Inspection Agency with measures to ensure that diafiltered milk is no longer used in cheese.

Does the hon. member agree with that simple statement or not?

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to target the party in power, but at the same time, I am not going to stand here, with dairy farmers from my riding, and pretend that the Conservatives are not also partly to blame for this situation.

I am not going to listen to Conservative members rise and tell us that they are going to defend supply management. I am also not going to let the Liberal government continue to betray farmers. The Liberals promised them so much and now they are giving them so little. For years, we have had successive Liberal and Conservative governments, and they created these loopholes. The NDP is going to keep fighting.

It may be playing politics, but I stand up for my constituents and I am proud to do so.

[*English*]

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to thank my colleague for bringing this motion forward. From all the questions raised in the House and to the agriculture committee, I want to acknowledge and thank the member for the great work she has done since the election to bring this issue front and centre.

It is an important issue, because across Canada and in my riding, these are real jobs for people. It is about good jobs for members of all of communities, and I am honoured to stand in this House today to speak on behalf of the wonderful dairy farmers in my riding.

In a world where jobs are at a premium, keeping a thriving domestic industry may be more valuable than cheap milk or imported diafiltered milk. For this reason, I am very happy to speak in support of this motion today.

Dairy farmers are speaking out in B.C. The dairy sector contributes many millions of dollars to the provincial GDP and is responsible for more than 15,000 jobs, which is 21% of B.C.'s agriculture jobs.

The NDP stands proudly next to our dairy producers. They are the pillar of our economy and our food sovereignty.

In my riding of North Island—Powell River, we have farmers losing out simply because the Canadian government cannot do its job.

Let me explain.

The problem of diafiltered milk has been going on and has been a battle for our dairy farmers for at least the last two years. The diafiltered milk is a U.S. product, part of the great family of milk protein concentrates. These are ingredients mostly used for cheese, which are less costly and are made from heavily subsidized U.S. milk. They are designed exclusively to get around Canadian rules. Diafiltered milk is imported and is used instead of milk from our farmers, which results in financial losses for them.

Currently, the Canada Border Services Agency considers diafiltered milk as a milk protein concentrate. It is, therefore, not subject to the dairy chapter of the customs tariff schedule, so enters the country tariff free.

For its part, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency considers the diafiltered milk as milk in its inspection work of these cheese standards.

We have two departments, under one disorganized government, considering the same product in two different ways.

Under the cheese compositional standards for Canada, it is required that a minimum percentage of the protein used in cheese-making be sourced from milk. Some processors have taken to using milk protein substances as part of their required minimum percentage of milk when making cheese, instead of using it as a part of their allowable percentage of added ingredients.

This is how U.S. producers and large-scale Canadian transformers are getting around the rules.

Consequently, this is a considerable financial advantage for some processors. However, but not all processors can use or have access to diafiltered milk, which causes unfair competition, specifically for small cheese processors.

The solution is quite simple. We need the diafiltered milk to cease to have a dual identity, and we need the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to enforce its non-dairy character so that processors do not use it instead of Canadian milk.

On Vancouver Island alone, where I reside, the dairy sector is responsible for more than 1,300 jobs. It is estimated that the financial loss caused by diafiltered milk is \$220 million across Canada a year. That is an average loss of \$15,000 per year, per producer.

Why is this problem persisting?

The issue was raised during the election campaign. The dairy farmers were persistent and continue to advocate. As Liberals do, they pledged to solve the problem. However, we now see the Liberal government continuing to drag its feet. It is starting to look like a broken promise.

Yet the solution is simple: enforce the cheese compositional standards.

If the Liberals genuinely care about supply management, our family farms, and our regions, they will support our motion and solve this problem once and for all.

Business of Supply

•(1200)

The Liberals have said repeatedly that they will protect supply management. With our motion, they have an opportunity to put their words into action and make this pass.

Let me quote Ms. Caroline Emond, the executive director of Dairy Farmers of Canada:

The government is responsible for the enforcement of Canada's border measures and must act quickly to limit damages caused to Canadian industry. This role will be even more important when service imports enter into Canada as a result of CETA and TPP.

Let's be clear. All we're asking is that the government enforce existing rules and allow only the amount that has been agreed to in trade agreements to enter the country.

The Quebec National Assembly voted unanimously in favour of a motion asking the federal government to apply its standards and protect the integrity of our supply management. When will the Liberals keep their promises and stand up for Canadian dairy farmers, like those who live in my riding and those who live in many ridings of members in this House?

Our producers are worried. To add insult to injury, Canada signed a trade agreement that opened a breach in supply management. The sum of access granted to the dairy industry projects to be 3.25% of Canada's 2016 milk production. The milk displaced by this agreement will never be produced in Canada and will result in a perpetual loss of revenue for our farmers and for the Canadian economy.

This month, Joe Stiglitz, winner of the Nobel Prize for Economics, sounded the alarm for workers. Why are the Liberals determined to move forward with this agreement? Then there is the Canada-Europe trade agreement. These concessions will cost the dairy industry an additional \$300 million in market losses. The 2016 Liberal budget's lack of compensation for cheese producers for concessions made as part of CETA has angered Canada's dairy industry.

It is clear that whether the Conservative Party or the Liberal Party is in power, they are doing the same thing. We have seen this happen again and again, and we are not protecting the jobs in Canada that make this country strong.

Let me conclude by quoting Mr. Wally Smith, president of the Dairy Farmers of Canada:

...all of Canada's dairy farmers speak with one voice on diafiltered milk. We are collectively disappointed with the lack of action on enforcement of the cheese standards. The Government does not need to pass a new law or new regulation and the solution is simple. The Government needs to enforce the existing standards.

I hope in this House that we can make sure today that this job is done. We need to enforce these standards to move forward in a positive way for our country and protect dairy farmers.

•(1205)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important to recognize that the Government of Canada is in fact aware of the situation. As was pointed out earlier, it is not the current government that ultimately created the problem. It was the former Conservative government which stood by and did nothing, and now we are being asked to look into it.

The government has a process which it needs to go through. The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food has been very clear on the issue of supply management. The Government of Canada supports supply management.

I find it interesting that this has been an issue now for a few years, and the NDP has chosen today, the day on which there is a protest, to bring the issue forward in the form of an opposition motion. That is fine, but I would like to know why, when the NDP was the official opposition, it did not raise the issue back then and put on pressure. The issue was there and it was being embellished upon and became an even larger issue.

Maybe the member could provide some comment as to why the New Democrats, when they were the official opposition were so negligent on the issue back then. We in the Liberal caucus agree it is a very serious issue. It is an issue which we are attempting to deal with in government. Why were the New Democrats, while they were the official opposition, so negligent on this file?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I am so proud to stand with the member who moved this motion today knowing the hard work that she has done both in this parliamentary session and in the past.

I was very grateful to watch, as the questions were asked. I have heard numerous times from my community's dairy farmers that they are appreciative of the voice that has been coming out again and again to fight on this issue.

I want to point out again the reality that small dairy farmers around this country are losing up to \$15,000 a year. They are hurting. They are asking for help. During the election, they were very clear. They asked for 100 days if they could have that change.

This is something that is simple. I am surprised that the hon. member is not interested in supporting this motion as he has reiterated again and again how passionate his government is to move forward with this. Therefore, I invite the Liberals to support us in this motion today, and we will all move forward in supporting the Canadian farmers who need it so desperately.

Hon. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, may I say that today is the birthday of Queen Elizabeth. I would like to take this opportunity to wish her a happy birthday. I had the great honour and pleasure of meeting her when she was on a visit to Canada. To our Queen, happy birthday. I am sure everyone will join me in wishing her a happy birthday.

Second, I congratulate my colleague, the parliamentary secretary, the member for Winnipeg North, on his daughter's victory in the election.

As for the NDP members, my colleagues on the other side, in reference to trade, I have been here for 18 years and I have never seen them support any trade deal. Because they have never supported any trade deal, it is not possible for us to support this motion.

•(1210)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the acknowledgement that so often these trade agreements that are negotiated really undermine supply management and undermine the hard-working farmers and other people across this country.

Business of Supply

I am sorry to hear that the Conservatives will not support the motion. We know what our job is over here in the NDP. Our job is to stand up for people in this country who do not have that voice, and make sure that it is heard in this House.

I am proud to stand today and say that we need to change something. We need to move forward, make sure we are protecting small farms, and make sure that dairy farmers can move forward. That is the reality. They are facing many challenges. They are here raising their voices today for a reason. It is important that this House listen.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia.

I am very concerned about the importation of diafiltered milk because it affects many people in my riding. I have the honour of representing the people of Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, a large region with a vibrant and active agricultural industry.

My riding is home to over 300 dairy producers and two processing plants, one of which is a cheese factory that uses only Canadian milk. The only French agricultural college in Ontario is also located in my riding.

I am rising in the House for Jasmin Benoit and his family, for Ferme D'Ia Sept, and for the Lafrance and Bilodeau families. I am rising in the House to stand up for the interests of all dairy farmers in my region. Whether big or small, each of them contributes to the collective well-being of our communities. Electricians, mechanics, veterinarians, and people in other occupations are all called upon to work for dairy producers. They are a real economic driver in the rural regions of Canada.

[*English*]

However, we strongly disagree with the assertion of my hon. colleague that we have undermined the interests of Canada's supply-managed sectors, and in particular, the dairy sector. The issue of milk protein and diafiltered milk is not new. I know what the official opposition may say about this issue, but where were those members when the problem was less substantial than it is today?

Unfortunately, we saw the former Conservative finance minister's recent comments in the *National Post*, in which he railed against supply management. Now I believe I really understand the true agenda of the Conservative Party. I can assure all members that our government fought hard for and implemented supply management. We know that it provides Canadian consumers with a stable, affordable supply of dairy and poultry products, while assuring farmers of a good and predictable income.

Unlike the Conservatives who cut nearly \$700 million out of Agriculture Canada, our government is committed to reinvesting, including over \$70 million in the budget for research and infrastructure and \$38.5 million for food safety.

We are also investing \$500 million to extend high-speed Internet to hundreds of rural communities across the country, which is much needed for Canada's agricultural industry. Our farmers are moving from pitchforks to iPads, but they need access to the Internet to be

able to use the application. That's how we create an innovative country.

Each and every day, Canada's innovative dairy and poultry farmers bring nutritious, wholesome food to our tables while creating jobs and adding value to our economy in rural and urban Canada. Combined, the sectors drive over \$30 billion in farm cash receipts and processing sales. That translates into close to 300,000 jobs for Canadians. That is why the government continues to support the current supply management system.

At the same time, the Government of Canada continues to pursue an aggressive trade and export agenda. Agriculture and food exports hit a new record of over \$60 billion last year, and there are more opportunities for growth to come.

The facts are clear. Supply management has not prevented Canada from signing any free trade agreements with any country in the world. From poultry to pulse crops, our government will continue to support a strong agricultural industry in Canada. The country's economy and the well-being of Canadians depend on it, and the demand for food is only going to go up in the future.

I want to take a moment to talk about the CETA, the comprehensive economic and trade agreement. The Government of Canada is committed to ratifying the Canada-EU CETA as soon as possible to open the world's largest market for food to our industry. This agreement, while not perfect, is the most comprehensive and ambitious trade agreement since the North American Free Trade Agreement.

With the CETA and NAFTA, Canada will be one of the few countries in the world to have preferential access to the world's two largest economies, some 800 million of the world's most affluent consumers. We understand the importance of compensation to the dairy sector in the context of the Canada-EU CETA. Let me repeat that we do understand the importance of compensation to the dairy sector. Engagement with the dairy sector is ongoing.

●(1215)

[*Translation*]

Our government is very clear with our international partners. We unequivocally support our supply management system and will defend it at all costs.

[*English*]

We will continue to do so while pursuing an aggressive trade agenda, because Canada's export sector depends on trade and creates economic growth across the country.

We are working in the best interests of Canadians. We are talking with industry stakeholders and listening to their views on compensation. We have heard how important compensation is to the supply-managed sector. We will protect the integrity of the supply management system and fully recognize the importance of import controls.

Business of Supply

We are aware of the industry's concern regarding the use of diafiltered milk in the making of cheese and are committed to continuing to engage with the entire industry on the best way to achieve a long-term, sustainable, and agreed-upon agreement to fix this issue.

[*Translation*]

I am constantly talking to farmers in my riding about the issues that affect them. I created a local agriculture committee to ensure that I fully understand the issues and to give farmers a real voice in the House of Commons, and not just when this issue is in the headlines.

[*English*]

We want to keep farmers engaged in this conversation so that we can ensure that we work together on finding a sustainable solution. Our party fought hard for implementing supply management, and we will continue to work for what is in the best interests of Canadian farmers.

Finally, I just want to highlight that we are helping to grow this vibrant sector of our economy by supporting commercialization of innovative dairy products.

In February, at the Dairy Farmers of Canada annual meeting, the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food announced an investment of \$1.75 million in the dairy research cluster under Growing Forward 2. This investment will support research by our scientists at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada in two key areas. The first is in increasing the quality of Canadian forages to help increase milk production, and the second is in understanding the role of dairy fat products, including their impact on type 2 diabetes. That brings the total federal investment in the dairy cluster to \$13.75 million over five years.

In closing, my message today is that the government is committed to keeping the Canadian supply management sector strong and profitable. It will promote a balanced trade agenda for all sectors of our economy. Demand is growing around the world for the high-quality, sustainable food that our farmers and food processors can deliver.

As we all know, a strong agriculture industry means a strong economy. It is a simple equation, but it works. I can assure this House that the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, a dairy farmer himself, and the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and I and all my colleagues, as well as the Prime Minister, are fighting hard in this chamber for all farmers.

• (1220)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech. I know that he speaks to producers; however, once again, I believe that this is just empty rhetoric. There is no concrete action.

This problem has been going on for years. It is not new. We raised this issue with the Conservatives when they were in power. The election campaign came along and all parties agreed to address the problem of diafiltered milk.

The Liberals have already been in power for six months, and they have still done nothing about diafiltered milk. They only have nice

words. They say that they will do something and that they are talking to producers, but everyone knows what the solution is, including farmers and processors: the government must take action.

Will the Liberal government address the problem of diafiltered milk today and really stand up for Canadian producers?

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé.

That is what we are doing here. This motion is nothing but empty rhetoric. It will not help dairy producers. Yesterday, we had the opportunity to hear from the Dairy Farmers of Canada at the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, but my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé did not stop talking in order to keep us from hearing them.

I can appreciate that she is suddenly taking a strong stand on the issue because it is in the headlines, but where was she between 2011 and 2014? The NDP was silent.

As well, during the election campaign, her leader promised to balance the budget. How does the NDP plan to balance the budget by paying out compensation? The math does not add up.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately I have heard only words from my Liberal colleague.

I would have liked to hear that they are dealing with the problem, that they have come up with solutions and are planning to introduce a regulatory process so that diafiltered milk is no longer considered milk, but an ingredient, which would allow its use in Canadian cheese production to be controlled.

Had my Liberal colleague said those kinds of things, I would have applauded him. Unfortunately, he did not.

Will the solutions we brought forward this morning be implemented by the Liberals, or will they say nothing until the cows come home?

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

When the house is destroyed, it takes a lot more time to renovate it. This is exactly the situation we are in. We have been caught with our pants down, as they say.

This has been a long-standing issue. However, I did not hear my colleague speak as strongly, when he was in government, to defend the interests of dairy farmers with respect to diafiltered milk.

In 2013, 10,000 tonnes of diafiltered milk was imported into Canada. In 2014, it was 13,000 tonnes, and then 27,000 tonnes in 2015. Where was my colleague to defend the interest of Canada's dairy farmers then?

[*English*]

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell for his speech, as well as for his knowledgeable input on the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Could the hon. member please comment on the progress of the agricultural policy framework and how this relates to today's debate?

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[Translation]

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Guelph for his question.

[English]

Yesterday I was truly saddened by the state of our politics. I have only been in politics for six months. Prior to that, I was in the private sector, and in the private sector this would never have happened.

In front of witnesses, both the official opposition and my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé kept talking and talking, rather than hearing about the dairy producers of Canada. We could have heard about their issues at committee, but opposition members decided to speak.

Speaking of the agricultural policy framework, why did they refuse to study this issue? What is wrong with the official opposition and the NDP? This is a five-year program. It is important for the agricultural sector.

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity to address the House on this very important issue.

I would first like to underline the work that is being done by both the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

• (1225)

[Translation]

I want to thank all the members of the Liberal caucus, and rural members. They are working very hard. I want to assure the members that the parliamentary secretary, especially, is working so hard that he has done much more than was done by the other government over the last five years.

Canada has always depended heavily on international trade and investment for its economic well-being. We live in a vast country with a relatively small population, and we enjoy a high standard of living. We produce more goods and services than Canadians consume. As a result, we sell our products and services abroad, which helps maintain a strong economy.

We strive to maintain and expand access to foreign markets, since an open trade and investment environment allows companies to prosper and provide better middle-class jobs. The government is committed to developing trade in Canada and attracting investment that creates jobs in our country.

In Canada, one in five jobs is generated by trade. In 2014, Canadian exports of goods and services represented just under one third of our GDP. More than 40,000 Canadian companies, mostly small and medium-sized companies, are exporters. Canadian consumers also reap the benefits of international trade, which gives them a greater variety of goods at better prices. Furthermore, we know that companies that participate in international trade are more innovative and have higher productivity.

[English]

Against a backdrop of slowing global economic growth, it is important for Canada to continue to strengthen our competitive position and extend our reach, including to new markets. The

competitiveness of Canadian businesses in the international marketplace will be enhanced by breaking down barriers to trade, both internal and abroad, and providing the appropriate tools and policy framework that allow Canadian exporters to take advantage of new trade opportunities.

Canada employs a variety of trade policy tools to do this. These trade tools improve operating conditions for our firms by committing countries to transparent, rules-based systems. This helps establish a more predictable environment for trade and investment.

Free trade agreements open markets to new opportunities but also give rise to concerns, sometimes about the concessions that have to be made. It is important to remember that Canada has always been a trading nation, and the government will continue to pursue opportunities while protecting Canada's interests. This government has not wavered in its commitment to supply management or the people who earn their livelihoods in these sectors—far from it.

The three pillars of our domestic system of supply management—namely, production controls, import controls, and price controls—have been maintained in all our free trade agreements. In addition, the Minister of International Trade has been tasked by the Prime Minister himself to continue to promote Canadian agricultural interests during future trade negotiations.

We are very aware of the issues with enforcement of our rules surrounding supply management. As my colleague, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, has repeated numerous times in the House and elsewhere, this government supports supply management, and we are working hard with the industry to find a long-term solution to this question.

Let me say a few words about CETA.

[Translation]

The European Union is Canada's second-largest trade and investment partner and its relationship with our country is of fundamental importance. The European Union is the largest market in the world, with 500 million people in 28 countries and a combined GDP of about \$20 trillion.

The Canada–Europe Comprehensive and Economic Trade Agreement is a benchmark model. We also addressed Canadians' concerns regarding investment protection and dispute resolution by establishing in the agreement stronger provisions on the right to regulate of all levels of government and creating a dispute resolution system that is fairer, more transparent, and more objective. We are pleased that this progressive agreement is now moving towards implementation next year.

Canada will be a leader that respects the guiding principles of international investment in the 21st century, and the comprehensive economic trade agreement has laid a solid foundation to that end.

The government believes that the agreement will have many positive spinoffs for the Canadian economy, including the agricultural sector, and for all Canadians.

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When the agreement takes effect, 98% of EU tariff lines on Canadian goods will be duty-free. Once the tariffs have been phased out, seven years after the agreement comes into effect, this percentage will be 99%, including more than 95% of the tariff lines on agricultural products. Eliminating duties will increase export opportunities in the European Union for Canadian producers, including exporters of agricultural and agri-food products.

Furthermore, as mentioned by the Prime Minister in the mandate letter for the Minister of International Trade, this government understands that it is important to work with departments as well as the provinces and territories in order to support necessary adjustments in sectors such as agriculture, which is supply-managed.

This issue is very important to the minister and the government as a whole. The minister has already met with the representatives of the five supply-managed groups, and she will continue to work closely with this sector.

We will ensure that the implementation of the agreement provides maximum benefits to Canadians across the country.

• (1230)

[*English*]

On the trans-Pacific partnership, our focus is to ensure that Canadians can have a good look at the TPP and that they can ask questions and express their views on whether the outcomes of this agreement are in the best interests of Canadians.

The government has made a commitment to consult Canadians before taking a decision on ratification, and that is exactly what we have been doing since we have taken office.

The Minister of International Trade has undertaken an extensive consultation process to offer Canadians the opportunity to provide their views on the agreement, and Canada's participation in it, before the government makes a decision on whether or not to ratify it.

The minister is also working closely with colleagues whose portfolios are implicated by the TPP to engage Canadian stakeholders and hear what they have to say. Since the Minister of International Trade was sworn in last November, the government has been part of more than 250 interactions with over 400 stakeholders to discuss the TPP, including all the provinces and territories, industry, civil society organizations, think tanks, academics, and the general public.

Parliament now has a sense of the consultations the minister has undertaken thus far. The engagement with Canadians will continue in weeks and months to come.

The government's TPP engagement has already touched many areas of Canada. Consultations are a good vehicle not only to learn about views on the TPP but also to have a constructive conversation on broader issues of importance to Canadians.

The government understands the fundamental nature of the agricultural and agri-food sector to our economy. That is why, as I mentioned already, the Minister of International Trade has wasted no time in meeting with representatives of all the supply-managed groups after taking office.

This government fully supports supply management, and we know that if a decision is made to ratify the TPP, we will need to work with sectors affected in the transition.

We are also pleased, as members know, that the House Standing Committee on International Trade is currently studying the TPP and in fact is beginning to consult Canadians in its own way.

As mentioned, this government is committed to being fully transparent and hearing the views of Canadians on the merits of the TPP before deciding whether to ratify the agreement.

On this motion, in conclusion, trade agreements are good for Canada, provided they provide benefits to Canadians. We think CETA is a good one; we are studying the TPP to see whether it is or not.

With respect to diafiltered milk, we are working with other members of the government and with farmers in the sector, knowing the complexity of the issue, in order to find a just and equitable solution for Canadian farmers.

• (1235)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his speech.

I did not hear much about the motion before us or diafiltered milk. I heard a lot about the trans-Pacific partnership and the importance of trade agreements. I get that.

However, do I need to explain to the hon. Liberal government member that we requested a study on the trans-Pacific partnership, but that, unfortunately, our request was denied?

The Liberal Party voted against a motion that I put to the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food to study the trans-Pacific partnership.

The Liberals talk about transparency, but they will not even allow the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food to study the trans-Pacific partnership.

Can the member tell me what he plans to do to keep putting pressure on his own government to resolve the diafiltered milk issue once and for all?

We all know that the solution is simple. Producers and processors know it too. Everyone knows the solution: the government needs to enforce the existing regulations.

What is the government going to do about this?

Mr. David Lametti: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé for her question.

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The first line of today's motion is about the negative impact of trade agreements. My goal was to emphasize that international free trade agreements also have very positive impacts, and that is part of the motion.

With respect to diafiltered milk, we are working hard to find solutions. If it were as simple as our friends across the way suggest, the previous government would have resolved the issue. However, it is not that simple.

There are different interpretations, and that is why we are working hard to find a fair and equitable solution.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague on his excellent speech on free trade agreements.

Our government is the one that concluded the most free trade agreements and did the most to grow Canada's economy, and we are very proud of our record. Unfortunately, in his speech, the member forgot the subject of the motion, namely, importing diafiltered milk.

I do not really understand this government. On the one hand, this government is capable of solving a problem that does not exist by moving a time allocation motion right here in the House of Commons and immediately preventing people from speaking, and no one knows why. On the other hand, it cannot even tell us that it is working on a solution or why it cannot come up with a solution to a problem that has existed for quite some time.

The question is simple: why is it that the government can quickly solve a problem that does not exist, but is incapable of solving a problem that has existed for some time?

Mr. David Lametti: Mr. Speaker, that is a great question, and I thank the hon. member for his question and for his passion.

The speeches made by the government members need to be taken as a whole.

Since the resolution centres on the basic presumption that free trade agreements are bad, my role was to clarify the fact that free trade agreements can actually be very positive for Canada's economy, and I hope I succeeded in doing so.

The issue of diafiltered milk is quite complex. It is not as simple as the opposition claims. Plus, we inherited a very bad situation from the previous government, which did nothing for five years.

We are trying to resolve the issue. We are working very hard on it, in collaboration with the industry and, of course, with all stakeholders involved.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Sherbrooke.

It makes perfect sense that the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot is rising in the House to talk about diafiltered milk. I represent a riding where there are close to 500 companies and nearly 1,500 agriculture and agri-food companies directly affected by this issue.

I just want to point out that every member of the House is affected when supply management is on the line. Supply management also

affects consumers. Whether we are in a rural and agricultural riding or a fully urban riding, people in every one of our ridings consume milk, eggs, chicken. This affects us all.

Supply management was put in place for our farmers. We say "supply", but really, the system manages supply and demand. That means that here in Canada, we know that we will always have enough milk, eggs, and chicken. We have known that for decades. That is not so across the border. In the past few years there was an egg shortage and consumers saw the price of eggs skyrocket.

In Canada, we are also assured of quality. Consumers know that when they see "Canadian milk", it means that the milk came from producers who comply with animal welfare, safety, and environmental standards. We have no guarantees when the milk comes from the United States. A number of young producers told me that they have visited farms there, that they saw how things worked, and that there is no guarantee of quality.

Under Canada's supply management system, consumers have assurances about quality, quantity, and reasonable prices.

We often hear people say that they went to the United States and that prices were lower there. Prices may have been low that week, but if those people returned the following month, that might no longer have been the case. However, when you buy milk here, you know that the price will always be reasonable and fair for consumers. It is important for the House to understand that this affects us all.

Members need to understand what is meant by diafiltered milk. It is important that all members understand that, because I hope that they will support the motion moved by my colleague today. Diafiltered milk is a way of circumventing the regulations. Importers claim that the milk is not really milk, but that it is "milk protein concentrate". They give it that fancy name to get it across the border. Since the product is not milk, the Canada Border Services Agency does not charge the importers customs fees. That makes it a competitive product. However, when the product gets to the processing plant, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency considers it to be milk. That means that, as a consumer, when I read the word "milk" on a product, I have no guarantee that the milk came from Canada. I have no guarantee that environmental, animal welfare, and food safety standards were upheld. That is what diafiltered milk is.

The parliamentary secretary just said that we do not understand, that the issue is too complicated. We are saying that that is not true. It is very simple. Milk usually contains 3% protein. The milk in question is being processed in such a way that it contains 15% protein so that the rules can be circumvented and the milk can get across the border.

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Supply management is a system that ensures that dairy producers do not need any subsidies. By letting this milk across the border, the government is telling dairy farmers that it is not going to give them any subsidies and on top of that it is also going to penalize them. On average, farms are losing \$15,000. In my riding, farmers are telling me that they are losing up to \$25,000. Today, farmers are protesting in front of the Parliament Buildings. Young farmers are saying that the money they are losing this year is their salary. Do we expect our dairy farmers to continue to give us a high-quality product without even earning an income? Are we going to make it impossible for the next generation to take over? This is a land use issue.

● (1240)

We represent regions all over Canada. Farms are going out of business all the time. In Quebec last year, 257 farms ceased to be. Every week, I meet dairy producers who tell me that they are sick of seeing the farms around them close up shop. They want their farms to be family farms, and they want them to be viable. They want to stay on their land.

Do we want to see our family farms in Canada disappear? Would we rather have mega-farms like those in the United States? Do we want our towns to cease to be?

My riding is 50 kilometres from Montreal, but some of the towns no longer have a credit union, a grocery store, or a convenience store. In some towns, even the school is barely surviving. In other regions, schools are being converted into seniors' homes. Our supply management system made it possible for dairy producers to operate in all of our regions: north of La Tuque, in Gaspé, in Abitibi. Our supply management system makes it possible for them to stay in business. Do we want to jeopardize the supply management system by allowing diafiltered milk into the country? The government says it believes in supply management, but saying so is not enough. The government has to take action to safeguard it.

For my region, this is about economic development. Millions of dollars are at stake. Last year alone, dairy producers lost \$220 million. Last summer, a press conference on supply management was organized in my riding. There were representatives of municipalities, chambers of commerce, and economic development organizations because they know very well that if agricultural producers go out of business, companies that sell goods and services will shut their doors because the economic activity of these producers is the lifeblood of the region.

It is important to bear this in mind, and that is why this concerns all of us. We cannot say that this only concerns the producers who came to see us on the Hill today. Today, when we reflect on this issue and when we vote, we really have to tell ourselves that this concerns every one of us and that it is important to support my colleague's motion.

The Liberals are telling us that this is complicated, but really, it is quite simple. The government simply needs to enforce the regulations that already exist. The House of Commons does not even need to pass any new legislation. The regulations exist; they just need to be applied. We are being told today that the discussions are ongoing, but farmers are coming to us and saying that the discussions have gone on long enough and it is time for action. The action to be taken is very clear: the existing regulations simply need

to be enforced. The cheese compositional standards need to be enforced.

● (1245)

The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food decided not to block products at the border, which is something he could have done. It has been done in the past. An agriculture minister did that a number of years ago, when mozzarella was crossing our borders in cheese kits. This time, although we have no idea why, the minister decided not to block diafiltered milk at the border, but he could still do something about cheese compositional standards, and there is no reason to wait to enforce regulations that already exist.

I do not know what they are waiting for. Last week, the Quebec National Assembly unanimously adopted a second motion calling on the federal government to resolve this issue. To me it is clear. When farmers tell us it is time to take action, when two unanimous motions from the Quebec National Assembly tell us it is time to take action, then it is hard to understand why the government still wants to discuss the matter and collaborate. It is time to take action, period.

This is also important because the trans-Pacific partnership threatens supply management. The Canada-Europe free trade agreement threatens supply management. The message I want to get across today is that we need to stop including agriculture in our international agreements. We took culture out of our international agreements because it was a sensitive topic, and now we need to take out agriculture. We simply cannot put agriculture in the same agreements with the automotive industry and the pharmaceutical industry. We are talking about land use.

The government has to act now.

● (1250)

[*English*]

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her intervention describing supply management. We are in agreement about supply management and our support for that very critical system for our farming communities.

As our parliamentary secretaries have both said, our government is working on the issue of diafiltered milk, which is something we have discussed at the agriculture committee as well.

Would the hon. member comment on the need to discuss the complex issue of our comprehensive agriculture policy, something that our agriculture committee has been blocked from doing, which could help us with this discussion today?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Mr. Speaker, we are talking about enforcing a regulation on diafiltered milk. The discussions have taken place. As far as broader agricultural policies are concerned, Canada's farmers have done their part by agreeing on standards in terms of safety, animal welfare, and the environment. In fact, I look forward to talking about agricultural policies so that we can discuss what we are going to do in the years to come.

However, that is not the issue today. The questions are the following. What are we going to do to enforce the cheese compositional standards? What are we going to do to make sure our food is safe? What are we going to do to keep our farms in our regions? That is what we are talking about today.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend my colleague on her speech.

As you know, she comes from a region where agriculture is very important. Many of our farmers are trained in her riding. When she talks about what dairy farmers have to say, we should listen to her because she is in close contact with them.

From what I understand from the speeches that were given here this morning, at least the ones given on this side of the House, our dairy producers have been working hard to make us aware of the issue. They have told us about their financial problems, the difficulty they are having paying their bills at the end of the month, and the problems related to the next generation of farmers. They simply do not understand why the government is not taking immediate action.

I assume that the members opposite have also had visits from dairy farmers. How do they not understand what this issue is all about? I cannot understand it.

Can the member, who comes from a region that is very proud of its milk production, tell us whether she agrees with me that the members opposite do not understand anything?

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Mr. Speaker, we understand that there is no political will to fix this problem.

The Quebec National Assembly understands this complex issue, since Quebec's agriculture department is very familiar with the reality facing agricultural producers and food processors. Its representatives understood this is a complex issue and understood that it was very simple to resolve it: two unanimous motions called on the federal government to enforce a regulation. It is very simple. It is important not only to the region I represent, but also to agricultural and dairy producers across Canada.

My colleague who just asked a question comes from a region that is also affected. Earlier, I met with young producers who surely trained at the Institut de technologie agroalimentaire in Saint-Hyacinthe. They are ready to take over, but they cannot do their jobs when the government does not enforce the regulations.

When the new generation of producers experiences economic losses, it means that they will not earn an income that year. Young agricultural producers who are passionate about their career choose to work for nothing so that we can have milk on our tables. It must be said, and the government must address this situation.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I wish to thank my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé for her initiative today in the House.

Before I begin my speech, I would like to read into Hansard what the current minister of International Development and La Francophonie said on August 26, 2015, during the election campaign.

She gave a press conference with the current minister of Foreign Affairs, and many farmers were invited. She gave this press

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conference to defend supply management. She gave a fine press conference with great fanfare to say that she was going to defend supply management if she were elected. With respect to supply management, she said:

[Supply management] also maintains our family farms. If we opened up the gates and abandoned supply management, our farms would be in danger...

I could not agree more. Today, the big problem is that the importation of diafiltered milk is undermining supply management because producers in the United States are circumventing the rules and ending up exporting what could be called processed milk. They are getting around the supply management rules.

I could not agree more with my government colleague, who during the campaign proudly stood up to defend supply management. Today, she and her government are dragging their feet. It is extremely unfortunate, because the situation is very serious.

I am delighted to rise today on behalf of all of Canada's dairy farmers, especially the many farmers in the Eastern Townships, where there are about 535 farms and 2,144 owners/producers. These 2,144 dairy farmers have families. We are talking about 5,157 direct and indirect jobs in this sector and an annual production of \$253.5 million. This is a major issue in the Eastern Townships.

It is extremely important for me to take part in this debate and especially to thank my colleague for her initiative. We need to ensure that the Liberals follow through on what they said during and after the election campaign. They said that they were going to address the problem and, today, six months later, nothing has changed. However, the situation is extremely serious. Several of my colleagues have pointed out that the losses are enormous. Each day that the government does not address the problem means losses for dairy farmers in Canada and the Eastern Townships.

This is affecting a lot of producers. Some have decided to add their voices to the discussion. For example, Christian Bouffard of Ferme du Cabouron made a video a few weeks ago that garnered 900,000 views. In it, he spoke out against the situation in Saint-Romain, which is in my colleague's riding, Mégantic—L'Érable. He began by talking about his own situation. He has been in the business for 30 years, and all of this is really destabilizing his farm and others all over the Eastern Townships. In his video, he asked processors to show some respect for the producers who supply their raw materials. He believes that some processors do not care. I will not paint them all with the same brush because some processors are talking about this. They are raising the issue and offering solutions.

Other people in the Eastern Townships have spoken out about this problem too. Lynne Martel Bégin of Ferme Rivière Verte in Bury has spoken out. Some of my colleagues may know Marcel Blais, the vice-president of the Eastern Townships dairy producers' association, who has a farm in La Patrie. In Magog, Ferme Magolait's David Beauvais said that if the situation persists, he will lose about \$30,000 per year.

● (1255)

Benoît Simard, from Ferme M. Grenier et fils in Stanstead, also denounces the situation.

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Many farmers in the Eastern Townships have taken part in demonstrations to protest the untenable situation they find themselves in because of the government's inaction and failure to enforce the rules. The rules could be changed or simply enforced if the government had the political will to do so.

Dozens of farmers went to Stanstead with their tractors and their placards to take part in the demonstration near the U.S. border in order to protest imports of diafiltered milk.

Ms. Walker said, "Medium-sized farms are losing on average roughly \$1,000 a week because of this problem." These family farms do not have huge revenues. Farmers are having a hard time making ends meet and making the necessary investments in their farms. They are losing piles of money every week, every year.

These farms are the economic drivers of the regions and are essential to their vitality. A number of hon. members are in a good position to talk about this, including my colleague from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, who knows the importance of family farms to the regional economies. They support communities and create direct jobs. When the farmers are doing well financially, they keep the regional economy going. It is therefore extremely important for the government to support them.

The government is dragging its feet, and I strongly object to that. Since he was appointed, the minister has been all talk. He is obviously familiar with the file. Everyone agrees that this is a well-known issue. However, the problem existed before the Liberal government was elected. It could have been solved a long time ago, but now producers have had to come to Parliament Hill to demand action because this government and the previous government have not done anything.

There is a fairly easy solution. We are being told that the issue is too complicated, that there are a lot of factors to consider, and that the problem cannot be solved overnight, but that is completely untrue. A Conservative member proposed solutions as though this were something new. He could have implemented those solutions when he was in power. This problem has been around for two years. Lately, it has gotten worse, and it is high time something was done about it.

It is unfortunate that the Conservatives did not do anything, but we need to focus on the Liberal government that is currently in office. If the minister had the political will to act, the problem would likely already be solved.

The Liberals are saying that we need to consult with producers to truly understand the problem, but if they had real political will, the problem would have been solved a long time ago. It is unfortunate that we have to talk about it here to force them to take action.

Finally, the Liberals did not hear the message sent by producers, even though they came to Parliament Hill recently to raise this issue.

Today, we are seeing the real face of the Liberal government, which seems to be listening very attentively to what certain processors have to say. Perhaps that is why it is slow to make a decision. This is a very sensitive issue.

The producers who have assembled on Parliament Hill deserve answers from the government, if not immediate action. This issue needs to be resolved as soon as possible.

I implore the government to take action once and for all and finally give producers the means to be able to sustain the regions.

● (1300)

[*English*]

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette (Winnipeg Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, supporting farmers is very important. I think we all love farmers. Who does not love a farmer?

As someone who represents one of the poorest ridings in the country, the price of milk and cheese affects the health of many of my fellow citizens. I have been working with dairy farmers in Manitoba, trying to come up with some of the issues surrounding the accessibility of food in Winnipeg Centre. When people have the choice of buying a large jug of pop for \$1, or buying milk at double that price, this affects the health of children and adults, particularly in northern communities.

I am trying not to be partisan, but do you have any practical solutions to deal with this? What could we be doing? How could farmers be working to ensure greater accessibility to high-quality foods for more of our fellow citizens?

● (1305)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I would remind hon. members to speak directly to the Speaker and not to members across the floor.

The hon. member for Sherbrooke.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question, which is not really related to the issue of diafiltered milk. However, I am happy to reply that the NDP is a strong advocate of food security. In fact, my colleague talked about that earlier. It is important that farmers have the resources they need to produce our food, and that includes government support. They need to at least feel as though they have the government's support in order to be able to provide Canadians with high-quality products.

Everyone in the House would agree that Canada is extremely proud of its farming industry and the quality of the products delivered all over the country. When we open our borders and open agriculture up to free trade agreements, there is a potential risk. My colleague also brought up a good point about that earlier when she said that agriculture, like culture, is a sector that needs to be protected and that deserves special attention, especially in the context of free trade agreements.

[*English*]

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is not the members in the House who have raised this issue. Repeatedly my colleagues and, frankly, our colleagues across the way in the Conservative Party have said that dairy farmers of Canada have called for action on this, and have done so for two years.

I will quote Mr. Wally Smith, president of the Dairy Farmers of Canada, who stated:

...all of Canada's dairy farmers speak with one voice on diafiltered milk. We are collectively disappointed with the lack of action on enforcement of the cheese standards. The Government does not need to pass a new law or new regulation and the solution is simple. The Government needs to enforce the existing standards.

Yet, the Liberals keep saying that it is complex and complicated, and that it is the member's fault because she is talking too much in committee. Frankly, it is insulting.

I am very proud of my colleague and all colleagues in the House who are standing up for dairy farmers. Let us not change the channel by talking about the price of milk in northern communities, or about the TPP or CETA. This law is in place now and it simply needs to be enforced to protect our dairy farmers.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague. She is quite right.

It is not the NDP who is demanding this today. It is the farmers who are here before us, along with a number of industry stakeholders, the National Assembly of Quebec, 58 processors, the provincial farmers' associations, and the national association.

The only thing standing in the way right now is the Liberal government, which is ignoring the problem. It keeps finding excuses not to act, when everyone, even our Conservative friends, are calling for this here today. The only thing missing is the political will on the Liberal side. They have been in power for six months now, and for six months they have been saying that they are familiar with the issue and that it is very important. However, nothing has happened in those six months.

The only obstacle, then, is the Liberal government. The farmers, the NDP, and the Conservatives are all demanding a solution. The only thing missing here is the Liberal Party.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform you that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia.

I would also like to thank the member for Berthier—Maskinongé for raising this very important and sensitive issue in the House. This is an important issue for all dairy producers in Quebec and Canada, and also for many producers in my riding of Châteauguay—Lacolle.

It is not political will that is lacking here. I am well aware that the dairy producers in my region are feeling the effects of the current turmoil in their industry. Part of the reason for that is the fact that our riding is adjacent to the United States and has one of the 10 largest border crossings in Canada, the Saint-Bernard-de-Lacolle crossing.

I am pleased today to clearly state that I support Canada's supply-managed industries. The goal of the opposition motion is to have a discussion today about the issues affecting the dairy industry. However, I would like to draw members' attention to the issues affecting the other two supply-managed sectors: the poultry and egg sectors.

In Châteauguay—Lacolle, the production of turkey, poultry, table eggs, and hatching eggs is an important sector. In fact, our riding has about 10 rural municipalities.

Business of Supply

These industries are thriving right now and are supporting many Canadian communities. I want to point out that our government fully supports Canada's supply management system, which is a vital and inalienable achievement for family farms and small farms. We are proud to say that these farms are the hallmark of Quebec's agricultural industry.

We are determined to maintain and protect the three sectors subject to supply management: dairy production, poultry production, and egg production. For example, the poultry industry brings in about \$3.9 billion a year for farms and contributes about \$1.3 billion a year to Canada's gross domestic product. Furthermore, this industry estimates that it provides more than 100,000 jobs across the country, on farms, in processing plants, and in other areas. In Châteauguay—Lacolle alone, there are 16 poultry producers.

We can also be very proud of the fact that Canadian egg producers supply the highest quality product, since they are subject to some of the strictest standards in the world.

In our riding, we have two sites that produce table eggs.

Since I am a student of history, I want to describe the situation that existed before Canada introduced the supply management system in order to prove just how vital the system has become.

First, in the 1960s, some provinces began restricting the entry of agri-food products from other provinces in order to protect their own farmers from the risk of falling markets, which often occurred when there was overproduction. Naturally, in keeping with the mechanism of supply and demand, overproduction resulted in major drops in prices. It was at this time that the Farm Products Marketing Agencies Act was passed to bring in an essential federal regulatory structure. The national agencies balance supply and demand by setting appropriate production levels for each province, once projected imports are taken into consideration.

Supply management was first introduced for the table egg industry, then a little later for the poultry industries. The hatching egg industry was added in the late 1980s.

For each of these products, the national agency works with the provincial boards to allocate production among the provinces to fully meet national market requirements.

● (1310)

In short, supply management has worked well and continues to work well in the poultry and egg sectors, since the system requires that responsibility be shared among the federal, provincial and territorial governments and farm groups to ensure a stable and well-functioning market.

Nevertheless, as elected members, we have an important role to play in protecting this proven system that can be held up as a model.

As the member for Châteauguay—Lacolle, I need to be sensitive to the needs and requests of the farmers in my riding, stay on top of the issues and bring forward information to our government.

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I wish to reassure the local farmers in my riding and all farmers across Canada by saying once again that our government will provide full support for trade and supply management in the poultry and egg sectors.

We recognize how vitally important supply-managed industries are to Canada's economy, which is why we are doing everything we can to keep these sectors strong and profitable.

Specifically, we will continue to support the three main pillars of the supply management system: production management, import control and price control.

Our government is making this aspiration a reality through our efforts to develop lucrative new markets for our farmers, in part through free trade agreements with large importer countries.

We also have other effective ways to support the poultry industry, such as strategic investments in research, science, and innovation.

Our ultimate objective is to help supply-managed producers and processors to boost productivity, build their competitive capabilities and maintain their sustainability.

Of course, we are also working in partnership with the industry to develop animal welfare codes of practice. Over the years, these strategic investments have helped grow our industry as well as Canada's economy.

I will conclude my speech by stating that our government fully supports supply management and that we are constantly working in the best interests of everyone: Canadian communities, families, and farmers.

We are positioning ourselves strategically on the international stage to maximize trade success, and this success is to be shared by all agricultural sectors, including those under supply management.

Our government is highly optimistic about the new growth opportunities to arise from our participation in new international trade agreements that will be valuable for Canada.

• (1315)

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech. She has shown that she listened to the farmers in her region and has demonstrated her knowledge of supply management.

She has said that the government will do everything it can and that it believes in supply management. I think that by supporting today's motion, she could turn those words into action.

In doing so, she would tangibly demonstrate that she supports her region's farmers and supply management. In 2015, losses incurred by dairy farmers totalled \$220 million.

How many hundreds of millions of dollars need to be lost before they take action?

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her question.

I am pleased with the motion moved today, because it gives us an opportunity to debate this issue. I must say that I have not heard much about this in the House for the past three years.

The government is very much aware of this problem. I can attest to the fact that the parliamentary secretary is working tirelessly to find a solution to the problem. It is going to take time, but it will be done.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my colleague says that it is going to take time, but that it will be done. What is going to take time? Why does it take time to enforce a law that is already in effect?

We think that the problem is simple and that it could be resolved today with a bit of good will.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Mr. Speaker, as my hon. colleagues have already explained, the problem is not that simple. It is rather complicated. Many factors and segments of the industry are involved. We have to find a sustainable solution that will benefit everyone in the long term.

• (1320)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the member and, prior to that, a brief comment.

The member made reference to the process of three years. I think it is important that we recognize that this is not an issue that came out of nowhere. Had the Conservative government been active on this issue, and quite possibly if the NDP had been more active on this issue while it was the official opposition, it might not have reached the point we have hit today.

Would the hon. member not agree that there is a responsibility for the Government of Canada to work with the industry representatives, as it has been doing, to try to do what is in the best interests of the industry as a whole? It is just a question of time. I would just reaffirm that the Government of Canada does in fact believe in supply management.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Mr. Speaker, indeed, this issue is of the highest priority for the government. It was the first study undertaken by the parliamentary committee.

It is an issue that I have certainly been made aware of from the earliest days, in conjunction with my colleague who is the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food. It is something we inherited from the previous government. It has been six months, but it will not be six years before this problem is solved.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rémi Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in the House this afternoon to talk about the important issue that is before us.

Agriculture is a critical part of our economy, and the Government of Canada has made it a priority. The government's mandate is clear: support the agricultural sector so that it can be a leader in job creation and innovation, including the supply management system.

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Together with our colleagues in the House, the provinces, and the territories, and with help from the sector itself, we will carry out the government's action plan to strengthen Canada's agriculture sector, help it boost innovation, and ensure its stability.

The government will use its policies and financial tools to support the essential work of the agricultural sector. It will help on many fronts: product commercialization, research, innovation, food safety, and export support.

To do that, we plan to invest in food processing so that we can help processors develop new value-added products that respond to changing consumer tastes and markets.

We will also invest in agricultural research to support discovery science and innovation in the sector. We will promote Canadian agricultural interests at the national level. We will also work closely with producers and provincial governments to determine whether all farm income protection programs are meeting the needs of Canadian farmers. We also plan to introduce a new five-year agricultural policy framework. Also, in partnership with the provinces, territories, and other partners, we will help the sector adjust to climate change and better address water and soil conservation and development issues.

The agri-food sector is a powerful engine for Canada's economy. After all, we are talking about a sector that creates one out of every eight jobs in Canada and, with its industries, employs more than two million Canadians. It contributes 6.6% of our GDP, or \$108.9 billion, and generates over \$60 billion in exports.

That is why our government is determined to support Canada's system of supply management. Together, the dairy, poultry, and egg sectors create more than 300,000 jobs and generate an overall economic impact worth \$32 billion.

The budget brought down in March contains important measures to support the Canadian agricultural sector. It includes a \$70-million investment to support research and infrastructure for mitigating the biological threats to agriculture associated with climate change. It includes \$41.5 million for the renovation and upgrading of agricultural research stations and laboratories in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, and Quebec. It includes a one-year investment of up to \$1.9 million for the agricultural youth green jobs initiative to attract youth to green jobs within the agriculture and agri-food sector.

This initiative follows through on a Government of Canada commitment made in budget 2016 to provide employment opportunities for post-secondary graduates to support the agriculture sector in implementing environmentally beneficial activities.

The budget includes funding of up to \$500 million to expand and improve digital infrastructure in order to provide Canadians in rural and remote communities with new opportunities to participate in the digital economy and to access government services remotely. These investments promote the establishment of a sound agricultural sector, including sectors under supply management.

Our government continues to work hard to stimulate innovation in Canada's dairy industry. Researchers from our research centre in

Sherbrooke are busy developing innovative tools to keep the Canadian dairy industry competitive.

● (1325)

For example, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada researchers discovered that it is easier to absorb vitamin B12 from cow's milk than from supplements. That kind of research can obviously give the industry a shot in the arm because today's consumers are particularly health conscious.

We are aware of the industry's concerns regarding the use of diafiltered milk in cheese production. Our officials are working on ensuring that the standards are clear for everyone. We are in regular contact with stakeholders in the dairy industry on this serious problem.

The Government of Canada fully supports supply management. We will also continue to defend all Canadian interests in agriculture, including supply-managed sectors, when examining trade issues. The Government of Canada fully supports supply management.

By continuing to work hard, the agricultural sector will continue to prosper and to stimulate our economy, which will reach new heights. Canada is a country with enormous economic potential and an unrivalled spirit of innovation. Its farmers produce world-renowned foods, which they sell on international markets that are full of opportunities.

The future is promising. Global demand for quality food is growing, and this food will be supplied by very progressive and productive farms and processors from across Canada. We will continue to work closely with all of our partners so that Canada's agrifood sector will be even more successful. We will continue to defend all of the interests of Canadian agriculture when reviewing trade files.

[English]

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague across the way for his speech. It is really good to hear that the government supports agriculture. I was also happy to hear the previous speaker talk about poultry and chickens and eggs. I have a few chickens at home, which I can assure members are outside the supply management system.

However, we are here to talk about diafiltered milk. This is something that the Liberals could fix right away. We just keep trying to get an answer. How much more time it will take to get the Liberal government to fix this problem?

[Translation]

Mr. Rémi Massé: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. It is a very important one.

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We obviously do not want to provide a band-aid solution. We want a solution that will help support our dairy producers in the long term. That is the commitment we are making to ensure that we can conduct the necessary consultations, understand the issue, and, once again, find a long-term solution that will help develop our dairy producers and their businesses.

• (1330)

[*English*]

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague across the way for his speech today.

However, what I have heard in the last two presentations is much rhetoric around what they are going to do for Canadians in other ways, such as bringing Wi-Fi to the rural communities, and so on. What we need is a fix right away for this issue.

I have heard from dairy farmers in my riding of North Okanagan—Shuswap about how, in other parts of the country, they are having to actually spread powdered milk on their fields because they have no market for it. There are millions of pounds of powdered milk sitting in warehouses that they cannot sell because diafiltered milk continues to come in across the country.

What we have heard is a lot of rhetoric, but what we have not heard is what they are really doing right now to try to get this problem fixed as soon as possible.

I would like to hear what they are actually doing right now to get this problem solved.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rémi Massé: Mr. Speaker, once again, I thank my colleague for his question.

I have a question for him. I would like to know what the Conservatives did in the past three years to fix this problem. We have had a problem with diafiltered milk crossing the Canada-U.S. border since 2013. This problem has been going on for three years. I would like to know what action the Conservatives took.

We are meeting with our farmers. There are more than 200 dairy producers in my riding. They have obviously come to my office, and I had the opportunity to talk to them to understand the issues. Right now, we are working on consulting with them to be sure that we are making the right decisions and bringing in long-term solutions to support the economy and our Canadian dairy producers.

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague is absolutely right. The official opposition says that we need to act right now, but for five years now, the Conservatives have been asleep at the switch and doing nothing. That is why we are now facing this problem today.

The NDP talks about compensation, and its former leader said that he wanted to balance the budget at all costs. The math does not add up. You cannot provide compensation and balance the budget.

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on that.

Mr. Rémi Massé: Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of our government. We have a minister who is a farmer. We have a parliamentary secretary who is a dairy producer. He truly understands the problem with diafiltered. This is a major issue, and we

certainly understand that significant imports of diafiltered milk have an impact on our farmers' bottom lines.

However, once again, the important thing is to make sure that all of the parties have been duly consulted so that we can understand all of the issues and find the right solution to support our dairy producers in the coming years.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will share my time with the outstanding member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

As I was listening to the member for Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, I got the impression that he regrets ever being elected because now he has to make decisions. True, it is unfortunate that the Liberals were elected, but it is a fact. Now they have to start living up to their responsibilities and stop coming up with excuses.

In the House today, we have dairy producers from Lanaudière, Mauricie, the Outaouais, Quebec City's south shore, and Montérégie. Today I had a chance to speak with producers from Saint-Boniface in Mauricie. They are very disturbed by what the Liberals are saying because the Liberals are using every excuse in the book to justify doing nothing. We do not need to change the law or even the regulations. We need a change in attitude.

When is milk not milk? It is not milk when it is diafiltered milk, of course. According to our border services, it gets through the border because it is not milk. When is diafiltered milk, milk? Well, of course, it becomes milk when it goes into cheese. Indeed, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency requires that cheese be made with milk, the same milk that was not milk when it crossed the border as diafiltered milk. That is the nonsense that the Liberals are trying to sell us here today.

However, this is understandable, because a government reveals its true colours over time. It took some time for us to learn that the Conservatives would always be against the little guy. The Liberals are showing us just how ready they are to get down on their knees before the powerful and well-connected.

We saw this yesterday with the Minister of Transport. He said it was no big deal if Air Canada did not obey the law. It is no big deal if thousands of workers and mechanics with good jobs in the aerospace industry lost their jobs. It is no big deal. Air Canada asked to have the law changed retroactively to have the violations dropped. The Liberals gave in to that request.

We are talking about the same Air Canada that systematically fails to comply with the Official Languages Act. Why? Just ask them, and they will tell you that it is not right that they are the only airline that has to comply with this legislation. The only little problem and the only little thing that Air Canada forgets in all this, is that they came begging for billions of taxpayer dollars. Canadians agreed on the condition that the maintenance is done in Canada and the Official Languages Act is respected.

It took a Liberal government to explain to us that even though Air Canada did not obey the law, there are two laws in Canada: one for the little guy and average Canadians, and another for the all-powerful friends of the regime. That is the Liberal government.

When I hear the drivel and rhetoric coming from the hon. member for Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, I feel sorry for the people in his region. Many farmers in his region are very worried, as are many people in Abitibi—Témiscamingue. The hon. member for that riding is going to talk later about her riding and the farmers in her region.

This is an unbelievable situation where we lost \$220 million last year.

• (1335)

[English]

In English, we will often talk about a catch-22. When is milk not milk? It is when it is diafiltered milk. Therefore, the American producers of this product do not have to pay customs duties. That is what our border services have decided. The same government, the same product, and it becomes milk, because the food inspection people say it is no problem. There has to be milk when making cheese, but this stuff is milk. It was not milk when it crossed the border when it would have been taxed, but now it is milk when it is put in cheese. It is not a catch-22; it is a catch-\$220 million. That is the problem.

I wish that some of the brain trusts on the other side, like the member of Parliament for Winnipeg North, would actually speak to some of the milk producers. They would understand that the banks in this country are holding back investments for these producers. Why? It is because they do not know whether they are going to be paid back. That is the insecurity in the lives of farming families. That is the insecurity in their communities. That is why the NDP is standing up to fight for the government to start enforcing these laws.

[Translation]

All I heard from the member from New Brunswick, who spoke earlier, and the member for Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia was empty rhetoric. It boggles the mind. We hear “the government's action plan”, “the policies”, “the financial tools to support”, and blah, blah, blah. Hang on.

Producers have financial tools. We call it the supply management system. We have to maintain it and enforce it. They are not asking the Liberal government for favours. They simply want respect for the law and for themselves.

The financial tools will take care of themselves. The banks will resume lending money to producers. However, as we saw once again, the banks can read this government's intentions.

The Minister of International Trade spends more time supporting American positions than defending Canadian producers. That is her record. She is always looking to curry favour with the Americans.

This same Minister of International Trade said that we should have let Canada's auto industry go bankrupt. She does not seem to be concerned about job losses or families that are struggling and can no longer make ends meet. She is above all that. However, the agricultural producers are told to always obey laws that are often complex.

I was an environment minister, and I can assure members that agricultural producers are familiar with the regulations and

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legislation, since they are required to abide by them at all times, and that comes at a price.

However, if an American producer wants to cross the border, it comes up with some kind of flim-flammy and looks for a government that is just naive enough to listen. This is the kind of thing that we need to stop.

Can we stop introducing cracks into the supply management system? Can we also stop listening to neo-liberal siren songs from people like the Minister of International Trade, who refuses to defend the supply management system because the Americans do not have such a system?

Earlier, I heard the member for Winnipeg Centre say that milk was expensive and that people back home were poor, as though the supply management system were responsible for price increases.

Let us look at the situation in the United States. Producers receive direct subsidies, and these are not reflected in the price of milk at the corner store. However, it is even worse than this, because everyone pays taxes, whether you consume dairy products or not, and these taxes subsidize agricultural production.

Canada's system is much fairer. It is based on the user-pay principle, and production is protected. As a result, the families who own these farms, many of which are in Quebec, have been able to retain ownership of their farms literally for centuries. However, they are worried.

We are talking about human beings, families, and communities who are worried. The Liberal government could eliminate these concerns if it had the courage of its words and convictions.

During the election campaign, the Liberals made all kinds of promises, including a promise to uphold the supply management system. They promised to find a solution to the diafiltered milk problem. It is not a complicated solution. It is simply a matter of enforcing the law equally for everyone. Everyone would benefit.

• (1340)

[English]

I have listened to Liberal after Liberal try to justify the unjustifiable. There is a very simple solution here: apply the law equally to everyone.

This diafiltered milk is being allowed in to the tune of \$220 million a year now, and it is only going to increase. They cannot have it as milk when it is put into the cheese. They say it is milk, and then it is not milk when it crosses the border. It is milk. It should be under our system of supply management.

We have to start protecting those dairy farming, poultry farming, and egg farming families that have been able to hold onto their farms, thanks to a very fair system of supply management.

Stand up. Defend that system. Start enforcing the law to these American companies.

Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, it is very entertaining this afternoon here in the House.

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I have to say that we must stop with the rhetoric, the sound bites, and the grandstanding. Where was the member, the leader of his party, two years ago when this was an issue? Where were the recommendations? The animation is breathtaking, and of course the entertainment, once again, is breathtaking.

The bottom line is that it was not dealt with in the past by the government. It was not dealt with in the past by the opposition party. This government is dealing with it. We do not have to deal with it by standing on our soapboxes, or by being very animated or entertaining.

This is business. This government is dealing with it. My question to the leader of the democratic party, the sometimes not democratic party in this case, is with respect to transparency, democracy, and working with those who are in the industry. How is the member going to sit down with the industry to ensure a sustainable resolution with their input—democracy, I might add—which is critical? How is the member going to sit down and come up with a true sustainable resolution?

• (1345)

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, that was pathetic. Talk about rhetoric. Obviously the new member for Niagara Centre did not get a chance to listen to what his colleague, the member for Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia had to say before. He actually read talking points from the election campaign that completely ignored the subject at hand, as did he.

The member talked about the government as if the Conservatives were still in power. This just in: I hate to break it to him, but the Liberals are in charge. They are the government, and they are supposed to find the solutions.

The member had the audacity to say that the Liberals were dealing with it. Oh yeah, how? The problem is there in the galleries. All of these dairy producers, and a lot of them from Ontario, want to know why, when diafiltered milk crosses the border it is not milk, but when they want to put it into cheese, it is milk. How is it getting across the border free and taking \$220 million out of the pockets of Canadian farming families?

That is what is happening. The families are worried. The producers are worried. The banks are not lending. The communities are being hurt. Instead of standing up and playing the clown, why do the Liberal members not stand up and defend the dairy producers of their region?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Simon Marcil (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I must admit that I rather agree with some of the comments by my colleague from Outremont, especially as they relate to the empty rhetoric we heard from the member for Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia. We often hear empty rhetoric from that source, so this is par for the course.

We see now that the Liberal Party did not really change its stripes during its 10 years in opposition. The old Liberal tradition of giving to the party's friends is still alive and well.

Does my esteemed colleague agree? Is there a chance that the minister and the parliamentary secretary will one day get out of their

limousine, put on their workboots, and go back to the stables to see what is really happening?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: It is an excellent question, Mr. Speaker. It shows that people in the Mirabel area care about the fate of producers in supply-managed sectors, including the dairy sector.

We are talking about family farms, particularly around Mirabel, that have already suffered too much at the hands of a previous Liberal government. We remember how people were taken away from their family farms, from centuries-old farms, for a Liberal flim-flammy: a shiny new airport, the same one that is now being dismantled.

Farming families from Quebec have been taking good care of us for centuries. The federal government needs to show them respect and care, enforce the rules regulating milk, and stop the free importation of diafiltered milk, a \$220-million problem that is really hurting farmers, their families, and their communities.

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the easiest way to understand the problem is to understand the dynamic it has created. I will therefore read a message I received from a producer at the end of March. “I am sending you this message today to ask that you speak to the government on our behalf. Let me introduce myself. My name is Genevieve Audet. I am the owner of Ronick farm, a beautiful family-owned dairy farm in Ste-Gertrude. I need your help in defending supply management, a world model of responsible production that requires no subsidies, and which is suffering greatly as a result of the importation of milk proteins from the United States. The futures of many dairy farms are in jeopardy as a result of the significant drop in the price paid for milk at the farm, which does not cover the production costs, according to the Canadian Dairy Commission. The government needs to enforce its laws at the border to prevent these proteins from entering the country. They do not meet Canadian standards, they favour processors, they mislead consumers, and they hurt our economy. I hope I have made the right choice, Madam, and that you will choose to defend us”.

Other comments received afterwards clearly show how dairy producers feel.

“For some years now, we feel as though the government has turned its backs on us. Agricultural funding keeps getting slashed as our revenues dwindle, and all these agreements we are entering into only serve to open our borders ever wider, leaving us at the mercy of market forces... We have the potential to be a great economic force, but the government does not seem to realize it... I do not know whether you are aware of this, but many start-ups are struggling to such a degree that they are on the verge of selling, and their creditors have all but lost faith in the industry... Agriculture feeds the world, which is why I cannot understand why nothing is being done to remedy the situation. What will we do when there is no one left to feed us? Thank you very much for taking the time to read my words... I appreciate it a great deal and hope you will be able to share them with others today”.

That pretty well sums up what several producers in my community are going through. From 2007 to 2016, the number of dairy farms in Abitibi—Témiscamingue dropped 24%. There are only 114 left, compared to 150 10 years ago. The industry accounts for some 1,200 jobs in my riding alone. Of those, 826 are employed by dairy farms and 493 by food processors. I have a specific example in mind. Many cheesemakers have opened shop. Some of the top-quality cheeses they produce have even claimed awards on the world stage, like the Cru du Clocher.

Every year, the Conservative government's failure to act has resulted in shortfalls of \$12,000 to \$15,000 per farm, and now, it is the Liberals' turn to sit on their hands.

Do members truly believe most people have the means to fill a \$15,000 hole in their budget? Several Liberal MPs are not earning the same salary as they once did. Though that may be the case, most people still have a hard time absorbing a \$15,000 loss.

In Quebec, this industry accounts for 80,000 direct and indirect jobs, contributes \$6.2 billion to the GDP and brings in \$1.29 billion in tax revenues—\$678 million to the federal government and \$454 million to the province. There are 5,856 dairy farms producing almost 3 billion litres of milk annually. Revenues for these farms total more than \$2.4 billion only in Quebec.

Failing to protect an industry that is so vital to our economy by not making sure that existing regulations and rules are enforced is absolutely appalling.

• (1350)

That is what is so shocking. Everything is already in place; all we have to do is get up one morning, roll up our sleeves, stop pretending that the problem does not exist and make sure that producers are not losing money. Milk is milk, that is all. Nobody here is going to tell me that a cow in the U.S. does not produce the same milk as a cow in Canada. Of course, the controls are not the same, but still, milk is milk. It is not hard to understand.

If it is as simple as that, it should be easy for this government to call the Border Services Agency and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and get them to talk to one another and agree on a single definition of what “milk” is, and to keep Americans from circumventing our laws to bring in diafiltered milk.

This basically means that this government, if it had a sense of what it means to act with communities in mind, could settle the issue in less than a week, because no legislative change is required. All the government has to do is to get a move on. It boggles the mind that we are forced to tell the government to do its job. I do not think that I should have to talk about this. This issue should have been at the top of the government's agenda, especially after an election. The Liberals cannot pretend that they were not aware of the problem, because we talked about it during the campaign.

It feels like there was a breach in the space-time continuum for the Liberals. They do not remember what happened during the campaign. For them, it is like 50 years have passed, like they went through a black hole and forgot everything that was discussed during the election.

Business of Supply

What I am asking the government to do is simple. I am asking it to protect the farms in my riding. I am asking it to ensure that the young people who decided to become dairy producers do not regret their decision, although they realize that there are some serious challenges, especially with respect to collecting the money required to buy back quotas. The government will have to ensure that in my riding people can continue to produce high-quality dairy products, such as cheeses. It must ensure that producers have the financial flexibility they need to put money aside, so that they can pay for their children's education.

I remind the Liberal government that operating a farm is not like it used to be. In the past, someone could run a farm after finishing grade two. Now, that person needs a lot of knowledge. They need knowledge of management, administration, and agronomics. Often, if they want to be successful, they need to seek out training and information. Even if producers want to pass on the farm to their children, they need to be able to afford training for these children so that they can properly hand over the business. We are talking about keeping up with something rather simple, which is feeding our communities. Canadians need to be able to feed Canadians. That seems logical to me.

I hope that the government realizes that it is possible to take action in very short order. I hope it will decide to climb out of this black hole it has jumped into and that it will follow through with what it said during the campaign. I hope that the Liberals will leave here and visit their ridings during constituency week, that they will do what they need to do, and that they will fix this problem. Too many family farms have shut down. I hope the Liberals will fix this, because the inaction we have seen so far is truly shameful.

Lastly, I hope that there will be good news in the next few days for the dairy producers in my riding.

• (1355)

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to a good speech. In Wonderland, the budget could be balanced and our dairy producers could be compensated. However, in reality, the NDP's decision to go with balancing the budget would have made it impossible for it to ever compensate Canada's dairy producers.

I can guarantee that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture is going to bat for our dairy producers. I can guarantee that the member for Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia is going to bat for dairy producers. Let us imagine that the solutions presented here were adopted and that tomorrow morning we would push a button to make it happen. Does the member understand that diafiltered milk would still enter the country and that is why we have to work with Canada's dairy industry to ensure the vitality of this industry in the long term? I would like her to comment on that.

Statements by Members

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada is responsible for the Canada Border Services Agency. If the government advises this agency to talk to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, and they come up with the same definition for “milk”, the problem will be solved. The customs officers will be able to say that it is milk. Since it does not comply with the rules and exceeds the permitted quantities, the product cannot enter Canada. Therefore, there will be no problem.

All day the Liberal MPs have given speeches that barely mentioned diafiltered milk. Earlier, I almost thought they would ask my colleague the names of chickens in an effort to avoid the question. That is ridiculous.

The motion is about the very specific subject of diafiltered milk. From the outset, they have been beating around the bush in order to avoid talking about the specific issue before us. We could move on this in a few minutes or a few days. It is simple. The government should take action and everyone would be happy.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue will have three more minutes for questions and comments after question period.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[English]

CONTRIBUTIONS OF ITALIAN-CANADIAN COMMUNITY

Mr. Marco Mendicino (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the contributions of Italian-Canadians in building up the foundations of this country are well known and a source of great pride for me as a member of that community, as I hope it is for all members of this House.

[Translation]

Throughout the 20th century, Italian immigrants worked tirelessly in the mines of northern Ontario. They also helped build the Ambassador Bridge in Windsor and railways, among other things.

[English]

Tragically, it was not just blood, sweat, and toil that was sacrificed: thousands of immigrants lost their lives while labouring in the most arduous of conditions. Thankfully, the community has come forward to commemorate those who fell.

I am proud to announce that a monument honouring the Italian fallen workers will be officially unveiled in my riding at Columbus Centre in Toronto, Ontario, on April 28.

Eleven columns will bear the names of each fallen worker and memorialize them forever.

I would like to acknowledge the efforts of the committee and invite all members in this House to join the ambassador and the consul general of Italy, along with other representatives, to commemorate the grit, resilience, and hard work of the Italian-Canadian community—

The Speaker: The hon. member for North Okanagan—Shuswap.

COMMUNITY SPIRIT IN NORTH OKANAGAN—SHUSWAP

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all small towns have great community spirit, but a couple in the North Okanagan—Shuswap deserve special recognition.

The first is Falkland, which will be holding the 98th annual Falkland Stampede on the Victoria Day weekend. One of the oldest and best rodeos in Canada only shows part of the spirit of this small town. Falkland is also home to the largest Canadian flag in western Canada. The flag is visible from over seven kilometres away, showing Falkland's community and Canadian spirit.

The second town is Lumby, now known as Hockeyville 2016. With over 1.2 million votes, Lumby out-voted all its competitors to bring home the \$100,000 prize. Hockeyville events, including an NHL pre-season game, are now being planned throughout the community to celebrate the victory.

Falkland and Lumby, two great small towns with big hearts and great big spirit in the North Okanagan—Shuswap.

* * *

CANADIAN CHARTER OF RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

Mr. Darshan Singh Kang (Calgary Skyview, Lib.): Mr. Speaker,

[Member spoke in Punjabi as follows:]

Wahe Guru Ka Khalsa waheguru ji ki fateh.

[English]

We live in a great nation where we can all stand in the House to share our own cultural values, religions, and beliefs but still remain united as one country.

It was made possible because of our Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which was signed into law on April 17, 1982, by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second.

The charter is one of the most enduring legacies of the Liberal Party under the Right Honourable Pierre Trudeau.

It is the charter that continues to make our nation the envy of the world. It guarantees Canadians the following, regardless of gender or ethnicity: the right to free speech; the right to vote and serve as members of a legislature; the right to life, liberty, and security of the person.

It is the spirit of the charter that has made celebrations like Vaisakhi possible in this great nation of ours. Every Canadian should be proud of the charter, because it reminds our children and families that in Canada, better is always possible.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

BOAT PEOPLE

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, April 30 is the national day of commemoration of the boat people. My parents and my brothers were boat people who, like thousands of other boat people fleeing the Vietnam War, arrived in Canada with the dream of a better life.

I would like to highlight Canada's generosity and openness and remind everyone that refugees and their children contribute economically, socially, and culturally.

Many people of Vietnamese origin are models of success and involvement. Kim Thúy, a famous Quebec writer who shared her universe in her books, *Ru*, *À toi, Mân*, and *Vi*, is one of them.

Paul Nguyen, a Toronto filmmaker and winner of the 2010 Outstanding Achievement Award, is another. In his work, he speaks out against racism.

As the daughter of refugees, I am proud to call both cultures, Vietnamese and Canadian, my own, to pass my mother's traditions on to my own daughter, and to give her the opportunity to enjoy freedom and democracy in our country.

I will continue to fight hard for social justice and human rights for all Canadians and Vietnamese.

Cam on .

* * *

[English]

PERFORMING ARTS

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, World Theatre Day is celebrated on March 27 around the globe.

World Theatre Day is meant to honour and further UNESCO's goal of celebrating the power of theatre as an indispensable bridge-builder for international understanding and peace.

Theatre promotes and protects cultural diversity and identity throughout the world. Theatre reflects life; it speaks of love, passion, joy, anger, pain, and death. It can elevate us and inform us.

In Vancouver we have 70 vibrant theatre companies, including the Arts Club, Bard on the Beach, Carousel, Pacific Theatre, and Frederic Wood at UBC.

We need theatre. We need theatre that challenges us, opens us to diversity, and takes us to places we would never go.

I am proud our government is restoring and adding funding to the performing arts across Canada. Let us make every day World Theatre Day. Canadians should attend a performance in their communities.

* * *

● (1405)

BENTLEY GENERALS

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker:

I thank you for this chance to rise
To tell members a tale
from Manitoba's "blue" skies:
The Generals of Bentley are my subject today,
Who went undefeated
In Allan Cup play.
They faced the best teams from Canada wide,
Winning each game,
Their fans beaming with pride.
Stoney Creek, Iles-des-Chênes, and Sunnybrook fell;
The tournament hosts,
Prairie Thunder, as well.
It was a hard-played final between these last two;
An overtime victory
Secured Bentley's due.
Three times in 8 years they've repeated this feat.
I could not be more proud
To be their MP.
To Heemskerk, the goalie who stood on his head;
To Matt Stefanishion;
Tournament scoring he led.
They all played great to ensure victory that day:
Rigby netted the goal
That we watched on replay.
Thank you Steinbach, Prairie Thunder, and the Army, our Fans
For supporting the Generals,
2016 Allan Cup champs.

* * *

GLORIA MCCLUSKEY

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honour the fiercest warrior from my hometown, the legendary last mayor of Dartmouth, Gloria McCluskey. My six years on city council would have been far less interesting if I had not had the pleasure of being seatmates with Gloria.

Gloria entered politics as an alderman for the City of Dartmouth back in 1985. Then, in 1992, she became the last mayor of Dartmouth, and she has represented Dartmouth on HRM council with passion and loyalty ever since.

Known for never giving up and for working tirelessly for Dartmouth, Gloria has gone to bat for numerous projects. To Gloria, it never matters how large or small a project is; if it matters to Dartmouth, it matters to her.

HRM council will be far less colourful in a few months, as Gloria McCluskey has announced her retirement from politics.

On behalf of everyone in Dartmouth, I want to thank Gloria for her dedicated service to our community. We wish her the best.

* * *

NEW HORIZONS FOR SENIORS PROGRAM

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a member of Parliament for a riding with some of the highest poverty rates in Canada, I find our government's focus on innovation and poverty reduction refreshing and exciting. Low-income single seniors will now receive a 10% increase in the GIS, and now we are introducing the new horizons for seniors program.

Statements by Members

Many of my constituents and our seniors live in poverty. For that reason, I rise in the House today with particular excitement to stand beside the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development to endorse funding for the Saint John Free Public Library under the new horizons for seniors program. This funding will assist in creating education-based programming for seniors in my riding by having a writer-in-residence program. This will work toward creating a better standard of living for seniors through engagement, social participation, and inclusion in my great riding of Saint John—Rothesay.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, perhaps there was something in the air yesterday. The Minister of Health was in New York championing pot policy, while the Prime Minister's pipeline policy continues to be half-baked. With tens of thousands of unemployed western Canadians, the current government is far too unmotivated toward the energy east and Trans-Mountain pipelines at a time when international markets have a huge appetite for Canadian oil. Canadians are wondering, “Dude, where's my pipeline?”

If the Prime Minister was serious about supporting Canadian oil, he would seize this budding opportunity and end our addiction to foreign oil. Despite the paranoia, pipelines have been by far the safest option to transport oil for 20 years or more.

Let me be blunt. These families who rely on the resource sector are watching their hopes for prosperity go up in smoke. I call upon the Prime Minister to work jointly with the provinces to ensure that oil moves to market quickly and safely.

The Liberal government's priorities should be pipes—pipes for oil.

* * *

● (1410)

PETER ADAMS

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Hon. Peter Adams, member of Parliament from 1993 to 2006 representing the riding of Peterborough, who turned 80 years old on April 17.

Peter represented his constituents well, keeping in touch with residents by regularly jogging through downtown Peterborough, and he continues to serve in various capacities today.

Peter has had a distinguished career as an academic, author, school trustee, and MPP. In 2012 he was awarded the Order of Ontario.

One of Mr. Adams's most significant contributions in this place was to found the post-secondary education caucus, through which he showed how backbench MPs can be change agents and to which he continues to provide sage advice.

I am pleased to count Peter as a new friend and mentor.

I wish a happy birthday to Peter and I thank Jill for sharing him with us.

[*Translation*]

AWARDS IN COMMEMORATION OF THE PERSONS CASE

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this morning the Governor General handed out the 2015 Awards in Commemoration of the Persons Case to five remarkable Canadian women.

Those women are here with us today: the Honourable Monique Bégin, a respected politician, activist, and professor; Marie-Thérèse Chicha, a professor and advocate for gender equality; Dr. Ruth Elwood Martin, a family physician and advocate for incarcerated women; Sheila McIntyre, a legal activist, scholar, and educator; and the youth recipient, Dee M. Dooley, a leader in her community.

[*English*]

On October 18, 1929, women in Canada were declared persons under the law. To commemorate this historic event and to remind Canadians that we must continue pushing for gender equality, these awards are presented each year.

Along with all Canadians, I wish to say a heartfelt thanks to these outstanding individuals for helping to advance equality to all Canadians.

* * *

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, fishing season is here, so the Prime Minister first convinced Canadians to swallow hook, line, and sinker his promise to run modest deficits. Then he flip-flopped, announcing huge deficits and breaking his promise to balance the budget.

Canada's small businesses, hoping to reel in a tax cut, were betrayed by the finance minister, who wormed his way out of keeping that promise.

The justice minister then took the bait and got snagged on a conflict of interest by attending a fundraiser at which lawyers angled for a trophy catch.

The floundering trade minister was lured into swallowing \$20,000 of taxpayers' money just to appear on the Bill Maher show, and we all know what a flop that was.

Then casting her line directly at the premiers, the environment minister failed to land the big one, a national climate change plan.

The fishy smell is from the Liberal government, which, like a fish out of water, has flipped and flopped on every promise it has made. Canadians cannot wait for the end of the fishing season.

*Statements by Members***EARTHQUAKE IN ECUADOR**

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Monday, April 18, three days ago, a major earthquake hit the coastal region of Ecuador. Early yesterday morning, Wednesday, a second earthquake hit the same area, causing further destruction. Over 550 are dead, including four Canadians. Thousands are missing, and unfortunately the numbers are increasing daily. Three towns have been almost completely destroyed. Many people have been left homeless.

Canada stepped up immediately with an initial million-dollar humanitarian contribution. The Canadian disaster assessment team has been dispatched to do a critical assessment of the needs on the ground as the events continue to unfold, and additional resources to support embassy and consular services were also sent.

My riding of Davenport is home to many vibrant cultures, including Ecuadoreans from the Latin American community. I want to let them know that we are thinking of them and that our hearts go out to friends, colleagues, and family members affected by this devastating earthquake.

In the days and weeks ahead, I encourage all of us to be generous as Ecuador calls on the Canadian community for help and support as it heals and rebuilds the towns affected along its beautiful coast.

* * *

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, next Thursday, April 28, Canadians will be marking the National Day of Mourning for workers killed and injured on the job and those who have become ill because of their workplace.

The National Day of Mourning is not only a time of reflection and remembrance; it also is a day to rededicate ourselves to the goal of keeping workers safe at their jobs.

Canadian workers die at a rate of 1,000 per year because workplace safety is sacrificed to serve the interests of the bottom line. Often workers are killed because they have been pressured into doing unsafe work. This has to stop.

Workers in Canada are actively campaigning to have the Westray law, which was passed unanimously by the House over a decade ago, properly enforced so that corporations that kill and injure workers are held criminally accountable.

An injury to one is an injury to all. Let us protect workers and enforce the law.

* * *

• (1415)

HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Niagara Falls, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour today to pay tribute to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II on the occasion of her 90th birthday.

I join with all Canadians to express our gratefulness for her selfless dedication in giving her life to service. No one has a better record than Her Majesty.

I remember as a teenager when world leaders would come to North America, they normally would frequent New York or Washington. However, the Queen always made a visit to Canada because that was her priority, and I always appreciated that.

Her inspiring role during World War II continues today, as she emboldens us all to become better citizens and global neighbours. In her own words, “the true measure of all our actions is how long the good in them lasts”. Well, the good in her own actions will not only last a lifetime but indeed will be timeless.

I am proud to be one of her loyal subjects and greatly honoured to be given this privilege. I wish Her Majesty a happy birthday, and may God bless her.

* * *

[Translation]

HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès (Brossard—Saint-Lambert, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I join my colleague in offering our best wishes to Her Majesty the Queen of Canada, who is celebrating her 90th birthday today.

She is the first reigning sovereign to reach that age, which is admirable in and of itself. However, what really deserves our recognition and admiration is the fact that Her Majesty continues to devote herself entirely to the service of her subjects after reigning for 64 years.

[English]

Our Queen has devoted her entire adult life to service, a word so often scorned and yet so notably lived by a sovereign who brilliantly has reinvented the role to which she was born.

[Translation]

Whatever our personal beliefs may be, I think we can all unite in congratulating our Queen on 90 successful years of serving the people of the Commonwealth.

[English]

With deep gratitude for such an inspiring life, I wish Her Majesty a happy birthday.

[Members sang *Happy Birthday and God Save the Queen*]

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NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING

The Speaker: Following discussions among representatives of all the parties in the House, I understand there is an agreement to observe a moment of silence to commemorate the National Day of Mourning and to honour the memory of workers killed or injured at work.

[Translation]

I invite all hon. members to rise.

[A moment of silence observed]

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS**

● (1420)

*[English]***TAXATION**

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, families relied on the children's fitness tax credit to help offset the cost of their kids' sports and fitness programs, but unfortunately the Liberals scrapped it.

Now the Prime Minister can use those same tax dollars of families and fly to New York to work out in front of TV cameras, while families are struggling to pay for their kids' sports. Instead of focusing on self-promotion, will the Prime Minister focus on promoting children's fitness and reinstate the child fitness tax credit?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in our budget, we have come through with a real commitment to Canadian families that will make a real difference for those families that want to help their children to lead better lives. We will move forward on changing our tax system so the wealthiest will not be advantaged. In fact, we will help those Canadians who need it most.

The imposition of the Canada child benefit will help nine out of ten families with children, with \$2,300 more on average per year. This will help Canadian families more than anything else, putting more children on sports fields this year.

[Translation]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, millions of parents appreciate the children's fitness tax credit, which helps them to pay for soccer, hockey, or football fees. It is impossible for them to go to New York to play their favourite sport in front of the cameras.

Instead of promoting himself, why does the Prime Minister not promote physical activity for young people by keeping the children's fitness tax credit?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our budget is clear. The Canada child benefit is much better for the middle class, for families across Canada. With this measure, nine out of 10 families with children will be in a better position this year, with an average of \$2,300 more per family. That is much better for families.

* * *

*[English]***FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we introduced a motion to recognize the atrocities that ISIL was committing as a genocide. By rejecting the motion, the Liberals have confirmed to the world their naive idea of the threat of ISIL, and they have let down Syrians and Iraqis who are being slaughtered, tortured, and raped.

We know ISIL is trying to wipe out entire cultural and religious communities, including Christians, Yazidis, and Shia Muslims. Therefore, for the Liberals to say that this is not a genocide is deeply unsettling. Why do the Liberals refuse to call this genocide what it is?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition also rejected our motion, so she should stop making partisan politics about this.

We agree that awful atrocities and horrors committed by ISIL have the hallmarks of genocide. However, the official recognition of genocide is so serious that it should only happen following a proper international investigation. That is what we are pushing, and it is absolutely in line with our allies.

The Speaker: Sometimes there are partisan politics made of things around here.

The hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean.

* * *

*[Translation]***INTERNATIONAL TRADE**

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the situation in the aluminium industry in Quebec is troubling. The Americans are imposing an emergency tariff of 50% on all aluminium imports. Quebec produces 66% of the aluminium imported into the United States.

Meanwhile, instead of dealing with this problem, the Prime Minister prefers to work on his image, by sparring in a boxing ring in New York.

Can the Prime Minister tell us why he would rather bask in the limelight in Brooklyn than fight for the aluminium industry?

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we support Canada's primary metal manufacturing industry and we will defend the interests of Canadian businesses. Imposing restrictions on Canadian exports will not help resolve global overcapacity. Canada and the U.S. must resolve the overcapacity issue in a strategic, comprehensive manner in the interest of all our workers.

* * *

DAIRY INDUSTRY

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the problem is not overcapacity. The problem is being able to export our products to the United States.

There is another unsustainable sector: dairy production. For a long time now, dairy producers have been calling on the Liberal government to solve the diafiltered milk problem. Losses are adding up to millions of dollars per week. It is getting harder and harder for dairy producers, and it is all because the processing industry has very little respect for its partners who produce milk.

Will the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food show us that he is taking this problem seriously? Instead of just talking about international trade, can he come up with solutions?

•(1425)

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

The minister and I have both been dairy producers, and my son represents the fifth generation working for the business. We are aware of what farms contribute to regional economies. We are working with the industry to come up with a long-term solution, not a short-term one.

* * *

AIR CANADA

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a solution to suggest to the government to help the dairy industry: enforce the law.

Dominique Anglade, the Quebec minister for economy, science and innovation, has been asking the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Westmount not to hurt the Quebec economy with his bill, Bill C-10.

Would the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Westmount be kind enough to listen to the Quebec government and give up on his ridiculous plan to let Air Canada off the hook retroactively? Will he show some respect for the Quebec economy?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, I think the minister did not know that we had introduced time allocation yesterday at second reading of the bill, specifically because the NDP tried to kill the bill using an amendment last Friday.

The good news is that several steps remain in the parliamentary process. The bill will go to committee, where we will hear from witnesses. Then comes the report stage and third reading. After that, the Senate repeats the entire process. There are many steps left in the process.

* * *

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, he is quite right, for once. We wanted to kill his bill, and that is what the Quebec government is calling for.

[*English*]

On Monday, the Liberals blamed the Conservatives for letting the Catholic Church off the hook for millions of dollars in the restitution of residential schools, but it turns out that the minister had seven days of briefings before she let the church off the hook.

Is the minister suggesting that it is not her fault, that she did not read her briefing books? Is she still going to blame the Conservatives, or is she going to stand in the House and explain why the Liberals let the church off the hook?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the headline of the story was wrong, and has subsequently been corrected.

Let me be clear. The agreement of release was signed October 30, five days before the new government took office. The previous

Oral Questions

government initiated negotiations last summer and the previous government agreed to withdraw the protective notice of appeal.

The government continues to work with the Catholic entities to urge them to fulfill their financial commitments to their reconciliation with aboriginal people in our country. This is not something the Government of Canada can do.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): It was actually on November 10, six days after they were sworn in, that the Liberals signed those documents, Mr. Speaker. By the way, if they do not really agree with it, why did they not just reverse the decision?

Should Canada sell weapons to countries that oppress their own citizens, torture or kill their opposition, and treat women as second-class citizens? Yesterday we found out from the member of Parliament for Kenora that human rights did not matter.

Here is the question for the minister responsible. Why did he sign this deal with Saudi Arabia when he knows its human rights record?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the NDP, during the campaign, said, “You don’t cancel a commercial accord retroactively.... It’s just not done”. The New Democrats say something during the election to get their seats and afterward they something else. I think they have a lot to explain.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are talking about signing an export permit after Saudi Arabia proceeded to a series of executions, including religious leaders, after Saudi Arabia used its weapons in Yemen. That is the context of that minister signing the export permits. The Liberals have a real problem. They do not accept that they are the government. They keep looking at the former government. They are in charge, he signed the export permits.

When does the government plan to start defending human rights around the world? When?

•(1430)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso should know that I know his voice even if he covers his mouth. He should restrain himself.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the NDP is mad because, in fact, he knows that he has double-talk on this issue.

This is what his member said, when she was elected.

Well, I have lost the quote from the member for London—Fanshawe.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, what she said is, “we would honour the contract, we don’t renege on contracts. It’s a signed contract and we will honour that contract”.

*Oral Questions***MINISTERIAL EXPENSES**

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of International Trade claims that her Hollywood adventure was a trip to promote Canada and meet with trading partners, but we know—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. Let us have a little quiet. It is hard to hear the member's question. I know you all want to listen to the member's question.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: It was not me.

The Speaker: Apparently it was not the member for Cape Breton—Canso, he tells me.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, it is funny: on that side the squeaky wheel seems to be getting the grease today.

We know the minister was originally scheduled to appear on a U.S. TV program in October, but she rescheduled her appearance to November after she was sworn into cabinet.

The minister wants Canadians to believe that she was there to promote Canada, but Canadians are not buying her story, even at a cost of \$20,000. The real reason she was there was to promote herself. If she was really there for government business, why did Time Warner book her stay?

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again the Conservatives are trying to create a story where there is none.

Since the members opposite continue to be so interested in this non-topic, let me remind them that it was their own leader who left taxpayers on the hook for a bill for \$50,000 to hire a consultant to try to secure American media interviews.

The Conservatives' accusations about the expenses are false. All the rules were followed. The details were publicly posted months ago.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, several times this week, the Minister of International Trade or her parliamentary secretary have risen in this place and told us that it was her department, and her department alone, that handled all of the arrangements for her fun-in-the-sun vanity trip to California.

However, documents indicate that it was Time Warner that booked the five-star Beverly Hills hotel rooms for her and her staffer. Something does not add up here.

The question is simple. Why should Canadians be paying for her vanity trip to Hollywood?

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again the Conservatives are trying to create a story where there is none.

Unlike previous Conservatives, the Minister of International Trade has a justly earned international reputation as a journalist and finance writer. In California, she appeared in the media with U.S. Senator Angus King of Maine and California Lieutenant Governor Gavin Newsom. There, she proudly defended Canada's leadership on the Syrian refugee crisis.

The Conservatives should learn from colleagues like their former Prime Minister that even they sometimes need to appear in the media.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked the Minister of International Trade about her taxpayer-funded trip to LA to appear on the HBO show, *Real Time with Bill Maher*.

The parliamentary secretary claimed the purpose of the trip was to promote Canadian interests with one of our most important trading jurisdictions. Yet, the minister did not even mention trade or make any reference to Canada's interests during her appearance on the show.

The minister's Hollywood meeting had nothing to do with her portfolio or government business. Why did Canadian taxpayers pick up the tab?

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our Minister of International Trade earned an international reputation as a global thought leader on economic and social issues well before she entered politics.

That is why she was given the opportunity to appear before millions of Americans, millions of viewers, on these high-profile panels. It is good for Canada to have a trade minister with that kind of international stature.

She should be celebrated for the work she is doing in defending Canadian values and defending Canadian interests.

• (1435)

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, yelling raises Liberals to their feet.

Yesterday, I asked the President of the Treasury Board why he and other ministers were violating rules obligating them to post their travel expenses by March 31. Then about an hour later, some of his expenses magically appeared online.

A few ministers are still missing, however. When can we expect the rest of the Liberal ministers to obey the law?

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Liberals have led the charge on openness, transparency, and proactive disclosure. In fact, it was a Liberal prime minister, Paul Martin, whose government was the first to proactively disclose cabinet ministers' expenses. It was a Liberal leader, our Prime Minister, in opposition, who led the charge, being the first party in the House of Commons to proactively disclose members of Parliament's expenses.

We disclose our expenses. We will continue to disclose our expenses, because it is the right thing to do. Canadians deserve openness and transparency. Our government will continue to deliver that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after missing the deadline set by his own department, the President of the Treasury Board finally reported his travel expenses. However, the same cannot be said of some of his colleagues who are late in doing so or have provided incomplete information. Canadians deserve better than this pseudo-transparency.

Oral Questions

When will we have proactive disclosure? Are they going to disclose information only when they get caught breaking the rules?

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is completely open and transparent. We report our expenses and we will continue to do so.

* * *

AIR CANADA

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Minister of Transport said that we must move quickly, and he moved a time allocation motion for Bill C-10. One of his arguments was that the Government of Quebec decided not to sue Air Canada. However, things are not going the minister's way because, this morning, Quebec's economy minister said that the federal government must not hinder her negotiations with Air Canada.

He is saying one thing, but Quebec's minister is saying the opposite today. That is not good. I am sorry to bring the minister back to earth, but why did he really impose closure? Why is he hindering the discussions? What are the Liberals trying to hide?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this gives me a chance to repeat what I said.

The reason we imposed closure yesterday was very clear. Last Friday, the NDP tried to kill this bill. In our fine democracy, we know full well that there are still many stages for Bill C-10 to go through before it reaches the end of the process. We are going to move to committee stage where we will listen to witnesses. Then there will be report stage, followed by third reading. The bill will then follow the same process in the Senate. There is still a lot of time for everyone to be heard.

* * *

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we cannot understand the Liberals' strategy to combat tax evasion. First, there were the secret sweetheart deals for a number of millionaires and posh soirees with KPMG representatives, and now we learn that, while the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance was a Bionest board member, he regularly made transfers to a partner's company, which was located in a tax haven. Furthermore, Bionest was receiving federal tax credits at the same time.

How much taxpayer money did this company transfer and divert to the Turks and Caicos?

[*English*]

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain is a colleague and a friend. There is absolutely nothing he has done that contravenes the law from an income tax standpoint. To insinuate otherwise is categorically false.

What I can say is that the members opposite clearly like our budget so much that they are moving to talk about other things, non-stories, to move us off the topic. The fact is that we are helping Canadians with our budget. We are going after tax evaders, and we are going to continue to do so.

● (1440)

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, is the Liberal government serious about tax havens?

The Minister of Finance and his parliamentary secretary are busy explaining why companies they have left have links to Caribbean tax havens. The Minister of National Revenue continues to defend sweetheart deals with millionaire tax cheats and privileged relations with KPMG.

As Canadians are sitting down these days and doing their taxes, they are angry about one set of rules for the super rich and another for the rest of us.

When will the minister just call an investigation into the KPMG tax evasion scandal?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, to insinuate any sort of wrongdoing on the part of the parliamentary secretary to finance is categorically wrongheaded.

What I can say is that our government is absolutely committed to dealing with tax evasion and to dealing with tax avoidance that is inappropriate.

At the G20, we were a strong and loud voice for common reporting standards around the world. We are moving forward on the base erosion and profit shifting initiative to come to those deliverables, and we have committed \$440 million to the CRA to ensure that we go after people who are evading taxes.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier this week at committee, I asked the Minister of Environment and Climate Change about Canada's competitive advantage in carbon pricing. The only response I could get was that China was considering a plan to price carbon and that this was a game changer.

Therefore, we are left with a minister who turns to China for inspiration on carbon taxes, and a Prime Minister who expresses admiration for the basic dictatorship that is China.

When will the Liberals abandon their plan for a carbon-tax grab and focus on supporting Canadians?

Mr. Jonathan Wilkinson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's government is working actively with the provinces and territories to develop and implement a Canadian plan to reduce emissions and to further the clean-growth economy. We welcome the discussion with respect to carbon pricing. Carbon pricing is something that will be part of the outcome of the discussions.

I would say that the hon. member should actually have a conversation with some of the leading Conservative members around the country, including Patrick Brown, the leader of the Ontario Conservative Party; Preston Manning; and Mark Cameron, who was an advisor to his former prime minister.

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is not only about a carbon-tax grab.

Oral Questions

Earlier this week in question period, the Minister of Environment and Climate Change was asked when she would make a decision on the \$36 billion Pacific NorthWest LNG project in B.C. She flippantly said, “We will make a decision when we are ready to make a decision”.

When will the minister abandon her plan for a harmful carbon-tax grab, get out of the way, and allow Canada's resources to be shipped to market?

Mr. Jonathan Wilkinson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been very clear that we will be working to ensure that the economy and the environment go hand in hand. We have also been very clear that we are going to base decisions on science and evidence.

With respect to Pacific NorthWest, as I have mentioned to my hon. colleague in the past, the proponent provided substantive new information during the public comment period, some of which had the potential to have impact on the second largest salmon run in British Columbia.

We are going through the process of assessing that information to ensure that we understand the environmental impacts. That is the responsible thing to do. That is what we plan to do.

Mr. David Yurdiga (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, mining is the biggest provider of jobs in the north. The recent downturn in the natural resource sector had disastrous effects on each of the territories. Unemployment is now 6.9% in the Yukon, 9.4% in the Northwest Territories, and a staggering 16.2% in Nunavut.

A carbon tax will only make things worse. When will the Liberals realize that a carbon tax will only weaken the northern economy and raise unemployment?

Mr. Jonathan Wilkinson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in an earlier reply, we are working actively with all of the provinces and territories across the country to develop a pan-Canadian approach to address carbon emissions and to actually promote a clean-growth economy.

We intend to work constructively with all provinces and territories to ensure that we have a plan that has the support of all parts of the country, but will allow us to ensure that we are addressing what is a critical international issue.

Mr. David Yurdiga (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, northerners want to work and support their families. Instead of embracing the resource industry, the Liberals have taken every opportunity to give it the cold shoulder. They are making it more difficult for the natural resource industry in the north by introducing a carbon tax that will raise the cost on everything.

Why are the Liberals kicking northerners down when the economy is already down?

•(1445)

Mr. Jonathan Wilkinson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to refer my hon. colleague to a number of elements in the budget which focus on innovation and driving clean

technology into sectors such as the mining industry, to enable the mining industry to become more carbon friendly, but also more productive and more efficient.

I would also note that people like Pierre Gratton, the CEO of the Mining Association of Canada, last week came out and actively supported carbon pricing as part of the overall solution. In fact, people in industries from oil and gas, to mining, to other industrial sectors have joined the modern age and understand that carbon pricing is part of what we must do in order to meet carbon emission targets and to ensure that we have a clean growth economy in the future.

* * *

BUDGET LEGISLATION

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives disrespected Parliament through their use of omnibus bills and the Liberals rightly joined New Democrats to decry them, but yesterday, the Liberals tabled an omnibus budget bill of their own. The bill runs more than 170 pages and includes a bill that is already before the House. It also contains the Liberals' inadequate EI changes that will leave most Canadians out.

Are the Liberals really using omnibus bills like the Conservatives did to avoid proper scrutiny from Parliament?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our budget implementation act is absolutely not an omnibus bill. Every measure in the budget implementation act is related to our budget, unlike previous omnibus bills from the members opposite, who put in things like the repeal of the Kyoto Protocol Implementation Act in 2012, or gutted the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act in 2010. We will continue on our message that our budget implementation act is about budget measures and budget measures only.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the problem is that, as members will recall, the Conservatives used their budget implementation bill to amend dozens of bills, and the Liberals are doing the same thing. The Conservatives made retroactive changes to other laws, and the Liberals are doing the same thing.

As my colleague mentioned, entire bills that had been introduced in the House were inserted into this bill. The problem is that the Liberal government promised to be more transparent and to do things differently.

In the interest of transparency, will the government agree to split the bill, so that it can be properly studied in committee?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, I would like to be clear. Our budget implementation act is in fact exactly that. It is a budget implementation act that includes budget measures and budget measures only. It is an act that shows Canadians in an open and transparent way the way that we are going to make a real difference in their lives both today and tomorrow.

* * *

[Translation]

ECUADOR

Mr. Marc Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last Sunday, Ecuador was hit by the worst earthquake in 40 years. This devastating earthquake claimed hundreds of victims, including four Canadians. Furthermore, tens of thousands of disaster victims find themselves in an extremely precarious humanitarian situation.

Can the Minister of National Defence inform the House of what could be made available to Ecuadorians to help them deal with this immense catastrophe?

[English]

Hon. John McKay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs for sharing his deep concern along with, I am assuming, everyone else in the House on Ecuador's disaster.

The Government of Canada immediately responded with \$1.1 million in emergency relief assistance. We now have a team down in Ecuador doing an assessment as to what further help can be given in order to make recommendations to the government, including the possible deployment of the DART.

I thank the hon. member for his concern and indeed the concern of all members in the House.

* * *

● (1450)

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to equipping our troops, the Liberals are deliberately misleading Canadians. The budget says, “funding that is not yet allocated to specific projects...can be moved forward to future years”, but the Liberals are making a \$3.7 billion cut to the defence budget. They are taking hundreds of millions of dollars from important military projects that are already under way.

Who is misleading Canadians? Is it the Minister of Finance or is it the Minister of National Defence?

Hon. John McKay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is another day and it is another Conservative question on procurement.

The Conservatives showed no leadership on the procurement file. In fact, ironically, they now show a love for the parliamentary budget officer. I remind them of the report with respect to the F-35, and wonder whether they still appreciate the views of the parliamentary budget officer.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on March 24, during question period, the Minister of National Defence said that the budget for procurement of equipment would be available if major acquisitions were needed. We now know that his statement was false. Hundreds of millions of dollars are being taken from projects to modernize our frigates, replace fighter planes, and improve our search and rescue capabilities.

Will the minister apologize for misleading Canadians and restore the funding this year?

[English]

Hon. John McKay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, major funding has been set aside for future years in order to address the continuous mismatch left behind by the previous government. We are trying to match the fiscal cycle and the procurement cycle. Accordingly, as procurement comes forward, our funds will match those procurements. There has been no cutback in the procurement funding.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Tony Clement (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): Mr. Speaker, back to the question of genocide, the Parliament of the U.K., the U.S. Congress, and Secretary of State Kerry have all condemned the ISIS killings of Yazidis, Muslims, and Christian minorities as genocide.

Your government had the chance to do the same thing in this House yesterday. You refused. You hid—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member knows that we do not use the word “you” unless referring to the Speaker. I do not think he means to refer to the Speaker. I hope not. Perhaps the member could rephrase his question and complete it. I ask the member to get to the question.

Hon. Tony Clement: Mr. Speaker, the current government had a chance to do the same thing in this House yesterday. It refused and hid behind weasel words.

My question for the government is this. Why did the government shamefully put Canada outside the consensus view of our allies and turn a blind eye to reality? Why do the Liberals not come to their senses and realize exactly what is going on over there, which is, in fact, genocide?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is what the U.K. Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs said on April 20:

...genocide is a matter of legal rather than political opinion. We as the Government are not the prosecutor, the judge or the jury... It is essential that these decisions are based on credible judicial process.... Right now, our priority is to prevent atrocities from taking place, and that is why we are playing a leading role in the global coalition against Daesh.

Replace “U.K.” with “Canada”, and it is exactly what I have to say.

Oral Questions

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if all of the atrocities, war crimes, and crimes against humanity perpetrated by ISIS are not genocide, then what are they?

We know that the UN Security Council is clearly incapable of instructing the International Criminal Court to act, but Canada should not hide behind international legal dysfunction. When will the Liberals fulfill their moral obligation to call this what it is, genocide?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I just want to inform my colleague that indeed the Government of Canada is asking for this international investigation on the atrocities and the horrors committed by Daesh and to be sure that it will be prosecuted and also to investigate whether it is a genocide. We are pushing for that. We are asking for that because it has all the hallmarks of a genocide. It is why this recognition should be done properly internationally. There is nothing more important than to recognize a genocide by the proper process.

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[Translation]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today, hundreds of dairy producers are with us in the House.

These producers from Mauricie, Lanaudière, Montérégie, and the Outaouais came to the House to demand that the government keep its word and resolve the problem of diafiltered milk once and for all.

The longer the government waits to take action, the greater the economic hardship in the regions. Dairy producers have been mobilizing for months and years, and the NDP is standing with them.

However, the government continues to drag its feet, despite its fine, empty promises. They will say anything.

Today, we are calling on the government to take action—

• (1455)

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for moving this motion in the House today.

We inherited this problem from the previous government. Even the previous government put manufacturing standards in place that it did not enforce.

That is why we understand how important it is to act. We are working with the industry to create a sustainable solution.

* * *

[English]

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after Volkswagen was caught illegally falsifying emission tests and lying

about the performance of its vehicles, U.S. regulators, senators, and Congress wasted no time taking it to task. Reports today say the case in the U.S. will be settled with fines, recalls, buybacks, and cash for consumers.

However, Canada has no deal, as per usual. Even though tens of thousands of these vehicles are in our driveways, and on our highways and roads, why are Canadian consumers, once again, condemned as second-class citizens and the doormats of recall?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I share the member's concern for the safety of our roads. In fact, this past week, we told Fiat Chrysler that we considered four of its models were dangerous and had defects in them. We have gone forward. This is one example. We have many other examples.

We believe it is important for Canadians to know when there are defects in different models of cars. We will continue to do that.

* * *

MARIJUANA

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is widely known that tobacco products are deadly and for decades, Health Canada has called for stricter policies against smoking. Marijuana has the same carcinogenic potential to cause harm to the body.

How can the Minister of Health, the minister responsible for promoting good health to Canadians, throw out decades of scientific research by Health Canada and promote the recreational use of marijuana?

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I had the honour yesterday of speaking at the United Nations General Assembly special session on drugs. I used that opportunity to talk about Canada's drug policy, which is grounded in scientific evidence, and which employs a collaborative, compassionate, and comprehensive approach to drug policy.

We are concerned about access to marijuana for young people. Therefore, we are going to be introducing a new regulatory regime which will keep our children safe, free from the potential harms of marijuana, and keep the profits out of the hands of criminals.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, like many other members, I am disappointed that the government chose to announce its plans to legalize marijuana in New York, rather than doing it here in the House, before the elected representatives of the people of Canada.

At this time, a number of questions remain unanswered, on top of many other troubling questions related to public health.

Can the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness tell us what he plans to do to keep this drug away from children? How does he plan to give police officers the tools they need to be able to arrest drug-impaired drivers?

*Oral Questions***ECUADOR***[English]*

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the public safety department is working very closely with the justice department and the health department to produce a regime for Canada with respect to marijuana that will, in fact, do a far better job in keeping our kids safe, keeping this product out of the hands of children and young people, and stopping the flow of illegal money to illegal gangs and organized crime.

The regime in place today has failed miserably. Perpetuating the status quo is absolutely the wrong thing to do.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, science has shown that marijuana is linked to serious health concerns, both mentally and physically, especially for our young people under the age of 25. Yet, the Prime Minister still insists on pushing forward marijuana legalization.

Would the Liberals admit to us that marijuana is in fact a causal factor for these illnesses and that their policies will not protect the Canadian children that we love?

• (1500)

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite may be aware of the troubling statistics that show that up to a quarter of teenagers are in fact currently using marijuana. This is a troubling fact.

As my colleague the Minister of Public Safety has already indicated, the current approach to marijuana is not working. Because of the potential risks, our government is introducing new legislation which will legalize marijuana, regulate it, and will restrict access to keep Canadians safe and to keep them healthy.

* * *

TOURISM INDUSTRY

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in my riding of Vaughan—Woodbridge, tourism is an essential part of the local economy. With sites like Canada's Wonderland, the Ontario Soccer Centre, Magnotta Winery, The National Golf Club of Canada, and unique conservation areas, tourists from America and around the world have plenty of attractions to choose from.

Would the Minister of Small Business and Tourism tell the House what the government is doing to encourage more American tourists to visit Canadian destinations?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his hard work, especially to his constituents, and also for highlighting the fact that the tourism industry benefits each and every one of our communities and local economies.

Each of us in the House, regardless of party, has something in each community that is worth showing off. That is why budget 2016 provides an additional \$50 million to Destination Canada to promote the Canadian brand in the U.S. and other key markets. This is a \$90-billion industry, and the government's investment in the tourism industry will support small business, tourism operators, and help grow the economy.

Hon. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, four Canadians are among the more than 500 people killed by the devastating earthquake in Ecuador. Hundreds are missing and thousands need emergency assistance now. Conservatives acquired the C-17 strategic airlift aircraft to enable the disaster response team to respond to disasters around the world.

Ecuador is calling for more assistance from the international community. Instead of using aid money to buy votes at the UN, why do the Liberals not rise to the occasion and help the people of Ecuador by increasing Canada's commitment now?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have already allocated \$1 million to help with the situation in Ecuador and help meet immediate humanitarian needs. Our consular team is assisting the grieving families at this time. We sent a team of three Global Affairs Canada staff and three Department of National Defence personnel to assess the needs.

We will take the appropriate action as soon as we receive their recommendations.

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[English]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government seems to be having problems delivering on their promises to Syrian refugees. Some refugee families in Saskatoon waited nearly three weeks without money for food or rent. They had to rely on charity just to feed their families and avoid being evicted. They said they are frustrated, worried, embarrassed, and feel like they have to beg to survive. This is not acceptable.

How many other families are in this situation, and what action will the minister take to ensure this does not happen to anyone else?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said many times, an operation of this kind is never perfect. There are always bumps along the road. There are always problems of various kinds, but overall, I am satisfied. I just heard today that 90% of the refugees now have permanent housing.

I wish those individuals to whom the member referred great success, but I am pleased to say that overall, thanks to the generosity of so many Canadians, this operation is going well.

*Oral Questions***FINANCE**

Mr. Seamus O'Regan (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the people of Newfoundland and Labrador have been hit hard by the global downturn in oil prices, as reflected in the province's recent budget. I am hearing time and again from my constituents in St. John's South—Mount Pearl that middle-class families are feeling squeezed. They are worried about what the future holds for them and what it holds for their neighbours.

Will the Minister of Finance please share with the House the work that he is doing to help the people of Newfoundland and Labrador?

• (1505)

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government stands firmly with the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. I was pleased that we were able to deliver a \$32-million stabilized payment to people in that province. More importantly, our Canada child benefit, our tax cuts, and our increase to the guaranteed income supplement are going to help people in Newfoundland and Labrador with more money in their pockets.

Moving forward, our new Canada building fund will be more rapid and flexible in delivering infrastructure projects to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, helping that province in the future.

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DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when we change the basic rules of democracy, everyone should get a vote, but the Prime Minister seems to think that only those who agree with him should get a say.

He clearly opposes directly consulting Canadians through a referendum on fundamental changes to how we vote. He told students at the University of Ottawa, “[T]he fact is that referendums are a pretty good way of not getting any electoral reform.”

Has the Prime Minister closed the door on a referendum because he thinks the only opinion that matters is his?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unlike the previous government, we intend to use evidence and a complete consultation process with Canadians across this great nation so that when we propose changes in this House, we bring our democratic institutions—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Can we have some order, please. We want to hear the answer from the Minister of Democratic Institutions.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Mr. Speaker, we will base our decisions on evidence and a complete conversation, an inclusive and meaningful conversation with Canadians across this great nation so that we can bring our democratic institution into the 21st century.

* * *

[*Translation*]

AIR CANADA

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this morning, even the Government of Quebec asked the Minister of Transport to settle down with his unacceptable Bill C-10.

This minister, who has been bragging for weeks about the agreement between Quebec and Bombardier and the creation of centres of excellence, is about to sabotage that agreement and cause more job losses in the riding of his own colleague from Saint-Laurent.

Does the minister realize that his closure motion is not only awful but also dangerous for the future of Quebec's aerospace industry?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the third time, I repeat that we decided to move a time allocation motion precisely because the NDP wanted to kill this bill last Friday.

As my colleague knows, in the federal Parliament bills go through several stages, including review in committee. Several witnesses will have the opportunity to speak to this bill. There will also be report stage and third reading. Then, we will start all over again in the Senate. People still have plenty of time to have their say on this bill.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this is unethical closure for the purpose of destabilizing the aerospace industry with an unethical bill.

The Government of Quebec never dropped its lawsuits against Air Canada. It merely suspended them to maintain its bargaining power so it could save Bombardier, which this government seems to have left to its own devices.

Why does the federal government want to take away Quebec's bargaining power in the aerospace sector?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as everyone knows, we decided to amend the Air Canada Public Participation Act precisely because the governments of Quebec and Manitoba decided to drop their lawsuits against Air Canada. That is why we decided to clarify the legislation.

I would remind my colleague that Air Canada is required to keep aircraft maintenance jobs in Ontario, Manitoba, and Quebec.

* * *

[*English*]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the recipients of the 2015 Governor General's Awards in Commemoration of the Persons Case: Madame Monique Bégin, Madame Marie-Thérèse Chicha, Mrs. Dee Dooley, Mrs. Ruth Elwood Martin, and Mrs. Sheila McIntyre.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

• (1510)

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during question period, the member for LaSalle—Émard—Verdun, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, mentioned that our leader had spent funds on an international consultant on U.S. media.

The last time I checked, I am the leader. I did not do this. I know I am new, but the member has known me since he was elected. If he could please retract and withdraw that comment—

The Speaker: It is debate. I see the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade rising to respond.

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I said the “former” leader of the opposition.

The Speaker: At any rate, I think the Leader of the Opposition has clarified that, and we will leave it there.

The hon. member for Outremont is rising on a point of order.

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am the former opposition leader he just accused, and I can assure you that I had nothing to do with what he was just talking about.

The Speaker: It is still debate, but I am sure the House appreciates all of the clarification.

[English]

Now it is time for the regular Thursday question. The hon. opposition House leader.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, now the moment everyone has been waiting for, the Thursday question.

I know that next week we will all be hard at work in our constituencies, getting back in touch with the constituents who sent us here to do work on their behalf.

I wonder if the government House leader could update the House as to what the business will be for the remainder of this week, and for when we arrive back from our constituencies.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, we will complete the debate on the New Democratic Party's opposition day on the Canadian dairy industry.

Tomorrow we will begin an important debate at second reading on Bill C-14, medical assistance in dying.

[Translation]

Next week, as my friend pointed out, we will be back in our ridings working hard to meet the people who elected us and sent us here.

Business of Supply

When the House returns on Monday, May 2, we will continue our second reading debate of Bill C-14. I hope that we can sit late on Monday and Tuesday of that week so that all members who want to speak to this important bill can do so.

[English]

On Wednesday, the House will begin second reading debate on Bill C-15, the budget implementation act, 2016, No. 1. We will continue that important debate on Thursday.

I hope, Mr. Speaker, that you will allow me to take this opportunity to wish Her Majesty the Queen a very happy 90th birthday.

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties, and if you seek it you will find consent for the following motion:

That, at the conclusion of today's debate on the opposition motion in the name of the Member for Berthier—Maskinongé, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion be deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, May 3, 2016, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

[English]

Mr. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, I have a very short point of order. I neglected to do this in my Thursday question, but on behalf of the official opposition, I would like to wish Her Majesty a very happy 90th birthday. It is a very special day for all her subjects all over the world.

I wonder if we could just make a note of this. As you know, Mr. Speaker, the House spontaneously sang “God Save the Queen”. I am not sure how *Hansard* will capture that, but I hope it does mark the occasion because it was a very special moment.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1515)

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—CANADIAN DAIRY INDUSTRY

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: Before question period, there were three minutes remaining for questions and comments on the speech by the hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

Business of Supply

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, perhaps I could answer the question as to why we are debating this issue today. This issue has been in the making for the last number of years, and because the Conservative government at the time chose to do nothing on the issue, we now find ourselves in this predicament.

I find it most interesting that on the one hand, the Conservatives say that they want to see action, but they did nothing when they were in government. On the hand, we have an animated New Democratic caucus that did not raise the issue when it was in the official opposition. Now everyone is taking an interest.

Let me provide assurances that the Government of Canada is very much aware of the issue and we are taking the necessary actions to protect the industry. As the Minister of Agriculture and others have said, the Government of Canada is very supportive of supply management.

I wonder if the member might want to provide some on why the previous government and the previous official opposition kind of put this on the back burner and did nothing on the issue.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in my speech I said that some Liberals seem to have fallen through a breach in the space-time continuum. It looks like my colleague has been lost inside that breach for the past four years, because I can assure him that the New Democrats have spoken to this issue under the previous government.

There is something that makes no sense here. The Conservatives could have taken action, but they did not. The solution is really quite simple: enforcing the law. All it takes is a few discussions for a couple of minutes. No new laws or regulations are required; it is simply a matter of enforcing the existing legislation. The Liberals could have settled this matter in a few hours or a few days—a few weeks at most. They could have argued that the Conservatives sat on their hands for a while but that they would get right on it since it is such a simple matter to resolve.

It seems to me that when we get involved in something, we move on the issues that can be dealt with easily and quickly and, after that, we go on to the more complicated issues. They are not even doing that. That is why it is ridiculous.

It is important to mention that the NDP raised the issue on several occasions and that we now have some Conservatives who seem to have forgotten that they did nothing and some Liberals who seem to have forgotten that this issue was brought up quite often, and that they can act quickly. Things are not going well.

[English]

Mr. T.J. Harvey (Tobique—Mactaquac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time today with the member for Saint John.

I am proud to rise today to speak on the subject of trade and agriculture, while underscoring the government's strong support for Canada's supply-managed sectors. We are all well aware of the

concerns regarding the use of diafiltered milk in the making of cheese.

Our government is working with all sides of the industry to ensure that we continue engaging everyone in order to find a long-term sustainable and agreed upon solution on this issue.

Agriculture is hugely important in my riding, and it has played an enormous role in my life, having grown up on a large family-owned farm myself, producing seed potatoes, oilseeds and small grains, as well as having worked both in the primary agricultural sector, farming myself for nearly 14 years, and food manufacturing prior to my new role as member of Parliament.

As a supply-managed egg producer for the last six years, along with my wife Tanya and our four children, through the New Brunswick egg producers new entrant program, I have had an opportunity to see first-hand the tremendous benefit that supply management plays within the dairy and egg sectors, and the tremendous benefit that it affords producers, allowing them to plan strategically in their investments with respect to their own agricultural enterprises, not only for themselves but for the next future generation and the subsequent generations to follow.

Canada's agriculture and agri-food exports exceed \$60 billion a year, \$61.4 billion. About half of the value of Canada's agricultural production is exported, which is why our government strongly supports free trade.

The opportunities for Canada's farmers and food processors on the global stage are nothing short of breathtaking. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has projected the global demand for food is expected to increase by 60% by 2050. Much of this demand will come from the growing middle class around the world, which is on track to exceed half the planet's entire population over the next 15 years.

This is good news for farmers in my riding and across our great country. Two-thirds of the middle class will be in Asia, with a quarter of a billion people in India alone. The Chinese middle class is growing by the population of Canada every year. It is projected that by 2030, almost three-quarters, 70% of China's population could be in the middle class, consuming nearly \$10 trillion in goods and services.

Canada's economic prosperity is built on open trade. Trade translates into jobs and opportunities for Canadians all across the country. Canada is the fifth-largest exporter and the sixth-largest importer of agriculture and agri-food products in the world.

With our small population and huge production capacity, Canada is the world's leading agricultural trader on a per capita basis. Trade accounts for one in every five jobs in Canada. As the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food likes to say, Canada has the responsibility and the ability to feed this world.

Our government certainly recognizes the importance of Canada's role in the supply-managed sectors and in the Canadian economy. In fact, it was our party that fought for and implemented the supply management system we see today. We will continue to work for the best interests of all Canadians and all Canadian farmers.

Business of Supply

Canada's supply-managed sectors are a major economic force in this country, accounting for close to 300,000, 285,000, jobs and \$32 billion in overall economic benefit.

We understand the importance of compensation for supply-managed producers in the context of the Canada-EU trade agreement and the TPP, should it enter into force.

We are at a time of tremendous opportunity for Canada's agriculture and agri-food sectors. Agricultural exports are at an all-time record high. Producer incomes and balance sheets are expected to remain at historic levels.

Agriculture and food is one of the top five fastest-growing export sectors in Canada. It is estimated that up to 50,000 new jobs in agriculture across the country will be created in the next five years, both on and off farm, on top of vacancies that already exist. Some estimate those vacancies to be in excess of 25,000 jobs.

With our small population and huge production capacity, Canada is the world's leading agricultural trader on a per capita basis, as I mentioned earlier. Meanwhile, global demand for food is projected to increase by 60% by 2050. For farmers and food processors this is tremendous news. The future is bright for Canadian farmers and food processors, with growing demand for the products we grow in Canada.

Our government will work hard to open new markets for them, while doing the right thing, consulting with Canadians and farmers on the TPP. The government's message is clear, we fully support trade and we fully support our supply-managed sectors. That is why we are committed to continuing to engage the entire sector on this issue to ensure we achieve a long-term, sustainable solution.

● (1520)

Once again, I would like to thank my hon. colleague, the member for Berthier—Maskinongé, for bringing this vital matter before this House and recognize her for her tremendous work on behalf of agricultural producers from coast to coast to coast.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am a little surprised that all of a sudden the Liberals have figured out what agriculture is. After all, it was completely absent in their Speech from the Throne and it took up less than two pages in the budget, and even then it was just reasserting previous Conservative policies.

I would like to ask the hon. member for Tobique—Mactaquac how it is that all of a sudden they are these great supporters of agriculture and the agricultural industry, yet their government has been completely absent about the policy up until this point.

Mr. T.J. Harvey: Madam Speaker, I would like to remind the hon. colleague that it was our party that fought hard for and implemented the supply management sector that we see today. We continue to work hard for Canadian farmers because we, as a party and as a government, recognize that rural economies depend upon a strong agricultural sector. If we are going to see agriculture producers and the rural economy grow, it is going to be through our farmers. Our farmers are the backbone of this country.

● (1525)

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask my hon. colleague if he is concerned at all that two government agencies regard our diafiltered milk product differently. Is it a concern at all that the Canada Border Services Agency and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency treat it differently?

Mr. T.J. Harvey: Madam Speaker, as we all know, this is an issue we inherited from the former government. If it were a simple issue, it would have already been settled.

We are working hard to resolve this issue. It is not simply an issue of two departments that cannot agree upon the same issue. There are greater factors that figure into this entire complex issue, and we are working hard on behalf of all Canadian farmers to resolve it as expeditiously as possible.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I really enjoyed the remarks from the member for Tobique—Mactaquac. I know he has worked hard in the farm industry himself over the years. He understands how important supply management is and how important the dairy industry is to this country. I know he in fact campaigned on strengthening the farming sector.

I just cannot accept the remarks earlier from the member for the Conservative Party when he tried to denigrate what the Liberal Party does in agriculture. We have been the party of agriculture. We are the ones who put in supply management.

I wonder if the member would tell us how important the supply management industry is to this country.

Mr. T.J. Harvey: Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague is absolutely 100% right. I did campaign on a strong agricultural sector and on building the sector within Canada.

I grew up in agriculture and my friends are from agriculture. I have travelled all over this country over the past years with various boards, working on behalf of the New Brunswick Federation of Agriculture, working with the Canadian Young Farmers' Forum, representing the views of young people in agriculture, and I am committed to working with this government, with members just like the one who just asked me the question, to try to grow the economy in the rural sector.

The best way, the strongest way, and the most efficient way to grow the economy in rural Canada is through agriculture, and it needs to be in a sustainable manner that represents the needs of all agricultural producers—not just supply-managed producers, but all agricultural producers from across this country from coast to coast to coast.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am from the riding of Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, which has more than 180 dairy farms. That represents about 700 direct jobs, plus the indirect jobs.

Business of Supply

I listened to the speech by my colleague from Tobique—Mactaquac. I am trying to find a reference for the problem we are currently debating. The problem is that two agencies, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and the Canada Border Services Agency, have different definitions.

He said that it is complicated, but the solution is simple: let us come up with a single definition. If he knows the industry so well, why will he not accept such a simple solution?

[*English*]

Mr. T.J. Harvey: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his question, but I disagree with him on that point. I do not think it is a simple issue. I do agree that there are two agencies, as he said, but I do not agree that it is a simple issue. It does not involve just one sector, but the whole of agriculture, and, as a party, we are committed to representing the views and best interests of all members of agriculture from across this country in all the different pillars of the agricultural sector.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rioux (Saint-Jean, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak today in support of Canada's supply management system.

We are aware of the industry's concerns about diafiltered milk being used in the production of cheese. We are working hard to find a solution. We are in regular communication with dairy industry stakeholders on this matter. As we have said many times, the Government of Canada fully supports supply management.

Every day, thanks to Canadian poultry and dairy producers who are at the cutting edge of technology, Canadian families have access to healthy, nutritious food. These producers also create jobs and add value to Canada's rural and urban economies, to the tune of more than \$32 billion in agricultural revenues and sales of processed products.

Canada's dairy industry is innovative and drives our economy, generating more than \$23 billion in farm gate and processor sales. It employs thousands of Canadians and is a leader in safety, quality, and sustainability. The government is proud of our country's innovative dairy industry.

We enthusiastically support supply management, and we are determined to invest in innovation and food processing to keep the industry on the cutting edge of technology. Canadian dairy producers have made remarkable progress in terms of production and efficiency.

The riding of Saint-Jean comprises nine municipalities, all with rural areas. I am proud to acknowledge several producers from my riding. Before the election, I met with agriculture sector representatives regularly, and I have continued to do so since becoming an MP. Just last week, I met with a delegation of dairy producers in my riding office to update them on the diafiltered milk file. They get that the government is working on a long-term solution.

Over the years, supply management has proven itself to be an effective tool for Canadian producers, processors, and consumers, and that is why the government wants to keep it going.

By following our vigorous trade policy and our export action plan, we are safeguarding the future of producers. Canadian producers depend on international trade to maintain and create jobs, thereby building wealth for all Canadians.

The government and our farmers know that Canada's balanced position on trade works well. From poultry to pulses, the government will continue to support our strong agri-food sector. Our economy and our well-being depend on it. We work in the best interests of every Canadian family. We will continue to defend tirelessly the interests of our supply-managed industries.

We also do everything we can to grow this important sector of our economy by supporting the commercialization of innovative dairy products. With a budget of \$3 billion over five years, the government's growing forward 2 program helps the dairy sector seize new market opportunities with a number of key initiatives, like a dairy research cluster with a \$12-million budget, which is almost twice our initial investment, and allows the industry to focus on the use of milk in animal nutrition, sustainable milk production and genetic improvements.

The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food recently announced that the government of Canada will invest an additional \$1.75 billion in the dairy research cluster in order to increase productivity and improve our knowledge of the health effects of dairy fat.

This new investment made under the growing forward 2 agricultural policy framework will enable Canadian dairy farmers to use the research done by the Department of Agriculture's scientists.

We have invested a total of \$13.75 billion in the dairy research cluster. There are also investments of close to \$1 million that will help Canadian dairy farmers meet consumers' demands regarding traceability, animal welfare, environmental sustainability, and food safety and quality.

● (1530)

Here is my message to the House today: the government is determined to keep Canada's supply management system strong and profitable. We all know that a strong agriculture industry means a strong economy.

I ask for unanimous consent for the following amendment. I move, seconded by the member for Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation, that the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word "That" and substituting the following: "the House recognize the magnitude of the economic losses to Canadian dairy producers from the importation of diafiltered milk, which has increased considerably in recent years; recognize that the industry is calling for the problem to be resolved; and call upon the government to work with the industry to find a long-term, sustainable solution."

● (1535)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It is my duty to inform hon. members that an amendment to an opposition motion may be moved only with the consent of the sponsor of the motion. Therefore, I ask the hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé whether she consents to this amendment being moved.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Madam Speaker, I thank my Liberal colleague for moving an amendment to the motion we are debating here today.

Unfortunately, the amendment proposed by the member opposite waters down our motion too much. Therefore, I cannot accept my colleague's amendment.

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

The hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

[English]

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am very intrigued by the member's mention of science with respect to diafiltered milk. I wonder if he is at all concerned that this new product, which is not actually milk, has a differential in calcium penetration. Is that a concern at all? Does he think that consumer awareness should be part and parcel of his arguments?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Rioux: Madam Speaker, I am quite familiar with this file, since there are quite a few farmers in my riding, which has nine rural municipalities. This is clearly a complex problem. If it were easy to resolve, it would have been settled a long time ago.

However, we know that all the members of the Liberal caucus want to find a solution, as do all members of the House. We have two dairy producers here, the Minister of Agriculture and the parliamentary secretary, who are very familiar with this issue. We want to find a lasting solution, not a temporary fix.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, I heard the government's proposed amendment and I listened to the hon. member answer the question. My colleague is wondering why we could not all work together on a solution. That is exactly what we are doing here right now.

We welcomed farmers. My colleague and I met with them earlier. They are not asking us to discuss this ad nauseam. The solution is simple: milk is milk. Can the Canadian Food Inspection Agency acknowledge that diafiltered milk is not milk?

Does the hon. member agree or not?

Mr. Jean Rioux: Madam Speaker, the member believes in a sustainable solution. We want to ensure the sustainability of the industry and of supply management. That is our primary concern.

The debate has to do with issues that are overlapping between Canada and the United States. The Prime Minister raised this issue during his last meeting with the President of the United States, and we are working on finding a solution.

I repeat what I said earlier: we want to find a sustainable solution, not a band-aid one.

• (1540)

[English]

Mr. T.J. Harvey (Tobique—Mactaquac, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his impassioned speech on the subject matter here today. I share his passion. I think everyone

Business of Supply

who is currently sitting here shares a passion for agriculture, rural Canada, and seeing the rural economy grow.

I am wondering if my colleague could share how he thinks this government could support agriculture and help grow the rural economy.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Rioux: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for acknowledging my passion. I am quite familiar with this area, since I was the parliamentary assistant to the minister of agriculture in the Quebec National Assembly. I hold farmers in high regard. I have a lot of respect for them. They are exceptional business people.

Our government has already been supporting them. For example, with respect to sustainable development, we invested \$13.75 million in agricultural research, including \$1.75 million for the dairy research cluster. Furthermore, there is a significant investment of nearly \$1 million in traceability, which is a safety measure and helps the industry to remain competitive internationally. This is part of what we are being asked to do by other governments and by all Canadians who want access to good-quality products.

[English]

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford.

As I hear others who are speaking on this issue validate their informed comments with their lineage in agricultural history, I would like to give a shout-out to my agricultural family, from dairy farmers to wheat farmers. Everyone is busy right now, getting the machines ready and getting into the fields. This is a very busy time. I salute them.

I would also add that in my informal discussions, not in political discussions with my colleagues here, these are the same people who are very disconcerted that there is no political will. There is a simple solution that must be addressed in the short term for the viability of family farms. Then, a long-term solution can be finessed, if the government chooses, with proper consultation.

We have seen this problem escalating for a few years, and the political will that was not forthcoming has made our dairy farmers cynical.

It is very disconcerting. Canadian consumers, and those who work in the farm and agriculture sector, including family dairy farms, are confounded by the Canadian government's lack of enforcement of Canadian cheese compositional standards. It is as simple as that.

Business of Supply

Dairy farmers, like the Jobins in my riding of Windsor—Tecumseh, are hard-working, resilient, dedicated members of our communities. Dairy farmers of Canada are disappointed that there was no mention of the safeguarding of their industry in the throne speech or in the budget. These are the same people who are very confounded with the lack of action by the government in its time here, since it did make a commitment during the election phase and it did identify in its 100-day plan addressing this issue.

There is an aligned and cohesive position on this issue of diafiltered milk, which is regarding food security and consumer awareness, as well as protecting a regulatory environment that Canadian dairy farmers accept and operate in. Canada's dairy farmers speak with one voice on diafiltered milk. The Canadian government is allowing this responsible and important industry to be undermined.

Ironically, this motion has been tabled to stress the point that it is not necessary for the government to take its time to develop and pass complex or new regulations and definitions. The solution is actually very simple. The Liberal government needs to enforce the very standards that do exist today. It is that simple.

Where is the conviction and the earnestness now that the Liberals hold government? It is very disheartening to hear the cries of our Canadian families who rely on the dairy industry for their livelihoods being ignored thus far by the government.

During the 2015 election campaign, Canadian dairy producers called for the problem of diafiltered milk to be solved within the first 100 days. The Liberals promised to review the existing “standards, rules, and practices regarding the importation of food products,” including dairy proteins, “to ensure they serve the interests of Canadians”.

They promised to solve the diafiltered milk problem, which is costing our dairy producers millions of dollars. Unfortunately, the Liberals are continuing to drag their feet. Once again, we are seeing that it is political will. It is starting to look like a broken promise. However, the solution is simple. It is a matter of properly enforcing the compositional standards for cheese for all Canadian producers.

● (1545)

The diafiltered milk problem has been going on for at least two years. It is an American product that was exclusively designed to circumvent Canadian laws. It is part of a larger family of concentrated milk proteins. No American processor uses diafiltered milk in its products. None. It is imported and used by Canadian processors in place of milk, leading to huge economic losses for our dairy producers. It is also misleading Canadian consumers.

Canadian producers lose an estimated \$220 million per year, \$15,000 per producer, from the importation of diafiltered milk. Our producers are worried. Not only has Canada signed trade agreements that undermine supply management and compensation, it is also letting the problem of diafiltered milk drag on. What does this insinuate? That is a troubling question.

I could segue and do a debate on softwood lumber at this point, but I will keep it to diafiltered milk.

It is important that we are concise and that we are enforcing existing standards. Even if we were going to identify a long-term plan, here and now we have to adhere to our standards. These are sovereignty and food security issues, highlighted in the most exemplary fashion.

Our producers are worried, as I said, about our trade agreements that undermine supply management and compensation. It is clear that we have the Liberals following the Conservatives, and they were trying so hard to differentiate themselves at election time. This is the time for them to seize the moment and, as a government, give a demonstrated effort with this opportunity to remove the cynicism that people have with more and more broken promises.

Under the cheese compositional standards for Canada, it is required that a minimum percentage of the protein used in cheesemaking be sourced from milk. Members can see why I talk about the cynicism. We are splitting hairs here, and whom we are letting split hairs are American suppliers who are undermining a Canadian system. This is why we have to act now.

Some processors have taken to using milk protein substances as part of their required minimum percentage of milk when making cheese, instead of using it as part of their allowable percentage of added ingredients. This is inconsistent with its classification at the border, where the ingredients are not even considered under the dairy chapter of the customs tariff schedule, entering the country tariff-free. As a result, more ingredients are being used in cheesemaking than are allowed under the cheese compositional standards. This is resulting in less Canadian milk being used, and a loss of revenue for Canadian farmers.

Having said that, we know that what is happening right now is very disingenuous. The use of diafiltered milk, which is not really milk, is disingenuous. It is surprising that this issue is being ignored and that it has come to this.

My colleague for Berthier—Maskinongé has formulated an excellent motion. This is something that our government can embrace with confidence.

These standards have been in place since 2008, and they continue to go unenforced to the detriment of Canadian farmers.

Today is our time to act. I think this is a wonderful opportunity for the Liberal government to put its own words and hope into action. I urge it to do so today.

● (1550)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rémi Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my riding is extraordinary and vast. It also has a large number of dairy producers. I would like to reassure the House and the dairy producers that we are working harder than anyone in the House to find a long-term solution that will give our producers the help they need to develop their farms.

Business of Supply

This afternoon, we had a good opportunity to come to an agreement with the NDP on a motion that would allow us to work together on a long-term solution to the problems facing dairy producers. Unfortunately, the NDP decided to reject our request. It clearly demonstrated openness on our part and it would have made it possible for us to work together.

Why is the NDP refusing to work with us to find common ground on this amendment?

[English]

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: Madam Speaker, I am actually very disappointed with the turn of phrase in that question.

Our motion is very carefully formulated so that the government can immediately effect the remedies that are needed. Whatever the government chooses to do in the long term can take proper consultation. What we are saying right now is that what is happening is eroding the dairy industry because of the semantics, the grey area, the lack of enforcement, and the lack of management culture.

What is happening right now is that the industry is being eroded, so a long-term plan will not be necessary. The government has to address this now if it truly believes there is any weight to having a long-term plan because this is so complex. I am suggesting—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am sorry, but we have to go to questions and comments.

The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, the motion is acceptable and we are thinking of supporting it. I imagine that if the Conservatives are prepared to back the NDP on something, it probably means that there is a certain logic to the motion.

I do not understand why the government is stubbornly refusing to work with us to settle the situation right now and not later, since we have the solution.

The Liberals are making producers lose thousands of dollars every month by telling them that they are going to study the matter a bit longer and that they will perhaps come up with something one day, after doing consultations and after producers lose more money.

Why not settle the problem right away? What solutions will the government put on the table? We have not heard any today.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would remind the member that if he has any other questions, he can always rise so we can give him the floor.

The hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

• (1555)

[English]

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: Madam Speaker, I believe I reiterated before that this is a very well worded motion. It is a no-brainer to me. Everyone can see what the solution is in the wording: a short-term solution that is very important, and it is actually becoming more and more urgent.

There is no political will. New Democrats know what needs to be done. If I were being extremely cynical, and I am trying not to be as I am new in the House, I would believe that there is no political will because somehow there is a ramification or layers somewhere when we talk about trade agreements perhaps. I hope that is not the case. I hope that those kinds of issues, if they are recognized, can be addressed in the long term and that right now the government will begin to recognize the urgency of doing this, or there will be no industry to address for the long term.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, the motion put forward by the member for Berthier—Maskinongé in the House today is incredibly important.

I want to give a shout-out to the hard-working farmers in my riding of Cowichan—Malahat—Langford. For those members in the House who do not know, the Cowichan Valley is worded after the first nations band that lives there, and it is referred to as the warm land. We have a beautiful climate on that part of Vancouver Island.

I am honoured to be a part-time farmer myself. My wife and I have a small, three-acre farm. It is very small scale compared to what some farmers go through, but it does give me a bit of insight into just how hard farmers work.

I could not be more honoured to be a member of Parliament who comes from a riding that supports farms and that has a real link between the people who buy produce and the people who produce it.

Let me look at the Liberal government's track record on this. I want to start off with the Speech from the Throne. Some hon. members have already mentioned that there was not one mention of the word "agriculture" in the Speech from the Throne. To me that signals a big omission. It signals that agriculture does not figure heavily in the government's view of going forward.

Following up on that, the budget released on March 22 devoted only a scant two pages to agriculture, and one of those pages simply mentioned the existing growing forward 2 program, which was launched in 2013. The budget devoted one out of two pages to mentioning a program that already exists, and that just does not signal to me that there is a serious commitment by the government.

Now, I do acknowledge that there are Liberal members of Parliament in the House and in the Conservative Party and the NDP who do care deeply about agriculture. We have heard a lot of passion in the House already, but when it comes down to actual action, that is for me what ultimately speaks louder than words.

We have heard the Minister of Agriculture in the House quite a few times. He has said that the government supports supply management, that it understands the importance of compensation, that he is fully aware of the problem, and that it is in discussions with the dairy industry. That is all well and good, but this problem has existed for a number of years now.

With respect to the Liberal MPs who do stand passionately on this issue, after six months of being in government it is time to stop blaming the Conservatives and to actually own up to the problem.

Some Liberal MPs are having trouble distinguishing between the legislative branch of government and the executive branch.

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The Minister of Agriculture is in charge of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. The Minister of Public Safety is in charge of the CBSA. We have two government agencies that have different views on the import of this substance. Nothing needs to actually be changed. We on this side of the House are simply asking that the government follow the rules that are already in place. It is a simple request.

The Liberals did promise during the election campaign to review the existing standards, rules, and practices regarding the import of food products, including dairy proteins, to ensure that they serve the interests of Canadians. Our motion is simply asking that they conform with that commitment made during the election.

I would also like to take some time to look more closely at the wording of our motion. Part (a) of the motion calls on the House to:

...recognize the magnitude of the economic losses to Canadian dairy producers from the importation of diafiltered milk from the United States, which totalled \$220 million in 2015;

That is \$220 million in just one year alone, or an average of \$15,000 per producer.

It has been said already in the House by my hon. colleague from Windsor—Tecumseh that diafiltered milk is designed to circumvent Canadian law, because when it comes into Canada it is imported as a concentrated milk protein and it is not subject to border fees. However, when producers of cheese use diafiltered milk in their product, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency regards it as the same as milk. It is treated by one agency as milk but by another agency as not milk.

• (1600)

We are simply calling for harmonization of these two views, and it is well within the capacity of the executive level of government, so it is time to stop beating around the bush, take some action, own up to the problem, and stop blaming the previous government for the issues.

In cheese-making, there needs to be a minimum percentage of protein sourced from milk. There are rules and regulations for how we make cheese in this country, but diafiltered milk and milk protein substances are less costly and they come from heavily subsidized milk.

The second part of the motion is “recognize that each day of government inaction contributes to the disappearance of a steadily increasing number of family farms across the country”. This is very true. For losses of this magnitude, small family farms are the ones that get hit the hardest. It is the big ones that are able to absorb these costs, and that has been a trend in Canada. We have seen the disappearance of the small family farm, and often those are the cornerstone of our communities. They certainly are in my community of Cowichan—Malahat—Langford.

Not all producers of cheese have access to diafiltered milk, so there is an imbalance there as well. The overall effect of not changing this policy is that we are using less Canadian milk in our cheese and dairy products. It is not working well for those hard-working dairy farmers across this country. It is a very unfair regulation, if we are not going to be changing it. I do not think we

want to become a country where only the biggest farms are able to survive and a family business is no longer profitable.

Part (c) of the motion is “recognize that the entire industry is standing together to call for the problem to be resolved immediately”. Earlier this year when I was at the Dairy Farmers of Canada reception, I noticed a lot of Liberal members of Parliament there. I noticed the Minister of Agriculture and the parliamentary secretary. It was all well and good for them to stand with the association then to get their pictures taken, but they completely ignore what the industry is calling for.

Wally Smith, who I am proud to say is from Vancouver Island, really close to where I live, said:

...all of Canada's dairy farmers speak with one voice on diafiltered milk. We are collectively disappointed with the lack of action on enforcement of the cheese standards.... The Government does not need to pass a new law or new regulation and the solution is simple. The Government needs to enforce the existing standards.

It is quite simple to me.

Part (d) of the motion calls upon the government “to keep its election promises and honour the commitments made since the start of its mandate [now six months long] by immediately enforcing the compositional standards”.

With respect to the Liberal MPs who moved an amendment to the motion, I agree with my colleague. It would have watered down what we are ultimately trying to do in the motion, and I agree that it was the right choice to disallow that amendment and go with what we are proposing on this side of the House.

On a final note, I want to note the importance in Canada of food security, and I would like to acknowledge the incredible work that the NDP has done on this issue for many years. We had Malcolm Allen and also Alex Atamanenko compile an important report called “Everybody eats: Our vision for a pan-Canadian food strategy”, and we recognize the importance of treating food security and agriculture in a holistic approach. We cannot look at it piecemeal. We have to see the system as a whole. That is what has been missing in Canada for many years. We lack a pan-Canadian food strategy.

One of the important parts of that is making sure that the government operates on a level playing field, that the law is equal for everyone, and that the laws that are in the books are actually being enforced. That is what gives producers in Canada peace of mind. It gives them the ability to produce their goods and to know that they have economic security.

In closing, I would like to say that I could not be prouder of the motion coming forward, and I am glad that the NDP is taking an initiative on this. We on this side of the House will be standing with our farmers.

• (1605)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have listened all day to the debate between the Conservatives and the NDP, and the many concerns they have raised. This issue was not created by the current government. It was the former Conservative government that allowed the issue to fester. As a result, we find ourselves in the situation we are in today.

Business of Supply

I do not recall the New Democrats raising the issue back when they were in the official opposition. I do not recall the former leader of the official opposition, the current leader of the third party, raising it back when it was starting to pick up ground. Where was the concern then with respect to farmers?

The Government of Canada has been forthright on the issue. We are saying that we support supply management. We are aware of the situation and we are working toward resolving it.

The member had the opportunity to support an amendment. Why did the New Democrats not support that? It is a very simple question.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Madam Speaker, I already answered that question during the course of my speech. I do not support a watered-down amendment. What our original motion calls for is the correct one.

The comments with respect to not handling this issue and that we inherited it from the Conservatives reminds me of the old rhyme: Liberal, Tory, same old story. Those parties are great at blaming each other but not taking any responsibility.

I do not care what was done in previous Parliaments. I am standing here right now in the 42nd Parliament trying to take action. However, I am not on the executive branch of government. It is up to it to take action.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am very disappointed by the comments my colleague just made. Up to that point, his intervention was not too bad.

He has to admit that the Conservatives did not invent diafiltered milk or create the problem producers are facing today, specifically that a product was specifically created to circumvent the rules. That is the problem.

When members on this side direct their attacks at us instead of the government, I feel like they are missing a good opportunity to try to convince the government to act right away for producers.

Why does the hon. member not direct his questions to the government benches? We are not the government anymore.

[*English*]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Madam Speaker, I will agree with my colleague that we have to keep the focus on the present government. I am trying to keep my comments to that subject.

I have highlighted this many times. Six months have gone by. It is time to stop living in the past and start living to the present. The NDP is trying to do that. We will continue to support that as the debate goes on in the House today.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Madam Speaker, there has been a lot of great debate in the House today. I am happy we are having it. However, farmers need action now. They are tired of promises. They are tired of talking about consultation and the work that is being done. We all know the solution. It will not cost anything. It just means the government has to do its job. I am sorry, but you guys have to stand up for Canadian farmers and ensure they have a livelihood and a future.

Therefore, could the hon. member talk about the importance of the government working and standing up for Canadian farmers? It is something that it has to do.

• (1610)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order, please. I would remind the member that she is to address her questions to the Chair and to not address the government as you.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Madam Speaker, my hon. friend knows this very well. She has done an excellent job on this file. She has asked a number of questions of the Minister of Agriculture on this. However, the answers we get are completely unacceptable. There is no ownership of responsibility with respect to laws and regulations needing to be changed. Rather, we simply need to follow the laws that exist on the books. We are looking for the government side to own up to the problem, fulfill its mandate, and work on behalf of Canadian agricultural producers.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, even though I have a lot to say, I will share my time with the member for Richmond—Arthabaska.

We have heard all kinds of things during today's debate. We heard some good things, but mostly rehashed talking points. The answers from the government side, regardless of who gave them, were always the same and obviously prepared beforehand. They were worded in such a way as to not really mean anything, so that no decision would be made. Unfortunately, that is the government's position: it does not want to make any decisions.

Sometimes, as members of Parliament, we need to learn to pipe down and listen. It is not always easy, because we parliamentarians tend to be quite loquacious. However, I decided to listen to dairy farmers from my riding and to let them speak. I asked them to tell me how I could defend their position today, and they answered.

I would like to read three short letters that describe what life is like for farmers in Mégantic—L'Érable.

The first letter says: “Dear Sir, There are many problems. As you know, farmers are busy people who work long hours every week. An 80-hour work week is a common occurrence. Given the abundance of both dairy farms and sugar bush operations in our area, these days [during maple-syrup season], we are working over 100 hours a week.” These are the people we are talking about today.

The letter goes on: “On top of balancing this workload with our family life, we must deal with stress, an overload of work, and loss of income at a critical period, brought on by [the difficult situation caused by the] diafiltered milk problem. We even have to fight to get the federal government to enforce its own laws. That, to me, is unacceptable.”

The producer goes on: “For many people, winter is a time to replenish their coffers before they need to spend large amounts on seeding and harvesting. Unfortunately, that was not possible this year. There is a record number of auctions taking place this spring, because people cannot afford to go on or have lost their love for agriculture.” That is alarming.

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The letter continues: “After defending our system...we now have to ensure that laws are enforced at the borders. Who knew that becoming a farmer meant choosing a life of poverty?”

I am moved when farmers from my riding write things like that.

She goes on to write: “We just want a decent income so that we can reinvest in the local economy and properly care for our animals. We are one of the most profitable industries in terms of money and jobs, and that is all without subsidies.”

That is wonderful; here is a system that lets people work without having to subsidize them.

In her words, “in 2015 we lost over \$15,000, and 2016 looks just as bad; \$15,000 is about the annual salary I pay myself.”

This is not a lot of money. We must keep that in mind.

She continues: “I am a young farmer, part of the next generation. I have all sorts of plans in my head that unfortunately I will have to put off. Farmers are fed up with being taken advantage of. It seems that everyone feels they can dip into our wallets without asking. The Conservatives promised compensation for losses from the [European Union agreement]. However this is not included in the federal budget. I can tell you that there will be a sharp increase in the number of farmers with depression. Farmers are at the end of their rope and feel discouraged. Classifying diafiltered milk as an ingredient is something that needs to be done yesterday [not after meetings or further consultations]. Drink a glass of that and tell me if it is milk”.

I will not, but it is a good question. Maybe we should get the processors to drink a glass of diafiltered milk so that they can see that it is not milk.

She closes by saying that, “Big companies are pocketing the cash, and taxpayers are seeing none of it. Considering how much profit they make in a year, I doubt they need even more to survive, but for us, this could be the straw that breaks the camel's back and forces us to shut down operations. This is an emergency. Thank you for fighting for us and for doing everything you can to make sure that this problem gets solved as soon as possible”.

That was a letter from Ms. Ruel in Saint-Ferdinand.

That is what is really going on behind the rhetoric. That was one of my constituents. I asked her to explain the reason for her distress, and she did. She shared her story so that members of Parliament would know what is going on. She opened her books and her heart.

• (1615)

At Ferme Kobert in Saint-Pierre-de-Broughton, Bertrand and Colette had this to say: “Our farm has been losing about \$4,000 per month since the beginning of the year because of this. It goes without saying that this situation is causing serious financial problems. We cannot pay our debts and our bills. We are putting off projects”.

They go on to say that, “By 2020, protein concentrates will have to find domestic buyers. All of the provinces will have to work together to find a solution”.

They add that, “A lot of farms could disappear. Do we still want family [dairy] businesses?”

That is what Bertrand and Colette of Saint-Pierre-de-Broughton want to know.

Alain Brassard is another producer in my riding. He and his brother, Yves, run a family farm with about a hundred cows. Alain and Yves are the sixth generation of Brassards on the land. They still believe in the future, and they are going to invest in their farm this year. There is even a seventh generation of the Brassard family waiting in the wings. They deserve our congratulations, and my colleagues have an opportunity here to show support for the Brassard family.

I had a good talk with Alain. He understands that, in a global market, things have to change. For him, the solution is simple: action is needed regarding the composition of cheese.

Producers can use two ingredients to make cheddar cheese: good cow's milk and milk ingredients. The latter can be concentrates, powders or isolates. They are all milk ingredients. However, they are not milk as we understand it. When making cheddar, the use of milk ingredients is limited to 17%. Therefore, usually, it has to have a milk content of at least 83%.

If consumers want to know whether the cheese they eat contains milk ingredients, they have to read the label. If the words “milk ingredients”, “milk substances”, or other synonyms are found on the label, that means that the cheese they are about to buy contains a maximum of 17% of milk ingredients. I urge everyone to read the labels.

Some cheesemakers in our regions make their cheeses only with milk, 100% Canadian milk. Unfortunately, the labels no longer tell us everything, since the introduction of diafiltered milk. There is a mysterious process that transforms diafiltered milk when it crosses the Canadian border.

When trucks full of diafiltered milk cross the border, the product is considered milk protein concentrate, so it is not subject to the supply management protection measures. However, when the same truck with the same diafiltered milk arrives at the factory, and no one has touched it, the concentrate suddenly becomes milk.

Processors use it the same way they use the milk produced by our farmers in our regions. It is not magic; it is more like the 12 labours of Hercules. Milk is milk. The Canada Border Services Agency does not consider it to be milk, but the Canadian Food Inspection Agency does. Try and understand that.

What does this mean for consumers who want to know what their cheese is made of? To the 17% of milk ingredients, processors can add a large quantity of American concentrate in the form of diafiltered milk, without having to indicate it on the label. It is therefore impossible to know whether our cheddar is made from 100% Canadian milk or not, because milk is milk, but it is not milk according to the federal government. It might be, but no one knows anymore.

To come back to Alain Brassard's farm, he is simply asking that the compositional standards for cheese that were put in place by the Conservative government be upheld.

It is a vicious circle: diafiltered milk creates a surplus among our dairy producers, and those surpluses are the responsibility of the same producers who must process it into milk concentrate and then sell it at a lower price. It is nothing but bad news for dairy producers.

The Brassard farm's request is simple: enforce the minimum percentage of Canadian milk in cheddar, which is 83%, as well as the compositional standards for cheese.

There you have three stories that clearly demonstrate that this is a very serious issue. We are not here only to debate. We are here to stand up for our farmers. I hope the government will take action as soon as possible.

• (1620)

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Madam Speaker, I commend my colleague on his speech, which was based on the testimony of real people who earn their living from this industry. I give him credit for working so well with the people who elected him.

Since my colleague joined the party that was in power a few months earlier, I cannot help but think that he had conversations with the bigwigs of his party before the election about solutions to this glaring problem.

What changes would my colleague make? He must know, since he lives in an area where lots of people talk to him about this, and he has colleagues who were in government. What needs to be done? The plants that produce diafiltered milk, near the U.S. border, certainly were not built yesterday, or on October 19.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, what a great question.

There are definitely solutions and things that need to be done. It is quite simple. The Conservatives set a cheese compositional standard whereby our cheddar cheese must be composed of 83% milk and 17% milk products. Even the farmers want that.

Accordingly, this Conservative measure currently in effect should simply be respected. We must ensure that the people at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and at the Canada Border Services Agency talk to one another so that they agree that milk is milk, and even if it is not milk. You know what I am trying to say, but they do not seem to get it.

[*English*]

Mrs. Alaina Lockhart (Fundy Royal, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am listening to the debate with interest today and I thank the member for bringing the matter forward to the House of Commons so that we have the opportunity to debate it today.

I represent the riding of Fundy Royal, which is considered the dairy centre of the Maritimes. I have talked to farmers and I understand this is a very significant issue, as does our government.

I would like to ask the member opposite if he could explain something to me.

I also sit on the agriculture committee, and yesterday we had witnesses there from the Dairy Farmers of Canada as well as from the Canadian Young Farmers' Forum. They were there to testify. However, because of the conversation that was dragged on by both

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the Conservative and NDP members of the committee, we did not get to hear from those witnesses.

I would like to hear if he has an explanation as to why we are not able to talk to them when they are there.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, in baseball, we call that a meatball, and I am going to hit a home run.

No one was able to speak yesterday because the government imposed a gag order and no one could do anything. We cancelled our meeting of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. We had to turn witnesses away in committee as well, because we had to rush back here. The government was so keen to fix a problem that does not exist. That is the truth.

An hon. member: Yes, yes, yes!

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague. This is a serious matter, and when constituents take the time to write to an MP, we know it is a very serious consideration. I would like to thank my colleague for reading out those letters, because those are the people we need to hear from.

I would like to ask my colleague how serious it is in his riding, because when one gets three letters, there is obviously a mountain of opposition because it is not being moved more quickly than it is.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, this is a serious issue in my riding.

Producers would come to me about this issue every week before and after the election campaign, and they still do today. I set up a committee with them to monitor the government and to ensure that it fixes the problem.

We are here to represent our producers and our constituents. People put their trust in us to find a solution to their problems. They do not want us to continue importing concentrated American milk. The rules are being circumvented to replace our producers' milk.

I am very proud to represent my constituents. I will rise on their behalf in the House at every opportunity I get.

• (1625)

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will take this time today to share with my esteemed colleagues in the House a major problem affecting many of Canada's dairy farmers, including quite a few in my own riding of Richmond—Arthabaska.

First, I appreciate that this is a complex issue for some, and that the government is working with the Border Services Agency, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, and the Canadian Dairy Commission to solve the problem.

However, it is now time for the government to act, to address once and for all the ambiguity surrounding the problem of the inappropriate use of certain milk proteins, namely diafiltered milk, in the compositional standards for cheese.

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I may not be a farmer or an agricultural expert like my colleague from Lévis—Lotbinière, who by the way delivered quite a speech and masterfully answered questions from the other members before me, from the other side of the House, but one thing is certain: I am very much aware of the magnitude of the repercussions from the inappropriate use of milk proteins for dairy farmers across Canada.

Furthermore, during the recent election campaign and since my election, I have had numerous meetings with associations, farmers, professionals, retailers and Canadians interested in the issue to gain further insight into the problem.

To the many stakeholders listening in, I gave my word that I would do my level best to put as much pressure on the government as necessary to resolve this issue once and for all.

I realize that the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food might have a hard time getting the Prime Minister to understand how important this issue is, particularly considering that there is no mention of agriculture in either the throne speech or the budget. This deliberate omission, combined with the government's lack of interest in this file since coming to power, makes it clear that this issue is not exactly at the top of the government's agenda.

I will therefore do my best to provide a clear, detailed, concise summary of the reasons why the Prime Minister, or at least his Minister of Agriculture, must show leadership on this file.

First of all, the use of milk proteins has a negative impact that is destabilizing the dairy sector, a key sector in Canada's economy. With \$3.6 billion per year in tax revenue and 215,000 full-time equivalent jobs, the value of Canada's dairy sector to our economy is incalculable.

Diafiltered milk imports cost Canada's economy more than \$200 million per year. In central Quebec, 835 farms are losing an average of \$15,000 each. These farms employ 5,600 people directly and indirectly.

When we take a closer look at what the Dairy Farmers of Canada, the Producteurs de lait du Québec or the Union des producteurs agricoles are asking for, we realize that their request is far from being excessive or unreasonable.

I wholeheartedly support their demands and I call for quick action on this matter. All they want is for current regulations to be enforced, which means treating diafiltered milk as what it is: a dairy ingredient in cheese that cannot go beyond a certain percentage in the product.

Currently, we have a strong system thanks to supply management, which is based on three important pillars: a farm gate price that ensures a fair price for farmers based on production costs; a milk supply that matches the demand, commonly referred to as "quotas"; and import control based on tariff quotas.

When those three conditions are met, the dairy sector can perform adequately and its viability is ensured without any additional financial support from the government. This is especially important when we consider the deficit the government is running.

However, when one of the pillars becomes unstable, the whole system becomes vulnerable. That is exactly what is happening right now. The third pillar, import control, is starting to crack.

As I mentioned at the outset, I appreciate how complex this issue is for some and that there are many stakeholders involved. That being said, I think the government has held enough consultations and it is time to act.

In addition to the numerous consultations held with farmers and the multitude of presentations made on the subject, the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food studied the specific matter of milk protein on March 9 and heard the following witnesses:

● (1630)

Dominique Benoit, senior vice-president of institutional affairs and communication with the Agropur co-operative; Alain Bourbeau, director general of the Fédération des producteurs de lait du Québec; Caroline Emond, executive director of the Dairy Farmers of Canada; and Peter Gould, general manager and chief executive officer of the Dairy Farmers of Ontario.

What I conclude is that consultations are all well and good, but sooner or later, action is needed. The time has come to take action.

On behalf of all dairy producers in Canada, the farmers in my riding, and consumers who are being misinformed by the government in this case about the ingredients in the products they are consuming, I urge the minister to provide direction immediately on this issue.

It is time to stop this dishonest practice regarding Canada's system of supply management once and for all and reassure Canada's farmers that the government is there for them and the next generation does not need to worry about being abandoned.

In the specific case of diafiltered milk, why are we allowing the use of milk protein in the manufacturing of our cheeses here in Canada when the United States will not even use it, even though that is where it comes from? If it is not good enough for them, why should we eat it?

It is just common sense. I wonder why I should even have to rise today with my NDP and Conservative Party colleagues to speak to this issue that seems so obvious and requires only the Liberals' political will to be resolved.

I entered politics to influence the development of our beautiful country and contribute in a constructive manner. I also have faith in our democracy. I leave partisan politics aside and act in the interest of the public and my constituents.

If we want our country to remain strong and prosperous, then we must provide appropriate support for the sector that is the foundation of every society in the world: agriculture.

We must provide our farming families with certainty so that they can continue to use their ingenuity to create a world-class agri-food economy for all Canadians. These individuals are hard workers who depend a great deal on the government's decisions right now, and for that reason it is essential to maintain their trust.

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That being said, today it is time for the government to stop hiding behind consultations and start listening to the recommendations and taking action, because like it or not, a responsible government is in office to take action and not stall.

Today, farmers need to regain their momentum, and the elected members of the House have the power and the duty to help them do that by enforcing the existing rules.

It is the government's responsibility to do so and, as the saying goes, the government must walk the talk.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the words of the member. He indicated that he is here to advocate for the dairy industry's best interests and to do it in an apolitical fashion.

A Liberal member put forward an amendment that I believe would in fact be in the best interests of the industry. We could pass that motion if as many members as possible voted in favour of it.

If he is true to his words and believes that this particular motion, as amended, would receive broader support from the House, thereby giving more support to the industry, would he not recommend that the NDP give its consent and allow us to have a vote on this commitment?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Madam Speaker, I believe that no amendment is required. What this motion calls for is quite simple.

It is simply a matter of enforcing the law. We have to ensure that the Canada Border Services Agency and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency do their jobs and enforce the standards to ensure that milk is milk and milk proteins are milk proteins. It is not complicated.

All we need is some political will on the part of this majority government. It has every authority to make this change.

• (1635)

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his answer.

I am pleased that the Conservative Party recognizes that the Liberals' amendment says absolutely nothing. Basically, they wanted to delete the motion and replace it with what the Liberals do best: empty words that say nothing.

I was perhaps hard on my Conservative colleagues this morning, but I will thank them for that in the hope, of course, that I will not be taken to task back home for such comments.

All joking aside, why does my colleague think the Liberals are trying to amend our motion so it no longer says anything? Why do the Liberals want to throw in the towel and not do what is so simple and what producers want: enforce the law?

Mr. Alain Rayes: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his kind words and especially for his question.

Honestly, I do not understand. I wish I had an answer to his question, but it makes no sense. This is extremely simple. All we

want is for the government to enforce the law. Everyone here wants to work to ensure that our producers can earn a living and operate on a level playing field. We want our agriculture sector, which is the very foundation of our society and an economic driver across Canada, to be able to sustain us, provide jobs, and drive the economy. Right now, all we need to do is adopt this motion so that we can move on to other things. There are all kinds of other issues we should be working on right now.

I completely agree. We should not accept this amendment from the government.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Madam Speaker, I congratulate my colleague from Richmond—Arthabaska on his excellent speech and the work he does for dairy producers in his riding and across Canada.

Today, he had the opportunity to participate in this very important debate. Like me, he heard meaningless speeches by government members, who show no concern for this issue and never offered even a hint of a solution.

Can my colleague tell us what he thought about the speeches he heard from the government members?

Mr. Alain Rayes: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

It gives me a chance to go back to the previous question. I was asked why I thought the Liberals wanted to amend the motion. I simply think that they are managing this file in a partisan manner and they want to drag things out, nothing more. They probably feel very frustrated that this did not come from them. Right now, we are at a point where we have to stop talking and start taking action. There is only one thing to do, and that is to make sure the law is enforced, period.

[*English*]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, one of the joys of being a member of Parliament is that one gets to learn about issues that one might not otherwise be aware of if not for being in this place.

In my case, I have been learning a little bit about diafiltered milk, having met with the Dairy Farmers of Canada earlier this year, and now through this very well-worded, specific, concrete motion that has been brought to the House on how to actually fix this situation.

The problem, as I understand it, is that there are rules for the composition of cheese in Canada, but certain milk proteins, such as diafiltered milk, are being used and counted against the allotment for actual milk when in fact they are not milk.

How do we know the diafiltered product is not milk? It is because the Canada Border Services Agency says it is not milk and does not charge duties on it as it does on milk.

This is really just an instance of government needing to appreciate and understand its own clearly written rules for the importation of milk proteins. The government needs to recognize that and then follow through on it when it comes to the way our cheese is produced.

Business of Supply

When the government fails to do that, as it has been, it means that there is competitive pressure to use the cheaper product. It is cheaper because it can be imported without being subject to the same duties as other milk. When that is counted against the quota for milk, it means that Canadian milk, which would otherwise be used for that purpose, is at a competitive disadvantage.

Therefore, all we are asking is that the rules be fairly enforced so that Canadian producers can sell the milk they produce, milk that actually meets the requirements, and get the economic benefit so that those dollars that are being spent can be reinvested in Canadian communities instead of shipped out to the United States. I think that is a laudable goal.

Incidentally, this is why I am often concerned when we talk about larger trade agreements, and there is mention of those here. It is because those agreements tend to tighten the noose, whether it is on Canadian producers in the agricultural sector or on other Canadian workers. In similar ways, those agreements create competitive pressures that either price those Canadian goods out of the market or cause the work and the jobs essentially to leave Canada.

Although it works in a different way, we are seeing something similar in the TPP with the provisions on temporary foreign workers. There are pressures created by allowing companies to bring in workers who can be sent back at any point by their employer and who are therefore concerned about complaining about their wages or working conditions. In this way, downward pressure is created on the expectations of Canadian workers. It is just one more way in which certain kinds of trade agreements end up not benefiting Canadians.

They are not benefiting Canadians, or at least Canadian workers and producers. There may be some few Canadians at the top who make obscene amounts of money because of market access, but if it is not being spread around, I have not only wondered about it but I have also not been able to answer the question of why we should get excited about supporting agreements that may produce enormous amounts of wealth for a select few Canadians while putting many other Canadians out of work or forcing them to work for lower wages and lower benefits.

I think this point is important when the government says that it wants to support supply management. Certainly we heard for a long time from Liberal members in the Canadian Wheat Board debate that they were supporters of supply management for Canadian wheat farmers. However, it is not just about what legislation one brings to the House, but also about what else one is doing. One's right hand has to be talking to one's left hand, and vice versa.

Here is an example of a government that says it supports supply management but then turns a blind eye to the enforcement of its own regulations, the practical implication of which is to undercut Canadian supply-managed producers. If the Liberals want to say they support supply management, that is one thing, but if they want to do something about it, they could pass this motion and follow through on it, because that is what supporting supply management really looks like. It looks like undertaking to do things, particularly the easiest things, which in this case means that the government should enforce its own regulations to make sure that it is not putting Canadian producers at an unreasonable competitive disadvantage.

● (1640)

That is why I was disappointed to see that Liberals members are not standing to support this motion. My understanding is that it was one of their election commitments. They said that within 100 days of being elected, they would solve this problem because it is an easy problem to solve and just requires enforcing.

Members can imagine how they came to have it as an election commitment because when this kind of thing comes into a war room, people are discussing it and saying, "So all we have to do is enforce our own standards? Yes, make that promise. That is an easy one. We can do that. That is no problem."

I do not understand how it became so difficult to enforce just because they won the election. It was an easy commitment to make, because it is the right thing to do. It is a matter of simply enforcing regulations that are already on the books. It is mysterious to me why we are not already doing that.

In case members are worrying that I am going on at length and they are going to have to listen to me for a full 20 minutes, I would like to let you know, Madam Speaker, that I will be splitting my time with the member for Windsor West. I will put the members in the House at ease by letting them know that I will be splitting my time and that this is not a 20-minute speech. I could go on, but I will not.

However, when one is making a good argument about something important, one needs to make sure that everything gets said and that it gets said well. Sometimes it takes time to do that. Thankfully, today it will not take too long, because I know the member for Windsor West is excited to make good arguments as well.

What is really the issue is one of those things that boggles the mind, because it is simple. It was a clear election commitment. It is about enforcing regulations that are already on the books. We already have the capacity to do this. It simply means keeping money in Canada and standing up for Canadian producers instead of standing up for American producers and allowing that money to go elsewhere.

We have heard from producers themselves that this is something they want. My understanding is that not only the producers who make the milk but also those who make the cheese want it. Everyone is on the same page. The only people who are not are the American producers and the Liberal government.

I just do not understand how they are the ones getting together on this issue. Why do the Liberals not stand up and vote with the rest of Canadians who are concerned about this issue? Then we can move forward and talk about all the many other issues that need to be discussed.

With that, I will finish.

● (1645)

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Intergovernmental Affairs), Lib.): Madam Speaker, part of the challenge we face is that for the last decade the law has not been enforced. The official opposition can cry all it wants about this, but it is literally crying over spilled milk. If it had done anything on this file in 10 years, we would not be having this dispute today.

Business of Supply

Now we find ourselves in the situation of having imports that are quite obviously in contravention of rules and we are trying to figure out how to exit from that situation, which was what the promise was. If we read what the promise was, we see that it was to resolve the issue. It was not as described by the member opposite.

I understand how they can draw the same conclusion as to the result we are trying to get to, but the process we promised, which is important, was that we would resolve this issue.

In light of the fact there are cheese producers in Quebec and in other parts of this country that are currently under contract and involved in trade where this really wrong practice has been allowed to be moved forward, do they not recognize that exiting out of this situation, rather than just simply enforcing a regulation and cutting off supply to cheesemakers and to the people employed in that industry, requires us to evolve a solution to ensure that we do not disrupt every company in the process and that we get to the right place in the right way, so that we have a permanent solution to this problem, rather than just simply throwing enforcement at the issue?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, I would say two things in reply.

First, a little over six months ago, if the Liberals were saying anything about this, it was that if the previous government was not enforcing it, that was a case for a new government. Canadians have a new government now, and I think they want some follow-through.

With respect to the promise, from what I have seen, I would say the Liberals have been masters, as they were in the election campaign—and we are seeing the truth of it now that they are in government—of putting a promise on paper. We have seen it with the Prime Minister saying about door-to-door delivery, “Do not pay attention to what I said. Go read the fine print on the website.” We have seen it with public servants, who had an expectation that they would be treated with respect through Bill C-5 and the removal of the legislative mechanism to enforce a solution, but the Liberals came back to the bargaining table with the same offer.

The Liberals have been masters of creating promises that in the letter were very limited but in the spirit and in the impression that they made in the minds of Canadians were quite significant.

This would be another issue on which I think they created an expectation and are now saying, “Read the fine print.”

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would say to the hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona that one does not get to that stature without drinking a little bit of milk. Strengthen those bones.

A lot of people in here know me for the work that I do on the defence committee, but from 2006 to 2008 in the 40th Parliament, I served as chair of the agriculture committee. I was a beef cattle operator before politics. Before BSE, I ran a livestock export company that predominantly moved dairy cattle. I can tell members that protecting supply management is critical to the success of our dairy farms right across this country. That is why our processors need to work with our dairy farmers to get the products they need rather than going in the back door and trying to violate the import system and bringing in derivative products as we are seeing right now and undermining our overall supply management system.

I am proud to support the motion that is before the House today.

• (1650)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, I am going to divine a question out of that and proceed to answer it.

An hon. member: Choose one.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the compliment. It is better than trying to create a compliment out of a question, so I appreciate being in the position of having to create a question out of a compliment.

An hon. member: A campaign promise.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: That heckle worked. I don't know what you said but it threw me off. Points to you, sir.

Madam Speaker, the problem is that our cheese is being watered down and the problem with the Liberal amendment is that watering down the motion is not the way to solve the problem of watering down the cheese.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Before resuming debate, first of all, I just want to remind members that they need to talk to the Chair.

Second, there are people who want to get up and ask questions on this and I would really appreciate it if members could try and keep their questions short so we can get in as many questions as possible on this. I see there is a lot of interest. Please keep the questions as short as possible, otherwise I will rise and members will not get a chance to ask their questions.

[*Translation*]

Order.

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 Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, National Defence; the hon. member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, The Senate; the hon. member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, Justice.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Windsor West.

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to such an important motion for all of our country. The motion not only relates to the specifics of dairy farming, but it also relates to the trade agreement we are entering into and the welfare of Canadian citizens from coast to coast to coast.

It is important to note that we believe in trade, but it has to be responsible and fair trade. Those are key elements that are missing from the TPP on many fronts. It is also one of those things that could undermine generations of contributions, planning, and infrastructure development to create an industry that could be exposed to a system outside of Canada that has an advantage, but there is a disadvantage for us, because we take account of humane and environmental standards and have a system with the highest standards in the world.

Business of Supply

We have a lot to be proud of in that system. It is about a country choosing one of the basic nutritious products and converting it into goods that Canadians can purchase and rely upon to be healthy, stable, and predictable. Canadians want to know that when they go about their purchasing, when deciding what to buy and when to buy. Now, that could all be turned upside down, and likely will be under this agreement.

I live in a border town. In fact, 40% of Canada's daily trade goes through my riding, the two kilometres along the Detroit River. There is the Detroit-Windsor tunnel, the CP rail tunnel, and the Ambassador Bridge. There is a hazardous waste ferry that crosses the river as well. Ironically, some of the goods and services we trade have to go through a hazardous waste materials check even if they are empty, because there are remnants in those containers.

I will return to the motion later, but I want to talk about the cultural experience we have.

Some people shop in the U.S. when our dollar is at an advantage, but they often do not know the differences, aside from taste, between American and Canadian milk. What they do not understand as well is that the milk industry in the United States is heavily subsidized by the U.S. government, from the farm and contributions from development marketing all the way to the grocery store.

It sounds attractive to go there to buy cheap milk, but what some Canadians do not understand is that milk is not the same as Canadian milk. They put in additives and preservatives to extend the shelf life. U.S. milk is very different from the Canadian milk on our shelves. It has not been tested as rigorously and has not gone through some of the approval processes that are necessary in Canada to ensure the health and vibrancy of the product.

Milk, as a kind of signature product, is crucial for families across Canada. It is interesting though, because there are other industries that are at risk, where many nations have strategic plans. Some of those at-risk industries and areas include the auto industry, property rights, foreign takeovers, rights and Internet freedoms, and affordability of prescription medicines.

This one is also very important, because quite literally, what will become an issue for our water and food supply in the future will be food security. Food security, at the end of the day, means the protection of good resources for Canadians so they can purchase goods and raise their families versus the situation right now. It could be a very short gain to bring in other products at the expense of this industry, which was promised protection and supports. We were supposed to get action quickly, within a matter of days here in the House of Commons, but it never happened.

We put at risk all the investment we have put forward. We put that at risk that investment for a short cut in the short term, and we will never recover in the long term.

• (1655)

I point to other examples in the world where we have seen governments take the short cut thinking it will save consumers, will save things, and will allow things to be better, but it has not been the case.

Most notably, look at what is taking place in London, England, and other municipalities with regard to the privatization of water. Water is one of the key elements for many of the products that are delivered at the end of the day. They have actually been seeking and securing the return of those elements, after they have privatized those facilities.

I worry about dairy farmers and others. Once we lose these elements, how do we get them back? We have a tough enough time to convince young people to stay in farming and carry the family legacy. We are talking massive investments for farmers and their families for the operations necessary to produce a product. That product, at the end of the day, is crucial for our Canadian citizens and our independence. We do not want to rely upon others for those resources.

I will give a quick example from the auto sector of how this poor judgment and the lack of competition can result in real problems. Specifically, it is the Takata air bags. Because of consolidation and lack of competition, the air bags virtually became the air bags for North American automobiles. There were problems. We did not have the same problems in Canada, but they are produced in the same places with the same logistics and the same products go into those air bags. Six people died because the air bags deployed and shrapnel killed them. Now we are in the process of recall. Defective bags are still being put into cars because they do not have a solution just yet and they cannot replace them in all the cars. We did that by dependence.

What happens if we lose this industry and we do not have the independence to resume it? I think that is critical, because all that investment we have made over the years does not seem to be worthwhile at the end of the day.

I have seen it before with respect to economic development where there are some businesses that we would call loss leaders for the full advantage of the overall plan. I have seen that with the auto sector. We have gone from number two to number ten in auto manufacturing, because the auto sector was the sacrificial lamb of NAFTA. That is why we lost the Auto Pact which was developed in the 1960s and created much of the prosperity and continues to be a cornerstone in the Canadian economy, despite the challenges. This could happen with the dairy sector as well.

The motion says, "recognize the magnitude of the economic losses to Canadian dairy producers from the importation of diafiltered milk from the United States, which totalled \$220 million in 2015".

There is a simple example of unfairness applied, because CBSA at the border allows some of it. It becomes uncompetitive because of the laws we have and the lack of interest to actually apply them. The government was good at promising a review. It was supposed to deliver a review and a solution. It has not delivered. How do we invest in this industry right now that is so critical when all it is going to do is bring uncertainty?

Business of Supply

•(1700)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there is nothing like sending an issue from the first stomach to the second stomach, regurgitating it to chew on the cud, sending it back to the second stomach, leaving it there and then milking it for all it is worth without ever letting it get to the last stomach to be digested.

Indeed, while the Conservative record is an “udder” failure, the member's own retirement-age New Democratic Party intellectual mastication on such an important grassroots issue is entirely reminiscent of cow pie.

The last government left this issue with so many holes in it, it might as well be Swiss cheese. It certainly is not Canadian cheese. However, we are working on a properly filtered solution. The answers are coming. We need not ruminate on it until the cows come home.

Mr. Brian Masse: Madam Speaker, I am just embarrassed by that. We have real people who have invested generations on something, who are wanting to voice an intelligent debate in this House of Commons, and that is what we get? Is that the best they can do? It is shameful.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Madam Speaker, let us say it outright: dairy farmers are paying the price for government inaction. Foreign companies violate our rules. Canadian laws are circumvented. The government is failing to ensure that Canadian laws are upheld. Regulations on cheese composition are not enforced. The Quebec National Assembly needs to bring the federal government into line and demand that it do its job.

Throughout the debate I have heard the current Liberal government blame the Conservatives, who in turn blame the Liberals.

Does my colleague not agree that we need to know who is in charge? Are the Americans the ones with the real power on this file?

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Masse: Madam Speaker, in this trade agreement, there are lots of things that we would give up. The American interest was clear in many cases and has been exposed.

One of the things I am most close to is the auto industry in this deal, and I will give a quick example on that. The Americans worked independently to get an exemption for the automotive sector of 20 years. Canada had to do that alone, despite an integrated market, and we got five years. The U.S. got 20 years of phasing in and Canada got five years. Malaysia got 12 years. We were outdone by Malaysia. Think of that.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, part (c) of our motion recognizes that the entire industry is standing together to call for the problem to be resolved immediately.

I just want to draw the attention of my colleague from Windsor West to the quote from Mr. Peter Gould, who is the general manager and chief executive officer of the Dairy Farmers of Ontario. He said, “[E]ffective border control is the foundation of a successful supply

management system, of a strong domestic dairy industry, and that is the pillar in supply management that the federal government has the sole responsibility for”.

I wonder if my colleague can comment on the fact that it is lamentable that not only is the dairy association standing up, but so is the legislative branch standing up to the executive and reminding it of its responsibilities.

•(1705)

Mr. Brian Masse: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for the excellent question. That is how unified this is with regard to the concerns, because so much is at stake. Once we actually lose our competitive ability to have safe, viable products, we then become vulnerable from that. There are also other side things that take place, and the member is right to point out the border.

I would argue that there is another one, and that is cheese. We have seen that with pizzas being shipped in and getting through the screens. Canadian cheese producers have been losing a lot of money over the years because of this import element. They have a loophole and they send it through in a cheaper and unregulated way.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind the member before I acknowledge him, that at 5:15 I will have to interrupt the debate.

Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today to address a very important issue. There is no doubt that there are hard feelings and a lot of passion for dairy farmers. It is a very difficult time, and that difficult time has not just been for the last days but for the last number of years. There have been certain activities, which we have heard a great deal about all day today, that have been causing a great deal of frustration.

I have had the opportunity to visit dairy farms in the past, and I believe in supply management. I believe in the quality of product that Canada's dairy farmers have produced for many years. I would ultimately argue it is some of the best, if not the best, product in the world. In good part, it is because of the whole supply management system, something which the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and other members have talked eloquently about, not only about how important it is to the Liberal Party but to the Government of Canada.

I am very much in tune with the threat to the industry, but it is important to recognize that the issue we are talking about today is before us because three or four years ago, the then Conservative government decided to stand by and ignore the law in essence. It allowed for this to take place. It has come to the point where there is a lot of stress and anxiety within the dairy industry, and it wants action to be taken.

Business of Supply

Yes, Liberals were elected six months ago, and it took a month for the transition of power. Yes, we have been in government now for five months, and we have accomplished a great deal in that time. A month or so ago, someone in a restaurant said to me, “Kevin, the current Prime Minister has done more in three months for Canada than the previous prime minister did in 10 years.” We are moving forward on a multitude of fronts, and we recognize that this issue is very important. We truly care about the farming community, particularly the stress on dairy farmers.

As the member for Vaughan—Woodbridge pointed out, it is not as simple as saying that we should stop it right now, today. It just cannot be done. It has to work its way through. We understand that, and I believe the Conservatives understand that. I do not know about the understanding of the New Democrats. It can be very difficult to understand their thinking process at times. However, they were the official opposition when this issue first came up, and there was not a word. I did not hear the leader of the official opposition talk about it when he could have asked dozens of questions every day or used one of the numerous opposition days.

The dairy farmers came to Ottawa, asked the NDP caucus to get more engaged, and the New Democrats brought forward the motion. I applaud them for bringing forward the motion. Let us have a healthy debate today, but do not try to give the impression that New Democrats are the only ones who care about the dairy industry, because that is a false impression. I can say that Liberal members, the Liberal caucus, and this government cares about the dairy industry, and that is why we are working with the stakeholders to try to resolve the problem.

When the government and both opposition parties had the opportunity to listen to what the dairy farmers and the industry had to say the other day in committee, what did the opposition parties do? They filibustered and prevented the industry representatives from making presentations on that important industry.

An hon. member: Shame.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, my colleague is right. Shame on the opposition parties for doing that.

Then, a member of the Liberal government put forward an amendment that I would have thought would have been perceived as good for the industry. It was something that would have actually made a difference. It showed that all members of the House are concerned. I believe that members who have been debating this particular issue are genuinely concerned about the dairy industry. What did the Liberal Party, the government, and this Liberal member do? They put forward an amendment.

• (1710)

What was the amendment? It said that the House should recognize the magnitude of the economic losses to Canadian dairy producers from the importation of diafiltered milk, which has steadily increased over the last number of years.

That is a fact. Everyone of us agrees with that. It went on to say that the House should recognize that the industry is calling for the problem to be resolved.

We on this side of the House know that, and if they would have allowed the representative to speak the other day, they would have heard—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We have a point of order.

The hon. member for Beloeil—Chambly.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Madam Speaker, in accordance with the rule of relevance, I would like to ask my colleague to be honest and to tell the truth, which is that, in fact, their amendment—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): That is not a point of order.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I am disappointed. The member might not like what I am saying, but at least allow me to say it. That is definitely not a point of order.

The second point was to recognize that the industry is calling for the problem to be resolved.

Had the New Democrats and Conservatives allowed those representatives to present at committee, they would have heard some comments in regard to what we are debating today, but they chose to filibuster and not allow the representatives to state their concerns to the government standing committee, which has members from all parties on the committee.

It went on to say that government should work together with the industry to find a long-term, sustainable solution.

This is something which ultimately—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Sorry, there is a point of order.

The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, I believe that the hon. member is debating an amendment that is not on the floor of the House. If he would like to—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind the members that there is some latitude when individuals are debating, and therefore the member is speaking to the question.

Resuming debate, the hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I can appreciate that the NDP used the word “shame” earlier. The members should feel shameful of their behaviour in terms of trying to be transparent and straightforward on what is such an important issue.

We have recognized that, and we have been advocating that we need to develop a long-term solution that is workable. That is something which the Minister of Agriculture and other ministers of this government, in fact the agricultural committee and others ultimately want to see.

At the end of the day, we recognize the valuable contributions that our dairy industry provides to all Canadians from coast to coast to coast. As I indicated, the quality of product that comes from our dairy producers is second to no other in the world, and it is something in which Liberals will continue to fight for to ensure that we do have a healthy industry going forward.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It being 5:15 p.m., pursuant to an order made earlier today, all questions necessary to dispose of the opposition motion are deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, May 3, 2016, at the expiry of the time provided for oral questions.

• (1715)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I believe if you were to canvass the House, you would likely find unanimous consent to see the clock at 5:30 p.m.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Do we have unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.) moved that Bill C-242, an act to amend the Criminal Code (inflicting torture), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Madam Speaker, I stand today to formally address my private member's bill, Bill C-242, an act to amend the Criminal Code (inflicting torture).

After being drawn ninth in the private members' bill lottery, I felt a responsibility to take advantage of this good fortune by putting forward a meaningful reform. I might have sought for a particular cause to be given special recognition or to have a forgotten historical event commemorated. Such initiatives certainly have their place, yet I felt the need to go in a different direction.

Bill C-242 is a human rights bill that aims to add a torture offence to the Canadian Criminal Code.

Article 5 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights states, "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

While a torture offence exists in section 269.1 of the Criminal Code, it only applies to acts perpetrated by state officials. Equivalent acts that would otherwise be defined as torture but committed by private individuals acting outside of state authority are instead typically considered to constitute the offence of aggravated assault under section 268. The proposed reform will pertain to those acts of

Private Members' Business

brutality that may be life-threatening and far exceed instances of aggravated assault, a charge that can apply to serious and trivial acts of violence. Section 268 is therefore insufficient.

Torturers aim to rob individuals of their dignity through the intentional and repeated infliction of severe pain, suffering and humiliation over a prolonged period of time for the purpose of intimidation and coercion. These actions have no place in a free, open and democratic society such as Canada.

For critics, the current charges available in the Criminal Code have been said to be sufficient. They believe that existing laws can adequately be applied when torture offences take place. I have already mentioned aggravated assault. Other possibilities include assault, assault with a weapon or causing bodily harm, sexual assault offences, and aggravated sexual assault.

Judges indeed may have the ability to impose sentences that account for aggravating factors when the offence has had a particularly difficult impact on the victim. I understand this argument, but do not accept it. True, it does not deny that torture committed in the private realm can happen, yet it also implies the problem is exaggerated and that existing laws are good enough. Tell that to the victims of torture.

Existing offences are in place and can be used to prosecute perpetrators, I agree. However, they are inadequate because they do not acknowledge that torture has been endured, unspeakable acts, heinous acts, acts so terrible that everyone in the House would be left shaking their heads in absolute disgust. A gap in our Criminal Code therefore exists. Ignoring it does a disservice to the victims of torture.

I will only point to a few examples, and there are many others, that have occurred in recent years. The details while difficult are important.

In 2006, a Calgary man was made to take off his clothes and had his hands and feet tied with cables. He was then left to hang from ceiling joists while his torturers punched, cut and whipped him with a belt before spraying him with butane. This happened over a period of days. Two individuals were found responsible. The first was a youth who could not be sentenced in adult court. The second pleaded guilty to assault with a weapon, and a mere two years was given in what amounted to an example of torture.

In 2008, a Brampton man had his toe cut off, was beaten with a bat, cut multiple times with salt rubbed in his wounds, and had a plastic bag put over his head. This took place over several hours and seemed to have been done with the intent of obtaining information about a theft. The individual who carried out the action was found guilty of aggravated assault and forcible confinement and given a sentence of less than 10 years. The more appropriate choice would have been torture, because that is what took place. In fact, the judge used the word "torture" to describe the victim's experience.

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• (1720)

In 2010, Dustin Paxton beat, starved, burned, and cut off the lip and part of the tongue of his victim in a well-known Alberta case. This seemed to have happened for perhaps as long as two years. While a dangerous offender designation was assigned by the courts, Paxton was charged with aggravated and sexual assault even though torture more properly captures what happened.

I have one final example. I received a call to my constituency office recently from a woman who told me that she lived through some of the most despicable actions that anyone could imagine. Her childhood was so terrible that she felt the need to flee to the United States, where she now lives. This was necessary in order to gain the sense of security that she so desperately needed. In repeated acts of torture, this young woman was tied up, hung upside down, and had objects, such as a cattle prod, used against her.

Though extremely hard to hear, the reality that our society requires a charge of torture to be put into the Criminal Code is evident from the cases I have described throughout.

The need to call crimes what they are is not simply an academic matter. In order for victims to heal, their suffering must be acknowledged. Indeed, this fact underlined the truth and reconciliation process on residential schools, and is a basic human rights principle.

Using terms such as “aggravated assault”, which can be applied to the above cases just as easily as it can be to a fist fight, does not adequately speak to the grave human rights abuses that have been committed.

This is why the bill proposes a sentence of up to life imprisonment for those who carry out torture. Some will criticize the bill on this basis because the existing state torture law only offers a maximum of 14 years. It is true that this is inconsistent and I believe strongly that a much stiffer sentence for acts of state torture is certainly warranted.

However, rather than aiming to do everything and, hence, nothing, I have placed my focus on a gap that has been almost completely disregarded by Canadian legislators until this point. I did so after consulting with victims, their families, justice department officials, and civil society organizations.

The legislation was drafted by expert bureaucrats trained in the law. I value the support they have provided and the passion they show for their work every day.

The same line of reasoning applies to the issue of aggravated assault. The maximum penalty for aggravated assault is 14 years. This is appropriate, I admit, for most violations. However, when torture more properly describes the offence, a much harsher penalty is warranted.

Furthermore, it is true that torture from an international legal perspective has traditionally been understood as a state crime. I respect this, but add that the definition of torture has shifted. The Committee Against Torture, for example, which is responsible for monitoring the UN torture convention of which Canada is a signatory, has said that torture in the private sphere qualifies as torture.

This view has been accepted by other states. The proposed legislation shares much in common with existing torture laws in Australia and France. Both countries, extremely important allies, have strong torture laws that apply to state and private actors. Canada should follow suit. Recognizing such a change would acknowledge the ordeal experienced by those who have suffered torture and punish torturers accordingly.

Cases of extreme violence and inhumane conduct have happened in Canada and could take place again. Canadians deserve a government that will stand up for their rights and safety at all times. Previous governments had an opportunity to make this change but failed to do. It is time to act and make positive change happen.

This is not perfect legislation, and I am not sure any piece of legislation is ever perfect. However, I want to assure all my colleagues in the House that I am open to any potential amendments that could be examined by the justice committee. This includes lowering the term of punishment and any other concerns that may exist. It would be a sincere shame to have this important bill defeated because of concerns related to technicalities which could easily be altered.

I ask my colleagues, before making a final decision, that they consider these important factors. If they believe that human rights matter, if they believe that torture has no place in our society because it robs individuals of their humanity and dignity, if they believe that the way to ensure public safety is not by building more jails or through the politics of division and fear but through enshrining human rights principles into the law, then I urge them to vote in favour of Bill C-242 for all of these reasons, and allow it to go to committee where it can be further examined.

This bill is not about me and has never been about me. Indeed, this is the most important point I want to make today. I dedicate this bill to all victims of torture. Their voice matters. I have listened to them. Their suffering cannot go unacknowledged any longer, and I will continue to fight for them.

• (1725)

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I commend the member for London North Centre, who has worked very hard on this bill. He is truly motivated by the highest standards and his dedication to human rights. I am moved by his focus on this bill and his intent and determination.

I support the bill, but I would like clarification. The member said that he was open to amendments, but perhaps he could elaborate on the extent of amendments. Some people do not support the bill as it is. It is a very meaningful bill that would have a lot of impact. However, if members have concerns, would the member consider amendments when it goes to the justice committee?

I hope to participate in the debate later on, but I want to clarify that one point on potential amendments.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Mr. Speaker, indeed, I am open to amendments. I would invite colleagues to allow this bill to move to committee where it can be studied.

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In particular, on the concerns around sentencing, I am open to having the sentence lowered. In this private member's bill, I have called for a punishment of up to life in prison. I believe that is warranted in these cases, and members heard me describe the examples. There are obviously very egregious acts of violence that, in my humble opinion, warrant a term of up to life in prison. However, if that is not the view of colleagues, I am open to having that amendment made and having the justice committee look at that.

Beyond that, on definitional issues around torture, I am even open to that, as long as the underlying principle of the offence is understood and recognized.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member for London North Centre on the passionate and vital initiative before us today.

I am very pleased to hear him reiterate his willingness to have amendments considered at the justice committee. I would agree with him that no piece of legislation is perfect, and there often can be changes made at the justice committee. I sit on that committee, and I would be very happy to assist in any way I can to ensure the bill is palatable.

The member mentioned one amendment in response to my colleague's question concerning harmonization of sentences. If there are problems in harmonizing this initiative on domestic torture with state torture, would he be prepared to perhaps remove the word "torture" should there be any ambiguity in simply reiterating the definition of "torture", but maybe not use that word, should that give any cause for concern to the government of the day?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Mr. Speaker, as long as the underlying essence of the offence is recognized, in other words, the infliction of severe and prolonged pain and suffering for the purpose of intimidation and coercion. I am open to the justice committee looking at the definitional issues.

I know there are concerns around having this offence classified as torture and perhaps that impacting upon our international legal obligations. I respectfully disagree with that view, but it is something that the committee can examine.

• (1730)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member across the aisle on taking the bull by the horns and addressing such an important subject in his first bill. I also congratulate him on making the distinction between a bill like his and other kinds of bills that members can introduce, which often seem somewhat frivolous. My colleague is talking about a very fundamental issue here.

I have a question for the member. I am not a legal expert or a lawyer. What charge is the closest to what my colleague is trying to introduce as a new offence?

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Mr. Speaker, in my view there is no charge that comes close. There is section 269.1 of the Criminal Code, but that applies only to acts of state torture, acts committed by state officials for the purposes of extracting information, for example, or for some other purpose.

Aggravated assault is on the books but for the reasons I outlined in my speech, it does not nearly capture what has happened to these victims of torture. That is how I would answer the question in that regard.

To follow-up on what I mentioned earlier, for me, there is no—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Resuming debate. The hon. member for St. Albert—Edmonton.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the hon. member for London North Centre for introducing this well-intentioned piece of legislation. Bill C-242 seeks to establish a Criminal Code offence for acts of torture committed by non-state actors. As the hon. member for London North Centre pointed out, the only section of the Criminal Code that establishes a specific offence for torture is section 269.1, and section 269.1 only deals with acts committed by state actors.

At the outset it is important to acknowledge, as the hon. member did, that those who commit torturous acts for non-state actors are not given immunity in Canada. On the contrary, there are any number of Criminal Code offences that apply to torturous acts, depending on the nature and the scope of the act. Those sections include offences such as aggravated assault, attempted murder, kidnapping, and so on.

The offences that are presently on the books in the Criminal Code are long-established offences. They are well understood. There is a wide body of case law. Those convicted of any one of those offences may spend a very long time in jail. Take, for example, aggravated assault. Someone convicted of aggravated assault may spend 14 years in jail. In the most serious of cases, someone convicted may be designated a dangerous offender, rendering that individual ineligible for parole. Being designated as a dangerous offender is tantamount to being sentenced to life in prison.

That is precisely what happened in the case of the Calgary man to whom the hon. member alluded, who had committed horrendous acts of torture. I will not mention that man's name in the House because it is unworthy of being mentioned in the House or in any other public forum. The fact is that the man took someone for two years and confined, beat, burned, and starved that person. That heinous, despicable individual was charged and convicted and designated as a dangerous offender and will very likely spend the rest of his natural life behind bars, where he belongs.

I mention that simply to say that there are laws on the books at present; and in general, it is my observation that they are largely working. However, the hon. member for London North Centre says that the laws on the books just are not good enough and that torture is a specific crime worthy of a specific Criminal Code offence.

All decent Canadians find torture to be abominable. Torture is vile, inhumane, and evil. The victims of torture, those who suffer at the hands of their torturers, endure physical and emotional pain that is probably unimaginable. They live with that legacy likely for the rest of their lives. To be tortured is tantamount to a life sentence for victims.

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● (1735)

When the hon. member for London North Centre says the current laws are not good enough, I take it that he has a point. We, as parliamentarians, have a duty to ensure that the laws on the books do justice by holding perpetrators of heinous crimes accountable and do justice for the victims so that they can begin the process of healing.

Therefore, it is on that basis that I believe that Bill C-242 deserves to go to the next step in the legislative process, to committee, for further review, further study, and further amendment. I want to thank the hon. member for London North Centre for acknowledging that, as with all bills brought before the House in the early stages, there are often modifications and amendments that need to be made to improve the bill.

This is not a perfect bill. In fact, there are areas with which I have some concerns. For example, the definition of torture in Bill C-242 is a different definition from the definition of torture under section 269.1 of the Criminal Code. The definition in section 269.1 of the Criminal Code is the same definition that is provided in article 1 of the United Nations convention against torture. The definition in Bill C-242, as I read it at least, seems to be more restrictive. Additionally, the sentencing in Bill C-242 is different from the sentencing under section 269.1.

We have a situation where, if Bill C-242 passed in its current form, we could have two different definitions of torture in the Criminal Code, two different tests for torture in the Criminal Code, and two different sentences under the Criminal Code, depending on whether the torturous acts were committed by a state or non-state actor. That is a problem.

However, as I say, I will support this bill so that it can move forward, because it is a well-intentioned bill and, as the hon. member says, the victims of torture deserve that we ensure that the criminal justice system and the Criminal Code fully provide the remedies that are necessary to hold perpetrators of those crimes fully accountable.

● (1740)

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wish to say at the outset that I am proud that the New Democratic Party members will be fully supporting this important initiative at second reading. I want to thank my colleague from London North Centre for bringing this issue to the attention of the House. I want to also salute him for taking the time to meet with members on all sides of this House to try to explain his reasoning in bringing forth this important bill.

The bill responds to the fact that torture, as it appears in our Criminal Code in section 269.1, applies only to the conduct of state actors like police and military personnel. The member intends through this initiative, I assume, to create a parallel within domestic torture, events that he has described with such clarity and that deserve society's opprobrium, without any doubt at all.

I want to also salute my colleague from St. Albert—Edmonton who moments ago pointed out that there would be overlapping sections of the Criminal Code, but like me, he wishes to let this bill go to the justice committee where it can be studied and improved because, as the member so modestly pointed out, it does deserve to be amended in a few key areas.

Sometimes it is important to use words in a Criminal Code to show society's disdain for certain conduct. We could charge people with aggravated assault—and we do currently—for things that the member has described, but they amount to torture, and everybody knows it is torture. Yes, it is true that the words are slightly different in the international covenant, and they are a little different in the Criminal Code from what my colleague has put in his bill. However, those are technical points that can be readily addressed through review at the committee.

Members may recall that several years ago a politician was charged with gangsterism. The authorities did not need to charge that individual with gangsterism. They could have charged him with fraud and breach of public trust or a whole bunch of other sections of the code. However, that word will never be forgotten. Similarly, many of the things we call terrorism are nothing more than criminal offences, but by calling them terrorism, we attach to them the weight that society needs to have attached to them, because they are of a different calibre than simple crimes like assault, kidnapping, or the like. We call them terrorism for a purpose and we call it gangsterism for a purpose, even though they amount to other crimes under other sections of the Criminal Code.

That is why I think the bill is so important. Let us call a spade a spade. It is not aggravated assault when we hear the heinous acts that were described by my colleague. It is torture. If we want to say that, because of some technical reason and our international commitments somehow not squaring perfectly with this domestic bill my colleague has brought forth and we do not even want to use the “t” word in the bill, who cares? The public will call a spade a spade, and call it torture. To not let this bill pass because of technical concerns that can be readily addressed at the justice committee would be very unfortunate.

I have consulted with criminal lawyers about this bill and I have looked at case law, and the fact situations are just chilling, as members know. We are talking about victims of the most prolonged and sadistic physical and mental abuse. For those who survive, the physical and mental consequences can be permanent: PTSD, etc.

In some cases, the possibility of bringing other charges such as kidnapping, forcible confinement, or assault with a weapon can ensure that the offender faces a lengthy sentence, even a life sentence. In other cases, however, the sentences have not seemed to many to meet the gravity of the crime. This bill would ensure that the gravity of the crime is matched by the appropriate sentence.

In all cases, survivors and their families may question why the acts of torture they endured are not acknowledged as such by the law. That is what I said earlier when I said that we as a society should call a spade a spade and attach terms that match what the public says about the crimes. It is up to us to make the Criminal Code be our servant, not our master.

There are many dimensions to this issue beyond the name change or the severity of a sentence. Canada is party to the United Nations convention against torture. As such, we are obliged to take effective measures against non-state torture within our borders.

•(1745)

It is certainly worth debating whether the existing offences in our Criminal Code, which do not mention torture by name, are the most effective and appropriate means to prosecute these crimes. However, this international dimension also gives rise to some technical concerns that have been raised about the bill.

Again, specifically, it is vital that any amendment we make to the Criminal Code under the rubric of torture not create discord, either in definition or sentence, with our international commitments under the convention and with our domestic prohibition against state torture.

I know the member for London North Centre is familiar with these concerns. I thank him again for taking the time to educate us all on the initiatives that he has taken and the work he has done.

Of course, as we consider what more Canada can do to eradicate torture, I would like to take this opportunity to call upon the government, once again, to ratify the optional protocol to the UN Convention Against Torture.

Despite promises in 2006 and 2009, and repeated calls from Canada and international NGOs, the government has yet to take this crucial concrete step to affirm our commitment to upholding human rights at home and around the world. There is simply no excuse. We cannot condemn torture and ignore effective measures to prevent it. As ever, the world is going to judge Canada by our actions, not just our words.

Of course, the bill speaks to the reality that acts of horrific and repeated abuse and violence do not just happen in foreign jails far from Canadian shores. They take place within our borders, in our communities.

As organizations like the BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition and the Canadian Federation of University Women have rightly pointed out, these abuses disproportionately target women and girls. I am thankful to those organizations and others for their advocacy on this issue.

As we sit here and debate the bill and its connection to gender-based violence, we must recognize that far more action is needed to not just reduce but end violence against women and girls in Canada.

My colleague, the member for Churchill—Keewatinook Aski proposed a motion in this House to develop a national action plan to end violence against women. She presented a wonderful town hall in my community of Victoria, where we addressed these issues about violence against women and girls. That action plan I commend to this House to this day as still being vitally necessary.

The motion would have led to better policies to prevent violence and support survivors, and more action to address socio-economic factors that contribute to violence, among many other things.

Despite the defeat of that initiative at the hands of the last Conservative government, I assure members we are going to keep pushing in this House for that action plan to end violence against women. We hope the new government understands the necessity to take that action and makes the investments in shelters, affordable housing, and emergency resources, so no woman is denied the help

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she needs to escape an abusive and sometimes torture situation that she faces.

There are many steps we can take to uphold our international commitment to eliminate torture, to prevent the most horrific acts of violence within our communities, and to support the survivors.

In my view, the bill is an important step along that path. It definitely merits further consideration in this House. With the help of the member for London North Centre, I am sure we can do a better job to ensure that the bill meets our international obligations, does not contradict sections of the Criminal Code, is appropriately harmonized with the sentences, and that we can get it right. Technical amendments should not stand in the way of justice.

Mr. Sean Casey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to private member's Bill C-242, an act to amend the Criminal Code, inflicting torture.

I would like to begin by thanking the member for London North Centre for his advocacy on this very serious issue. We can all agree that torture and all forms of violence have no place in our society.

The bill before us seeks to amend the Criminal Code to create a new offence, specifically prohibiting any person from inflicting torture on any other person—that is, private torture—for the purpose of intimidating or coercing that person. This new offence would be punished by a maximum term of life imprisonment.

As I have said, we do condemn all acts of torture; however the government has issues with this particular bill. Briefly, this bill aims to prohibit torture committed by non-state actors. The new offence would be punished by a maximum term of life imprisonment.

In contrast, the existing crime of torture, found in section 269.1 of the Criminal Code, is restricted to state-actor torture, which is torture committed, instigated, consented to, or acquiesced in by a public official.

This bill aims to specifically denounce the worst kind of assaults, those that cause severe pain and suffering over a prolonged period of time. Victims of such attacks could include women victimized by the most abhorrent kinds of sexual assaults, and our hearts go out to anyone who has suffered these deplorable acts.

The amendments proposed by this bill, while put forward with good intention, are already addressed in our criminal justice system, and they create an inconsistency by proposing a punishment that is not consistent with how the Criminal Code already addresses torture; and it overlaps with the already existing crime of torture set out in section 269.1 of the Criminal Code.

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The Criminal Code currently has numerous assault provisions. For example, there is the basic crime of assault in section 265 of the Criminal Code, which has a maximum penalty of five years' imprisonment. There is the crime of assault with a weapon or causing bodily harm, which has a maximum punishment of 10 years' imprisonment. Bodily harm is defined in section 2 of the Criminal Code to mean any hurt or injury to a person that interferes with the health or comfort of the person and that is more than merely transient or trifling in nature.

There is also the crime of aggravated assault, which has a maximum punishment of 14 years' imprisonment. Aggravated assault is defined as wounding, maiming, disfiguring, or endangering the life of the victim of the assault.

Also there are offences of sexual assault in the Criminal Code. For example, there is the crime of sexual assault in section 271 of the Criminal Code, which has a maximum punishment of 10 years' imprisonment. There is the crime of sexual assault with a weapon or threatening or causing bodily harm to the victim, which has a maximum punishment of 14 years' imprisonment. There is the crime of aggravated sexual assault found in section 273 of the Criminal Code, with a maximum punishment of life imprisonment. Aggravated sexual assault is defined as, when committing a sexual assault, wounding, maiming, disfiguring, or endangering the life of the victim.

As well, there is the crime of state-sanctioned torture set out in section 269.1 of the Criminal Code, which has a maximum punishment of 14 years' imprisonment.

Furthermore, the Criminal Code contains sentencing principles that can apply to non-fatal violence inflicted on victims. For example, section 718.2 of the Criminal Code sets out a number of aggravating factors that must be considered by a judge before imposing a sentence in relation to any crime.

Among these aggravating factors are the following: evidence that the offender, in committing the offence, abused the offender's spouse or common-law partner; evidence that the offence had a significant impact on the victim, considering their age and other personal circumstances, including their health and financial situation.

In other words, the Criminal Code already contains crimes that capture the kind of conduct that Bill C-242 wishes to specifically catch, perhaps most notably the crimes of aggravated assault and aggravated sexual assault. Existing sentencing provisions do already provide a range of aggravating factors that could apply in a case of private torture.

● (1750)

In effect, I believe there is no gap in the criminal law that requires the creation of a new offence of private torture to provide for a remedy. The proposed torture offence in Bill C-242 is therefore not necessary. It is also useful to know that these existing laws can and do work effectively to address these types of cases.

Next let me address the issue that this would create an inconsistency in punishment. The proposed penalty for this new offence of private torture would be a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. I start with a basic proposition that similar crimes should be dealt with similarly.

As I have previously outlined, the crimes of aggravated assault and torture in sections 268 and 269.1 of the Criminal Code have a maximum penalty of 14 years' imprisonment. Even if the crime of aggravated assault is omitted from this equation, leaving us to compare just the offence of torture in section 269.1 of the Criminal Code to the offence proposed in the bill, the stark contrast in punishment remains: maximum punishment of 14 years in relation to section 269.1 versus life imprisonment in relation to the proposed offence.

Creating an offence of private torture could have the unintended effect of seriously weakening Canada's contribution to the focused global effort to prevent torture under the convention against torture. This could cause confusion as to what Canada considers to be its international obligation when it comes to the effective prevention of torture. This is because, as was indicated earlier in debate, there would be two definitions of torture, one of which, in the private torture offence, would be narrower than the internationally accepted definition of torture set out in section 269.1.

States that are reluctant to abide by the obligations set out in the convention could argue that they need not accept the internationally accepted definition of torture because Canada has enacted a private torture offence that contains a narrower definition.

It could be argued that this inconsistency could best be resolved by increasing the maximum punishment for torture in section 269.1 to life imprisonment. However, such a change would result in yet another inconsistency being created. The maximum punishment for aggravated assault would no longer be the same as that for torture under section 269.1 of the Criminal Code. It would remain at 14 years' imprisonment.

The result would be that someone who maims another by, for example, cutting off his or her hand, would be seen as less blameworthy than the state official or private individual who whips someone repeatedly.

In my view, it is far better to have the norm for maximum punishment for the most violent forms of non-fatal violence to be 14 years' imprisonment rather than to erode this norm by seeking higher maximum punishments for such conduct.

Let me address the final effect that the proposed offence would have on the Criminal Code. It would not complement the offence of state-sanctioned torture found in section 269.1. Instead, it largely overlaps with section 269.1 and thereby undercuts the exclusive jurisdiction of section 269.1 to address state-sanctioned torture. This is because it is defined so broadly that it captures anyone who commits the conduct defined as torture by the offence, whether private citizen or public official. Put another way, it is not restricted to torture committed by a private citizen.

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The effect is that, if a case should arise where a public official commits torture as defined by the bill, a prosecutor would have the choice of prosecuting either under the new offence or the current offence found in section 269.1. Such a result is possible, especially if the prosecutor wishes to obtain the most severe sentence possible. He or she could avoid the 14-year maximum punishment for torture under section 269.1 of the Criminal Code by prosecuting under the proposed offence, which has a maximum punishment of life imprisonment.

In my view, creating this crime would likely have immense symbolic value to some of the most vulnerable persons in our society. However, symbolism alone is not enough reason to add yet another offence to the vast array of offences and sentencing procedures that already catch the most harmful kinds of assault and that already speak to Canada's ongoing efforts to protect the most vulnerable among us.

For these reasons, I am opposed to the bill, and I call on other members of the House to also oppose it.

I do wish to say in closing that the goal of the bill and the intent of the member is to advocate against violence, and that is a goal which we can all support.

• (1800)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his speech. He demonstrated an impressive familiarity with the relevant laws in question.

What I would say to his great technical speech is that the symbolism does matter here. I agree that more than symbolism is important, but we are here to debate the principle of the bill. If we deem the principle of the bill worthy, then we should send it on to committee. Hopefully, at committee those two things, the technical aspects as well as the symbolic aspects, could be reconciled.

I would say that at this stage of the debate, that symbolism is sufficient for me to say that I support the bill. With all of the intelligence and resources of the House, if we decide that it is important to have language in the Criminal Code that reflects the strong feelings that heinous acts of torture compel in us, we have the capacity to find technical solutions to allow us to express those feelings properly in the law and attach consequences that are in keeping with those feelings.

It is my confidence in the House that allows me to say that what we need to decide today is whether we affirm the principle of creating a separate offence within the law. If there are problems with technical aspects of the bill, we should at least give it due consideration at committee to see if those cannot be resolved, and they may well be resolved.

Language is very important, and we have already come to this theme in a couple of ways in the House. One we heard in question period, for instance. Regardless of what side of the issue one falls on, because I do not want to complicate it too much, we have talked about the word “genocide” and the importance of giving a proper name to things. Whether that name is proper on that issue is certainly a subject of debate, but we have had other debates in which language was very important. I guess that is what I am trying to highlight.

This bill highlights very well how important it is to people who experience terrible acts of torture—acts that go above and beyond what would be a typical assault and are particularly cruel and long-lasting—for us to call it what it is. It is difficult to understate how much it can mean to victims and their families when what actually happened is recognized for what it is in the language of the law in court.

There have been other times in my life, in various roles, when I dealt across a range of issues with people who felt that an injustice had been committed, and sometimes the worst part was not so much what happened or the consequences of what happened: it was that government or other authorities did not recognize it in the language that victims felt was needed and to the extent they felt it needed to be recognized. The language did not match up with the reality of what had happened to them.

Changing the law to create an offence called “torture” can go a long way when we think about victims and the effects after the terrible event. This is something we can do, if we get the details right, to help alleviate the effects after the events. I think that is the most laudable aspect of this bill.

It is important to any victim, but I think my colleague spoke earlier to the fact that instances of torture, unfortunately and predominantly, tend to happen to women. Therefore, it becomes an issue of also making sure that we have the right language to address something that is happening to women in Canada, including indigenous women, and calling it what it is. In that way, when people hear it, even if it is a passing report on the news, as is the case so often when we hear terrible things, the word being used will really capture what happened. It will not be passed by as another case of aggravated assault. People will realize in that 15-second clip, or however long it is, that what happened was actually worse than that. It was an act of torture.

I want to emphasize the extent to which I appreciate the arguments about the technical aspects of the bill, but I really think that what we will be concerned about at second reading is the principle of the bill. Making this change can do a lot for victims and their families. It is worth sending the bill to committee to see if those technical details cannot be hammered out. That is why I am pleased to support the bill today.

• (1805)

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the member for London North Centre for his work in bringing this legislation forward. He has been very determined and committed on this.

Perhaps a lot of people have not heard of the term “non-state torture”, but I was introduced to it by two incredible women in my riding, Linda MacDonald and Jeanne Sarson, both of whom are nurses. They are the founders of an organization called Persons Against Non-State Torture. They came to my office years ago, and since then I have tried to help them in any way I can to raise public awareness on this issue. These women are tireless. They are committed. They will leave no stone unturned to make progress in this mission.

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I will mention some of the things I know these two incredible women have done in the interest of raising awareness about non-state torture and trying to make progress on the issue.

They have come to this Parliament and made presentations to the Standing Committee on Human Rights. They have spoken at several universities. They have been invited by the United Nations twice at two different locations to make presentations on non-state torture. These women have made presentations in several states in the U.S. They have been to Geneva, Switzerland to make a presentation. In London they spoke at the Feminism in London conference about the non-state torture aspect of the impact on women and girls. They have made submissions to the federal U.S. State Department. They have been on CBC and many other media. They have made submissions to Australia, New Zealand, and Edinburgh. They have been on op eds and news articles.

These women, as I mentioned, are tireless. They have been doing this over many years and mostly at their own expense.

The fact that all of these organizations are interested in hearing from them to me justifies us studying the bill at committee. Both of these women have spent their lives helping others as nurses, volunteers and advocates for victims of torture. They are incredible people and I am grateful to them for teaching me about non-state torture.

They have pointed out to me that victims of non-state torture know that torture is distinct from assault. It is delivered in a prolonged and dehumanizing nature. The impact of non-state torture is usually on women and girls, and it is usually permanent. It is different from almost any other.

I call on the government to work with the hon. member for London North Centre to acknowledge the unique and terrible impact of non-state torture. The member says that he is open to amendments so let us get the legislation to justice committee. I support it going to justice committee, and I thank the member for bringing this forth.

I also thank Jeanne Sarson and Linda MacDonald for their tireless work on this very focused human rights issue.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to echo the statements of my hon. colleague who just spoke. Linda MacDonald and Jeanne Sarson have been tireless advocates on this issue.

I would also like to thank in addition to Jeanne and Linda, the Native Women's Association of Canada, Amnesty International for supporting the bill in principle, the Canadian Nurses Association of Canada, and the Canadian Federation of University Women. All have voiced either complete support, or support in principle in the case of Amnesty International, for this legislation.

It is better to put forward to committee a bill that is flawed. I am even open to definitional issues, difficult as it is for me to accept because these are acts of torture. It is better to pass imperfect legislation than to leave an unjust status quo in place. That is the message I would like to deliver to my colleagues.

●(1810)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Accordingly the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to revisit a question I asked in the House back on December 7 related to the Speech from the Throne.

In the first part of the question, I talked about the comment about having a leaner military, which was almost prophetic for what we saw later in the main estimates and in the budget. In the second part of my question, I said that of the 1,700 words in the budget, not one of those 1,700 words was ISIS, ISIL, or Daesh. I want to revisit those two issues, because the replies we have been getting from the government have been incoherent.

The government is saying “leaner”, and we all know that leaner means cuts. It means a smaller military. It means less capabilities. We are seeing ongoing decisions by the government to withhold money from the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces.

If we look at the main estimates that were subsequently tabled, “leaner” translated into \$300 million of money being cut from the main estimates. This is \$300 million total that has been reduced from the main estimates. Then, in the budget that was presented by the government, we saw a defence procurement cut of \$3.7 billion or, as the parliamentary secretary will probably say, the money has been delayed or put off for the next five years. However, we all know in this place that any money that is deferred is potentially up for grabs by other departments, or for paying down the national debt, or reducing the deficit, or for special projects that the government may take from time to time.

Therefore, what we have here is a situation that the Liberal government is repeating itself. As we know, during the 1990s and early 2000s, we lived through what was called the “decade of darkness”. That was confirmed by the parliamentary budget officer in his report of 2015. He said:

The most significant budget cuts under program review occurred from 1995 to 2004.... The cumulative defence expenditure over that period of time was roughly \$13.4 billion below what our modelling showed was required to maintain the existing force structure.

He went on to say:

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As a result of the underinvestment through the 1990s, the model illustrates the cumulative affordability gap that existed until the early 2000s. The model shows that it was only with the significant spending increases seen in the latter half of the 2000s that the affordability gap was closed.

Of course, that affordability gap was closed by our Conservative government of the day.

Therefore, we are dealing with a situation where not only did we see the \$3.7 billion, which was supposed to be for future defence procurement, but they actually reduced current procurement projects that are ongoing, such as the upgrades for our Halifax-class frigates, which are going to be potentially slowed down through the national shipbuilding program, and the Arctic offshore patrol vessels. The Harry DeWolf-class ships, which they are already starting to build, are now, according to reports in the *Ottawa Citizen*, up for grabs. The certification of our Cyclone maritime helicopters is also being slowed down.

My question back to the parliamentary secretary for National Defence is: Why are they not giving our troops the equipment they need right now?

• (1815)

Hon. John McKay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with some amusement to my colleague, the critic for the Conservative Party on this matter. He started off his question by saying “we all know”. Well, I do not know who the “we” is. Maybe he knows, but certainly on this side of the House we, meaning the government, have not cut anything at this point and do not intend to.

He said it is all a code word for cuts. He should know something about cuts because he was a member of a government that ran the national defence budget down from about \$22 billion or \$23 billion to what it is today, which is about \$18.6 billion. Over the course of about a four-year fiscal cycle, Conservatives ran it down about \$3.3 billion, so the hon. member certainly does know something about cuts. Possibly when he is concerned about those cuts he should look in the mirror as to what his government did.

His government also was quite artful in its cuts because, over that similar period of time, it lapsed something in the order of \$2 billion, and that is money that is not available for future procurements. That is just money, as he rightly says, to go to other priorities, and the Conservatives were very keen for the purposes of this last election to show that they had a bogus balanced budget. In some respects, that bogus balanced budget was put onto the backs of the men and women in uniform in order to be able to get to this magic number that they thought would take them to some sort of electoral nirvana.

Our approach is far different. Our approach is to try to match when funds are available and when the procurement cycle is available, so match those two cycles. It has been a *bête noire* of all governments that the procurement cycle and the fiscal cycle do not necessarily always match up.

The last budget that was presented by the Minister of Finance actually tried to redress that core problem of matching procurement cycles with fiscal cycles, hence the forwarding of a substantial sum of money, somewhere in the order of about \$3 billion, for future procurement. It does not follow that the money is lost to DND. In fact, the Minister of Finance said it is not lost. The Minister of

National Defence said it is not lost. The Prime Minister said it is not lost, but there is a concern that the previous government left us in a procurement and fiscal mess.

I want to point out that, since we took government, we have actually allocated \$1.6 billion to the Middle East operations over the next three years. This is something that we debated in the House, and those monies have been set aside. We have also allocated \$200 million over two years to undertake infrastructure projects at Canadian Forces bases, most of which I assume my hon. colleague would agree with.

We are trying to bring a fiscal cycle into alignment with a procurement cycle for the men and women in uniform, who both he and I agree should have the equipment they need, so that those two cycles will match.

• (1820)

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I want to remind the parliamentary secretary that he has been here for a long time. He actually predates the Paul Martin government, so he was here for the decade of darkness. Our spending as the Conservative government was double what we saw during the decade of darkness. For about 10 years we never saw spending go above \$10 billion. When we left office, it was over \$20 billion, and that is all it is today under this new budget.

The Liberals are punting \$3.7 billion down the road. It is a cut, and it is interesting that it is not even going to be looked at again until after the next election cycle.

I am glad he brought up the Middle East operations, which is the ISIS mission, of course, which we still believe should be a combat mission. It is interesting to note, and I would like to point this out to the House, that Denmark had a vote on April 19, earlier this week, and they are putting back in to the fight against ISIS. They brought their planes and equipment home and they have put back into the fight against ISIS seven F-16 fighters, plus a refueller, 60 special operation forces, and another 400 members to fight ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

It is time for Canada to take ISIS seriously.

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, I feel badly for the hon. member and his fixation on jets. In fact, we have reprofiled this mission so that there is a far greater involvement by our troops in this mission, and it has been applauded by our allies, most particularly the United States and Great Britain, because we need intelligence if those jets are going to be effective. We need assist, advise, and training missions if those jets are going to be effective. Canadians are doing it and Canadians are stepping up to do it.

The hon. member talked about the Martin years. We are going back quite a ways here. We could go to Mulroney, for that matter, but the truth of the matter is that when Paul Martin became the prime minister, he set the defence budget on a fiscal path of ever-escalating numbers, to the point where when the Conservative government took over, it did not deviate from the path that was set by the Martin government in the previous instance. The only deviation occurred subsequently, when the Conservatives cut \$3.3 billion from the budget.

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THE SENATE

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am here today to follow up on a question I raised back in January on the subject of Senate appointments.

I understand that the hon. member for Mississauga Centre, my good friend, will be responding tonight. When I ask my questions, I will have to place them in the form of going back to the government, since he obviously is not formally assigned this portfolio.

In the question I raised in January, I pointed out that the government is inaccurate when it says that it is necessary to make appointments to the Senate as opposed to having Senate elections.

The argument that is presented by the government regularly is that the Supreme Court has ruled that Senate elections are not permissible, abolishing the Senate is not permissible, etc., without one of these very difficult-to-obtain 7/50 amendments to the Constitution, to which seven provinces must agree as well as the federal Parliament.

That is actually not true with regard to Senate elections. It is impermissible, according to the Supreme Court—and we have to take its decision on this—to sponsor federal elections of senators—that is, to actually hold federal elections from which nominees would then be presented to the Prime Minister for appointment to the Senate. However, it is permissible to have elections on the model that have produced a number of elected senators, some of whom still sit in the Senate—Betty Unger, for example, and Scott Tannas. They are there after having been elected by Alberta voters under a provincial statute, the Alberta Senatorial Selection Act.

That was one of the points I was trying to make, and I do hope that through the parliamentary secretary the message will get back to the government that Senate elections are still permissible. Indeed, there is an elected senator-in-waiting in Alberta who ought to be appointed when the next Alberta vacancy arises in another two years.

The other thing I wanted to address is what I want to actually pose the question about.

There has been inadequate transparency with regard to the appointments process. There is a board that has now been appointed. The board makes recommendations. The recommendations are presented to the Prime Minister. The rule that has been set up by the Prime Minister is that he gets five nominees for each vacancy. He then selects from among those five—or he can choose someone else who is not on that list. If that is the case, the board cannot report back to us about that.

That is a source of enormous frustration, and I would like to see it changed. I want to encourage my colleague to go back to the government and urge it to be more open in that regard.

There is a further problem with regard to the procedure and House affairs committee on which I sit.

We have been attempting to get members of the board before our committee so that we can ask them questions about the first round of Senate appointments and about what they plan to do with regard to future Senate appointments. There is some lack of clarity as to how

they are acting and what the rules under which they are going to operate will be, now that the first phase of appointments is over.

I have been blocked at every turn in attempts to bring them forward. The Liberal members continually vote down any attempt to bring the board members forward, and this effectively means that in place of transparency we have opacity.

Will the parliamentary secretary commit to going back to the government and encouraging it to allow these members of the board to come before the procedure and House affairs committee to answer questions about their mandate?

● (1825)

Mr. Omar Alghabra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Consular Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me address the member's first point on his opinion about what the Supreme Court said. If that is the case, dare I remind him of what the former prime minister, and his former leader, said after the Supreme Court decision. He went around the country saying that he was sorry, that the Conservatives tried their best, but the Supreme Court said they could not do anything about it.

If he is so confident in his opinion, why did his former leader, after 10 years of promising the entire country Senate reform, not go ahead and appoint those elected senators? This question poses itself, and it is worthy of a response from the member.

The reality is that the Supreme Court decision was loud and clear. It said that any significant and substantive changes to the Senate appointment process would require constitutional changes.

However, our government was happy to commit to Canadians that we would introduce an open and transparent process for appointing new senators. We have been very clear throughout this process, and each step of the process has been as transparent as possible.

First, when the government process was announced, the government published the merit-based criteria for senators online, so all Canadians could see what qualifications and skill sets the advisory board was expected to assess in its deliberations.

Second, when the advisory board members were appointed, the government published their terms of reference.

Third, the advisory board established a public website to call for nominations during the transitional phase and was mandated to reach out broadly in its consultations with organizations.

The next phase of the process will entail an open application process through which any qualified Canadian can submit an application to be considered for the Senate.

In following each cycle of appointments, the advisory board will provide a public report to the Prime Minister that contains information on the process, including on the execution of the terms of reference, the costs related to the advisory board's activities, and statistics relating to the applications received. The board's report on the transitional phase was published April 5, 2016.

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I do not know about my colleague, but in the past when I applied for jobs, I really did not want the entire world to know which job I applied for because I did not want to be embarrassed if I was rejected. Because we want to attract the best and brightest for these jobs, we need to respect the privacy of those applicants.

I hope my colleague can respect the privacy of those applicants, particularly if we want to attract the best and the brightest.

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, perhaps what I should do is respond to the parliamentary secretary's question in the first part of his response.

He asked why, following the Supreme Court's ruling, the former prime minister did not go ahead and fill the vacancies with elections? The reason is that only one province, Alberta, actually has a senatorial election act. There were no vacancies in Alberta. The next one is in 2018. He had previously made appointments from those selected under the Alberta senatorial selection act. No one said that was unconstitutional. The Supreme Court certainly did not.

What the Supreme Court did say with regard to the prime ministerial monopoly on appointment, which the government seems to regard as being constitutionalized, was that it was purely a constitutional convention. Therefore, in fact, the current government could make appointments to the Senate from Alberta based on the elections. I encourage it to do so.

• (1830)

Mr. Omar Alghabra: Mr. Speaker, again, the question remains. Why did the former government not do anything? It was not able to implement any of the reforms. For 10 years, while the Conservatives were in office, they promised Canadians they would implement reforms, during every election and at every opportunity. In fact, they continued to damage the reputation of the Senate, but offered no solution.

Our government is very proud to rehabilitate the image of the Senate. We all admit to the fact that the reputation of the Senate has been damaged, but our government is committed to rehabilitating that image, ensuring we appoint non-partisan, substantive individuals who will be effective in performing their duties and providing sober second thought to the House of Commons.

JUSTICE

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are dealing with a lot of confusion on the marijuana file, because the government is refusing to have a clear conversation with Canadians. I hope, sincerely, that tonight we can get to the bottom of what actual action will be taken on this file, without hiding behind smoke and mirrors.

I want to bring up a few facts that add to the present confusion. The parliamentary secretary has previously stated that the only control in place is the current criminal sanction for the production and trafficking of marijuana. He did not mention possession, although he probably did wish he had.

The Minister of Health has spoken to the United Nations and did not once say that Canada will legalize marijuana, but I suppose it was strongly intimated.

When the parliamentary secretary was asked in this House last week about the Prime Minister saying that he would legalize marijuana, there was a quick shift in his answer. He spoke about replacing the current existing criminal sanction with a more effective regulatory regime. The criminal sanction is presumably not seen as effective.

I had a great opportunity to speak with police members from Vancouver, Saanich, and Victoria during the recent Canadian Police Association reception, and they too are very confused over the government's plan. Police are justifiably uncertain on whether to enforce against small marijuana infractions, knowing that the laws are set to change.

The confusion continues with local governments in British Columbia, some of which have issued business licences for marijuana dispensaries.

The Minister of Health has stated that the government will work with law enforcement partners to encourage appropriate and proportionate criminal justice measures. In light of the plan to legalize, what exactly is the appropriate and proportionate response to stopping young people in possession of marijuana and having them live with a criminal record for the rest of their lives?

Marijuana possession of 30 grams or less can result in an up to \$1,000 fine and/or six months in jail. Even if the maximum penalty is not imposed, that person still has the record. It can have profound consequences for the rest of his or her life.

Both the Liberals and NDP realize, to quote the Minister of Health again, that is "impossible to arrest our way out of this problem." This is a fact, and yet Canada today continues under existing punitive marijuana laws that harm Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

The status quo is morally unacceptable and does nothing to effectively confront the problem. What we need is for the federal government to take some leadership on this issue and decriminalize possession of small amounts of marijuana while we wait for it to eventually bring forward legislation for legalization.

The Prime Minister has previously stated:

There have been many situations over history when laws come in that overturn previous convictions. And there will be a process for that that we will set up in a responsible way.

However, the parliamentary secretary has since stated that they are not looking at a system of pardons or amnesty. These comments conflict with what the Prime Minister has said and give rise to questions on who is actually speaking for the government.

With this as context, I want to ask the parliamentary secretary some clear questions. Will the government decriminalize possession of small amounts of marijuana immediately as we wait for legalization next year? If yes, when can we expect this to happen? If the answer is no, will the government be pardoning those who get criminal records for possession?

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• (1835)

Mr. Bill Blair (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for the opportunity to provide some clarification that he clearly requires with respect to this file. I would like to speak at some length on this, but I want to be very clear on his questions.

He asked me very specifically if the Government of Canada will decriminalize marijuana immediately. The answer is no. He also asked if there is at the present time any contemplation of pardons or amnesty. I want to be very clear so that he is not further confused on this. The answer is no.

With respect to the suggestion of decriminalization, this has been a matter of some discussion over a number of years. I would simply point out to the member opposite that in 2012, the leader of his party, the hon. member for Outremont was asked very directly in a televised interview if he would decriminalize marijuana. His reply is very helpful and may assist the member in understanding some of the issues associated with his recommendation.

In response to the question of whether he would decriminalize marijuana, the member for Outremont stated, “No. I think that that would be a mistake.” He then went on to say that before ever contemplating any changes to the current control of marijuana regime, the criminal sanctions, we need to get the best medical experts, the best legal experts, and the best law enforcement experts around the table to see what is realistic. That is precisely what this government is doing.

The member for Outremont went on to say, “but to decide in advance that it should simply be opened I think would be a serious mistake”. I agree with the comments of the member for Outremont in 2012. It would be a serious mistake.

Decriminalization would only achieve one thing. It would make it easier for the police to enforce the existing sanctions against the possession of marijuana. It would do nothing to protect our children. It would do nothing to keep marijuana out of the hands of our kids, and this is a serious health and safety problem in our communities.

It would do nothing to remove the profits of organized criminal activity associated with the marijuana trade from organized crime. It would do nothing to keep our communities safe. What it would do is make extremely difficult the implementation of an effective regulatory regime that would enable us to control the production, distribution, and consumption of marijuana.

Our government is absolutely committed to working with the scientific community to base our regulations on the best evidence, the best science, and the best advice of experts. I can talk about what the police are dealing with currently, and my knowledge of what the police deal with in this country with respect to these laws is based on more than simply a conversation at a reception. For over 40 years I

was a police officer and for 10 years I was the chief of the Toronto Police Service. I can say that police officers across this country know their responsibilities and know the law. They know their responsibility is to keep their communities safe. They have the discretion to exercise their authority according to what is in the best public interest and in the interest of keeping their communities safe and I, for one, have confidence in their ability to do the job we ask them to do.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Mr. Speaker, I am very disappointed to hear that kind of response from a supposedly progressive government. The fact of the matter is that in my province of British Columbia alone, marijuana is worth \$6 billion a year. The current laws are not effective. All of that money is going to criminal organizations and the people who are getting their lives ruined by getting records are people who are innocent. They get caught with possession of small amounts and have to face a charge and sentence that will profoundly impact the rest of their lives.

If I understand the parliamentary secretary correctly, that means we have more than a year of waiting while we continue with needless arrests and wasteful trials. The justice department has confirmed it is going to cost taxpayers as much as \$4 million a year. It is not what a progressive government should be doing with marijuana laws.

At least yesterday the Liberal member of Parliament for Beaches—East York had the courage to publicly say that prosecution for marijuana possession is patently unfair in light of the government's future plans on this matter.

I was wondering if the parliamentary secretary could take direction from that member.

• (1840)

Mr. Bill Blair: Mr. Speaker, our government takes its responsibility for the safety and health of all Canadians very seriously. We are not introducing legislation to legalize and regulate marijuana to improve the profits of any enterprise. We are doing it to fulfill our responsibility to keep communities safe.

I would urge all Canadians to respect and uphold the laws of Canada as they exist and we will work diligently toward the development of an effective regulatory framework that will help us achieve our public aims. We are looking forward to the opportunity of working with the provinces and territories, with Canadians from coast to coast, to find the best way to do that.

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): 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 6:41 p.m.)

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